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Reflections on a Healing Journey:

An investigation of published research material on the role of spirituality in the lives of

women healing from the effects of domestic violence

by

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ABSTRACT

REFLECTIONS ON A HEALING JOURNEY:

AN INVESTIGATION OF PUBLISHED RESEARCH MATERIAL ON THE ROLE OF

SPIRITUALITY IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN HEALING FROM THE EFFECTS OF

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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This thesis looks at the role of spirituality in the healing of women affected by domestic violence. Nine published research articles were analysed using a content analysis approach, and points of convergence, as well as insights into areas that require further study have been identified.

Findings indicate that there is little consistency between published articles on the subject. Recommendations include the need for researchers to articulate definitions of terms like *spirituality* and *healing*, as well as to analyse the ambivalence or ambiguity that is expressed by women who speak about their paths of healing.

Incorporating a deeper investigation of the assumptions that researchers bring to their studies is also very importance, and attention should be given to understanding how these assumptions have religious roots. Finally, because of the topic's abstract nature, methodologies such as longitudinal studies, as well as interview and narrative approaches are proposed for future studies.

DEDICATION

For Laura Mocquais

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a Baha'í, I am encouraged to honour my teachers. I recognize that I am now afforded the great task of honouring these individuals through my life's work.

Finally, I must not forgo the chance of using this space to thank my husband, Michael, even though I feel assured that I have an eternity to thank him for his kindness. Among other things, he is an intellectual equal whom I have always enjoyed engaging with on many subjects, and my thesis was yet another topic that we spent many hours discussing. I thank him for accompanying me through this process, especially since he had only just completed his own thesis weeks before I began mine, and had very little time to recover from one experience before being launched into another.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Why is a woman still not safe when she's in her home?

Tracy Chapman, "Why", from self-titled album

Background

Throughout Canadian society, spirituality is considered a highly personal aspect of life. Individuals incorporate spirituality into their lives in different ways, and utilize a range of social or private practices to express their spiritual understanding. Given the multiplicity of perceptions around spirituality, as well as the often private realm to which it is assigned in the lives of many individuals, it is thus difficult for studies to tackle this complex subject.

However, this has not prevented researchers from attempting to address the subject of spirituality and healing. Cohen, et al. (2001) in fact, reports that over 350 studies find some level of correlation between religiosity and good health. These studies however, address this correlation in a cursory fashion, since their main focus is on subjects not directly related to spirituality and healing. Hence, there remains a need for the development of a greater body of in-depth research that examines specifically the importance of spirituality in affecting transformational processes such as healing.

Correspondingly, a review of current literature that addresses the topic of spirituality and healing yields the observation that a broad range of perspectives exist on this topic, and little effort has been made to identify convergence with the hope of advancing knowledge in the area. Furthermore, inadequate attention has been paid to

understanding the role that spirituality plays in the healing processes following traumatic events, such as the experience of domestic violence. Indeed, such experiences disrupt all dimensions of human well-being, whether physical, mental, emotional or spiritual.

Given the prevalence of cases of domestic violence in Canada, it seems imperative to pay attention to how women have engaged in healing following such experiences, and in particular, to understand the role of spirituality in this transformative process. It also seems important to seek some coherence and direction among the range of current views on spirituality and healing in relation to domestic violence. This study therefore sought to address the above points, utilizing key research questions as its pivot.

Research Questions

The main question addressed in this study was: "Where is there convergence and divergence in how published research materials discuss the importance of spirituality in the healing of women affected by domestic violence, and what are the implications of these?"

A number of related research questions were also examined:

- How do published research materials operationalize the term spirituality?

- How do they represent the relationship between spirituality and healing?

- How do the materials describe the impact of spirituality on the healing of women affected by domestic violence?

Goal

The goal of this study was to explore how published research articles (from 1987 to present) conceptualized spirituality and its relationship to healing among women who have experienced domestic violence.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were:

1. To examine a sample of published academic research literature on the importance of spirituality in the lives of women healing from the effects of domestic violence, in order to identify themes used to describe spirituality and healing.

2. To identify coherence within the discourse on spirituality and healing in relation to domestic violence.

3. To offer insights into areas that require further study in relation to spirituality and healing from the effects of domestic violence.

Importance of the Study

This study provides further insight into the topic of spirituality and healing as well as congruence between the various perspectives on the subject. Such congruence is essential in order to create a platform for conducting more in-depth research in the area of spirituality and healing. Through this research, differences in terminology and the operationalization of terms are addressed, and additional questions and avenues of research that emerge from themes identified across articles are posed. This study is the first step in the germination of insights that will hopefully and eventually lead to the

formation of multi-disciplinary policy groups that will highlight the potential for having

spirituality further incorporated into the healthcare system in Canada. It also may help

lend weight to the call for alternative methods of healing to be adopted and accepted by

the Canadian healthcare system.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis proceeds by moving from theoretical to methodological considerations

and then to an analytical discussion of the results of the study. It begins with a review of

the dominant theoretical trends in the area of spirituality and healing, particularly in

relation to women and their healing journeys following experiences of domestic violence;

it then moves into a description of the methodology utilized to carry out the study. It

finally closes by undertaking a broader reflection on the implications of the findings in

relation to the literature.

More specifically, the thesis is broken-down into chapters. Chapter Two sets out

the context within which this study takes place, by articulating a theoretical perspective

on spirituality and healing, and exploring the implications of this relationship when

applied to the area of domestic violence. It does this by first examining the term

spirituality, and then proceeds to map its relationship to healing and domestic violence. In

order to do this, an overview of domestic violence is also provided for the reader.

Chapter Three focuses on the research design and data collection methods for the

study. Special attention is given to addressing how the methodology of content analysis is

employed to study the published articles. Methods of ensuring rigour in the research are

outlined. The chapter also elaborates the reason for utilizing content analysis by drawing

from the gaps in the literature highlighted in Chapter Two. The chapter finally outlines some potential limitations of the study.

Chapter Four reports the results of the study through the presentation of a set of themes that have emerged from the content analysis.

Chapter Five contains an in-depth discussion on the findings of the study, and the implications of the emergent themes. This chapter also serves to tie the literature review to findings of the study.

Chapter Six draws the thesis to a close through a series of concluding remarks, as well as a recapitulation of key recommendations that have emerged from the study.

CHAPTER TWO:
BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides an exposition of relevant literature on the topic of

spirituality and healing as it relates to women affected by domestic violence. It provides

further insight into the concepts that frame the topic, such as the differences between

spirituality and religiosity, the relationship between spirituality and healing, the issue of

domestic violence, and finally, the relationship of spirituality and healing within the

context of domestic violence.

The difference between spirituality and religiosity

Not surprisingly, defining the term spirituality has been quite problematic for

researchers interested in understanding its different aspects. For instance, of the eleven

studies that Chen and Koenig (2006) analysed in their empirical review, the term

spirituality was operationalized in 10 different ways.

Some definitions of spirituality concentrate upon the issue of transcendence,

where spirituality may relate to beliefs or the sense of relationship with powers

transcending the present context of reality (Crossley & Salter, 2005). Another approach is

to define spirituality as a particular and distinct experience, for example, when one

attends only to the present and ceases to be preoccupied with the past or the future, or

with concerns and anxieties, a state of being 'in the moment' (Rowe, 2001, as cited in

Crossley and Salter, 2005). And yet other definitions focus on the values that individuals

hold, which may be either idiosyncratic or personal, relating to each individual's unique value systems (Duffy, 1998, as cited in Crossley and Salter, 2005).

Crossley and Salter (2005), in their search for a succinct definition of the term spirituality conclude that the tendency for this definition to "reveal numerous nuances of form and content has ensured that it has been problematic to develop reference points for discussion and investigation" (Nino, 1997, as cited in Crossley and Salter, 2005: 296). There is growing concern that having no agreed upon definition of spirituality fosters a situation where it is difficult for researchers to compare results between studies (O'Connor, 2002), and ultimately make generalizations that will lead to theories on spirituality and healing.

In relation to defining the term religiosity, it is important to recognize that some authors utilize the terms spirituality and religiosity interchangeably (Koenig, 2000; Barnes, Plotnikoff, Fox, and Pendleton, 2000), while others distinguish the term spirituality as referring to the umbrella concept, while religiosity is perceived as the institutionalization of spirituality. For instance, Kaye and Raghavan (2002) refer to religiosity as an expression of one's spiritual perspective in reference to an external experience. Arbab (2001) on the other hand, arrives at what is a comprehensive understanding of both terms, such that religion and spirituality are placed within a common framework. He defines the term religion as "…The spiritual heritage of humankind, as the knowledge system that studies the powers of the human spirit and which concerns itself with the demands and the desires of the higher nature of the human being" (2001: 5).

Because this study has been designed to look at the power of the human spirit to overcome the debilitating damage inflicted through domestic violence, the choice has been made to focus on the spiritual nature of healing by utilizing the term spirituality, which will include, and not be limited by the term religiosity. This study will thus adopt the definition of the term spirituality as articulated by David Bohm, a respected quantum physicist:

> What is spirit? The word is derived from a Latin word meaning "breath" or "wind" (like respiration or inspiration). It is suggested by the trees moving with the invisible force of the wind. We may thus think of spirit as an invisible force--a life-giving essence that moves us deeply, or as a source that moves everything from within (1993: 2).

It is finally important to note that how each published article defines spirituality or religiosity was also a focus of this study, and will be addressed in the results section.

The relationship between spirituality and healing

According to the norms governing Canadian society, which transmute into the biomedical model of our health care system, it would appear unusual, or even irrelevant to address spirituality within the realm of healing. However, if one were to consider healing in light of its original intent, it becomes evident that in fact, there is an important relationship that exists; one that modern biomedicine has largely failed to recognize.

Egnew (2005), in an article that looks at the meaning of healing in contrast to curing, asserts that:

> The marriage of science and medicine has empowered physicians to intervene actively in the course of disease, to affect cures, to prevent illness, and to eradicate disease. In the wake of such success, physicians, trained as biomedical scientists, have focused on the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease. In the process, cure, not care, became the

primary purpose of medicine, and the physician's role became "curer of disease" rather than "healer of the sick." Healing in a holistic sense has faded from medical attention and is rarely discussed in the medical literature (Egnew, 2005: 255).

Indeed, in looking at the historical and linguistic roots of the term *healing*, one is better able to understand Egnew's reference. Linguistically, the term *to heal* means "to make sound or whole" and stems from the root, *haelan*, the condition or state of being *hal*, or whole, while *hal* also has the root of "holy", which is defined as "spiritually pure" (Egnew, 2005: 258). This association of the terms *spirituality* and *healing* via their linguistic roots also points to an historical association.

In the same article, Egnew (2005) posits that healing should involve developing a sense of personal wholeness that involves physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of human experience. He explains that in relation to the above definition, illness can therefore be seen as a threat to the integrity of personhood, isolating the patient and engendering suffering. However, Egnew (2005) goes on to suggest that suffering can be relieved by removing a threat in order to allow for the reinstatement of the patient's sense of personhood. It is understood that removing a threat may entail curing the illness itself, but does not exclusively mean this. Removing a threat may also involve overcoming intrinsic barriers to personhood related to the illness itself, from fears of how others will perceive the illness, to fears of death and dying, or even to fears related to being a burden on loved ones. Finally, removing a threat may also include addressing extrinsic fears, such as those related to economic constraints surrounding an illness. As such, Egnew (2005) proposes that suffering can therefore be transcended when a circumstance is invested with meaning that is in-accordance with a new and often

greater understanding of personal wholeness. He summarizes by providing a

comprehensive definition of healing to be "the personal experience of the transcendence

of suffering" (Egnew, 2005: 58).

Others have also looked at the importance of spirituality in healing. For instance,

Berger (1990, as cited in Chen and Koenig, 2006) observes that spirituality has been

perceived by many as offering a source of comfort, meaning, and purpose for those

experiencing extremely difficult and negative life events. Chen and Koening (2006: 372)

propose that spirituality serves to integrate seemingly incomprehensible traumas into a

"sacred order", providing the knowledge that even traumatizing events have a place

within the space of a larger purposeful universe. Similarly, Kaye and Raghavan (2002)

indicate that spirituality relates to coping and facilitates the process of transcending

perceptions of helplessness. In a way, perceptions of God being in control of the overall

universe, when an illness has resulted in loss of function and control within one's current

life, may help transcend feelings of helplessness (Kaye & Raghavan, 2002).

Religious traditions for many centuries have also had theories of human nature

and strategies for wellness, whether explicit or implicit, within dogma, practices, or

sacred texts (Koenig et al., 1998; McCullough & Larson, 1999; Miller, 1999; Spilka &

Bridges, 1989). Prayer and meditation, for instance, have been shown to be valuable

resources during illness and to reduce stress (Byrd, 1988; Saudia et al., 1991).

Heckhausen and Schulz (1995, as cited in Ai and Park, 2005: 249) found that,

> People experiencing overwhelming threats tend to pursue support from a
> higher power, referred to as vicarious control, a secondary control
> strategy. Accordingly, spiritual coping may increase with distress as a sign
> of crisis related resource mobilization.

All of these perspectives point to the idea that spirituality serves to assist the individual to transcend suffering and reframe a sense of wholeness as an individual, to find meaning or sense making within the context of facing illness or duress.

Domestic Violence

The term domestic violence typically refers to "the physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse to an individual perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner. While this term is gender-neutral, women are more likely to experience physical injuries and incur psychological consequences of intimate partner abuse" (Rodriguez et al., 1999: 469). The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (United Nations, 1993: 3). This definition refers to the gender-based roots of violence, recognizing that violence against women is one of the numerous social mechanisms that act to force women into subordinate positions compared with men (United Nations, 1993). Although this study operationalizes the term domestic violence to refer to the abuse of a woman by her male partner, it is important to note that domestic violence involves a struggle for power that extends beyond gender, and thus can exist within any type of relationship.

As mentioned above, central to the different faces of domestic violence is the abuse of power and control. This occurs when abusers believe they have a right to control their partners by telling them what to do, expecting obedience and using force to maintain

their power (Bopp et al., 2003). Figure 1 indicates the numerous forms of abuse that are

used to enforced power.

Figure 1: Domestic Violence Wheel – The Different Forms of Violence
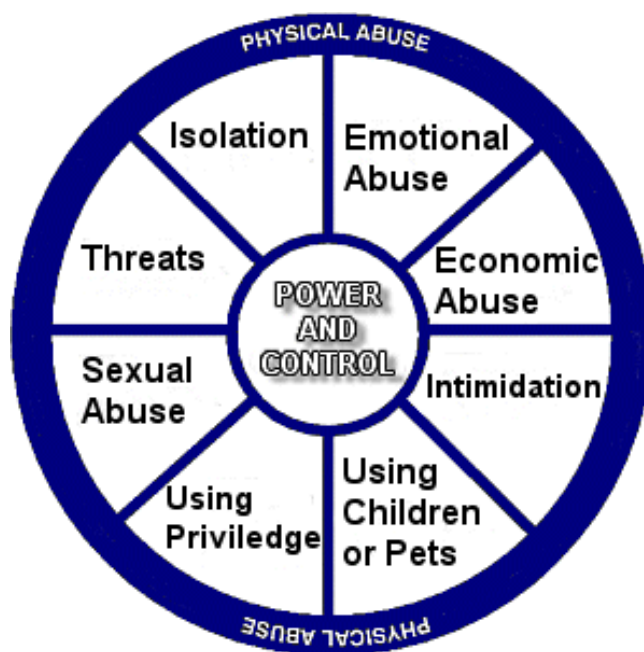
(Metropolitan King County Council, 2002)

In Canada, 29% of women over the age of 16 (of a nationally representative

sample of 12,300 women) reported being physically assaulted by a current or former

partner since the age of 16 (UNICEF, 1999). Unfortunately, it is also a reality that of all

cases of domestic violence reported, women have been found to experience more serious

forms of violence than men. In 2000, women made up 3/4 of the victims of homicide by

an intimate partner (CCJS, 2001). Furthermore, 33% of all women murdered (only cases

which are solved are included in these statistics) were murdered by an intimate partner (CCJS, 2001). Indeed, women make up about 85% of the victims of non-lethal intimate partner violence (CCJS, 2001). In all, according to Rennison (2003), women are victims of intimate partner violence at a rate about 5 times that of males.

There are many factors that perpetuate domestic violence (Table 1), and research has also shown that in some cases, even spirituality (predominantly framed within the context of cultural norms in Table 1) has fostered values that discourage women from leaving violent situations (United Nations, 1993).

Domestic violence is increasingly being recognized as producing serious, and often long-term effects that are costly for both the individual and the healthcare system (Gill & Theriault, 2005). For instance, Thurston and McLeod (1997) cite a study that has reported that hospital-bed use and use of emergency services are extremely high among women affected by domestic violence, and that such women are also patients in every other part of the health care system. Thurston and McLeod (1997) go on to note that another study shows evidence that 65% of the women questioned for the study said that abuse had resulted in their requiring medical attention, and 27% reported that they had been hospitalized due to abuse, with 50% having been hospitalized more than once.

Another study (Radomsky, 1992, as cited in Thurston 1998) found that women who reported a lifetime history of sexual or physical abuse had significantly more chronic health problems, as well as twice the number of surgeries during their lifetime than women not reporting abuse.

Table 1: Factors that Perpetuate Domestic Violence

Cultural	・ Gender-specific socialization ・ Cultural definitions of appropriate sex roles ・ Expectations of roles within relationships ・ Belief in the inherent superiority of males ・ Values that give men proprietary rights over women and girls ・ Notion of the family as the private sphere and under male control ・ Customs of marriage (bride price/dowry) ・ Acceptability of violence as a means to resolve conflict
Economic	・ Women's economic dependence on men ・ Limited access to cash and credit ・ Discriminatory laws regarding inheritance, property rights, use of communal lands, and maintenance after divorce or widowhood ・ Limited access to employment in formal and informal sectors ・ Limited access to education and training for women
Legal	・ Lesser legal status of women either by written law and/or by practice ・ Laws regarding divorce, child custody, maintenance and inheritance ・ Legal definitions of rape and domestic abuse ・ Low levels of legal literacy among women ・ Insensitive treatment of women and girls by police and judiciary
Political	・ Under-representation of women in power, politics, the media and in the legal and medical professions ・ Domestic violence not taken seriously ・ Notions of family being private and beyond control of the state ・ Risk of challenge to status quo/religious laws ・ Limited organization of women as a political force ・ Limited participation of women in organized political system

(Heise et al., 1994: 46)

Spirituality and healing from the effects of domestic violence

The investigation of the relationship between spirituality and healing is not a new area of interest (Richmond, 2004). Indeed, spirituality is now being pursued as an important if not critical component of general healing from trauma, both physical and psychosocial (Hathaway & Scott, 2004; Kier, 2004; O'Connor, 2002). However, interest in spirituality and healing from trauma does not necessarily translate into action. Spirituality tends to be ranked behind the primary focus given to pathologies, symptoms and clinical treatments in the healing process (Ai & Park, 2005).

The research carried out on the importance of spirituality within the context of healing practices indicates that it has repeatedly been identified by participants of studies as a key, if not essential aspect of their healing. In fact, a few researchers hold to the assertion that not taking into account a person's religious or spiritual beliefs may actually impede the efficacy of the healing process (Propst, 1980, as cited in Maloney, 2006). At the very least, it is suggested that not having some understanding of a client's religious tradition and worldview can lead counsellors to mistakenly interpret certain behaviours or emotional states as psychopathological or miss opportunities to initiate or enhance healing (Maloney, 2006).

The value of spirituality as part of the healing process is emphasized in the results of a few other studies looking at spirituality, healing and domestic violence. Among these studies is one that took place in the United States that looked at women who had survived sexual assault. The researchers in this study found that 60% of the women who participated in the study reported that they became more spiritual after their experience of sexual abuse, and this increased spirituality was related to increased well-being over time

(Kennedy, Davis, & Taylor, 1998, as cited in Ai and Park, 2005). Another study, by Gillum et al. (2006) found that of 151 women interviewed, the majority (97%) noted that spirituality or God was a source of strength or comfort for them.

One study that has significantly contributed to the body of knowledge on this topic is by Senter and Caldwell (2002). The study was phenomenological in nature and it looked at the importance of spirituality in the maintenance of change among women who leave abusive relationships. Senter and Caldwell (2002) found that there were twelve themes that emerged from their phenomenological study, among them the theme of making adjustments to a new way of living, where for some women, this meant turning to faith or spirituality in order to cope with the tremendous changes in their lives. These women described this focus on spirituality as a sense of submitting their will to a higher power (Senter and Caldwell 2002).

Another important theme that emerged from this study was that all nine of the participants had an affirmed faith, as well as a belief in a higher power (Senter and Caldwell 2002). The participants' relationships with this higher power can be best described as evolutionary. In essence, the women's religious and spiritual beliefs evolved as they healed (Senter and Caldwell 2002). This study points to the same realization that Ai and Park recognize, that, "professions addressing the area of violence and trauma may need to shift from a primary focus on managing and mitigating [Post-traumatic stress disorder] PTSD to one that also promotes post traumatic adaptation, development, and resurgence" (Ai and Park 2005: 243).

Kreidler (1995) is another researcher who has identified the necessary place for spiritual healing groups for survivors of domestic violence. She proposes that the

experience of being hurt by someone whom one believes should love, cherish, and protect one causes a great deal of spiritual distress. This may manifest itself in various ways, including through feelings of despair, thoughts that life is meaningless, or perceptions of oneself as powerless (Kreidler, 1995). On the other hand, Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000) report that those women with a welcoming, caring religious experience have reported feelings of hope for healing after such a distressing life event (an abusive relationship).

The above studies capture a glimpse of the complexity of the relationship between spirituality and healing and point to the need for an analysis of where the literature on this subject may require synthesis as well as recommendations in terms of future directions of research.

Gaps in Literature

For a number of reasons, there were large gaps in the literature on the importance of spirituality in the healing process of women affected by domestic violence. Firstly, although there is a body of research that acknowledges that women affected by domestic violence identify the importance of spirituality in their healing process, very rarely do the authors delve deeply into the subject. Indeed, although the anatomy of the human brain is no longer a mystery, the anatomy of the human spirit and how it overcomes suffering is still very much an unexamined subject. Hence, there still remains a need for the development of a greater body of in-depth research that examines specifically the importance of spirituality in affecting transformational processes such as healing.

Correspondingly, a review of current literature that addresses the topic of spirituality and healing expose a broad range of perspectives on the topic, and little effort has been made to identify convergence or common themes to be pursued towards advancing knowledge in the area. There is thus a need for researchers to focus on identifying points of convergence.

Furthermore, inadequate attention has been paid to understanding the role that spirituality plays in healing processes following traumatic events, such as domestic violence, and how such experiences disrupt all dimensions of human well-being, whether physical, mental, emotional or spiritual.

Summary

This chapter was primarily devoted to providing a critical analysis of relevant literature on spirituality and healing as it relates to women affected by domestic violence. It began by creating a context for the literature review by offering an overall perspective on the difference between spirituality and religiosity. It looked at the essential relationship between spirituality and healing, and subsequently introduced domestic violence, culminating in an exposition of what has been written on the relationship between spirituality and healing in the context of women healing from the effects of domestic violence. The chapter finally served to identify gaps in the literature on this subject.

CHAPTER THREE:
METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

This chapter is organised broadly into two sections: methodological approach, and

research design. The first section looks at the different methodological lenses that this

study employed are described in detail, including general characteristics of qualitative

studies, and more specifically content analysis and its sub-component of relational

analysis. The second section of the chapter discusses the strategies used in selecting the

articles for the study and the elements used to maintain rigour.

Methodological Approach

This study is best described as adhering to a qualitative research approach.

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive,
naturalistic approach to its subject. This means that qualitative researchers
studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or
interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.
Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of
empirical methods – case study, personal experience, introspective, life
story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts –
that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in
individuals' lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 18).

Consistent with the epistemological stance of qualitative inquiry, this study

acknowledges that the process of inquiry is an explicit and integral aspect of the research

process, and not merely a prefatory stage.

This study took an exploratory approach. Babbie (1999: 90-91) points out that an

exploratory approach is appropriate for three purposes: (1) to satisfy the researcher's

curiosity and desire for better understanding; (2) to test the feasibility of pursuing a more

exhaustive study; and (3) to develop the methods to be employed in any subsequent study. He argues that the exploratory approach is best fitted whenever a researcher is examining underdeveloped theoretical ground.

Content Analysis

Within the qualitative methodological approach, this study utilized content analysis as a means of extracting meaning from individual themes that arose, as well as their relationships to one another,

> Content analysis is a family of procedures for studying the contents and themes of written or transcribed qualitative data, usually by reducing it to more structured or concise units of information (Scherl & Smithson, 1987: 199).

It is important to note that content analysis can involve either or both qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, for this study, a qualitative methodology was utilized, since it "relies less on coding schemes and checklists and more on a well-defined research question and a thematic reading of sample materials" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 236).

Content analysis that is qualitative in nature also tries to reveal latent dimensions of text by means of interpretation (Kracauer, 1952, as cited in Huber, n.d.:2). For instance, personality characteristics of authors of texts, their attitudes towards the participants of their study, and other nuances of the text is part of what is analyzed in this form of content analysis. Indeed, it is a level of analysis that can be accessed only by reading "between the lines" (Huber, n.d.: 2). Indeed, qualitative content analysis focuses

more on the intentionality of a text and its implications, rather than on the text itself

(ibid.).

This form of content analysis can involve any kind of analysis where

communication content (speech, written text, interviews, articles and images) is

categorized and classified (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), and unlike secondary data analysis

and meta-analysis, content analysis treats data as a cultural artefact. Cultural artefacts

have been defined as being the products of individual activity, social organization,

technology, and cultural patterns (Reinharz, 1992). Reinharz goes on to explain that,

> Cultural artefacts have two distinctive properties. First, they possess a
> naturalistic, 'found' quality because they are not created for the purpose of
> study. Second, they are non interactive, i.e., they do not require asking
> questions of respondents or observing people's behaviour. Cultural
> artefacts are not affected by the process of studying them as people
> typically are. Instead, scholars can examine a written record of some other
> type of 'text' without interacting with the people who produced it
> (Reinharz, 1992: 147).

Relational Analysis

As part of the process of qualitative content analysis, a relational lens was adopted

as part of the research process. Relational content analysis begins with the act of

identifying concepts present in a given text or set of texts, but with the added dimension

of seeking to go beyond presence by exploring the relationships between the concepts

identified. In other words, the focus of relational analysis is to look for semantic or

meaningful relationships. Individual concepts, in and of themselves, are viewed as having

no inherent meaning. Rather, meaning is a product of the relationships among concepts in

a text. Carley & Palmquist (1992: 611) assert that concepts are "ideational kernels;" these

kernels can be thought of as symbols which acquire meaning through their connections to other concepts.

Because of the multidimensional nature of qualitative content analysis, through which a relational lens is employed, the analysis process has been separated into two levels, the first being focused mainly on the words and concepts expressed in the texts, while the second being directed towards the assumptions and implications surrounding the articles.

Computer Programs for Supporting the Analysis Process

Although the work of conducting the content analysis took place primarily through the researcher's efforts to code articles and understand relationships between themes and concepts, the computer program TAMS[1] Analyzer$^{©}$ was utilized by the researcher in order to store and sort the data collected.

Personal Worldview

A description of the methodological approach taken in this study would be incomplete without making clear some of the elements of the researcher's personal worldview. Furthermore, in the spirit of reflexivity espoused by the qualitative research approach, and given the highly personal nature of spirituality and the diversified perspectives related to its expression, it is appropriate to indicate how I have chosen to express my own spirituality. My views and commitments are influenced by my beliefs and practice as a Bahá'í. Therefore, some attention has been given to addressing the

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[1] TAMS is an acronym for Text Analysis Mark-up System. TAMS Analyzer's creator, Matthew Weinstein, designed the program to be an open-source qualitative analysis software tool, to be used by Apple computer users.

framework built around the essential principles and concepts espoused by my beliefs and in-relation to others' beliefs, mainly in the In-depth Analysis section of the Results Chapter, but also throughout the Discussion Chapter.

However, what can be stated at this point is the driving force behind my undertaking this research. As a Baha'í, I hold a conviction that it is through incorporating into the dominant discourses on health and healing ways of knowing that are derived from women's perspectives and experiences that individuals, families and communities can begin to experience more complete healing. For too long, discourses like the one on healing from the effects of domestic violence have been dominated by ways of thinking that do not fully recognize the contribution of spirituality. Because I found that there was little attention given to this aspect of health, and because most of the women I interacted with who had experienced domestic violence in their lives acknowledged a spiritual dimension to their healing, I felt impelled towards approaching this issue through this angle in order to help advance the thoughts and perspectives of these women who otherwise would have little access to shaping research and practice in this area.

Research Design

Data Collection - Selection Strategies

According to Krippendorff (2004), several points must be addressed in designing a study using content analysis, including questions surrounding the type of the data to be analyzed, the defined boundary of the data to be collected, as well as which population the sample will be derived from.

This study was primarily focused on previously published research articles on spirituality and healing among women affected by domestic violence. The articles chosen for this study met the following criteria:

- They were derived from peer-reviewed, widely-circulated journals. This was to ensure that there were some checks and balances (such as a peer review process and a wider audience that can respond to false information) in place to ensure validity.

- They were published no earlier than 1987. Journal articles published before 1987 on the subject of spirituality and healing within the context of domestic violence tend to face a number of challenges. Firstly, domestic violence was less studied by the research community. Additionally, the concept of the relationship between spirituality and healing was not yet a topic of significant investigation by the scientific community since less attention was given to the relationship between spirituality and healing among health-related researchers generally.

- Finally, the articles were derived from studies that had well-defined scientific methodologies for studying the subject. For instance, as identified in Table 2, the published articles identified for analysis were all based on established research methodologies, hence this allowed for a general consistency between submissions, which is useful for drawing connections between articles.

Eight articles were identified in electronic searches that met the inclusion criteria. The articles were sought through online databases accessed through the University of Calgary library catalogue, namely databases such as *Academic Search Premier, MEDLINE* and *PubMed*. Multiple searches were conducted using phrases that were a combination of key words, that is, "domestic violence, healing, spirituality", or "violence,

heal, spirit". Another means of finding related articles was to use a snowball method, such that new articles were found by going through the bibliographies of other articles. One article was identified via a professor and was added to the study, bringing the total number of articles analysed to nine.

Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis for this study was the individual article. All but one article were published in journals, and the one document selected for study was actually a book, entitled <u>Lifelines: Culture, Spirituality and Family Violence</u> (Boehm et al., 1999).

Table 2: Summary of Documents to be Included in the Study

No.	Author(s)	Title	Date	Methodology	Journal
1	Ai, A. L. & C. L. Park	Possibilities of the Positive Following Violence and Trauma: Informing the Coming Decade of Research	2005	Literature Review	Journal of Interpersonal Violence
2	Boehm, R., J. Golec, R. Krahn & D. Smyth	Lifelines: Culture, Spirituality, and Family Violence	1999	Qualitative Narrative Design	Book
3	Fischer, Kathleen	Violence Against Women: The Spiritual Dimension	1988	N/A	Book Section – <u>Women at the Well: Feminist Perspective on Spiritual Direction</u>

No.	Author(s)	Title	Date	Methodology	Journal
4	Flink, A., E. Paavilainen, & P. Astedt-Kurki	Survival of intimate partner violence as experienced by women	2005	Inductive Qualitative Content Analysis	Journal of Clinical Nursing
5	Gillum, T. L., C.M. Sullivan, & D.I. Bybee	The importance of spirituality in the lives of domestic violence survivors. Violence Against Women	2006	Cross-sectional Survey	Violence Against Women
6	Hassouneh-Phillips, D.	American Muslim women's experiences of leaving abusive relationships	2001	Interpretive Phenomenology	Health Care for Women International
7	Senter, K. E., & K. Caldwell	Spirituality and the maintenance of change: A phenomenological study of women who leave abusive relationships	2002	Phenomenology	Contemporary Family Therapy
8	Stenius, V. M. K., & B.M. Veysey	"It's the Little Things" - Women, Trauma, and Strategies for Healing	2005	Ethnographic Survey	Journal of Interpersonal Violence
9	Stotland, N. L.	Tug-of-war: Domestic abuse and the misuse of religion	2000	Case Study	American Medical Journal - Psychiatry

Ensuring Rigour

The researcher drew on a number of strategies for ensuring rigour, including the following:

- Investigator responsiveness refers to the researcher's creativity, sensitivity, flexibility and skill in conducting research (Mayan, 2001: 26). This requires that at all stages of the research process, the researcher is open and able to change the direction of idea

development, despite the excitement that a particular idea or theory proposes (Mayan, 2001: 26).

- Methodological coherence proposes that congruence between the research question and the components of the method should be maintained (Mayan, 2001). It would require therefore, that the various components of the study fit and verify each other. Having an audit trail or documenting the decisions, changes, insights and interpretations of the researcher will supplement this strategy of rigour (Mayan, 2001). All of these methods were employed to ensure methodological coherence. The specific details of this will be further articulated in subsequent points that address each method independently.

- Appropriate sampling ensures selection of articles that best represent the research topic (Mayan, 2001). Sampling adequacy can be evidenced by effective saturation and replication found in the analysis of the data (Mayan, 2001). Although the selection of topics represents the research topic sufficiently, saturation and replication were not attained, due to the limited nature of the literature available for study.

- Concurrent collection and analysis of data specifies that the cycling between data analysis and collection should ensure reliability and validity by allowing the maintenance of focus, systematic checking and ensuring that the data fits the objectives of the study (Mayan, 2001: 27). This method of maintaining rigour was exercised in a limited fashion by the researcher.

- Awareness of, and attempts to bracket the researcher's personal worldview, as well as her cultural and ideological background that she brings to the research played an

important role in maintaining rigour. The utilization of a journal in order to exercise reflexivity was particularly useful in this respect, and was kept from the proposal writing stage of the research through to the thesis defense.

- Prolonged engagement was created through analysis of the literature over approximately 12 months, and allowed the researcher to feel fully immersed in the subject area, and therefore become more aware of patterns and relationships over time (Mayan, 2001: 27).

- Finally, a written trail should also be maintained, to confirm the steps in the development and confirmation of themes and linkages as data is collected and analysed, so that others are able to go back and note the evolution of emerging ideas (Creswell, 1998). This was done through the aid of computer programs such as TAMS Analyser[©] and Microsoft Excel[©]. While the former program traces the coding procedure that each document underwent, the latter program provided a more visual representation of the linkages that were made across articles that were analysed.

Underlying all of the above strategies is the important element of reflexivity. Constructivist researchers strongly emphasize that critical reflection on the part of the researcher, throughout the whole process, can foster rich insights into the researcher's role, as well as the hermeneutical lens through which both the questions of the research and their findings are defined (Creswell, 1998). Reflexivity was encouraged by keeping a journal throughout the study and by discussions with committee members.

Limitations

Limitations to the study were identified during the research process. Firstly, this study did not look directly at those articles that highlight the importance of spirituality in preventing women from leaving domestic violence situations, since the focus of this research is to explore women's healing subsequent to leaving abusive relationships. However, in order to address the broader dimensions of the relationship between spirituality and domestic violence, this study included a review of literature that includes both the positive and negative elements of the interaction between spirituality and domestic violence, in order to delve more deeply into concepts around spirituality and healing. In addition to this investigation, articles about the negative relationship between spirituality and healing among women affected by domestic violence have also been included.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodological considerations, design and activities that have shaped and guided this study from the preliminary stages of planning to data collection, through to data analysis. The chapter detailed the methodological approach taken, including the subtlety of relational analysis within the broader context of content analysis. The chapter continued by discussing research design, and the corresponding rigour that is essential in carrying-out such a study. Several points were highlighted by the researcher as key ways that rigour would be maintained through the study.

CHAPTER FOUR:
RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an examination of the ways in which the

relationship of spirituality to healing as it relates to women affected by domestic violence

has been conceptualized in the literature. In keeping with the guiding research questions

of the study, and with the design principles of content analysis, this chapter presents a

number of key findings based on an analysis of these articles, while the subsequent

chapter provides an interpretation of these findings. The results of this analysis are

explored at two levels. At a first and more descriptive level, the analysis provides a

macro perspective of the articles through the identification of the conceptual points of

convergence and divergence across the articles. At a second and more in-depth level, the

analysis takes a more subdermal look at the underlying assumptions and convictions of

the authors, and involves searching for meaning in the terminology, tones, backgrounds,

and inferences found in the articles.

It should be noted that the approach taken in this chapter avoids the type of

generalizations in which data are often subsumed to advance a single overarching theme

while minimizing the multiplicity of themes that might have otherwise emerged. Thus,

contrary to the usual tendency of quoting short fragments to bolster support for an

argument, the chapter allows for a free-flow of quoting from the articles, such that short,

medium and lengthier quotes are integrated into an overall picture of how the themes are

viewed, from the different perspectives presented by the articles. This approach allows

the reader to discern more thoroughly the voice within each article, as well as the context around the use of certain words and concepts.

An Overview of the Articles

The articles analysed for this study represent a variety of perspectives, from a range of positions on a continuum between research and practice. Although this point is expounded upon later in the chapter, it is important to mention here that the academic fields that provide a backdrop for the articles include Nursing, Family Therapy, Psychology, Sociology, Criminal Justice, and Public Health. Despite this range of backgrounds, it is interesting to note that almost all of the authors address three major topics in their articles, either formally or informally, and not necessarily in the order specified here. These topics are the following:

I. The impact of domestic violence on a woman's spirituality;

II. The spiritual challenges involved in leaving an abusive relationship; and

III. The importance of spirituality in the healing process.

Because of the nature of this study, *the importance of spirituality in the healing process* was expected to be one addressed by all the articles being analysed, since a major criteria for choosing the articles was coverage of this topic. However, the other two topics, namely, *the impact of domestic violence on a woman's spirituality*, and *the spiritual challenges in leaving an abusive relationship* were not part of the criteria for choosing articles for this study, and were therefore not expected. Through the content analysis process, however, it became apparent that the authors found that an important way of understanding the importance of spirituality in healing was to first understand the

impact of domestic violence on a woman's spirituality, as well as the spiritual challenges

involved in leaving an abusive relationship. Many of the authors placed emphasis on the

destructive impact of domestic violence on a woman's life, and extended this destruction

into a woman's sense of spirituality. However, one article written by Ai and Park (2005)

did focus on possibilities of the positive following domestic violence experiences. The

authors were well aware of the predominant attention given to the negative impacts of

domestic violence and therefore clearly stated in their article that in focusing on the

positive, they were trying to "… provide a counterbalance to the predominant orientation

of victimization and pathology currently evidenced in the literature" (Ai & Park, 2005:

242).

As an overview of the articles, Table 3 provides details about the background of

the research, the methodology employed, the type of data that each article analyses, and

the number of participants included in the studies described in the articles.

Table 3: Characteristics of the Articles Analyzed

No.	Author(s), Date	Title	Background of the Researcher	Methodology	Type of Data that Article Analysed	Sample Size
1	Ai, A. L. & C. L. Park, 2005	Possibilities of the Positive Following Violence and Trauma: Informing the Coming Decade of Research	Gerontology and Psychology	Literature Review	Literature on the subject	N=40

No.	Author(s), Date	Title	Background of the Researcher	Methodology	Type of Data that Article Analysed	Sample Size
2	Boehm, R., J. Golec, R. Krahn & D. Smyth, 1999	Lifelines: Culture, Spirituality, and Family Violence	Women's Studies, Sociology	Qualitative Design	Interviews and narrative accounts	N=15
3	Fischer, Kathleen, 1988	Violence Against Women: The Spiritual Dimension	Women's Studies	N/A (This was a paper written by the author, drawing from her experiences)	Draws from various uncited cases, as well as personal experience	N/A
4	Flink, A., E. Paavilainen, & P. Astedt-Kurki, 2005	Survival of intimate partner violence as experienced by women	Nursing	Inductive Qualitative Content Analysis	Loosely-formulated open-ended interviews	N=7
5	Gillum, T. L., C.M. Sullivan, & D.I. Bybee, 2006	The importance of spirituality in the lives of domestic violence survivors. Violence Against Women	Ecological and Community Psychology, Urban Health	Cross-sectional Survey	A survey method was utilised, drawing from different sources	N=151
6	Hassouneh-Phillips, D., 2001	American Muslim women's experiences of leaving abusive relationships	Nursing	Interpretive Phenomenology	Group and individual interviews	N=17

No.	Author(s), Date	Title	Background of the Researcher	Methodology	Type of Data that Article Analysed	Sample Size
7	Senter, K. E., & K. Caldwell, 2002	Spirituality and the maintenance of change: A phenomenological study of women who leave abusive relationships	Family Therapy	Phenomenology	A series of interviews with a group of women	N=9
8	Stenius, V. M. K., & B.M. Veysey, 2005	"It's the Little Things" - Women, Trauma, and Strategies for Healing	Criminal Justice, Mental Health	Ethnographic Survey	In-depth interviews	N =18
9	Stotland, N. L., 2000	Tug-of-war: Domestic abuse and the misuse of religion	Public Health	Case Study	A single case, drawn from clinical experience	N=1

First Level of Analysis

Themes

Five broad themes were identified in the data at the first level of analysis, and a number of sub-themes were identified within each. The themes and corresponding sub-themes are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Themes from First Level of Analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme
1. Domestic violence has a major impact on the life of a woman.	1.1 All articles find that the impact of domestic violence extends into a woman's spirituality.	
2. The relationship between domestic violence and spiritual beliefs is complex.	2.1 Spiritual beliefs can prevent a woman from leaving domestic violence.	2.1.1 Forces derived from ties to a spiritual community and its norms can compel women to remain in an abusive relationship.
		2.1.2 Women can feel impelled to remain in abusive relationships because of entrenched beliefs regarding marriage and the relationships between men and women.
	2.2 Some articles on the other hand, find that spirituality can assist a woman in leaving an abusive relationship.	
3. Spirituality plays a role in a woman's healing from the effects of domestic violence.	3.1 The role of prayer and meditation	
	3.2 Religious communities support women's healing.	3.2.1 Spiritual companionship beneficial for a woman's healing.
	3.3 The woman's relationship to religious leaders in her community.	
	3.4 The woman's relationship to a deity	
	3.5 Spirituality expressed by a woman through self-discovery	
	3.6 Use of religious text for inspiration and strength	

Theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme
4. Practitioners deal with the spiritual element in women's healing		

I. The Impact of Domestic Violence on a Woman's Spirituality

1. Domestic violence has a major impact on the life of a woman

Although it is clear through the articles that there are a number of dimensions related to the impact of domestic violence on the lives of women who are thus affected, for the purpose of addressing the objectives of this thesis, the identified physical, emotional and psychological impacts of domestic violence on women have been clustered into this general section. However, this does not imply in the least that the other impacts are of a lesser importance.

Indeed, the articles all acknowledge the reality that domestic violence has a major impact on the lives of women. Senter and Caldwell (2002), for instance, state that the women who participated in their study "suffered repeated assaults to their self-esteem and to their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being as a result of extended periods in the abusive relationships" (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 549-550).

Senter and Caldwell (2002) go further and state that a major consequence of being in abusive relationships is the isolation that women face from friends, family, and other outside human contact. In some cases the separation was forced by the abuser, and in others, it was self-imposed:

> The practice of isolation was a main strategy used by the male partners to
> control the women. This perfidious practice slowly undermined the self-

esteem of the women as they were mainly subjected to the abuser's
negative, controlling voice…With their partners' prompting, they
managed to convince themselves that they were incompetent, inadequate,
and totally worthless (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 548).

Flink et al. further attest that abused women, "Suffer from physical and

psychological hypervigilance and hyperalertness, sleeping problems, fragmentariness of

memory, forgetfulness and difficulty concentrating"(Flink et al., 2005: 384).

Finally, Stotland (2000) identifies that women who are abused over time begin to

exhibit certain characteristics such as suspicious behaviour, volatile moods, isolating

oneself from others, and dissociation during particularly frightening episodes of abuse.

1.1 All articles find that the impact of domestic violence extends into a woman's

spirituality

The impact of domestic violence on the spirituality of women, although within the

same spectrum as physical, emotional and psychological impacts, is identified as a

separate sub-theme because it is the major focus of all of the articles. For instance, the

article by Ai and Park (2005: 245) clearly underscores that, "Violence and trauma tend to

challenge people's core values and raise questions about meaning and purpose in life."

Fischer goes on to mention that, "Because of our body/spirit unity, violence is a deep

violation of a woman's personal integrity or wholeness" (Fischer, 1988: 156). Another

article further attests that women who have experienced domestic violence have

expressed feelings of spiritual anguish in the midst of the abuse (Gillum et al., 2006). The

same article goes further to explain:

The experience of being hurt by someone one believes should love,
cherish, and protect one causes a great deal of spiritual distress. This
distress can manifest itself in various ways, including feelings of despair,

belief that life is meaningless, or perceptions of oneself as powerless (Gillum et al., 2006: 241).

Another impact of domestic violence on a woman's spirituality comes in the form of anger towards a higher power. Senter and Caldwell (2002) state that, "Anger and frustration toward God were acknowledged by three of the participants. Unanswered prayers were the main cause of anger at God" (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 552). Fischer (1988) further attests that domestic violence threatens a woman's trust in a higher power and raises many faith questions, such as, "Was this somehow God's will? Where was God when I was so in need? How could God love me and let me go through this?" (Fischer, 1988: 157).

What is at stake for women affected by domestic violence is not so much their abstract notions about God, but rather their trust and their relationship to God (Fischer, 1988).

Gillum et al. further add that,

Because of the importance of spirituality in the lives of many victims of family violence and the spiritual distress that can be caused by victimization, spiritual healing is necessary to restore one's sense of meaningfulness of and power over one's life (Gillum et al., 2006: 241).

II. The Spiritual Challenges Involved in Leaving an Abusive Relationship

2. The relationship between domestic violence and spiritual beliefs is complex

There was unanimous agreement in the existence of a complex relationship between spirituality and healing from the effects of domestic violence. Specifically, several authors clearly highlight the existence of some degree of ambivalence in how women affected by domestic violence relate spirituality to their lives. For instance, Flink

et al. (2005) note that spirituality, when manifested through religiousness, becomes a factor that obliges women to maintain commitment to the couple relationship, while the abusers use religiosity to make demands on women. However, Flink et al. also point out that religiousness promotes the recovery of integrity. Essentially,

> The spiritual conviction of four of the women tied them to the couple relationship on the one hand, making religious demands on them and yet supported them in their recovery on the other (Flink et al., 2005: 389).

However, besides identifying ambivalence in the overall link between spirituality and the lives of women affected by domestic violence, some articles go into more detail and express a range of diverse perspectives on the nature of the connection between spirituality and a woman's choice to remain in an abusive relationship.

2.1 Spiritual beliefs can prevent a woman from leaving domestic violence

Some articles describe a sense of duty that women feel to remain in an abusive relationship, due to their spiritual beliefs. For instance, Senter and Caldwell identify in their study that, "Many of the women chose to remain in the abusive relationships because of religiosity" (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 548). Fischer also acknowledges in her article that the women she has worked with feel a sense of duty to remain in an abusive relationship due to their religious beliefs. The author identifies that women tend to forgive their abusive husbands because of their interpretation of Christian teachings on forgiveness. Fischer thus suggests that therapists should clarify for women of Christian affiliation that, "Forgiveness does not mean allowing things to go on as before" (Fischer, 1988: 156).

There was some agreement regarding the change that takes place in women in relation to their relationship to spirituality in their healing process. Ai and Park suggest that, "A strong faith may be related to more initial distress as the devout individual's positive worldviews are shattered by their sudden and inexplicable trauma" (Ai & Park, 2005: 246).

> A strong faith may be related to more initial distress as the devout individual's positive worldviews are shattered by their sudden and inexplicable trauma yet to better adjustment as the stressful event is eventually integrated into their meaning system. This faith-based reaction to trauma and protective effects of religious coping over time is better demonstrated using longitudinal design and advanced statistics (Ai & Park, 2005: 246).

Two types of pressures are identified within the context of a woman's sense of spiritual duty to remain in an abusive relationship: impulsion and compulsion.

2.1.1 Forces derived from ties to a spiritual community and its norms can compel women to remain in an abusive relationship

Some articles actually identify, on the one hand, certain external forces that compel women to remain in abusive relationships. Hassouneh-Phillips, for example, cites several instances where women of Muslim background felt compelled to remain in an abusive marriage. She observes in one instance that the participants in her study relied heavily, "… on individual Muslim leaders and scholars who, unfortunately, often were acquainted with their abusers personally" (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001: 424). In another instance, Hassouneh-Phillips finds that,

> Divorce, when initiated by a woman, is called khula. Khula requires a judicial decree issued by an Islamic court. This presented a problem for participants because there are no Islamic courts in the United States to petition (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001: 424).

2.1.2 Women can feel impelled to remain in abusive relationships because of entrenched beliefs regarding marriage and the relationshisp between men and women.

In addition to compulsion, Hassouneh-Phillips identifies that some of the Muslim women who participated in her study felt impelled to remain with an abusive partner. For instance, in following the above example related to divorce when initiated by a woman, although the inability to perform khula in the United States compels the women in her study to remain in abusive relationships, she notes that the participants also feel impelled to obey this law. Indeed, "All but two of the women who decided to divorce felt the need to obtain not only a civil divorce, but also an Islamic divorce" (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001: 422).

2.2 Some articles on the other hand, find that spirituality can assist a woman in leaving an abusive relationship.

Fewer articles focus on how spirituality can assist a woman in leaving an abusive relationship; however there is some attention given to it, particularly by Senter and Caldwell (2002). These authors identify the importance of, "Receiving and acting on the advocating voices of others" as a way of assisting a woman in leaving situations of domestic violence (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 549). The authors note that that among friends and family, these advocating voices were heard from ministers, church members and even through communion with God (Senter & Caldwell, 2002).

Senter and Caldwell go further in stating that an internal knowing or certainty that, "God would somehow get them through anything," allowed many of the women to persist in leaving abusive relationships" (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 550).

Although Gillum et al. (2006) do not cite specific examples pertaining to the role of spirituality in leaving abusive relationships, these authors identify in their article that they are seeking to understand how spirituality helps women both cope with and leave domestic violence situations.

III. The Importance of Spirituality in the Healing Process

3. Spirituality plays a role in a woman's healing from the effects of domestic violence

All of the articles analyzed for this study propose that spirituality plays a major role in the healing process. These articles base their conclusions on the first-hand accounts of the women who are participants in their studies. For instance, Stenius and Veysey's (2005) findings show that, of the women who agreed to participate in their study, 72% confirmed that a spiritual connection helped them maintain their emotional balance. Stenius and Veysey further point out that spirituality provided women with a source of support, a sense of hope, and a feeling of inner peace. "In contrast to seeking out support from others, which depends on the availability and accessibility of others, spirituality is a constant presence" (Stenius & Veysey, 2005: 1161).

Gillum et al. also present evidence to show that women with a welcoming, caring religious experience report feelings of hope for healing after a distressing life event such as the experience of domestic violence (Gillum et al., 2006: 240).

Stenius and Veysey best summarize the general benefits of spirituality in the

healing process in the following quote:

> In essence, the importance of spirituality is threefold. It is critical that
> women believe that they are good people, that they are not responsible for
> the bad things that happened to them, and that life is ultimately just. These
> concepts re-establish a sense of order and fairness, while reducing shame
> and hurt. Redefining the past and placing blame where it belongs to
> transform the present takes the hurtful events and not only neutralizes their
> effects but also, in fact, turns them into assets (Stenius & Veysey, 2005:
> 1161).

Besides the general statements noted above, other articles have approached the

subject of spirituality in the healing process with a more specific lens.

3.1 The role of prayer and meditation

The articles, although sometimes avoiding the explicit use of terms such as

prayer, meditation and *faith*, still recognize that the women who participated in their

research studies refer to prayer and meditation as part of nurturing their faith. In fact,

some of the articles clearly state that their participants use of prayer*,* meditation and faith

provided them the impetus for overcoming difficult challenges (Stotland, 2000). Senter

and Caldwell share some accounts of participants in their study that reflect the intensity

of focus and determination that these women derived through prayer and meditation:

> While preparing for her divorce, Marcia recalled meditating and praying
> quietly on a park bench during her lunch periods asking for and receiving
> guidance from God. Kate's faith in God helped her to end her abusive
> relationship and also assisted her in overcoming a serious drug addiction.
> She chose to seek treatment for her addiction first before she confronted
> the relationship issues. She questioned her ability to succeed in the face of
> these two enormous undertakings. It was her faith that ultimately gave her
> the strength to triumph in both areas (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 550).

Stotland identifies in her article that Christian practitioners, "Reinforce patients'
attempts to think, feel, and live according to religious precepts and incorporate prayer
into therapy" (Stotland, 2000: 702).

Finally, Boehm offered practical advice for practitioners by suggesting that a
quiet room could be made available for women in shelters, where prayer and reflection
could take place (Boehm, 1999).

3.2 Religious communities support women's healing

Gillum et al. (2006) focus on this theme. They note that abused women, especially
those in closed religious communities, are more likely to disclose their experience of
violence within their religious communities. Furthermore, "As women search for means
of coping with living with or leaving an abusive partner, many of them turn to their
religious institutions and religious family for strength, comfort, and support" (Gillum et
al., 2006: 240). Gillum et al. (2006) go on to conclude that some women affected by
domestic violence find that other women within these communities are the ones who
discreetly and informally provide them with much-needed forms of support.

It was also found that, "For women of color, greater religious involvement was
also related to increased social support" (Gillum et al., 2006: 240).

3.2.1 Spiritual companionship beneficial for a woman's healing

These articles noted that it appears to be tremendously important for a woman to
have others believe in her – spiritual companionship was reported to be very beneficial
for a woman going through a healing process. This theme received extensive coverage by
the articles analysed. For example, Senter and Calwell (2002) share that generally, the

women in their study received advocating reinforcement from family, friends, ministers and co-workers. Besides general comments on the topic, a thorough description of the concept of spiritual companionship is provided in the article by Fischer:

> One of the principal ways in which spiritual companions assist the healing process is by being present to the person in her pain, listening to her story, and offering her unqualified love and acceptance. It provides her with a supportive presence while she develops her own strength (Fischer, 1988: 157).

Within the realm of the practice, Stenius and Veysey (2005) identify that a very effective form of spiritual companionship is found in women's shelters and safe houses where women can gather around a kitchen table for coffee and tell their stories to one another. This gathering provides new strength from common courage and women often find their humanity affirmed by their peers who have known similar pain (Stenius & Veysey, 2005). "Empowering interpersonal relationships place a woman's life in context. They validate her experiences, place the injury in perspective, reflect back her worth, and give value to her personhood" (Stenius & Veysey, 2005: 1161).

3.3 The woman's relationship to religious leaders in her community

There were mixed conclusions about the role of religious leaders in the healing process. For instance, Senter and Caldwell (2002) highlight how women who have left abusive relationships have identified their ministers as providing a great deal of support in their healing process, in addition to friends, family, church members, counselors, and support groups.

Gillum et al., on the other hand, point out that some "Women expressed their desire to seek comfort from their faith communities and religious leaders but often found this support lacking" (Gillum et al., 2006: 240).

3.4 The woman's relationship to a deity

Most articles touch on the importance of a woman's relationship to a deity. Gillum et al. clearly state in their article that, "For many women, their trust in a higher power is integral to their healing" (Gillum et al., 2006: 240). This article further notes that the overwhelming majority of the women who were participants in the study (97%) reported that spirituality and God was a source of strength or comfort for them (Gillum et al., 2006).

Senter and Caldwell also note that, "In addition to receiving help from others, some of the women found support in their faith in God. They described an internal knowing or certainty that the help of God would somehow get them through anything" (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 550).

Fischer approaches the subject of spirituality and healing within a Christian framework, and deals with questions such as, "Where was God?" (Fischer, 1988: 156). Her response in relation to the above question is to reflect on evil:

> God's relationship to evil. It is not God who sends us suffering, even for our good. But God cannot prevent all evil in a world of free agents. When tragedy strikes, we find the presence and activity of God grieving with us in the pain and working with us to try to redeem it (Fischer, 1988:156).

Fischer concludes her own search for understanding of how women relate to a deity (in this case to a Christian view of God) by explaining that, "Finally it is a matter of helping the woman find the existential answer, as Job did, in an experience of God's

healing presence. Healing the wounds of violence is a resurrection experience" (Fischer, 1988, 156). Indeed, she realizes over the course of her investigation that wounds remain for the woman, but at the same time, these wounds can be transformed into a new kind of wholeness as she discovers new strengths, through her relationship to God (Fischer, 1988).

3.5 Spirituality expressed by a woman through self-discovery

One article identifies the idea that spirituality can be expressed in self-discovery:

> The theme of awakening and rediscovery refers to a period in the lives of the women where the awareness of self was once lacking. For all of the women in the abusive relationships, energy was primarily expended on survival, allowing little time and attention for the practice of self-discovery. The freedom to engage in self-exploration was attained with the termination of the abuse. Self-discovery led Marcia to a heightened sense of awareness after she had been away from the relationship for some time (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 554).

Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) in her article points to the reality that the women in her study often went through a period of spiritual crisis that was precipitated by alienation from the community, and feelings of tremendous loss after leaving the abusive relationship. She notes, however, that as the crises evolved in the women's lives, a majority of them experienced, "A spiritual reawakening that lead to *reclaiming the self.* Distanced to some degree from the power of group-oriented norms, women gradually became free thinkers, reinterpreting Islam in empowering ways" (Hassouneh Phillips, 2001: 422).

In explaining this notion of reclaiming oneself, Hassouneh-Phillips (2001) states that those women who were able to see their communities with a critical eye remained distant and began to gain new insight and meaning in their lives as they developed

different and more empowering understanding of their experiences of abuse, as well as

their experiences of faith. "Asserting their right to interpret Islam independently was part

of this healing processes—a process of *reclaiming the self*"(Hassouneh Phillips, 2001:

429).

3.6 Use of religious text for inspiration and strength

A small portion of the articles note that women draw on religious text for

inspiration and strength. There was strong evidence in the articles pointing to the

importance of religious texts as a strong influence in the lives of women healing from the

effects of domestic violence. Boehm et al. particularly acknowledge that:

> Throughout the process of recording *Lifelines,* many women quoted
> religious texts to explain how they felt about themselves and how these
> passages influenced their actions. Often, the exact passage was not known
> to the woman, yet existed subconsciously as a cornerstone to her
> behaviour in her community like an invisible stone in a stream firmly
> directing the flow of the stream (Boehm et al., 1999: 206).

Boehm et al. conclude that by the end of the study, they realized that, "Each

woman's knowledge of sacred writings is usually hidden in the subtext of her life,

unconsciously forming her image of herself, guiding her in her actions" (Boehm et al.,

1999: 206).

It is however, important to note that although religious texts can act as a powerful

influence for women in coping and healing, another article, one by Fischer finds that

religious texts or their interpretation can also provide impediments for women in violent

relationships. For instance, the article by Fischer states that, "Women with violent

partners may believe that the bible supports the subordinate position of women in the

family and decrees that a wife be subject to her husband" (Fischer, 1988: 159). Fischer

thus suggests that these women need the assistance of their therapists, religious community and religious leaders to see that *The Bible* does not support battering and violence against women (Fischer, 1988).

Another article also identifies that in some instances, religious texts can be used as a tool by an abusive partner, in subjugating a woman. For instance, Stotland identifies in her single case study that the husband of the abused woman whom she was treating has mentioned that, "He has found Biblical injunctions to support his domination and control over the activities and beliefs of every member of the family" (Stotland, 2000: 701).

4. Practitioners deal with the spiritual element in women's healing

Practitioners deal with the spiritual element in women's healing in different ways. Stenius and Veysey identify that there is an existing gap in the health care system when it comes to identifying physical or sexual abuse taking place in a woman's life when she seeks medical attention (Stenius & Veysey, 2005). In their article, Stenius and Veysey note that, "Women who receive mental health, substance abuse, and/or emergency medical services are rarely asked about histories of physical and sexual abuse"(Stenius & Veysey, 2005: 1156).

Flink et al. note that among other things, the survival of a woman following the traumatic effects of being in an abusive relationship can be promoted by the support of a good therapist (Flink et al., 2005).

Boehm et al. spend a great deal of time looking at how practitioners deal with the spiritual element in the healing of women, and summarize the conundrum they perceive many practitioners facing:

The secularization of the modern world has left many of us in a deep conundrum…Professional training gives us insights into the psychological, the emotional, and the mental states of these women. But what about the spiritual? We address legal issues, housing needs, economic concerns, child care, and personal safety (Boehm et al., 1999: 205).

One article in particular characterizes the work of a therapist in helping a woman in an abusive relationship as not being an easy one. Indeed, the article by Stotland provides a unique perspective on the role of practitioners in the spiritual aspect of healing, since she writes her article in a first-person format, introducing a case of a woman she had been working with for over twenty years. She summarizes her work with this woman by confiding that, "It often feels to me as though Violet spends 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in the suburban equivalent of a prisoner-of-war camp, while we have one session a week to counter the damage" (Stotland, 2000: 701). Stotland even points out that, "For evangelical Christians, a large 'Christian therapy' movement has developed. Practitioners reinforce patients' attempts to think, feel, and live according to religious precepts and incorporate prayer into therapy. When freely chosen, this may be a workable synthesis" (Stotland, 2000: 702).

In-depth Analysis

In attempting to identify how the backgrounds of the authors, whether religious, professional or otherwise, have influenced their own analysis of the role of spirituality in healing, it seems essential to first grapple with the role that my own background plays in my relational analysis of their articles. There are major elements of my own belief system

that have informed this analysis, and these elements have revolved around the beliefs I
have as a Baha'í.

First and foremost is my fundamental belief in the underlying spiritual nature and
nobility of every human being. Spirituality therefore, is not seen merely through an
instrumentalist lens where it is perceived as one aspect of a person's being that is
employed as the situation necessitates it, but rather that spirituality is central to being
human. Indeed, the Baha'í conception of this subject suggests that the essence of the
human being is the soul, and that enshrined within it are a number of different faculties,
among them the human heart and mind, as well as their expressions, consciousness,
emotion, perception and other such faculties. It is also my conviction that it is the human
spirit that allows one to endure and grow through trials and difficulties, and there is thus a
strong link between curing an ailment (whether physical, psychological or emotional),
and enabling the spirit to grow and heal.

A second aspect of my beliefs that play a role in my approach to analysing these
articles is the non-sectarian and universal nature of the Baha'í Faith, which also allows
me to resonate with a more constructivist paradigm that sees reality not as single and
linear, such that there is only room for one religious worldview, but rather that reality is
far more complex in nature, and that it embraces the fundamental principles espoused by
many of the world's religious teachings. However, what accompanies this belief is the
understanding that neither fundamentalist approaches to seeking truth, where the desire is
to find one answer and to negate all others, nor relativistic approaches where all answers
are considered equal and therefore tolerated are acceptable. Instead, an approach is taken
where there are certain guiding concepts and principles that contribute to a framework of

being and doing, one that encompasses the varying dimensions of many of the world's religions.

With the above in mind, the following in-depth analysis was carried-out.

Themes

Four broad themes emerged from the more in-depth analysis of the articles that were utilized for this study:

Table 5: Themes from In-depth Analysis

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Religious frameworks shape understandings of spirituality	
2. Language used to understand spirituality and healing	2.1 Language reveals each researcher's knowledge system.
3. The gap between the impact of domestic violence on spirituality and the importance of spirituality in healing	
4. References to spirituality in healing disconnected from other factors	

1. Religious frameworks shape understandings of spirituality

What is being noted through the analysis of the data at a deeper level is that the framework for understanding spirituality may in fact be primarily created by religious knowledge systems. Whereas it was thought that spirituality encapsulated religious understanding, what is instead being proposed is that religious knowledge may actually

define how we employ the term spirituality in the first instance, and how we measure its effect on the healing process.

For instance, Fischer (1988) is on one end of the spectrum of exposing her religious framework when dealing with the subject of spirituality and healing. She utilizes a strong Christian voice in her article, and in several instances refers directly to Christian teaching while, in other instances, she quotes directly from *The Bible*. Her indicators of spirituality in the healing process furthermore have to do with releasing oneself from Christian notions of guilt in reporting violence, or in leaving one's spouse (Fischer, 1988).

Other authors, like Gillum et al. (2006), do not refer to any specific religious framework, however what they deem to be indicators of religious support uncovers a more Christian lens that shapes their perspective:

> The authors looked specifically at three identified dimensions of religious support: God support, congregational support, and church leader support (Gillum et al., 2006, 241).

Flink et al. (2005) also adopt a more Christian voice. For instance, their article refers to religion as a means of receiving support via the church and its religious leaders.

2. Language used to understand spirituality and healing

An entire range of terms are used by diverse fields of study in looking at the role of spirituality in healing. The choice of one's language, it is argued, can reveal philosophies and underlying assumptions held by authors. For instance, several authors utilize the word *survivor* or *survival* throughout their texts, when referring to women who have been affected by domestic violence. Flink et al. (2005: 383) and Gillum et al. (2006:

240) use this term even in the titles of their articles. Within their framework, women who have experienced domestic violence face the challenge of survival. Their article does not refer to any possibilities of thriving, growing, or overcoming the impact of domestic violence on their lives.

Other authors like Ai and Park (2005) however, acknowledge other more positive outcomes other than survival. In fact, the entire focus of their article, as denoted by the article's title, "Possibilities of the Positive Following Violence and Trauma" (Ai & Park, 2005: 242) is positive outcomes.

On the other hand, some authors who acknowledge positive aspects related to overcoming the impact of domestic violence do so with some detachment from the women's transformative experience, and instead recognize the women's achievements as if they were patients who overcame an illness. Stenius and Veysey (2005) for instance, attempt to see how women engage in their own healing, and yet despite their qualitative ethnographic survey approach to this very important subject, on several occasions utilize removed and disease-related terms such as "trauma-specific treatment" (Stenius & Veysey, 2005: 1157), and "patients" (Stenius & Veysey, 2005: 1154).

Gillum et al. (2006) also limit the extent of the transformative experience of women who have experienced domestic violence by using language that under-estimates the power of a woman to overcome and become strengthened through the experience. For instance, the term "coping" (Gillum et al., 2006: 240) is used to refer to how a woman relates to the domestic violence in her life.

Hassouneh-Phillips (2001: 415) uses the term "abusive relationship" in her title, to refer to the types of situations the women she interviewed were in. Stenius (2005:

1157) employs the term "women with histories" of violence to describe women who have

left domestic violence situations. A counsellor and psychologist, Allan Wade (2002: 15)

proposes to some of the women he has counselled that in using terms such as *abusive*

relationship and *women with histories of violence*, it is implied that there is an interplay

between two individuals who both exhibit abusive tendencies, rather than the imposition

of violence on a woman by her partner.

Boehm et al. best describe the emergence of this professional language in the

following manner:

> The terminology commonly used to describe family violence, such as
> survivor, victim, healing, faith community and multicultural group has
> gradually evolved as society began to understand and describe the
> magnitude of violence against women in our communities. You will not
> find these terms used much by the women who describe their experiences.
> "Professional jargon also, all too easily, becomes the voice of authority. A
> counselor of a victim of family violence becomes, when using this
> language and jargon, the one authorized to advise, to help, to heal others.
> In *Lifelines,* we sometimes use these terms in default of other options,
> leaving the search for new language to future activists who may use this
> book as a catalyst (Boehm, 2005: 202-203).

2.1 Language reveals each researcher's knowledge system

Fischer does not disclose the lens that influences her article. Furthermore, no

definition of spirituality is described, nor is any distinction between religion and

spirituality made. In fact, religion is used quite interchangeably with spirituality:

> Help for the religious crisis created by experiences of violence does not
> consist primarily in providing theological answers, although these can be
> useful and freeing. It lies rather in accompanying the woman through the
> death/resurrection passage to her own answers. Spiritual guides are there
> to facilitate the process as God brings about healing (Fischer, 1988: 157).

However, through the language that Fischer utilizes, one can clearly denote the Christian influence in her article when she uses terms such as "resurrection" (Fischer, 1988: 157). Fischer also openly uses the term "God" (Fischer, 1988: 159), but it is interesting to note that she refers to *The Bible* in lower-case, as "the bible" or "biblical" (Fischer, 1988: 159-160). There is no reason given for this.

Gillum et al. (2006) also make no differentiation between spirituality and religiosity. The terms "God" and "higher power" are used interchangeably throughout the article, with no acknowledgement of the significance of the use of either or both of these terms (Gillum et al., 2006: 242).

What seems more important to Gillum et al. is the type of measurement utilized for the study. Quantitative methods, with the predominant use of scales that were developed by other authors, were employed for this study. In addition to this use of largely positivistic scientific methods, the authors explained in the discussion of their article that, "We did not ask women to identify their religious affiliations nor to provide information about how their religious communities had been supportive or unsupportive of them in the past" (Gillum et al., 2006: 248).

Although these authors don't express the background reasoning for their use of quantitative methods, or their decision not to ask the study participants about their religious affiliation, this could be because, as noted in Table 3, these authors come from community psychology and urban health backgrounds, and at the time of the publication of this article, were affiliated with more established universities such as Johns Hopkins and Michigan State Universities. The religious background of these authors could therefore have been purposefully muted by the positivistic scientific methodologies and

philosophies that their universities and fields of studies adhere to. Their universities may also have tended towards divorcing spirituality from religion, in order to avoid factional dissension. Indeed, these authors seem to assume that spirituality is like another aspect of a person's being, equivalent to emotional, intellectual, physical and social well-being.

Stotland, unlike Gillum et al. (2006), makes a clear distinction between spirituality and religion because the topic of her article necessitates it. Her article, entitled "Tug-of-War: Domestic Abuse and the Misuse of Religion" (Stotland, 2000: 696) reports on a specific client and Stotland's 20 years of interaction with her:

> This case illustrates a tug-of-war in which the abuser adduced the family's Christian faith, not only to support his abuse, but also—when threatened with the dissolution of his marriage—as a powerful tool to disrupt the therapeutic relationship. He declared that the psychiatrist was a liberal and a feminist sent by Satan to tempt the patient to repudiate her marital and maternal obligations and that she was going to go to Hell if she persisted with therapy. He initiated a tug-of-war in the patient's mind between her religion and her treatment (Stotland, 2000: 696).

3. The gap between the impact of domestic violence on spirituality and the importance of spirituality in healing.

Domestic violence and its impact on women's lives is a topic covered by all of the articles as a prelude to looking at the importance of spirituality in healing. Although there is also reference to the importance of spirituality in women's healing, there is a gap, because it is not explained how an article could refer to why and how women could summon courage, detachment, strength, all components of the healing process, when they have been depicted as spiritually diminished because of their experience.

For instance, Gillum et al. refer to how "The experience of being hurt by someone one believes should love, cherish, and protect one causes a great deal of spiritual distress"

(Gillum et al., 2006: 241). They further state that, "The women viewed both their experience of abuse and recovery from abuse as occurring within the context of their faith" (Gillum et al., 2006: 240). However, the path from the diminishment of spirituality caused by domestic violence, to how spirituality can then become a major factor in the healing process is never clearly traced by the authors.

Senter and Caldwell (2002) offer a more realistic depiction of the change that takes place in a woman's spirituality as she goes from a situation of domestic violence to a space where she can begin to heal:

> The participants' relationships with God can be best described as
> evolutionary. In essence, the women's religious and spiritual beliefs
> evolved as they evolved (Senter & Caldwell, 2002: 556).

But interestingly, Senter and Caldwell (2002) do not idealize the evolutionary process that women's religious and spiritual beliefs undergo. They attempt instead to capture the complexity related to how women relate to religion and spirituality as they go through the leaving and healing process:

> Many of the women chose to remain in the abusive relationships because
> of religiosity, and religious beliefs engendered conflicting emotions
> regarding the church and its practices. As the women left their
> relationships and were able to focus on their self-recovery, they
> experienced changes in their perceptions of God (Senter & Caldwell,
> 2002: 556, 563).

It is unfortunate, however, that Senter & Caldwell (2002) do not go into further detail into the nature of the changes in their relationship to God that the women experienced.

4. References to spirituality in healing disconnected from other factors

Numerous references to spirituality in the healing process are made, but are placed alongside many other factors in a disconnected fashion. Flink et al. in particular report spirituality as one of many factors that support healing:

> Survival was promoted by support from a good therapist, a spiritual community, a good physician of souls, faith in God, family of origin, friends, a new partner relationship, positive feedback on work, strengthening of self-esteem and hobbies (Flink et al., 2005: 388).

It is not clear through this what the importance of spirituality is in the healing process, particularly in comparison to factors such as the role of positive feedback on work. Each factor is never qualified by the authors, nor are the factors considered in-relation to one another. Therefore, one assumes from the above depiction that a woman healing from the effects of domestic violence could adopt any of the above factors independent of the others.

Other authors like Stenius and Veysey (2006) attempt to further qualify the factors involved in the healing process, and to place them in more of a sequence:

> Several factors are known to help women in the healing process, including adequate and early identification of co-occurring problems, a treatment philosophy based on competency building and empowerment, and services and supports provided in safe, accessible, and community-based locations. Other essential components include the establishment of mutual relationships built on trust, notably in the form of peer relationships and peer run groups, establishing and maintaining safety, and trauma-specific treatment (Stenius & Veysey, 2006: 1157).

However, it is still questionable whether it is beneficial to create such lists of factors, since there is no explication of the relationship between them, nor any sense of which factors hold greater priority.

Summary

This chapter sought to present and weave together a number of related themes that emerged in the data. Two levels of analysis were employed for this purpose. The first level consisted of analysing the content of each article, and what was being said about the role of spirituality in the healing of women affected by domestic violence. Through this, four broadly defined themes were identified. However, three overarching areas that provided a framework for looking at these themes were also presented. These included: the impact of domestic violence on a woman's spirituality, the spiritual challenges involved in leaving an abusive relationship, and the importance of spirituality in the healing process. The themes that emerged included the following: Domestic violence has a major impact on the life of a woman who is thus affected, there is a complex relationship between a woman affected by domestic violence and her spiritual beliefs, spirituality plays a role in a woman's healing from the effects of domestic violence, and the way practitioners deal with the spiritual element in women's healing.

The second level of analysis consisted of a more in-depth exploration of the underlying assumptions that the authors held in writing their articles, as expressed through their backgrounds, and through the language that has been employed by each author. Themes such as how each researcher's religious framework shaped his/her understanding of spirituality, how there are different ways in which language is utilized in understanding the role of spirituality in the healing process, how a gap exists between the impact of domestic violence on spirituality and the importance of spirituality in healing, and finally, numerous references to spirituality in the healing process are made, but are placed alongside many other factors in a disconnected fashion were all identified.

CHAPTER FIVE:
DISCUSSION

Introduction

One of the main goals of this thesis was to offer insights into various aspects of spirituality and healing from the effects of domestic violence. In light of the above goal, this chapter will incorporate key findings from the analysis of the articles, coupled with a strong component of personal reflection. Because the insights presented here are a product of the identification of coherence between articles, as well as the gaps between them, and because it feels quite natural to suggest implications and corresponding recommendations based on the insights, this chapter has been structured in a manner that covers all of the above aspects in an organic manner, avoiding unnatural or disjointed categorizations that conclude with recommendations that lose meaning when isolated from a context in which they have been derived.

However, before entering this pattern of addressing gaps, implications and recommendations, the chapter begins with an exploration of personal beliefs and how they relate to research, based largely on reflections that took place throughout this study, and as recorded in a learning journal.

On Personal Beliefs

It is important to firstly mention that this researcher's worldview incorporates the understanding that every human being is in essence spiritual in nature, with latent potentialities that can be developed and refined through effort. As such, every aspect of this study has been perceived through a lens that incorporates this belief. It is important to

make this explicit because it can not be assumed that everyone perceives the existence of

a human spirit, and even if they do, it may be perceived in a different manner.

In relation to this, the qualitative researchers who authored the articles for this

study brought to their work sets of assumptions and beliefs rooted within one or more

religious doctrines which directly or indirectly influenced their approach to both the

subject itself and those affected or involved in it. However, regardless of whether they

openly and explicitly state their religious beliefs, or whether their beliefs remained less

explicit to the reader and possibly even to themselves[2], their understanding of reality and

its features, such as the nature of the human being, the nature of family, the nature of

healing, and even the nature of injustice and oppression had an impact on the way they

approached a topic like the one being investigated. Thus, what becomes a challenge for

researchers and practitioners alike is to not simply grapple with understanding the various

dimensions of an issue in order to tackle it, but rather to grapple with the more difficult

task of understanding the assumptions and ways of thinking that have lead to their

perspective.

This reflexivity can not simply be an undisciplined act, but should rather involve a

deep and thorough exploration of the role that one's beliefs play in one's understanding

of, and approach to a subject in an effort to be clear about the transferability and rigor of

a study. However, it should be noted here that it is a difficult task to understand how

one's beliefs and worldview shape one's approach to a subject, particularly since beliefs

and worldviews are dynamic aspects of one's being, and are affected by new experiences

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[2] Their beliefs may remain hidden to themselves and others because whatever spiritual views they hold
have been shaped more subtly by structures and institutions, social forces and cultural background that
themselves have been shaped by religious doctrine.

such as conducting research. Thus, opportunities to discuss openly with colleagues and co-investigators may play an important role that goes beyond the self-study captured by journaling.

Furthermore, results from studies that look at aspects of spirituality need to be communicated using a common language among researchers, in order to allow for outcomes to contribute towards the advancement of knowledge in this area. At the very least, authors need to be clear about how key terms are being used. This is something that is evidently lacking in the current base of literature on spirituality and healing as it relates to domestic violence. For instance, none of the articles analysed for this study defined the term *healing.* The reader could therefore only assume what the researcher meant when it was mentioned that *healing* was an outcome of a specific act. As a result of this lack of clarity, it became quite challenging to compare factors that contribute to healing across articles.

One recommendation therefore, would be to encourage collaboration among those wishing to advance this discourse, so that a conceptual framework can emerge, one that also lays the groundwork of a common language that gives expression to various concepts pertaining to the subject. Through this process, words such as s*pirituality*, *healing, and religious practice* would be among those that would be grappled with in order to develop a common operationalization. It should also be understood that the operationalization of such terms will evolve as understanding of the subject increases.

It is understood that what is being recommended is by no means a simple task, because firstly, divergences between different religions can have the tendency of making conversations on the topic of spirituality and healing challenging. More importantly,

there presently exists a disjointed and often oppositional relationship between science and religion that does not allow for an open interface between the two systems of knowledge. Many have examined the current schism that exists between science and religion, including its historical roots, and a great deal can be said on this topic, however for the purpose of this study, it seems pertinent to only suggest a consequence of this schism. This consequence relates to the stigma that may be faced by those who attempt to integrate into scientific research an element of acknowledging (if not investigating) the essential spiritual beliefs and principles that influence one's perceptions of a subject. Thus, a well-meaning individual or group of individuals may find it tremendously difficult to create a space within their university settings to openly discuss the implications of their religious or spiritual perspectives on a subject.

Key Insights Related to Research

Understanding the issue

A great deal of research has been conducted in the past twenty-five years to gain insight into various aspects of domestic violence. By contrast, much less research has been conducted on the actual process of healing, in particular more abstract dimensions such as the role of spirituality in healing. There are however, lessons that can be learned from existing research on various dimensions of domestic violence that can inform the healing process.

To illustrate this, many of the articles analysed (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Ai & Park, 2005; Fischer, 1988; Senter & Caldwell, 2002; Flink et al., 2005; Gillum et al.,

2006) first focus on domestic violence as an issue before moving on to the healing process. For instance, a number of authors looked at the impact of domestic violence on the spirit of women, as well as the spiritual challenges involved in leaving an abusive relationship as a way to contextualize the importance of spirituality in healing.

However, more research needs to be done on aspects of religious institutions and how these structures either prevent women from leaving, or enable them to leave abusive relationships. Although religious doctrines generally condemn violence, including violence against women, it is still a tendency for women who come from various religious backgrounds (whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or Baha'í) to remain in abusive relationships, because of feelings of compulsion or impulsion derived from their beliefs. One recommendation therefore would be to conduct research that would investigate how religious communities, institutions and the beliefs of a woman either compel or impel her to feel that she cannot leave her violent partner.

It's unfortunate that only one article (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001) looks at spirituality within the context of a religion. This article focuses on Islam, and how Muslim women relate to their Faith when it comes to healing from the effects of domestic violence. Based on this, another recommendation would be that more research needs to be done on this particular subject of healing and spirituality, but should include other religious contexts, such as those of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, the Baha'í Faith, and other religious affiliations. It would have been more balanced to have presented such articles in this study, had they existed during the extensive searches that were undertaken to locate articles on this subject.

Another area that requires further research pertains to the impact of domestic violence on the spirituality of women. Although this subject was brushed upon by a number of the articles analysed (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Ai & Park, 2005; Fischer, 1988; Senter & Caldwell, 2002; Flink et al., 2005), the authors state that not a great deal is yet known on how domestic violence affects a woman's spirituality.

Furthermore, although Flink et al. (2005) state in their article that not enough is known about spirituality in relation to how it both ties a woman to an abusive partner relationship, and on the other hand helps in healing following violence, another subject that is never discussed in-detail by any of the articles is the clear gap in the research on how, if a woman's spirituality has been affected by domestic violence, she then draws on her spirituality to assist her in the healing process.

As mentioned earlier, what has also emerged from the present study is the need for agreement on definitions of terms like *healing* and *spirituality,* particularly among those engaged in this discourse. For although they may be evolving definitions, articulating a common meaning of such terms could play a pivotal role in understanding the role of spirituality in healing.

There are many areas within the sphere of this topic that require further investigation. For instance, one could conduct a study on fear and its connection to spirituality in the lives of women experiencing domestic violence. From the role of fear in preventing a woman from leaving an abusive relationship, which incorporates the fear of one's abusive partner, the fear of the retribution of family or community, to the fear of being alone, to the fear of not healing, to the fear of falling into a similar relationship, to

the fear of losing one's freedom and ownership of one's life – it would be useful to understand how spirituality affects these fears.

Another area of study could be on the importance of prayer and meditation in the healing process as it relates to domestic violence.

Understanding the healing process

Healing is an abstract process in relation to domestic violence, the characteristics, mechanisms and methods of which are still largely unknown to researchers and practitioners alike. This could be because the body of research on this topic is still relatively small, and within the realm of practice, the idea of employing formal techniques and programs (the programmatization of healing) that foster and support this process is a relatively new one. Furthermore, even less is known about the role of spirituality in healing as it relates to women affected by domestic violence, despite the fact that research has shown that these women consistently identify spirituality as a component of their healing process (Boehm, 2005).

Some authors (Flink et al., 2005 and Gillum et al., 2006) in their articles identify domestic violence and its relationship to the women affected by it in a way that is both narrow and linear, identifying largely destructive impacts on the women's lives, and often employing terms related to *coping* and *survival* to describe how women emerged from such an experience. Other authors like Ai and Park (2005) identify in their research some ways in which women experienced the positive following the experience of domestic violence, essentially as a reaction to the plethora of articles that focused on the negative effects of such an experience.

From the content analysis conducted on the articles identified for this study, it has become clear that the experience of domestic violence is transformative, and the impact of such an experience is more complex than simply positive or negative outcomes. For instance, saying that a woman has lost her trust in religious institutions as a result of her experience of being in a violent relationship would be somehow incomplete if a researcher did not also recognize that she may at the same time have developed a greater religious conviction through a more personal faith in God.

Researchers need to become comfortable with often complex and sometimes seemingly ambiguous outcomes that women identify, especially in relation to spirituality and healing. It might also be helpful for researchers to separate the wrongness of the actual act of domestic violence that a woman has been subjected to, from the multidimensional transformative outcomes of going through such an experience, outcomes that involve both positive and negative aspects, and may even be neither positive nor negative, but rather simply be changes in habit.

In relation to the non-linear nature of transformation (where some ambivalence may exist), it may be useful for researchers to avoid perceiving the actual healing process following the experience of domestic violence as involving either a movement forward or backward. This study has shown that healing from the experience of domestic violence may involve movement forward in one realm of a woman's life, and movement backward in another.

Researchers may also wish to analyse the relationship between the movements. For instance, the articles analysed in this study did identify movement in the lives of the women they studied, such as a growth in confidence and independence, aspects of a

woman's emotional or psychological well-being, but did not necessarily link this to changes in her spiritual, physical, or social well-being.

Those conducting studies should also be careful when making claims about certain factors contributing to the healing process. It is indeed a process that involves a series of inter-related factors, and these factors may depend on a timeline or sequence in the way they are carried-out. Factors thus need to be qualified and not just presented in a list, or worse, in isolation of each other. A number of the articles in this study fell into the tendency of simply listing factors. For instance, when Flink (2005) refers to a number of factors involved in the promotion of survival and identifies "finding a new relationship" (388) as one factor in this process, he offers no explanation about how if this factor is adopted in isolation from others, finding a new relationship could actually be quite harmful to a woman's survival, because it is possible for the woman to enter another abusive relationship. Therefore, we must not be overly simplistic in offering potential factors to healing, especially spiritual ones.

From the above points, it seems to be the case then, that charting a path of healing is not an easy endeavour, and may in fact be something that can only happen as more knowledge is generated through the exploration of the various dimensions and characteristics of healing, and the relationships between them.

It is important to understand that what is also being sought is not a clear set of guidelines and measures that women can employ uniformly in their lives in order to heal. Just as researchers need to avoid charting a path of healing, so too must they avoid trying to prescribe a set of factors and methods to what they perceive as a universal woman as victim. A parallel can be drawn here to development that takes place at any level, from

the individual (for example in child development) to community development. Researchers in these fields are learning that one cannot simply create a blueprint for development and then apply it uniformly to different contexts. Any attempt in the field of community development to do so has in the past produced only distorted outcomes, since this sort of application of theories and methods often failed to acknowledge certain aspects unique to a community, thus the equilibrium of the community was disturbed and the path of development unique to their context was derailed. What is being proposed here is that the same can be said for the individual woman who is going through her own unique healing process. There is no doubt that common themes and key elements can be identified that can be useful for different women who are engaged on their healing path, but researchers and practitioners should present their insights as contributing to a tool box of theories and methods that can be presented to the women themselves, thus empowering them to take ownership of their own healing process. The very act of determining what methods and theories of healing can be applied in her life might even be a means of inspiring a woman to feel a sense of reclaiming ownership of her destiny, and a source of confidence as she attempts to move forward.

In terms of methodologies that can be employed by researchers in understanding spirituality and healing in relation to domestic violence, one observation is that longitudinal studies seem to be more needed at this point in the knowledge generation process, since factors have been identified, but the relationship between factors over time has not yet been understood.

Ai and Park confirm this by suggesting that researchers will have to utilize longitudinal methods to assess the role of spirituality healing:

Yet, a question remains: If spiritual resources are mobilized in violent crises, do they protect mental health over time? This chicken-versus-egg question cannot be answered by cross-sectional studies. A strong faith may be related to more initial distress as the devout individual's positive worldviews are shattered by their sudden and inexplicable trauma yet to better adjustment as the stressful event is eventually integrated into their meaning system. This faith-based reaction to trauma and protective effects of religious coping over time is better demonstrated using longitudinal design and advanced statistics (Ai & Park, 2005: 246).

Another method of research seems to be particularly useful for addressing the complex and more abstract topic of spirituality and healing in relation to domestic violence in an exploratory manner. The interview and narrative style used in the work of Boehm et al. (2005) was particularly pertinent and powerful for a number of reasons:

1) It allowed for the voices of the women, practitioners and religionists to directly reach the ears of the reader, with little or no alterations or explanations.

2) It allowed those who shared their stories to do so in a manner that was not interrupted, that for the most part was not directed by questions, and that did not have to incorporate words and phrases that were not familiar to the women. It thus allowed the researcher to understand the language the women employed to describe this subject, and the approach these women would take to the subject.

3) It presented in a very clear manner a set of experiences that could form the platform for future research in this area.

Although this approach has been judged as being "too subjective," not using "proper quantitative methods," and being "anecdotal", Boehm et al. ask the questions: "How do you quantify misery and pain? How do you quantify life's forces to survive? How do you quantify the power of the spirit" (Boehm et al., 2005: 203).

A third research method that would be useful for this area of study would be that of content analysis, particularly when employed in examining primary data, or the direct words of women affected by domestic violence. As Reinharz (1992) mentions, "Cultural artefacts are not affected by the process of studying them as people typically are. Instead, scholars can examine a written record of some other type of 'text' without interacting with the people who produced it" (Reinharz, 1992: 147).

Key Insights Related to Practice

Although the above paragraphs have essentially covered gaps and recommendations related to both research and practice, there are a few points that are specific to the area of practice that need mention. Flink (2005) notes that within a clinical context, nurses should be aware of the symptoms of violence, and should have the skills in dealing with intimate moral and spiritual issues. Qualities such as discipline and detachment, combined with the principles of justice and a belief in the equality of men and women would all inform the work of practitioners in working with women affected by domestic violence.

Mention was made by a number of authors (Boehm et al., 2005; Ai & Park, 2005; Fischer, 1988; Senter & Caldwell, 2002; Flink et al., 2005) about how health professionals need to be aware of the importance of spiritual and moral issues, but does not propose how to deal with those issues.

Something else that is important is looking at issues within a context. That domestic violence and healing from its effects cannot be seen as an isolated matter, and in fact, domestic violence cannot simply be approached as an issue divorced from a context.

The context in this case may simply be the creation of family well-being, and within that domestic violence is addressed.

Another implication involves not just looking at spirituality and healing from the effects of domestic violence as a process that takes place at the level of the individual. From the healing of the family, to the healing of others who are experiencing domestic violence and who are encouraged by a woman who is herself going through the process, to the impact that one woman's refusal to submit to religious doctrine that disables her from being free from the violent situation has on the lives of other women in her faith community, there may be numerous levels of interaction taking place between the individual and their social space. For instance, several authors (Senter & Caldwell, 2002; Stotland, 2000; Gillum et al., 2006; Fischer, 1988; Boehm, 2005; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Stenius & Veysey, 2005; Ai & Park, 2005) found that the exercise of spirituality in a woman's life extends into the lives of others, from the lives of their children and other family members, to the lives of women around them to whom they were reaching-out. It is important for practitioners to identify and raise awareness of this, for it can become a source of encouragement and empowerment for a woman to understand that not only is she not isolated (as she may have felt during the period of abuse), she is actually having an impact on others, and on systems in her society. This awareness can foster growth as one becomes empowered and sees that one is helping others through the process, this further leads to greater empowerment.

Summary

This chapter has synthesized the findings of the research into a series of inter-related insights that include the identification of gaps, the recognition of coherence or the lack thereof between the articles, and the implications of these findings for future research and practice. In addition to drawing on the findings from the content analysis, insights have been shared that have come from personal reflections that were noted through the process of reflexivity that was employed throughout the thesis. In fact, the whole matter of reflexivity was addressed as a separate issue in this chapter.

While the points raised in this chapter are not intended for making broad generalizations about the role of spirituality and healing in relation to women affected by domestic violence, nor was there any intention to offer definitive statements about how research and practice should be directed in the future, the insights acquired from this study will hopefully shed light on the current landscape of knowledge that exists on the topic, and offers suggestions synthesized from current knowledge about possibilities for future research in this area.

CHAPTER SIX:
CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the thesis and its key findings, puts forward a number of recommendations for further research, and closes with final conclusions about the research. The summary that follows seeks to place the analysis of the preceding chapter succinctly in the broader context of the purpose of the study and its guiding methodology, whereas the subsequent recommendations are an attempt to distil the implications into concrete steps that can taken for future research and practice.

Reviewing Goals and Objectives

The goal of this study was to explore how published research articles (from 1987 to present) conceptualized spirituality and its relationship to healing among women who have experienced the effects of domestic violence.

The specific research objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To examine a sample of published academic research literature on the importance of spirituality in the lives of women healing from the effects of domestic violence, in order to identify themes used to describe spirituality and healing.

2. To identify coherence within the discourse on spirituality and healing in relation to domestic violence.

3. To offer insights into areas that requires further study in relation to spirituality and healing from the effects of domestic violence.

This study was informed by the guiding conceptual framework of the researcher, coupled with the knowledge conveyed through existing literature on spirituality, healing and the relationship between these two subjects. The study also drew from a wealth of knowledge on domestic violence to inform the direction which the role of spirituality in healing could be looked at. With this foundation, the study centered on a number of articles that were uncovered that referred to the role of spirituality in the healing process, particularly for women affected by domestic violence.

A content analysis methodology was employed for the study, with a sub-component of relational analysis, meaning that emphasis was placed on learning inductively and generating insights from the relationship between concepts as they were conveyed through words, or implied meaning, such that reading "between the lines" became part of the more in-depth analysis conducted (Huber, n.d.: 2).

A description of the methodological approach that guided and shaped the process of inquiry in the study would not have been complete without making clear some of the elements of my own personal worldview. In addition to stating that my interests in the area of spirituality and healing were informed and inspired by my beliefs and practice as a Bahá'í, some of the principles and teachings of the Baha'í Faith that guided my investigation of this subject were also highlighted as an outcome of attempting to understand the assumptions and ways of thinking that lead to my perspective of the subject.

Objective 1

In accordance with the first objective of this thesis, nine academic research articles related to the importance of spirituality in the lives of women healing from the effects of domestic violence were chosen to be analysed for the study. Only nine were selected because, despite efforts to achieve a theoretical saturation conducive to a qualitative research design, a thorough and exhaustive search of journals relevant to the topic revealed no more than nine articles, and as such, the study was limited to this number.

Two levels of analysis were undertaken for the study. The first related to the actual content of the articles, while the second level analysed the preconceptions that the authors of the articles brought to their research.

Objective 2

In-line with the second objective of this thesis, two sets of four major themes were identified that brought coherence within the discourse on spirituality and healing in relation to domestic violence. For the first level of analysis, four major themes emerged from the data:

1) Domestic violence has a major impact on the life of a woman who is thus affected.

2) There is a complex relationship between a woman affected by domestic violence, and her spiritual beliefs.

3) Spirituality plays a role in a woman's healing from the effects of domestic violence.

4) Practitioners deal with the spiritual element in women's healing in different ways.

The more in-depth analysis of the articles subsequently yielded the following major themes:

1) Each researcher's religious framework shapes his/her understanding of spirituality.

2) There are different ways in which language is utilized in understanding spirituality and healing.

3) A gap exists between the impact of domestic violence on spirituality and the importance of spirituality in healing.

4) Numerous references to spirituality in the healing process are made, but are placed alongside many other factors in a disconnected fashion.

Objective 3

From the above findings, a series of recommendations were made that corresponded to the implications of the results, all in accordance with the third objective of this thesis. The recommendations were:

1) There is a need for greater collaboration between those wishing to create a conceptual framework for research on the subject of spirituality and healing in relation to domestic violence. This collaboration should attempt to foster a common language that gives expression to the various concepts pertaining to the subject.

2) Researchers need to be cautious in how they convey that certain factors contribute to the healing process, even though these factors emerge from a study. Factors

need to be qualified and contextualized within the lives of the women who identify them, and should not be presented in a list, or worse, in isolation of one another or a context.

3) There may be the need for researchers to separate in their minds the wrongness of the actual act of domestic violence that a woman has been subjected to, from the multidimensional transformative outcomes of going through such an experience, outcomes that may be either positive or negative, or even involve both, and may even be neither positive nor negative, but rather simply be changes in life patterns.

4) In terms of the non-linear nature of transformation, researchers should avoid perceiving the actual healing process following the experience of domestic violence as involving either a movement forward or backward. Research needs to be done on understanding the relationships among factors and in so doing it must be made clear what the ontological and epistemological positions of the researchers are. It also is important to understand that what is being sought by researchers is not a clear set of guidelines and measures that women can employ uniformly in their lives in order to heal. Just as researchers need to avoid charting a path of healing, so too must they avoid trying to prescribe a set of factors and methods to what they perceive as a universal woman as victim.

5) It seems important for practitioners to understand that domestic violence and healing from its effects cannot be seen as an issue divorced from a context. The context in this case may be the family unit and its healthy (or unhealthy)

functioning, or the life of a woman, past and present, and within that healing can then be addressed.

6) Another implication involves not just looking at spirituality and healing from the effects of domestic violence as a process that takes place at the level of the individual. From the healing of the family, to the healing of others who are experiencing domestic violence and who are encouraged by a woman who is herself going through the process, to the impact that one woman's refusal to submit to religious doctrine which disables her from being free from the violent situation, there may be numerous levels of interaction taking place between the individual and their social space, and this is worth further investigation.

7) There are a number of topics that require further research in order to inform the subject of spirituality and healing in relation to domestic violence. One such area pertains to the impact of domestic violence on the spirituality of women, since not a great deal is yet known on how domestic violence affects a woman's spirituality. Another area that requires further investigation is the role of fear in the lives of women experiencing domestic violence. Yet another area of study could be on the importance of prayer and meditation in the healing process as it relates to domestic violence.

8) In terms of methodologies that can be employed by researchers in understanding spirituality and healing in relation to domestic violence, longitudinal studies seem to be more needed at this point in the knowledge generation process, since factors have been identified, but the relationship between factors over time has not yet been understood. Methods of research that are particularly useful for addressing

the complex and more abstract topics in an exploratory fashion are the interview and narrative approaches like the ones used in the work of Boehm et al. (2005). The results produced were particularly pertinent and powerful. As this study demonstrated, a research method that is also useful for this area of study is that of content analysis, particularly when employed in examining primary data, or the direct words of women affected by domestic violence.

Concluding Remarks

This study acted as a starting point, a first attempt at bringing into focus a series of emerging perspectives on an essential and yet largely undeveloped aspect of healing, how spirituality plays a role in the way women heal from experiences of domestic violence. My experience in working with, and interviewing many women affected by domestic violence piqued my interest in the role of spirituality in healing. What I found was that most of the women I interacted with would interweave into their stories elements of spirituality that they felt were at the core of their healing, and yet, what I found perplexing was that the interview guides and survey packages that I was required to rely on as a research assistant filtered-out what I perceived to be very clear evidence of ways that women found the strength to survive and thrive following experiences of domestic violence.

What I also recognized was that these women referred to a spirituality that was far from superficial. Spirituality played a profound and practical role in their lives. In fact, several women admitted that they would have forgone living had it not been for their connection to the spiritual.

Among other things, spirituality was found in prayer and meditation, involvement in a religious community, service to others that nourished the soul, or connections to the environment and nature that moved the spirit. Regardless of how spirituality was manifested, it was clear that these elements of their lives were as essential as other aspects of recovery that social support systems already focused on, such as protection, shelter and employment. This is not to say that such services are not important in the process of healing, but rather, that they are simply part of a larger process, one that may rather revolve around the human spirit that is grappling with the experience of domestic violence.

It is therefore hoped that this thesis will not only foster further research on this topic, but that future research will acknowledge and attempt to delve deeper into uncovering the forces that foster resilience and a drive to thrive despite or in spite of experiences like domestic violence.

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