

WHAT BENEFITS DO MEN EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE WORK THAT
RECONNECTS? A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

by

Vincent Brown

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
the California Institute of Integral Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Transformative Studies

California Institute of Integral Studies

San Francisco, CA

2020

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read WHAT BENEFITS DO MEN EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE WORK THAT RECONNECTS? A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY by Vincent Brown, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Transformative Studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

May Elawar, PhD, Chair
Assistant Professor, Transformative Inquiry

Jennifer Wells, PhD
Professor, Transformative Inquiry

Molly Young Brown, MA, MDiv
Psychosynthesis Press; The Work That Reconnects

Vincent Brown
California Institute of Integral Studies, 2020
May Elawar, PhD, Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a phenomenological inquiry into the lived life benefits of a significantly homogenous group of white men who participated in men-only retreats in the Work That Reconnects that is rooted in the work of Joanna Macy. Their homogeneity is relative age, ethnic heritage, economic status, and access to resources. In this inquiry I use the lenses of tradition, safety, community, environment, and spirituality to explore the impact of the Work That Reconnects. A goal of this inquiry is to understand what benefits these men have experienced through their engagement in these retreats. A secondary goal is to gain insight into what keeps men from attending these retreats as well as what motivates some men to become involved in personal growth activities that lead to social change. The Work That Reconnects is described as an integral dialogic group model that helps men overcome emotional numbness, alexithymia, thus helping them identify and give voice to their inner world of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and core values. I frame this discussion around patriarchy, social masculine norms of behavior, men's health, aspects of the men's movement, white privilege, deep ecology, and how self-introspection informs multiple intelligences leading toward an integrum of inclusion. Also included in this discussion is complex systems thinking, the expansion of conscious awareness, neurophysiology, and how brain plasticity

allows neurological change. In addition to the benefits of the Work That Reconnects, I offer a discussion on contradictions and concerns offered as suggestions for growth in this work. I conclude the discussion with a summary of the benefits as expressed by study participants, areas of future research, and recommendations for using the Work That Reconnects with men working to create more meaning, purpose, and value in their lives thereby benefiting themselves, their relationships, and society at large.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to recognize the men who were my co-researchers in this inquiry, without them I could not be here. It was not just their willingness to take part in my work, to take time to meet and tell me their stories. The courage and vulnerability, the trust, these men demonstrated while sharing deeply intimate parts of their lives continues to nourish me as it has throughout this inquiry.

I want to acknowledge May Elawar for her strength, her support of me in this work, for the clarity of thought she brought to this project, and for her subtle guidance that led me through many stages of self-discovery and self-doubt. Words can never fully express my respect and gratitude. To Jennifer Wells, for immersing me in complexity thinking, always encouraging me to look for nodes and linkages, the intersectionality of seemingly disparate social drivers to arrive at a fuller understanding of the forces at play. To Molly Young-Brown, for joining my committee after the train left the station and bringing fresh energy to my inquiry. Her support for me and her understanding of the Work That Reconnects has kept me grounded in the knowledge that personal growth and social change begins within each of us.

It is with deep humility and love that I acknowledge the brilliant, powerful women of my writing group, Robin Miles, Erin Lightfoot, Tiffany Kim, and Cynthia Gadsden. They have supported, cared for, and encouraged me to go beyond self-imposed limits and dare to stand up and be seen. They are the queens of my academic landscape for whom I am forever grateful for their gracious acceptance and understanding.

DEDICATION

To Joanna Macy, for her life of dedication in shifting consciousness toward a life sustaining society, being an inspiration to thousands of people around the world,
and for her wild love for the Earth.

To my son Brandon in hopes that I model being a good man and father,

To my grandson's Ivan and Connor, in hopes that I model being a present and
compassionate man, father, and Grandfather,

To future generations of men desiring more value and meaning in their lives by
seeking a healthier vision of masculinity,

And to those who love us.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Dedication.....	vii
List of Tables	xiv
Chapter 1: What Benefits do Men Experience Through the Work That Reconnects? Introduction.....	1
Significance.....	9
The Life Journey of Joanna Macy: A Synopsis	14
The Work That Reconnects	16
Integral Mind	22
Integral Psychology	23
Researcher Qualifications	24
Researcher’s Experience: Setting the Context.....	28
Recognizing Personal Bias	30
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....	32
Men and Social Conditioning	34
Patriarchy	36
Men’s Health.....	39
The Men’s Movement.....	41
The Christian Men’s Movement	42
Mythopoetic Men’s Movement.....	46
Living Myth	49
Deep Ecology.....	52
Complex Systems.....	54

Multiple Intelligences	57
Cognitive Neuroscience	59
On Whiteness	62
White Male Entitlement	64
Summation of the Literature	67
Chapter 3: Methodology	71
Procedures	72
Guidance for Future Researchers	77
Method	78
Synergic Inquiry	79
Feeling as Knowing	82
Multiple Ways of Knowing	83
Approaching the Data	83
Participant Selection: Inclusion Criteria	86
Participant Exclusion Criteria	88
Importance of Dialogue in Addressing Social Change	88
The Emergence of Five Key Factors as Themes for Data Synthesis	90
Chapter 4: Findings Gleaned from the In-Depth Interview Process	94
Examining the Key Five Factors	96
Factor 1: Tradition	97
Researcher's Understanding of Tradition	97
Tradition Themes Arising From the Data	101
Modeling	101
Life history	103
Experiential	108

Discourse.....	111
Structure.....	114
Celebrity.....	117
Discussion of Tradition.....	120
Factor 2: Safety	123
Researcher’s Understanding of Safety	124
Safety Themes Arising From the Data.....	127
Nonviolence.....	127
Nonjudgment.....	130
Trust.....	132
Intention (Behavioral).....	134
Well-being.....	137
Respect.....	138
Discussion of Safety	139
Factor 3: Community	142
Researcher’s Understanding of Community	144
Types of Community	146
Community Themes Arising From the Data.....	150
Acceptance.....	150
Belonging.....	153
Group bonding.....	156
Relationship.....	158
Support.....	160
Mirroring and witnessing.....	163
Service.....	165

Inclusion.....	167
Discussion of Community.....	168
Factor 4: Environment	172
Researcher’s Understanding of Environment	173
Environment Themes Arising From the Data.....	175
Intentional (space).....	175
Natural.....	179
Comfort.....	182
Aesthetics.....	185
Equality.....	186
Tranquility.....	187
Discussion on Environment and Place.....	188
Factor 5: Spiritual Foundation	195
Researcher’s Understanding of a Spiritual Foundation	197
Spiritual Foundation Themes Arising From the Data.....	200
Calling.....	200
Need.....	202
Values.....	205
Purpose.....	208
Identity.....	211
Ecological self.....	215
Discussion of Spiritual Foundation.....	217
The Five Factors: A Synthesis	222
Intentionality	223
Trauma	225

Vocabulary	226
Inspiring Appreciation	228
Awareness of Place	228
Chapter 5: Contradictions and Oppositions Held by Co-Researchers	230
Issues With the Retreat Model	231
Concerns Regarding Homophobia	238
Embedded Racial Division	240
White Privilege as Reluctance to Shadow Work	248
Infiltration of the Outside World	253
Disabling Relationships	255
Unintended Learning	256
Synthesis of Contradictions and Concerns	259
Chapter 6: Dissertation Summation	262
Removing the Masculine Mask	262
Unrecognized White Privilege	265
Importance of Dialogue	266
The Way Forward—An Integral Arising	267
Epochs of Consciousness	271
Expanding Consciousness Studies	272
Benefits of the Work That Reconnects	275
Next Steps	278
References	284
Appendix A: Five Key Factors of the Work That Reconnects—A Philosophical Framework	294
Appendix B: Five Factors of the Work That Reconnects—A Narrative Description	295

Appendix C: Interview Questions.....	302
Appendix D: Co-Researcher Interview Summaries.....	306

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Five Key Factors and Their Themes.....	96
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CHAPTER 1: WHAT BENEFITS DO MEN EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE WORK THAT RECONNECTS? INTRODUCTION

This dissertation documents a phenomenological inquiry with a group of 10 men who in the past had participated, with other men, in a model for personal and social change called the Work That Reconnects (Macy & Brown, 2014). The Work That Reconnects, which sits at the heart of this dissertation, is rooted in the work of Joanna Macy, and emerges through her experience, worldview, and philosophy. To better articulate the relevance and nature of this inquiry, it is therefore essential to delve deeper into the Work That Reconnects to explore its foundational ideas and perspectives through the life and work of Macy. In a following section, I will introduce Joanna Macy in an endeavor to honor the philosophical and ideological lineage of the Work That Reconnects, as well as acknowledge the complex and integral nature of this work.

Central to this research is the examination of masculine identity as it relates to patriarchal male conditioning and how the Work That Reconnects provides a theory and method to address and change this conditioning. The damage caused by Eurocentric male dominance over the centuries, to people of all lands, is historically well documented and ongoing in the current American Western racialized dominant culture. The forceful protection of business-as-usual by social structures of “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 1997, p. 7) in America and around the world, is evident to the point of being painfully cliché, if not normalized as expected.

It is out of these social structures that weave together patriarchy, predatory capitalism, and white supremacy that we witness the emergence of militarism, empire, colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, agism, economic injustice, ethnocentric nationalism, and environmental degradation, to name just a few social inequities. It is important to acknowledge that patriarchy cannot be extracted out and separated from these social structures. This dissertation contends that the construction of masculinity in the West emerges through this white supremacist capitalist patriarchal amalgam and is then solidified by patriarchy. In this dissertation, references to patriarchy do not necessarily separate patriarchy from other systems of oppression; however, it is important to acknowledge in a nonreductionist approach the specific role patriarchy plays in maintaining the male-centeredness and male-dominance of these systems of oppression.

It is beyond the scope of any one dissertation to address the fullness of what needs to happen to completely and effectively transform all systems of oppression. However, as a contribution toward this transformative endeavor, in this dissertation I explore how masculinity has been constructed in a way that perpetuates all these systems of oppression. In particular, I am interested in how men's internal emotional landscapes have been shut down by their patriarchal conditioning in the dominant Western culture and how they experience *alexithymia*, which is defined as the inability to identify and put words to emotions.

Patriarchy in the west is intertwined with other systems of oppression and leads to a social construction of masculinity that commends numbness of emotions in men. One must be numb to be masculine, to be macho, to be a man, and over time this creates the alexithymia. In this dissertation, I focus on the cultural numbing of men's feelings. This numbing, in turn, enables men to enact the oppressions and the horrors necessary to perpetuate white supremacist capitalist patriarchal structures. I offer that the Work That Reconnects (WTR) allows men to begin to open up that unidentified emotional landscape, a place to begin to address these larger structural systems. Doing the WTR is not going to end all that is wrong or cure most social ills. However, it is a necessary and significant beginning point of intervention that allows men to just open up their feeling space, to reconnect with their ability to feel.

I acknowledge the magnitude of the survival challenges the world is currently facing and assert that we have to begin the work of change somewhere. This inquiry is an entry point to the crucial transformation out of the expansive reach of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that has prompted cultures of war, militarism, and multiple inequities, oppressions and violence based on, and perpetuated by, a construction of masculinity that has been shut down, that is not able to feel, and that is oppressive to self and others. In this dissertation I explore how we can begin to transform the western constructions of masculinity to bring in feeling as a first step toward addressing the horrors of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Using in-depth interviews to inquire into men's experiences I asked the following question: *What benefits do men experience through the Work That Reconnects?* A guiding interest in this inquiry is represented by these questions: *What attracted these men to attend these men-only retreats? Who are they?* Moved by a shared observation that there is a shortage of men participating in WTR retreats and given the need for their involvement in social change I ask a follow-up question: *Where are the men?*

The word "men" carries with it several assumptions and perceptions, and as such cannot be used as a universal homogenous noun to describe a uniform category of humanity without some qualifications. While I acknowledge the differences and diversity inherent in the category "men," along racial, sexual, class, ability, and other factors, in this dissertation I will use the word "men" as a stand-in to connote the white supremacist capitalist patriarchal social construction of masculinity in dominant western narratives and not as a universal uniform experience. In this study, this means middle-aged to older privileged white, educated, professional, males. As such, this dissertation is seeking to make a contribution toward the transformation of the perceptions of masculinity as perpetuated by dominant patriarchal western narratives.

Within this group of men I identify as an older, cisgendered professional white male who is trying to navigate the complexity of my own personal trauma, while witnessing the ongoing oppression wrought at the hands of patriarchy to Black, Brown, and other people of color, and those in the LGBTQ community, while recognizing the benefits of privilege I receive as a result of this oppression.

Much of my motivation for this inquiry has been to learn to use this privilege to aid in dismantling these systems of oppression and envisioning a thriving future.

Since the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president of the United States we have witnessed a resurgence or resurfacing of oppressive white supremacist masculinity in our national politics. It appears in the ignoring of the constitution; the hollowing out of our institutions; the usurpation of our legal system; and the rise of racism, sexism, hatred, white supremacy, environmental degradation, and corruption in the highest seats of government. We in the United States have had a hostile foreign government working to manipulate our electoral system, our national and social media inundated with false information creating dissension among the populace using artificial intelligence (Jamieson, 2018; Maskovsky, 2017). This is no longer speculation; sadly, it is common knowledge and in common conversation. “When all truth is a cultural fiction, then there is simply no truth at all – epistemic and ontic nihilism” (Wilber, 2017, p. 9). Without accurate and truthful information, we cannot make informed decisions.

If humans are to continue to live and thrive on earth, then white supremacist capitalist patriarchy must be replaced and that must include the involvement of an awakened, whole, and mature masculinity. I feel guilty because I am not out on the street with a bullhorn screaming at the top of my lungs for people to wake up before it is too late to effectively respond to the myriad of extinction level challenges facing humanity: nuclear war, lethal climate, pandemics, and other extreme world events that are demonstrating that we are running out of response time, and this is giving me a sense of urgency and anxiety

because it is so much bigger than me and I know I cannot change it. This dissertation is my protest, my soapboxing on the street corner, a way I can contribute to creating a livable future for the children of the future, our great-great-grandchildren yet unborn.

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (hooks, 2004). Patriarchy, via male against male violence, “from simple assault to gay-bashing, is linked to the same structures of gender and power that produce so much men’s violence against women” (Katz, 2007, p. 9) so “the big question then is, how do we reach the men?” (p. 10). This dissertation is about reaching men who are seeking more meaning, value, and purpose in their lives. Even in a group as racially and socially homogenous as my research group, there is much diversity to be found; each person experiences their lives and environments differently. Ways of seeing and experiencing events, ways of knowing these experiences, and how meaning is made from them varies. No person experiences the same phenomena in the same way.

There is a plurality of powerful social drivers, including patriarchy, that are shaping postmodern life on all levels: social, racial, economic, political, cultural, and environmental (DiAngelo, 2018; Eisler, 2008; Kendall, 2013; Wells, 2013). These social drivers are complexly entangled with education, race relations, global economics, the military, and geopolitics, increasing the

likelihood of armed conflict, climate change, and social upheaval (Beck & Cowen, 2006). Much of the conflict and violence the world is witnessing is perpetuated by patriarchy, a system focused on the (white) father, the firstborn son, and goal orientation (Gebser, 1985); of male superiority, oppression of women, control over nature, and mechanistic reductionism (hooks, 2004; Levant & Richmond, 2016; Morin, 1999; Tarnas, 1991). This is one of the main reasons that I focused my research on the experiences of men. The patriarchal system is kept in place through male agreement with social taboos and consequences that negatively affect men's inner identity and health (hooks, 2004; Levant & Richmond, 2016). The WTR offers a theory and method within which men can introspect on their inner life, social conditioning, and ideals of masculinity, opening the possibility for personal change.

My co-researchers in this study were selected from men who had attended one or more of three men-only retreats in the Work That Reconnects. This group is a rather homogenous group in that most of us are similar in race, age, education, professionalism, and social status, me included. In this discussion I need to point out that the WTR has been primarily attractive to European-descended white folks and that the WTR has been negatively critiqued because it mostly attracts this social demographic. This is why my study group is comprised of all cisgender white males. As such, one of the lenses I use to critically assess the WTR is one of white privilege and white supremacy.

This work of inquiring into white men is important in the multilayered and complex approach one needs to take in anti-racist work. In doing this work, white

men need to examine the white privilege that resides within themselves to recognize the depth of their racial conditioning. This is but one step, a necessary step in this multilayered, complex process for this society to move toward anti-racist realities. I am offering the WTR as a potential way to guide white men in this process of self inquiry as a first step in becoming an anti-racist.

Out of my co-researchers, several of us participated in all three of these men-only retreats as well as helped to organize them. These men were drawn to attend the retreats because they were seeking changes in their lives and in the world around them. They had a willingness to look within themselves to discover beliefs, ideologies, and social conditioning that constrained them as men, limiting their life experience. I explore, given the context of each life, how these men experienced connecting with their inner self and with any patriarchal male conditioning, beliefs, ideologies, or habits they encountered during their participation in the work. It is hoped that by bringing the benefits these men experienced forward, more men might choose to participate in the WTR. This would increase the number of men willing to embracing the necessary transformation out of debilitating white supremacist capitalist patriarchal systems.

The contemporary patriarchal social worldview in the West, which this dissertation critically engages, came into fruition during the Enlightenment and the subsequent industrial revolution (Tarnas, 1991). Centuries of patriarchal rule and conditioning, buttressed with power gained through science, technology, and wealth, have brought much harm to non-white, non-male, and other non-normative peoples and ecosystems around the world in the name of growth and

progress (Eisler, 2002; Macy & Brown, 2014). Patriarchal rule has been entangled with what Norwegian ecophilosopher Sigmund Kwaloy calls the Industrial Growth Society, to indicate a society based on exponential economic growth, the extraction of natural resources, consumption, and the suppression of public dissent (Macy & Brown, 2014); it is also referred to as the domination model, which is maintained by social conditioning and the historical patriarchal structures of male superiority, domination, and aggression (Eisler, 2002).

In the current North American and western social structure, it is imperative to adhere to what is called the masculine code, or to develop a “masculine mask,” in order to live up to the cultural definition of how it is to be masculine (hooks, 2004; Howes, 2017). To conform to and support this system of governance, along with the continued aggression it demands, men need to deny parts of themselves and ways of being that they could otherwise manifest, as well as deny knowledge of the damage caused, or the self-brutalization involved (hooks, 2004). It has been my experience that through the dialogic experiential practices of the WTR, men can help men see and remove their masculine mask, revealing access to a deeper sense of self and being. By becoming aware of feelings and denied ways of being, by looking behind the mask, men can develop a more authentic self-identity, have better health, and be more successful (Howes, 2017).

Significance

In this study and in life, I hold the assumption that all social change begins within the consciousness of the individual. It is imperative that men face their

own conditioning and beliefs if they are to develop the ability for honest, authentic relationships, and to support a life-honoring society. If there are identifiable lived-life benefits of participation, men who are struggling to create healthier, happier, and more meaningful lives might choose to participate in the WTR, or a similar model, to enhance their lives. I feel it is also a responsibility to take a stand against male violence and aggression.

There has been much talk about the need for meaningful dialogue across the divide of seemingly oppositional dualities (Bohm, 1996; Levant & Richmond, 2016; Morin, 1999, 2008)—me/you, us/them, him/her—but how to achieve this kind of conversation has consistently been elusive in Western patriarchal hierarchical contexts. One method that can contribute toward a more relational and nonoppositional approach across differences is through fostering authentic, truthful, and meaningful dialogues through which people develop the ability to sense what they are feeling and to verbalize these feelings in terms that another can understand (Bohm, 1996; Gadamer, 2008). Social conditioning is the process of training individuals and groups in a society to respond in a manner approved of by that society, usually categorized as social patterns (norms) and social structures (Gergen, 2009). “What we take to be the world importantly depends on how we approach it, and how we approach it depends on the social relationships of which we are a part” (Gergen, 2009, p. 2). This social conditioning of the masculine code stands directly in the way of meaningful dialogue and effective change.

A five-part, multidisciplinary study, consisting of 997 college-aged men and women from Boston College was conducted on the psychometric properties

of conformity to social gender norms identifies 11 significantly distinct norms of male behavior that can be considered as socially produced (Mahalik et al., 2003). These masculine gender norms were identified as “winning, emotional control, risk-taking, violence, dominance, playboy, self-reliance, primacy of work, power over women, disdain for homosexuals, and pursuit of status” (Mahalik et al., 2003, p. 9). Significant sub-norms are “psychological stress, social dominance, aggression, and the desire to be more muscular, along with negative attitudes toward psychological help and social desirability” (Mahalik et al., abstract). Conformity to social male conditioning has contributed to a numbness in people, mostly men, known as *alexithymia*, a form of social trauma, beginning in youth, where a person develops difficulty in identifying and expressing their feelings; they are literally without words for emotions (Levant & Richmond, 2016; Real, 1997). Given the pressure from society and peers on men to conform to these socially created masculine norms of behavior it is not easy for men raised in Western culture to allow themselves to lower their defenses, risk vulnerability, and communicate about their wellbeing (Mahalik et al., 2003).

Physicist David Bohm (1996) considered that not knowing how to live together in a changing world to be at the core of our problems, and dialogue was the means for resolving them. Bohm advocated an open form of dialogue, without structure, which can be a remarkable process. However, without skill, patience, and the suspension of judgment, what initially begins as a dialogue can end up being a conflict between egos and opinions. Knowing that meaningful dialogue is necessary for relating to each other is one thing and having such a dialogue is

another. In contrast to Bohm, dialogue in governance, politics, and business can be highly structured. Another barrier to effective dialogue can be how much, or how little, if any, structure is to be used and who gets to decide. Some people refuse to have structure, some want a little, others a lot (personal experience) and the quality of the dialogue hangs in the balance.

The WTR framework, called the spiral, guides the topics of discussion minimizing the chance of polarization and argument. This model works by fostering adaptive change through the promotion of safety, empathy, enactment, and engagement (Hollis-Walker, 2012), without allowing a person or group to impose their views, beliefs, or truths on others (Macy & Brown, 2014). The WTR engages the whole person, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, in a way that invites self-introspection and truth-speaking. It invokes the power of bearing witness, of community, and of common cause, which reinforces the group as it does the individuals, sustaining this over the days of the retreat. Knowing all sustained emotionally engaged activities—physical, mental, or cultural—are mapped onto the brain (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Davidson & McEwen, 2012; Doidge, 2007), it is not far afield to assume that the WTR practices may act similarly to activities found in cognitive-behavior therapy (Davidson & Begley, 2012) and the self-directed neuroplasticity practices (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2005).

Neuroplasticity is the human brain's ability to change its neural structure and patterns of activity in significant ways; this ability is greater in youth, yet continuing throughout one's life (Davidson & Begley, 2012). The brain's native

capacity of directed attention and mental effort systematically alters brain function by rewiring brain neural pathways. Cognitive-behavior and self-directed therapy utilize Buddhist mindfulness practices or mindful awareness “to recognize obsessive thoughts and compulsions as the flotsam and jetsam of an overactive [neural] circuit” (Davidson & Begley, 2012, p. 174). I offer the idea that the practices of the WTR facilitates the development of self-awareness through the engagement of feelings, sensations, and a person’s core values. The state of the mind influences the body and emotions are the most embodied form of mental activity: knowing all sustained emotionally engaged activities are mapped onto the brain (Davidson & Begley, 2012), sustained engagement with the practices in the WTR can have a significant effect on brain neurology.

In the current western patriarchal social construction of maleness, there is a general narrative that men do not seek counseling because the therapeutic session is usually done with the client facing the therapist, face to face (Golden, 2005; Mahalik et al., 2003). “Men link eye contact, particularly with other men, as a sign of confrontation or challenge” as hockey players “faceoff”, boxers “face” each other, and one “faces their competition” (Golden, 2005, Introduction, Finding Safety, para. 1). Men respond best doing something “together for a common goal, shoulder to shoulder, like in the fire department, the military, on sports teams” (Golden, 2005, loc. 91, Kindle). The WTR, as a theory/model for personal and social change, gives men an option outside of this traditional psychotherapy approach. It is possible to mature or develop our instincts without denying them or overcoming them, but through educating them with intentional

cooperative relationship (Doidge, 2007, p. 296), remapping the brain for relationship.

The WTR, birthed and guided by Macy, has arisen out of living systems theory, deep ecology, and Buddhist philosophy into what I consider to be an exemplary group participation model for personal and social growth. In the next two sections I introduce Joanna Macy, aspects of her life journey, and give an overview of the WTR.

The Life Journey of Joanna Macy: A Synopsis

The words “teacher,” “author,” “scholar of Buddhism, systems thinking, and deep ecology,” “ecophilosopher,” “anti-nuclear activist,” “wife,” “mother,” and “translator of the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke” just touches the surface of the depth to the person that is Joanna Macy. Spanning over six decades of social activism, Macy’s work has roots in the anti-nuclear movement and deep ecology, who at 91 years of age is still teaching and inspiring social and spiritual activists. She is the originator and root teacher of “the groundbreaking framework for personal social change” (Macy, 2020, p. 363) known as the Work That Reconnects (Macy, 2020, Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). A brief overview of the WTR is given below, yet it serves to say here that over these decades Macy has conducted hundreds of workshops and retreats all over the world, is beloved by tens of thousands of people, and recognized by many to be a spiritual leader and true Elder arising from Western culture.

In 1964, she went to New Delhi, India, for 16 months with her husband Fran Macy, who was working with the Peace Corps. There, Macy

worked alongside a Peace Corps volunteer to help a community of Tibetan monks, yogis, and lay people, under the guidance of Khamtrul Rinpoche, create an economic base so that they could stay together and not be scattered into various Indian government sponsored programs. (J. Macy, personal communication, August 2019)

Working together, they created a successful “Tibetan carpet and craft business, and in a few years, the Sarvodaya community built a center with a monastery and lay community called Tashi Jong, up the Kangra Valley” (J. Macy, personal communication, August 2019). Tashi Jong continues, and although Macy has not been in the community physically in many years, in “all her subsequent teaching and writings Joanna Macy continued to be one of our great supporters and inspirers” (A. T. Ariyaratne, as cited in Macy, 2020, p. 21).

While maintaining her Buddhist practices, Joanna entered Syracuse University in the Department of Religion and was introduced to (and influenced by) the works of the American poet Theodore Roethke and the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges (Macy, 2007a). At Syracuse, her study focused on the Buddhist Dharma and the concept of interdependent causation. Under the tutelage of the renowned systems philosopher Dr. Ervin Laszlo, Macy conducted a study of Buddhist philosophy and general systems theory to discover how the two bodies of thought illumined each other, called a reciprocal hermeneutic study. Her dissertation was later published in book form as *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (Macy, 1991).

Macy has published 16 books as author or coauthor, including *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* (1983); *Thinking Like a Mountain* (1988), cowritten with John Seed, Arne Naess, and Pat Fleming; *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory* (1991); *Coming Back to Life* ([1998]

2014), cowritten with Molly Young Brown; *World as Lover, World as Self* (2007); *Widening Circles: A Memoir* (2000); and *Active Hope* (2012), cowritten with Chris Johnstone. Her thoughts and writing appear in the works of many authors and she has published numerous articles on Buddhism, deep ecology, spirituality, and the impacts of the nuclear power industry. At 91 years young, she is the author of *A Wild Love for Our World: Joanna Macy and the Work of Our Time*, which became available in April 2020.

It is out of Macy's life journey, her sensitivity to the pain and suffering in the world she saw along the way, that the WTR came into being. Helping to relieve the suffering of others is a noble work, but not enough; there must be work toward ending the causes of suffering as well. "Information is not enough either, in fact too much could cause resistance" (Macy, 1991, p. xii). People needed a means of talking to family, friends, community leaders, and others about the many crises evident in our communities and around the world without creating fear, argument, and resistance. In this dissertation, the efficacy of the WTR as a model for meaningful communication and personal change will be examined through the stories of men who have experienced these practices.

The Work That Reconnects

The Work That Reconnects (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012) is a theory and model for personal and group work with the central purpose of bringing people into a new relationship with their selves and the world, empowering them to take part in the "Great Turning" and reclaim their lives from corporate rule (Macy & Brown, 2014). The Great Turning refers to the movement

away from a life-threatening human presence on Earth to a life honoring and sustainable society (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). The theory underlying the WTR is founded in the living systems thinking of Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1969), Ervin Laszlo (1972), and later by the cybernetics of Gregory Bateson (1972). As a Buddhist practitioner and a scholar, Macy brings Buddhist philosophy into many of the activities, practices, and teachings to the WTR.

Also, influencing Macy during the development of the WTR was the Earth-honoring living spirituality of theologian and historian Thomas Berry (Macy, 2001). The WTR is an amalgamation of all this and more, developed through Macy's genius and sensitivity. Assumptions that guide the work, in abbreviated form, are as follows:

- This world, into which we are born and take our being, is alive.
- Our true nature is far more ancient and encompassing than the separate self-defined by habit and society.
- Our experience of the pain for the world springs from our connectivity with all beings, from which also arise our powers to act on their behalf.
- [Psychological] unblocking occurs when our pain for the world is not only acknowledged, but experienced.
- When we reconnect with life by choosing to bear our pain for it, the mind retrieves its natural clarity.
- The experience of reconnection with the Earth community arouses the urge to act on its behalf (Macy & Brown, 2014, pp. 65–67).

WTR workshops can range from a few hours to many days and they have been held in many different places: churches, schools, town halls, living rooms, retreat centers, and at the gates of nuclear test sites and uranium mines (Macy & Brown, 2014). Intended mainly for group work, the WTR provides a flexible structure, the sharing of information about the political, economic, ecological, and spiritual state of the world, and experiential practices for groups, from dyads to everyone, in dialogue. Perhaps the most important aspect of the WTR is for a person to hear themselves speaking from their authentic truth (Macy & Brown, 2014). It can be revelatory to hear oneself speaking their personal truth about what they are grateful for, how they feel about the suffering they see in the world, the positive changes they encounter, and how they can participate in these changes.

Bearing witness as others speak their gratitude, truth, and pain can bond us through shared risk, shared values, compassion, and the knowledge that in many ways the world is about connection and mutual dependence, which helps build authentic relationships and stimulates the desire to make changes in their lives (Macy, 1991; Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). For men who have a difficult time feeling and expressing emotions, or alexithymia, this can be challenging but much-needed work. The benefits of this work, for men, is a focus of this proposed study.

There is no claim that the WTR is a panacea or cure-all for the world's ills. It is a theory, framework, and method, which is open to the creation of new activities to fit specific circumstances, inviting people into connection with self,

others, and world (Macy & Brown, 2014). This is the point: the work itself is expanding into new regions and communities. The WTR has been largely developed within a Western Eurocentric world view, with stories and practices that reflect this perspective. Some people of color have felt marginalized for this reason. WTR facilitators have received serious criticism as to how some of the exercises and language used perpetuates the colonial patterns of the dominant social system (Nahar, 2017).

There is truth in this criticism. This criticism is also a sign of the effectiveness of the work and is an indication of how widely it is being used and adapted in various communities in the United States and abroad. The WTR was born out of the need to wake up the Western white supremacist capitalistic patriarchally conditioned mind to the damage and suffering this system causes. Even though the WTR has striven to be open and inclusive to everyone, regardless of their race, nationality, sexual preference, gender identification, or religion (Macy & Brown, 2014), to make it a space for all people regardless of race, color, class, or gender identity a distinct culture has developed around it (Peng, 2017). This is demonstrated in the homogeneity of myself and my co-researchers, as well as the men who came to the men-only retreats. The WTR retreats I have participated in have largely been attended by white participants, all with good intentions, seeking meaning and purpose in life, if not simply to do no harm. What diversity there was is mostly among the women and few men of color attending.

For several years work has been ongoing to decolonize the WTR. In this process women of color have contributed to the growing awareness regarding cultural bias as it pertains to giving and receiving feedback, as well as when to not give feedback (Ananda, 2020; Nahar, 2017). There is a recognized need and opportunity to develop new activities and practices that evolve WTR learning experiences, that increase facilitator capacity to create more safety, inclusion, and belonging for all participants amidst challenges of difference, internalized power and oppression, and potentially charged dynamics (Peng, 2017, p. 1).

Gains are being made. There is greater awareness of the way that colonization and the industrial growth society, a term coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, have impacted participants as well as leaders of the Work That Reconnects differently. How these differences emerge within the dynamics of WTR methodologies and its framework are being aired, as well as suggestions for how we can work together to overcome them. Evidence of this evolution would be people of color feeling safe enough to “choose this space and methodology to grapple with the invisible burden that is on our backs every day” (Nahar, 2017, para. 17). After more than 400 years of oppression, with the current and ongoing violence against Blacks and other people of color, it is past time this legacy trauma is addressed. This inquiry explores the potential for WTR practices and framework to help facilitate this discussion.

The Work That Reconnects has a structure, or roadmap, called the spiral, that combines the sharing of information with dialogic practices that allows participants to embody their experiences in addition to grasping them mentally.

There is also a spiritual underpinning that grounds the retreat community in a sacred trust inviting honesty and a sense of safety. There are four stops along the spiral where the information and practices are experienced: (a) Gratitude, as gratitude is given the joy for life and being, is acknowledged; (b) Honoring Our Pain for the World, as when people acknowledge their pain for the world, they can honor it in others, in themselves, and they can speak it aloud; (c) Seeing With New Eyes, in the belief that when people are not consumed by the pain or fear they become empowered, they see the world in new ways and make use of previously unseen resources and networks; and (d) Going Forth, which is about connecting, networking, collaborating, and being seeds of change wherever one goes (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). As the spiral is completed, participants return to gratitude and enter the spiral again, with more awareness, usually on another occasion. This is a recursive process forming an ascending positive spiral of awareness and connection that keeps growing.

The experiential nature of the activities and practices of the Work That Reconnects may help people confront their conditioning to discover a deeper sense of self-awareness. Neurological research has shown that every sustained activity, including thoughts and cultural activities, are mapped neurologically on/in the brain (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Doidge, 2007), suggesting that the WTR practices, sustained over a multiple-day retreat, could play a part in altering brain neurology. With repeated practice, new neural patterns could be formed altering old patterns and creating new ways of seeing and knowing, in turn creating new opportunities and potentials.

In the next section, I speak to connections I see between the aperspectival, or integral, worldview of Jean Gebser, the integral psychology of Ken Wilber, and the Work That Reconnects. Although the Work That Reconnects was developed to help people effect positive personal and social change, the practices seem to cross into other disciplines, such as with cognitive-behavior therapy (Davidson & Begley, 2012). The spiral of the Work That Reconnects, with the practices it embodies, engages our senses, emotions, creativity, imagination, individuality, community, mythic, magic, and time in ways that can expand one's sense of self to include all life and the cosmos, or ecological-self (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Seed et al., 1988). It is my claim that these WTR activities are integral in the sense that they engage Gebser's integral mind and Wilber's integral psychology.

Integral Mind

Central to Gebser's philosophy (1985) are five stages of consciousness, and the rapid changes or "mutations" of consciousness that separate one epoch from another, each new stage including and transcending the one previous. The first four previous stages are

(1) Archaic mind, signified by integrality, pretemporal and prespatial, unconscious spirit; (2) Magic mind, signified by unity, oneness with nature, spacelessness and timelessness; (3) Mythic mind, signified by complementarity, soul/psyche, circularity, and imagination, and; (4) Mental mind, signified by duality, ratio, abstraction, and oppositionality. The emerging epoch is, (5) the Integral mind, signified by diaphaneity (transparency), wholeness, conscious spirit, and concretion (manifesting). (Gebser, 1985, pp. 118–120)

Integral mind has the potential to include and supersede all previous states of consciousness into a new wholeness, an Integrum. An Integrum represents a

fully completed and realized whole ... establishing the inviolate and pristine state of origin by incorporating the wealth of all subsequent (post-origin) achievement. The intergrum includes, integrates, and utilizes the best of all previous levels of human consciousness into an integral whole which could be the next intensification of human consciousness (Gebser, 1985). It is also possible that the numerous stressors in a racially divided, oppositional, rapidly changing world can cause fragmentation. The theory and practices of the Work That Reconnects that incorporates these stages with the Great Turning (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012) can be seen as the turning of the Mental Mind into the Integral Mind.

Integral Psychology

At the core of integral psychology (Wilber, 2000) is a four-quadrant system of human consciousness, charted as a four-section square, with the upper half representing the individual and lower half representing the collective aspects of one's being. The upper-left quadrant contains the interior "I," the individual awareness; the upper-right quadrant contains the exterior "It," the exterior objective behavior; the lower-left quadrant contains the inner "We" of shared values, meanings, world-views, and ethics; and the lower-right quadrant contains the "It," the exterior-collective of the social, material institutions, geopolitical formations, and forces of production (i.e., agricultural, industrial, informational; Wilber, 2000, Chapter 5, para. 18).

The theory and practices of the Work That Reconnects reflects Wilber in that by following the WTR spiral, engaging fully with the practices, all of

Wilber's aspects of our being are exercised and nurtured. To meet the challenges facing humanity, "dimensions of the human bodymind—physical, emotional, mental, social, cultural, spiritual" must be developed to respond appropriately (Wilber, 2000, Chapter 8, Four-Quadrant or Integral Therapy, para. 7). As I see it, through the sharing of information regarding the state of the world—the pain and suffering, the injustices—our sense of values, ethics, and moral responsibility are exposed. Practices such as Deep Time activities (i.e., talking to seventh generation ancestors or descendants), the Council of all Beings (speaking on behalf of a nonhuman entity), and the Cradling (honoring the evolution and complexity of the human body) offer opportunities to engage all of Gebser's epochs and Wilber's dimensions. Wilber (2000) could have been talking about the Work That Reconnects when he says the general idea of integral practice is "to exercise body, mind, soul, and spirit in self, culture, and nature" (Wilber, 2000, Chapter 8, Four-Quadrant or Integral Therapy, para. 106Loc. 1893) and "The curative catalyst, in every case, is bring awareness to bear on an area of experience that is (or has been) denied, distorted, falsified, or ignored" (Chapter 8, Typical Therapy, para. 4). Using a dialogic approach, the practices of the Work That Reconnects does just this and, in this way, can be understood as being integral practices.

Researcher Qualifications

My qualifications for conducting this research are grounded in my personal experiences with the Work That Reconnects and the benefits I have gained from my participation. After engaging with the WTR community, I felt less alone and a part of something meaningful. I felt empowered to change my life

and in doing so change society. I felt less competitive with others, less of a need to be right or in control, and less of a need to feel like I had to have all the answers. Overall, this led to less stress in my life, more connection, and fewer feelings of being adrift in a world seemingly gone mad. I want to know if the other men had similar experiences, came to similar conclusions, felt similar sensations, and (if so) how these have manifested in their lives.

I was introduced to the Work That Reconnects in 2003 following an all-too-common mid-life collapse of everything I held dear: family, career, sense of meaning, self, purpose. I was questioning everything I thought I knew of life, love, and existence but lacked the tools and support to find answers. Introduced by a friend, I went to a three-day WTR retreat and in one way or another everything I have done since that experience has been the result of actions taken during that retreat. As much as the Work That Reconnects is a model of practice it is also a community, and I continue to be nourished by the relationships I have developed with others through my participation.

For 17 years I have been involved in the Work That Reconnects as a participant, a facilitator of the practices, and a retreat organizer. I am a founding member of a self-facilitated WTR men's group that has continued to meet regularly for 10 years running. These experiences have changed my life, giving me the ways and means to focus on and define what I valued, what I held sacred, and how much I loved our world. I was introduced to the familial and social conditioning I carried, which illuminated how far I was from the person I felt to be inside. I experienced, within myself, how this conditioning hurt me and

through me those around me. It kept me from seeing my worth and developing my potential. It was then that I took responsibility for my decisions. Seeing life in a new way, I chose to make new decisions making my life is richer and fuller.

It is my assumption that the effectiveness of the Work That Reconnects stems from profound changes occurring within the individual and the means for these changes are contained within the practices and process of the Work. “The actions we take, and structures we build, mirror how we relate to the earth and to each other” (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 14). From my personal struggles to allow for the vulnerability and risk of speaking from my inner truth, and witnessing other men in this work, I have come to identify with five factors within the practices and community that I see as critical for my personal change: physical environment, methodology/tradition, community, safety, and a spiritual foundation (Appendices A & B). I believe that together these form the minimum conditions necessary for men to lower their guard, drop their personas, and inquire into their own truth. In this study I wanted to ascertain if my experiences with the Work That Reconnects are unique, an anomaly, or if my experiences are like those of other men.

Because it is my contention that the development of work such as Work That Reconnects is a way to begin transitioning out of oppressive patriarchy and the devastation, pain, and suffering it manifests, I have conducted this inquiry. Patriarchal systems intertwined with predatory capitalism and white supremacy were installed and have been maintained by men, and therefore it falls largely to men to dismantle these systems. This requires men to acknowledge and dismantle

patriarchy within themselves before they can begin to envision ways and means of engaging with positive social change. This inquiry supports this endeavor by identifying factors that motivated men to become involved in the work and the benefits they have recognized from their participation. Given the racial, economic, and social inequality we see in our communities and in the world, it is imperative that men commit to a more inclusive, compassionate, and caring system of governance. Helping men to see their internal patriarchy can aid in dismantling systemic racism and in identifying with the needs and values of others. For white men particularly, the discovery of blind spots such as deeply engrained white privilege can promote the evolution of new transformative practices that can reach a wider and more diverse population are also supported by this work.

I have attended WTR retreats with the study participants who I interviewed for this inquiry. I have participated in the same activities and practices; I know the history of its tradition, speak the same language. This enabled me to engage and embed myself in the dialogue with the men, making possible emergent intuition and gnosis of the unspoken essence, the inner meaning of the words as-a-whole. “True saying, the kind of saying that occurs in everyday life between people who understand each other, allows the unsaid so to accompany the said that the two comprise a unity (Palmer, 1969, Chapter 12, *The Speculative Structure of Language and of the Nature of Poetry*, para. 2). My co-researchers and I have a history of trust together, which helped them to delve deeply into their experiences and trust me to hold their interests at heart.

I reflected on these experiences and stories, contrasting them with my personal experiences and seeking the shared meaning of these experiences; therefore, an inquiry approach using hermeneutical phenomenology was appropriate for this study. Phenomenology can best be understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophizing, emphasizing an attempt at the truth of matters and an attempt to describe a phenomena as whatever appears in the manner it manifests in the consciousness of the experiencer (Moran, 2000). In its attempt to understand a lived experience, phenomenology delves into the ontology (being), epistemology (knowing), and axiology (meaning) of lived experiences, which cannot ever be completely known in its totality (Gadamer, 2008). As such, there are no concrete conclusions or facts generated from this research. Rather, this dissertation contains a description and discussion of the data in terms of the experiences, the meaning made from the experiences, and how this is lived into the lives of the study participants. Given that a word or phrase, cannot convey all of the meaning intended by a speaker (Gadamer, 2013), an effort was made to understand more of what is veiled or beyond the word.

Researcher's Experience: Setting the Context

As stated previously, I attended each of the three WTR men's retreats and personally knew my co-researchers from these retreats. A small group of nine men developed a strong friendship bond through their shared experiences and continue to meet at least annually. As did most of my co-researchers, I had previous retreat experience with the Work That Reconnects in diversely mixed groups of men and women. These groups represented different nationalities,

ethnic heritages, cultural beliefs, and sexual/gender orientations. Although not always so, the retreats I attended have been held in rural locations and in natural settings such as Camp Westwind, at the mouth of the Salmon River, in Oregon; Lost Valley Education Center, in Oregon, and; the Land of Medicine Buddha, a Buddhist education center in the Santa Cruz mountains, California, which borders a state forest.

When the first men only workshop was offered, I applied immediately, committing quickly to avoid talking myself out of it. I could feel it was something I needed but my prior experience with men and men's groups was largely competitive, aggressive, and something I tried to avoid. After an initial hesitancy, I began to feel safe enough to be able to engage with the activities with honesty and emotionally commit to the process. This proved to be a transformative experience. Through engaging with the men in the practices of the work, I witnessed us all lower our guard, remove some of the armor, and engage together as feeling emotional beings. The outcome was liberating and transformational, yet getting there was a challenge; these were strangers and I had to risk being emotionally and physically vulnerable in front of them, which was a big risk.

More importantly, I had to look at things about myself I would rather not look at and to be honest with myself about what I saw. I had to verbalize my findings to either another man, a small group of men, or the whole assembly. That level of honesty requires a strong sense of safety for me, mentally and physically. Feeling safe is paramount for me to engage in any group action or activity that detracts from my ability to assess a potential danger in time to respond

appropriately. This is a harshly learned defense from years past yet doubly true in a group of men who I do not know well.

Because of the above history with the Work That Reconnects, having a preexisting relationship with study participants, and my knowledge of WTR theory, practices, and vocabulary, and my interest in this topic, I feel that I was appropriately situated to conduct this research. I feel a strong sense of responsibility to uphold the spirit of the Work That Reconnects, as I see it, and considering Macy both mentor and friend. I wished to contribute to her work through conducting this study. A well conducted study into the benefits of the Work That Reconnects, with meaningful and applicable results, would let her know that her work will live on and continue to reach out to new audiences, *in ever widening circles*, as her favorite poet Rainer Maria Rilke writes (Barrows & Macy, 2005).

Recognizing Personal Bias

In a phenomenological inquiry it is customary to bracket off personal bias, to be without presuppositions or prejudgment for a text or an experience to speak for itself, as it is. I cannot bracket out my bias for Work That Reconnects; it is because of this bias I have conducted this research. I have experienced the effectiveness of the work personally and bring to the fore intimate knowledge that gives depth and breadth to my reflection. My strongest asset, coming into this research, has been my personal experience with the Work That Reconnects and how profoundly this work has impacted me, changing the direction of my life. Admitting this bias, I locate myself within this research along with my co-

researchers; it is a combining of our individual stories into a collective voice. I cannot deny that I read and interpreted the data through a lens of my experience, although it was not be the only lens I utilized.

As mentioned above, this research focuses on the hermeneutic experience, inquiring into the ontological and epistemological impacts of the experiences as well as the value to the individual. The interview language has an ontological foundation and implicit premeaningfulness as well as explicit meaningfulness related to the whole. The implicit premeaningfulness is that which can never be fully expressed by a word or phrase, yet it is through language that understanding occurs (Gadamer, 2008). Having a common language with my co-researchers aided me in looking into and beyond, deeper into individual stories and into common core values—the shared axiology held by my co-researchers. It is here, in the shared values, I felt the greatest gains in understanding men’s motivation for change lay.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review draws from ecopsychology, feminist critique, social constructionism, men's psychology, spirituality, cognitive neuroscience, integral philosophy, and complex systems thinking to frame my discussion. I begin with a general background on the topic of men's social conditioning, patriarchy, and men's health, followed by a discussion on aspects of the men's movement. In discussing deep ecology, I briefly explore cognitive neuroscience and how activities that engage our attention change brain neurology and gene expression. My intention is to give the reader a solid understanding of the challenges for men given their social conditioning and pressure to conform to social norms of behavior, and how men are responding to these challenges. It is also my intention to show how WTR theory engages all of these disciplines through group activities and dialogic process.

There are no known scholarly inquiries into the Work That Reconnects (Macy, personal communication, August 2019), although this is not to say that none exist. Macy has taught in many countries around the world, bringing WTR retreats with her. In addition, there have been several surveys and questionnaires filled out by participants after attending a retreat and an online journal, titled *Deep Times: A Journal of the Work That Reconnects*, has been created and supported by a network of WTR facilitators and volunteers. I listed the books by Macy and her co-authors in the section on her life's journey and so will not list them here.

Hollis-Walker (2012) compares the Work That Reconnects with Emotion-Focused Therapy, developed by Dr. Leslie Greenberg, which is based on the

concept that engagement with emotional memories makes problematic emotions more receptive to new information and change. The Work That Reconnects taps into emotions associated with human interconnection with all life to inspire intentional engagement with sustainable behavior and action. “Both systems emphasize safety, empathy, enactment, and engagement with emotions and hold that the dark emotions are a source of empowerment and change” (Hollis-Walker, 2012, Abstract).

Hathaway (2017) supports this saying, “the Work That Reconnects is a transformative learning process which endeavors to help participants acknowledge, experience, and understand the emotions that may either empower or inhibit action to address the ecological crisis” (Abstract). Through Joanna Macy’s insights from deep ecology, systems theory, ecopsychology, Buddhism, and political activism, the WTR assumes “the more we draw issues into the open, the more inclined we become to tackle them” (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 80). With the social expectations on how to be masculine, exposing how one’s feelings and concerns can be difficult for many men.

As we see in the social masculine norms inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003) men, as a gender, are sorely equipped to admit being wrong or not in control. Boys are encouraged to develop their public, assertive selves, but systematically pushed away from the full exercise of emotional expressiveness and skills for making and appreciating deep connection (Real, 1997). Boys, and later men, have trouble processing strong emotion, tending toward externalizing their pain and feelings of being victimized by others, and discharge distress through action

(Real, 1997). I therefore move to a discussion of male social conditioning, how some men are responding to the rapidly changing and chaotic times we all face.

Men and Social Conditioning

One of the most evident factors in the history of Western civilization is that it has been from start to finish an overwhelmingly masculine [centered] phenomenon (Tarnas, 1991). Over the centuries, masculine activities have often focused on the development and celebration of physical strength, competition, and violence (Eisler, 2008; Macy & Brown, 2014, Messner, 2000), leading to a system of governance that claims the male as superior, with socially defined and enforced gender roles that suppressed women, nature, and anything else that got in its way (Eisler, 2002; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). In effect, it has predominately been men, adhering to patriarchal social structures and norms of masculine behavior, that has led to the harmful aspects of the industrial and scientific revolutions and the wicked problems we are facing as a global community (Eisler, 2002, 2008; hooks, 2004; Morin, 2008; Tarnas, 1991). Socially, any rebellion against this male authority was considered immoral, while the oppression of subordinate groups and the violence used to maintain this oppression were considered moral” (Eisler, 2008, p. 70).

Conformity to this approach of governance has created a “pathologically adolescent society” (Plotkin, 2008, p. 8), where there is “a scarcity of true maturity” and many adults suffer from “incapacitating social insecurity, identity confusion, extremely low self-esteem, few or no social skills, narcissism, relentless greed, arrested moral development, recurrent physical violence,

materialistic obsessions, little or no capacity for intimacy or empathy, substance addictions, and emotional numbness” (Plotkin, 2008, p. 9). Given the isolation and competition within the above list of pathologies it should be no surprise that “today men are mostly afraid of other men’s violence” (Messner, 2000, Preface, para. 4). We see this played out on inner-city streets daily as gang violence, crime, and domestic violence; we also see it played out through the government-sanctioned practices of law enforcement and military combat and war (Katz, 2006); and it “is getting harder for a young male to figure out how to *be* a man” (Messner, 2000, Preface, para. 5) as they are embedded in dominant narratives of aggression and violence at the local level and play out on the national level through the perpetual state of global warfare.

The paradigm maintaining longstanding patriarchal forms of masculinity is shifting. Connell (1995) cites three areas where this is evident: (a) power relations, involving the possible collapse of patriarchal power and the movement toward global emancipation of women; (b) production relations, involving more women in business and labor combined with the decline of industrial blue-collar jobs which emphasized physical strength; and (c) in cathexis, psychosexual energy—the investment of mental or emotional energy in a person, object, or idea—or in Freudian psychoanalysis, the libido’s charge of energy. A “blockage of this energy can result in an inability, or unwillingness, to invest emotional energy in others and various frustrations that requires release in one form or another; regressions, fixations, and auto-eroticism (acute narcissism for example)” (Messner, 2000, loc. 344). As this paradigm shift unfolds there is an

accompanying loss of traditional Western masculine identity, which offers men, individually and collectively, an opportunity to reject the narrow, limiting, and destructive masculinity to create a more humane, peaceful, and egalitarian definition of manhood (Messner, 2000).

Even with psychological help effecting personal change, men tend to fall back into old habits when stressed if they do not confront their underlying conditioning (Baron, 2003; Duran et al., 2008; Heinrich, 2014; Mahalik et al., 2003). “Psychic projections can be undone only by conscious mental understanding” (Gebser, 1985, p. 136), and to overcome one’s social-patriarchal conditioning it must first be recognized within the person, accepted and understood; then, from this conscious awareness, new decisions can be made (hooks, 2004; Levant & Richmond, 2016). Acknowledging a need to change does not make change easy. I feel a way for men to practice self-exploration and dialogue is critically needed, a need this inquiry was intended to inform.

Patriarchy

Given the enormity of this topic, a comprehensive discussion of patriarchy is beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, it is necessary to spend some time on it in order to give a historical perspective in order to ground this research and develop the reasoning for it. Patriarchy did not arise on its own, separate from imperialism, colonialism, militarism, or sexism, but as part and parcel of these things. We cannot say which came first (e.g., sexism or patriarchy, patriarchy or imperialism); they must be considered as inseparable. It is well accepted that patriarchy has long been associated with male oppression of women, as well as

control over politics, economics, and society in general (Eisler, 2007; LaConte, 2010; Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). Many feminist writers relate patriarchy to a kinship system of control over women, symbolized by the power of the father (Mitchell & Mishra, 2000). Patriarchy is composed not men per se, but a set of social, political, economic structures that insist men are superior to everything and everyone seen as weak, especially females, and maintain dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence (hooks, 2004). Patriarchy, in short, is less about gender and more about a socially and culturally constructed system of control, including the institutions, structures, and ideals supported by men and women alike that keep it in power (Courtenay, 2000; Eisler, 2008; Grant, 2004; A. Johnson, 2007; Levant & Richmond, 2016; Wester & Vogel, 2012).

There are many theories and lineages that discuss the emergence of patriarchy in the West. These encompass the fields of mythology, philosophy, science, sociology, economics, and other disciplines. What we know for certain is that systematic patriarchy is a framework that shapes the contemporary dominant cultural narrative in the United States. These socially created norms of masculine behavior are deeply engrained in the American masculine mind (Levant & Richmond, 2016; Mahalik et al. 2003). For example, the term “sissy” came into use during the mid-18th century to indicate young boys who were rather nonaggressive, nonathletic, and soft in facial features or effeminate— “mommy’s boys” (Grant, 2004).

President Theodore Roosevelt, around the year 1900, said effeminate boys were a threat to American civilization, insisting that boys fight, and any boys who got punched and did not fight back were cowards (Grant, 2004). Not long after, the term “sissy” was used in clinical psychology to indicate a potential psychosis of identity and gender confusion in young men. In 1931, an article was published in *Parent’s* magazine with the title of “Boys Must Fight,” promoting the idea that boys who did not fight were not real boys (Grant, 2004). This social pressure continues to this day and “men continue to grow up with, and are socialized into, a deeply misogynistic, male-dominated culture” (Katz, 2006, p. 9).

To fit into the social male role, men must practice ongoing self-betrayal, denying they are both conditioned and wounded by patriarchal society, yet adhering to it under the masculine pretense that real men feel no pain (hooks, 2004). An effect of this self-wounding is that men as a gender suffer more health and mental illness issues than women in all 15 leading categories of illness (Levant & Richmond, 2016), such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, smoking and drug addiction, physical activity, injuries, and violence. Men commit suicide at a higher rate than women (Wester & Vogel, 2012), have higher drug and alcohol addiction, and die an average of seven years sooner than women (Courtenay, 2000; Wester & Vogel, 2012), yet resist asking for psychological help (Golden, 2013; Levant & Richmond, 2016, Messner, 2000). Studies have shown that men tend to be “emotionally limited, have poorer health overall, and have a shorter life expectancy than women” (Messner, 2000, p. 22).

Men's Health

Within the psychometric study of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003) was a subgroup of 450 men who took part in a concurrent study regarding men's health. The results demonstrated that men are more likely to take part in risky and unhealthy behavior, including risking death, if they felt they could leverage these risks into social power and status (Mahalik et al., 2003). Thus, the socially constructed norms of masculinity, when adhered to, are contrary to men's health consistently enough to be interpreted as a gender-based predictor of health and wellness (Courtenay, 2000). The more a man or boy tries to live up to these social norms, the more likely they are to be unhealthy and die at an earlier age. Through shame and threats of violence, young men can be forced to deny their emotions, coerced into risky behavior, and commit violent acts to not appear weak, or feminine, to male peers and themselves (Wester & Vogel, 2012).

Social systems are maintained through the way people live their lives, eventually shaping us (A. Johnson, 2007), which indicates that systems are strengthened, or weakened, through our participation, or lack thereof. A psychological study on conformity to majority type as a function of task and acceptance of sex-related stereotypes conducted with 204 college aged men and women at Purdue University (Goldberg, 1975) found that men were conforming more to the traditional feminine gender sex-roles, such as exhibiting care, compassion, and nurturing than in previous studies. This finding was taken to be an indication that men were being more accepting of the feminine values and

opinion, a potential product of the feminist movement (Goldberg, 1975). This has been validated in a recent study in social constructionism (Levant & Richmond, 2016), demonstrating that men continue to become increasingly accepting of women speaking their views and concerns as more women are coming to the discussion table. Another result of the feminist movement is the perspective that “men can do the work of overcoming social conditioning and confronting violence against women because of the great leadership of women” (Katz, 2006, p. 7). There is nothing stopping a man from going against the social norm but doing so comes with a list of negative consequences from society and peers (Levant & Richmond, 2016; Mahalik et al., 2003).

Even so, there are efforts and movements by many men to lead healthier, less stressful lives and develop a healthy sense of masculinity. This men’s movement is ill defined and fragmented, with critique from feminist thinkers, proponents of social constructionism, and others working toward redefining masculinity, adding much to the awareness of the historical patriarchal suppression of women as well as the flaws in this collective men’s movement (Heinrich, 2014; Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). The loss of “masculine rituals of initiating boys into manhood” and “urban industrial society replacing tribal-social bonds with competition, alienation, and bureaucratic bonds cut men off from each other and their own inner masculine nature” (Messner, 2000, p. 17). Although perhaps inadequately, much of the men’s movement has been about reconnecting this bond between men and sense of initiation.

The Men's Movement

By the year 2000, eight major groups had emerged in men's attempts to engage in a dialogue concerning the conscious politics of masculinity: "men's liberationists, men's rights advocates, radical feminist men, socialist men, men of color, gay male liberationists, Promise Keepers, and the mythopoetic men's movements" (Messner, 2000, p. 11). This politics of masculinity attempts to simultaneously take in men's institutionalized privileges, the costs attached to adherence to narrow conceptions of masculinity, and the differences and inequalities among men (p. 11). Many men, myself included, are seeking to find better health and wellness by going outside the social masculine norms, finding the support of other men, identifying for themselves how they are supporting the masculine norms, and then choosing a healthier way of being (Courtenay, 2000).

However, with emotional stoicism, the stoic mask (Howes, 2017) young men are being socialized into that prescribes not showing any emotion (except for pride and anger) turns into an inability to experience and express a sufficiently broad enough range of emotions (Wester & Vogel, 2012). It is widely recognized that men need to work with other men to learn how to fully experience and express their emotions. Gaining in emotional resiliency and maturity is essential for them to be assets and to work constructively for positive, long-lasting social change alongside the women already leading in this field (Arnold, 1989; Castellini et al., 2005; Duran et al., 2008; Goss, 2015; hooks, 2004; Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). Men also need other men to see and overcome their masculine

socialization, choose healthier lives, and build resilient relationships (Bly, 2004; Levant & Richmond, 2016).

Not all men in the men's movement are interested in working alongside women; these men take a more traditional patriarchal avenue toward their quest for a better life through organized religion. By far, the largest membership within the men's movement comes from men in faith-based communities who seek to maintain their control and position as the king of their castle. Although one may argue difference among religions, I contend that world monotheisms are patriarchal in founding and organization, with a male creator God in control. To discuss this, I focus on the Christian men's movement as exemplar of this portion of the men's movement.

The Christian Men's Movement

The biblical image of God is as a great patriarch in heaven. Perhaps the Bible is one of the earliest books on patriarchy, as it begins by saying that the woman is to painfully give birth to children, focus her desire on her husband, and be ruled by him (Genesis 3:16, New International Version). The symbol of Father God has been sustained as plausible by patriarchy, making its mechanisms for the oppression of women seem right and fitting (Daly, 1973). "If God, in 'his' heaven is a father ruling 'his' people, then it is in the 'nature' of the universe that society be male dominated" (Daly, 1973, Chapter 1, para. 1). Many men, white men specifically, feel that they are losing this power through immigration, the feminization of men, and feminism (DiAngelo, 2018; Kimmel, 2017; Messner, 2000; Metzler, 2019; Real, 1997). These men are gathering to reestablish their

masculinity and reclaim their power in their families and communities (Messner, 2000).

The largest population of men's groups comes from the Christian Church with an estimated 10,000 different men's support groups in the United States and Canada (Castellini et al., 2005). The purpose of the Promise Keepers, a prominent group, is to help Christian men reclaim the spiritual leadership in their families and communities (Messner, 2000). In this sense, whether true or not, men in this movement see a deterioration of their (patriarchal) control over wife, home, and nuclear family as the source of social strife. In this movement, men gather to discuss issues of marital problems, family issues, and issues surrounding the workplace (Castellini et al., 2005; Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000; Messner, 2000).

In faith-based communities with men's peer group and mentoring organizations, men are finding benefits in establishing authentic relationships with other men (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). Authentic relationships are important in reducing the stereotyping of other men while allowing their masculinity to be affirmed by them (Castellini et al., 2005). These support groups generally have two purposes specifically for men: (a) to realize God through theology, and (b) to find God through the experiences of personally connecting with other men (Baker, 2015). The men gather to discuss personal issues: issues with spouses, family, and work, childhood wounding, father-son relationships, and feelings of isolation (Baker, 2015; Castellini et al., 2005). However, it is also recognized that there is a fear of grief in the men and in its avoidance many men

stop well short of reaching their conditioning and deep wounding (Castellini et al., 2005; Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). Messner (2000) says there is also “a fear of social feminization” (p. 9) and call for “remasculinization” is the central message of the Promise Keepers (p. 26).

Men are gathering to support, inspire, and empower each other for male bonding, self-awareness, and to seek what it is to be a man (Castellini et al., 2005). Another group from the Catholic faith claims that for men, “God is realized through theology and through personal connections with other men” (Baker, 2015, p. 19). Men will get together to talk about their troubles with their wives, children, work, and parents, but not about themselves and largely without acknowledging the historic oppression of women, their current oppression, and their cries for equal rights in society (Messner, 2000). Pushing back against feminism, these faith-based men’s groups claim that there is a powerful wave of feminine energy sweeping unsuspecting males into a spiritual abyss by radical feminists (Arnold, 1989). Although fear of feminism may lead some men to care more for his spouse and family (Baker, 2015), it is an attempted remake of the traditional system of patriarchal male authority (Heinrich, 2014).

On the other end of the spectrum there is Joe Kramer’s Erotic Christianity, which encourages men to embrace the potential of their erotic energy (Goss, 2015). Speaking against the erotophobic tradition of the Christian Church, Joe Kramer, a Jesuit priest and sex guide, conducts retreats where men get in contact with their erotic energy, the heart-genital connection. There was no identification or accounting of whether a man was heterosexual, gay, bisexual, or queer in this

observation, but many men attending his retreats reported having a powerful and liberating experience (Goss, 2015).

Many men and men's groups have made attempts to separate their philosophies from feminism. Both the Promise Keepers and many in the mythopoetic men's movement share a common aversion to the feminization of men. "The mythopoetic movement is more apt to blame modernization for this feminization of men, whereas the Promise Keepers are more apt to blame feminism, gay liberation, sexual liberation, and the 'breakdown of the family' for men's problems" (Messner, 2000, p. 16). From these perspectives, it appears that the main goal of the Christian men's movement is for men to live healthier, happier, less stressful lives without acknowledging, challenging, or changing the established Western patriarchal superiority of the white male.

In contrast, the "mythopoetic discourse is at its core anti-modernist and anti-rationalist and the aims of mythopoetic practices are primarily therapeutic and spiritual" (Messner, 2000, p. 21). That these practices can be therapeutic cannot be denied by the Promise Keepers as a whole, and it exists within aspects of the mythopoetic movement. However, the mythopoetic men's movement as put forth by Robert Bly (2004) is not fully representative of the scope and scale of how mythopoetics can be used to view our world, ourselves, and our relationships. The following is a discussion on Bly's mythopoetics, and the concept of myth as offered by Michael Meade (2016, 2018) that speaks to the indwelling spirit, or genius, within each human soul.

Mythopoetic Men's Movement

Mythopoetics is the use of poetry, myth, and storytelling for personal growth, self-understanding, and gaining self-awareness within the men's movement (Bly, 2013). "Myths are the spontaneous productions of the psyche, constructs of the psyche, to convey archetypal forces that permeate life and each archetype bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source" (Campbell, 2008, p. 2). An *archetype* is an idealized concept of a larger-than-life figure, such as Warrior, Father, Fool, King Healer, Mother, Queen, and so on (Campbell, 2008), which appear all over the earth as symbolic constituents of myth as well as individual products of unconscious origin (Jung, 1955). Mythopoetics speaks of mythic-imagination as a primordial resource containing heart-felt intelligence and a reverence for life in its myriad of forms (Meade, 2006). Genuine stories are highly personal, offering "a living school where the only requirements are an active imagination, some capacity to feel one's feelings, and the willingness to approach the world as a place of mystery and revelation" (Meade, 2016, p. 2).

When we lose our connection to the otherworld of myth and deeper ways of knowing, "we lose our capacity for vertical imagination and the world becomes flat" (Meade, 2016, p. 16); life loses depth, texture, and meaning. For example, when one reads the poet Hafiz (c. 1320–1389) saying "the sun's eyes are painting fields again" (Ladinski, 1999, p. 189), they may see various images of a sunlit spring meadow erupting with wildflowers or have visions of forests, although they know the sun has no eyes; it is not literal in that sense, yet the poem tells a true story of springtime. The story or poem can resonate with a person, bringing

them a new perspective or lens with which to look at themselves and their situation, allowing them to reevaluate and change (Bly, 2013 Meade, 2006). The use of myth, poetry, and story incorporates the mythic imagination, which is a way to unlock the literalism of the present moment while opening the future to greater meaning (Meade, 2006).

A study of mythopoetic men's peer groups (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000) found that men working together as role models and mentors helped men to inquire into their conditioning and sustain the positive changes they make in their lives. By exchanging stories, in a supportive environment, men can develop a shared understanding of what it means to be male that differs from the oppressive and self-destructive meanings that typify traditional forms of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000; Eisler, 2002; Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000).

The beginning of the mythopoetic men's movement in the dominant culture in the United States is attributed to Robert Bly as a response to an increasing feminist focus on issues such as domestic violence, women's reproductive rights, sexual freedom, equal pay, and much more. Being careful not to directly blame feminism, Bly claimed "the masculine voice has been muted ... men have become passive, tamed, domesticated," limiting their communion and spirituality with other men (Messner, 2000, p. 19). The men who responded to Bly's message were primarily men with privileged status—white, educated, financially secure, heterosexual males, who are not personally affected by the structural inequity and injustice of society and less likely, as a group, to create a group ideology to confront these forces (Clatterbaugh, 1996; Katz, 2006;

Messner, 2000). This is not so different than what takes place in the *Work That Reconnects* (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012), where male participation in the three men's retreats consisted almost entirely of white, middle-aged, educated, professionals, with only a few men of color in attendance (per my personal observation).

In the research for this literature review, using online journals, university library databases, or other search methods, I found no documentation or studies of African American, Latino, or other ethnic groups outwardly using mythopoetics as a means of personal and social change. This is not to say that men from diverse cultural backgrounds are not engaging with myth, poetry, and story and incorporating the mythic imagination in more culturally appropriate ways, but they may not be calling it "mythopoetics."

Examples of Afrocentric practices using myth, song, and poetry come from Malidoma Somé (1997), an Elder of the Dagara tribe in West Africa who has worked with James Hillman, Robert Bly, and Michael Meade connecting ritual and the complexity of tribal communities. Indigenous traditions among North American First Nation peoples are related by Deloria (1992, 2006) and Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005), who speak of place-based spirituality and a lived connection with nature. There are various traditions within shamanism, as taught by the late Carlos Castaneda (1925–1998), Martin Prechtel, and Don Miguel Ruiz, which emphasizes engaged place-based learning and reverence for nature; these are also examples of what could be called mythopoetic practices. These indigenous ways of knowing and relating to the world are ancient and although

not considered mythopoetic in academic literature, they nonetheless exemplify a tradition of using myth, story, song, and art as teaching modalities.

The mythopoetic men's movement discussed in the following section is made up primarily of men from the dominant culture, as this is the makeup of the men who participated in this study; it does not include men's groups from other cultural backgrounds who may be engaging in similar activities that speak to their specific histories and experiences of masculinity.

Living Myth

According to mythologist and storyteller Michael Meade (2016), it does not matter what sex one is born into, but about one's inner genius, one's in-born, born-with gift to the world. Meade suggests a folk-myth from the ancient Jewish tradition about "'Lailah' the 'Angel of Conception'" (p. 75), which depicts how each human, male and female, is born with an innate genius—a specific and needed gift for the world. This myth is about the development of the human soul, not about male prowess, and may be a more beneficial myth for the challenges of our day.

This story of Lailah (Meade, 2016) is not about "forbidden fruit or original sin," but a story about the fruit of the World Tree connecting heaven and earth, and one's "original gifts" (p. 74). This is a story of the creativity to the Tree of Life and the uniqueness of each human soul. After taking shape on a root of the Tree of Life, the new human soul migrates up the trunk to a branch where it matures until it is ready to drop into the Treasury of Souls to be born into the world. Once in the Treasury of Souls, the Archangel Michael reaches in, pulls out

a soul, separates it from the collective congregation, and hands the soul to Lailah, the Angel of Conception. Lailah places the new soul into the womb of the mother, setting a candle near the head and illuminating “the distinct role it will play after it has been born,” which it must forget “until the day comes when a person finds their own true voice” (Meade, 2016, p. 75).

By this light, Lailah teaches the new soul about the world and what their role in it will be. When the soul is ready to be born into the world, Lailah extinguishes the flame and places her finger on the lips of the infant to silence the inner knowing, causing the infant to forget its gifts and why it is entering the world. It then becomes the life work of the new soul to rediscover its inner gift and purpose in life. According to this myth, this is true for all souls, male or female. Having a gender-neutral creation story that empowers all human souls could help alleviate much tension between the sexes as well as invite people to discover their hidden gifts.

It is good that individual men are working on their personal issues, but many still ignore the masculine impacts on society, such as less pay for women doing equal work, fewer job opportunities for women, and competition within the workplace (Richard-Allerdyce, 1994, as cited in Magnuson, 2016; Stoltenberg, 1993; Wester & Vogel, 2012). Men may benefit from the support and connection with other men (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000), but as we see in the Christian men’s movement, these discussions are mainly about men’s issues—problems with their wives, kids, parents, and work—and rarely about the men themselves (Baker, 2015). This lack of focus on men’s emotional inner life is a challenge for

the leadership in the mythopoetic men's movement as a majority of mid-life men are angry, in denial (not dealing with their shadow), have deep insecurities about identity and self-worth (universe as a battlefield), fear of all kinds, and are in denial of death (Barton, 2008).

It is reasonable to assume that any form of men's group would have the same challenges of leadership, because without facing the shadow side of their inner life and the social norms of masculinity, men will not be able to overcome the social conditioning that risks their health and wellness, and maintains business as usual (Barton, 2008; Courtenay, 2000; Duran et al., 2008; Mahalik et al., 2003; Meth & Pasick, 1990). This literature review demonstrates that in today's mainstream culture, men for the most part do not reflect on their inner life and have difficulty feeling and expressing a wide range of emotions, which is exactly what is needed for the personality to mature (Barton, 2008; Levant & Richmond, 2016; Grant, 2004). The process of self-inquiry and maturing one's self-identity can bring forth strong emotion, at times to the point of pain, and due to men's alexithymia and the adherence to social conditioning this is difficult for many men (Levant & Richmond, 2016; Mahalik et al., 2003). There is also a fear of grief and the avoidance of the shadow side of the persona, highlighting the inner places men need to go to overcome their social conditioning (Barton, 2008; Castellini et al., 2005).

A feminist criticism of the mythopoetic approach is that it tries to reestablish the hierarchy of kings and patriarchal society of the Middle Ages, which is antithetical to social change, and that it fails to acknowledge the historic

damage done to women, society, and nature through the patriarchal social structure (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 1998; Liu, 2005; Richard-Allerdyce, 1994, as cited in Magnuson, 2016). Some feminist thinkers see benefits to the mythopoetic movement while acknowledging the movement's limitations and failures, offering instead ways to improve the movement to be more inclusive (Heinrich, 2014). In this patho-adolescent society it is imperative to mature our personalities, to have a mature and expansive sense of self to be effective as adults (Plotkin, 2003).

Given the power of the myth imagination, poetry, story, metaphor, symbols, and archetypes are all useful tools for this purpose and, thankfully, not isolated to the realm of the men's movement or mythopoetics. This brings us to a brief discussion on how myth, ceremony, archetypes, and metaphors are used to connect and expand one's identity to include other humans, the nonhuman world, and nature. There are several voices in this discussion that at their core can be situated within the concept of deep ecology.

Deep Ecology

Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess coined the term "deep ecology" to indicate an ecological philosophy and ethic that reconnects the individual to their long history with our living planet (Macy & Brown, 2014). Human beings have a 4.5 billion-year history with life on Earth, arising from and dependent on the living body of Earth: this is our deep ecology, our deep interconnectedness with all of life and the Earth itself (Macy & Brown, 2014; Seed et al., 1988). When one lives in recognition of their deep ecology, their sense of self identity extends beyond a personal self to include all life, which changes their perception of the

world and their actions in it (Macy, 1991; Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Plotkin, 2003; Seed et al., 1988). Deep ecology recognizes the self as a metaphor, a social construct, naming several as examples: the ego self, social self, metaphysical self, and an ecological self (Seed et al., 1988). “The ecological self, like any notion of selfhood, is a metaphoric construct, useful for what it allows us to perceive and how it helps us to behave” (Macy, 2007, p. 157).

The self is a metaphor that can be changed or expanded to be more inclusive, global, and even reach cosmic proportions, which is the ecological self (Bragg, 1996; Macy, 2000; Macy & Brown, 2014; Seed et al., 1988). To emphasize our choice in this Macy (2007) states “any notion of selfhood is a metaphoric construct, useful for what it allows us to perceive” (p. 157). We can choose the self’s boundaries in objective reality how large or small we want our self to represent. “Deep psychological healing is the result of learning how to embrace our woundedness and fragmentedness from the cultivated perspective and consciousness of the Self. We must, to some degree, cultivate our wholeness before we can be truly healed” (Plotkin, 2013, p.27). “Individual emotion is hardly of the human order ... it needs to be shared. In the sharing, the resonance is increased, and a greater range of human experience is established” (Berry, 1999, p. 171). Individual emotion is to be shared. Group work has shown that despair, grief, and anger can be confronted, experienced, and creatively channeled, releasing new energy, creativity, and empowerment, and opening us to our fundamental interconnectedness with all life (Seed et al., 1988).

As with the development of any new skill or ability, practice is needed to achieve mastery and the reprogramming of old habits and patterns of behavior. Group workshops provide focus and duration to the activities, participant support, safety, group synergy, and momentum of activity post workshop (Macy, 1991). Not only does this effect one's physical wellbeing, it also changes brain neurology and biochemistry, connecting our inner and outer lives in profound ways as well as indicating possibilities for the future (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Doidge, 2007; Ramachandran, 2011). I return to this discussion at the end of this section, but for now I turn to a brief discussion of systems thinking as it applies to this research.

Complex Systems

Our ability to make informed decisions and act appropriately to changing conditions depends upon our ability to receive and exchange information with our immediate environment. In systems terms the mechanisms for this information exchange are called "feedback loops," which connects one's perception to their actions and must be unblocked to function properly (Bateson, 1972; Laszlo, 1972; Macy, 1991; Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Miller, 1978; Morin, 1999, 2008). The daily bombardment of misinformation from the business-as-usual side of society is sophisticated and relentless: consume, pay, be silent; we are on the right track and we just need to stay the course, trust the markets; the economy will grow and technology will solve all our troubles. This is one of three stories that, as Macy explains, are being told simultaneously during

our time: “Business as Usual,” the “Great Unraveling,” and the “Great Turning” (Macy & Johnstone, 2012).

The second story being told is that of the Great Unraveling. This story is about economic collapse, the unraveling of many institutions, and increasing social unrest. Denial of economic collapse is continually coming from the current White House and Republican party while institutions such as the postal service and the electoral process are being undermined. Simultaneously, the current administration claims the social unrest, protest against police violence, and increasing violence from right-wing terrorists against Indigenous, Black, and People of Color are being created by the Democratic party and leftist extremists. The backdrop for this is the global pandemic; in the United States alone, more than 200,000 lives have been lost at the time of this writing (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, November 2020).

The Great Unraveling story says that environmental regulations need to be removed to stimulate industrial growth; deaths should be ignored, given the claim that it is patriotic for old people, people with preexisting health conditions, African Americans, people of color, and the poor to die for the economy (Beckett, 2020). This story denies the destruction of ecosystems, ignores the climate crisis, magnifies species extinctions, and increases the possibility of wars over resources to the point of putting life itself in peril (Macy & Johnstone, 2012).

The story of unraveling exposes the overwhelming odds we are facing as a species that deaden our senses and block our feedback circuits. Some signals of distress can be too much to handle and we can repress the signals because they are

so bleak and painful (Macy & Brown, 2014). Other signals are part of the structure of the domination culture and serve to reduce our capacity to respond. Even though many people see the destruction and the suffering, feel the pain of it, they do not act or speak out, and there are reasons for this inaction (hooks, 2004; Levant & Richmond, 2016). Our ability to face our pain and, if needed, to grieve is key to finding the emotional reserves and courage to change (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). Doing so opens blocked feedback channels that can accurately inform the body-organism's innate intelligences.

The third story is the story of the “Great Turning, also called the Ecological Revolution, the Sustainability Revolution, even the Necessity Revolution” (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 26), and the Great Transition (Wells, 2013). Individuals and groups around the world are actively working for social and environmental justice, human rights, and the rights of nature, to name only a few causes. These are the people with a “commitment to act for the sake of life on earth as well as the vision, courage, and solidarity to do so” (Macy & Johnstone, 2012). These actions encompass three areas: holding actions, acts that “hold back and slow down the damage that is being done by the economy of business as usual” (Macy & Johnstone, 2012, p. 27); life-sustaining systems and practices, “creative re-design of the structures and systems that make our society” (p. 29); and a shift in consciousness, connecting with our “deeply engrained values allowing us to draw from a deeper pool of strength, accessing the courage and intelligence we so greatly need right now” (p. 30).

The complexity of the interweaving of the individual in relation to their self, work, home, education, wealth, society, and so on is tremendous in itself, and the intricacy of how these stories interact in each life is near impossible to imagine. “Complexity presents itself with the disturbing traits of a mess, of the intractable, of disorder, of ambiguity, of uncertainty” (Morin, 2008, p. 5). In our current social structure or paradigm, the “modern pathology of mind is the hyper-simplification that makes us blind to the complexity of reality” (Morin, 2008, p. 6). A first step to complex thinking “is to become aware of the nature and consequences of paradigms that mutilate knowledge and disfigure reality” (p. 3). Introspection is critical for complex thinking because whatever affects a paradigm “affects the ontology, the methodology, the epistemology, the logic, and by consequence, the practices, the society, and the politics” (p. 34). What we are and what society is, is a recursive process informed by feedback loops between the individual and their environment (Macy, 1991).

Multiple Intelligences

“We need to consider our situation in its relation to the natural world and a four-fold wisdom available to guide us: the wisdom of indigenous peoples, the wisdom of women, the wisdom of classical traditions, and the wisdom of science” (Berry, 1999, p. 176). It is the responsibility of all capable individuals to help make their culture whole and vital; those who are most capable in this way are those who are most whole in themselves (Plotkin, 2013). We need people who are aware and connected to their inner wisdom, to each other, and to life, or emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998). *Emotional intelligence* is “the capacity

to perceive, assess, and respond in a healthy, helpful way to our own emotions and those of others” (M. Brown, 2009, p. 3). Emotional intelligence is a necessary component of authentic relationships, including the ability to listen, to communicate, and to accept feedback from others (Vaughan, 2002). Due to men’s lack of experience acknowledging and processing their emotions, it is assumed that this intelligence is underdeveloped in most men.

Another intelligence is *ecological intelligence*, loosely defined as the awareness of the impacts of our decisions and actions on the health and wellbeing of the Earth’s ecological systems (Goleman, 1998). Simply stated, many people do not know the connections between the decisions that are made daily—for instance, whether to buy this item rather than that one—and the toll those decisions have on the workers who make those items, planetary ecosystems, and our long-term survivability as a species. Although Goleman used this term specifically in the context of the awareness of our purchases and their impacts to the ecology, I am expanding its usage to include an awareness of how natural systems function—that we arise from the natural world and that our fate as a species is tied to the fate of our ecosystems. This is an aspect of the ecological self and our deep ecology (Seed et al., 1988).

Last to be discussed here is *spiritual intelligence*, which “calls for multiple ways of knowing an integration of the inner life of mind and spirit with the outer life of work in the world” (Vaughn, 2002, p. 18). Spiritual intelligence is related to emotional intelligence in that it develops intrapersonal and interpersonal sensitivities, cultivating an ever-deepening awareness of matter, life, body, mind,

and spirit (Vaughn, 2002). This intelligence connects humans to the material world as well as the underlying ground of being from which all we know arises. To have the perspective that we arise out of the natural world and are part of something grand and magnificent, beyond our humanity, may be critical if humanity is to survive as a species (Morin, 1999).

These intelligences inform the body-organism that takes part in forming how a person interacts with the world and who they become. While changing our behavior, challenging our socialization, and persisting in breaking old habits helps us mature our personality (Plotkin, 2007), these acts also have a neurological impact, which I turn to now.

Cognitive Neuroscience

In the past few decades, cognitive neuroscientists and other researchers in brain science have conclusively demonstrated the brain's neuroplasticity—its ability to change and adapt (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Davidson & McEwen, 2012; Doidge, 2007; Ramachandran, 2011; Sacks, 1998). Research in neuroplasticity has demonstrated that every sustained activity is mapped onto the brain, that physical activities, sensory activities, learning, thinking, and imagining—as well as cultural ideas and activities—change brain structure and basic personality types (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Doidge, 2007).

Doidge (2007) describes the genetic research of Dr. Eric Kandel and the two functions of a gene he identified: the template and transcription functions. The template function “allows our genes to replicate, making copies, of themselves from generation to generation” (p. 220). The gene transcription

function tells an active, or expressed, gene to “make a new protein that alters the structure and function of the cell,” which “is influenced by what we do and think” (p. 220). Kandel’s work tells us that when we learn “our minds also affect which genes in our neurons are transcribed,” meaning that with sustained, intentional, effort one can go “deep into the brain and its neurons changing their structure by turning on the right genes” (p. 221). Our genes may “shape our behavior and brain anatomy,” but “we can shape our genes, which in turn shapes our brain’s microscopic anatomy” (p. 222), making this a reciprocal relationship.

Emotional connection is highly important in this process (Bragg, 1996) as positive bonds appear to facilitate neuroplastic change by triggering unlearning and dissolving existing neuronal networks, so a person can alter their existing intentions (Doidge, 2007). Although not designed as or intended to be a therapy, it is my contention that the Work That Reconnects, as a theory and a practice, operates as if were a neuroplastic activity capable of inducing change in gene expression and corresponding neurological structure within the brain—a neuroplastic nontherapy. This is not too far afield of the idea of self-directed neuroplasticity practices as a means for a person to take control of or influence their inner growth (Schwartz et al., 2005). Ultimately, the goal is the remapping of undesired neural networks into intentionally desired ones for personal well-being and better social relationships (Davidson & Begley, 2013). When we connect with a spontaneous emotional response, the boundaries between self and other dissolve and a more global, or cosmic, type of connection occurs (Bragg, 1996).

The point is that the actions we take in our lives and the structures we build in our society mirror how we relate to the earth and to each other (Macy & Brown, 2014). “We need to reinvent the human at the species level because the issues we are concerned with seem to be beyond the competence of our present cultural traditions, either individually or collectively” (Berry, 1999, p. 160). Given the advances in cognitive neurology and the understanding of brain plasticity, Berry’s goal of reinventing the human is an achievable possibility. As I see it, key to this reinvention of the human is through self-knowledge gained by honest introspection into one’s core values and understanding the core values of others. For me, this goes to the heart of the Work That Reconnects, which uses specific practices involving dialogue between people to guide introspection and its verbalization to others.

Consistent with this approach is the philosophy of the physicist David Bohm (1917–1992), who felt our core problem is that we do not know how to live together in a changing world, which results in one group attempting to impose their truths on another (Bohm, 1996). The Work That Reconnects has a framework that guides the dialogue, fostering adaptive change through the promotion of safety, empathy, enactment, and engagement without allowing a person or group to impose their views, beliefs, or truths on others (Hollis-Walker, 2012). The Work That Reconnects engages the whole person, physically, emotionally, and spiritually in a way that invites self-introspection and truth-speaking while invoking the power of bearing witness to the truth of others. Although it has yet to be proven, it is my assumption that the Work That

Reconnects practices act similarly to neuroplastic activities that help rewire brain neural pathways. This study validates the Work That Reconnects as a model for personal and social change, giving men another option outside of traditional psychotherapy and the polarities of the men's movement to find more meaning and purpose in their lives.

On Whiteness

I include this section in the literature review given the white homogeneity of the group who participated in this inquiry, and the required vigilance to identify and critique white privilege and white supremacy if and when they arose in this work. For understanding white supremacy and white privilege I relied heavily on the work of many authors who have written about the history of race, racism, and the treatment of nonwhite peoples. In this dissertation, I am tracing racism back 500 years to Spain, when Spanish separation of Old Christians (Spaniards) and the New Christians (immigrant Jews) was enacted to keep New Christians from gaining financially and attaining power in the church. Old and New Christians could live together and assimilate to a degree, yet this separation also kept New Christians from attending college, joining certain religious groups, and holding public office (Sussman, 2014).

The Spanish brought colonial expansion to the New World, claiming the 1493 Doctrine of Discovery. This doctrine stated that if the indigenous people were not Christians, their land could be claimed and exploited for their Christian rulers. Even though Pope Paul III claimed in 1537 that the Indigenous Americans were truly men, could understand and learn the Catholic faith, and were not to be

subjugated, the Doctrine of Discovery was used to justify the genocide and enslavement of the native population in North America.

In the centuries to follow, African people were enslaved to toil and die in the making of the American empire as well. By the turn of the 20th century, eugenics (the controlled breeding of individuals to increase desirable traits in a population) and social Darwinism (belief that the weak will die and the strong will survive) had gained power and found full expression in Hitler's Germany. Although modern science has proven there are no separate races, the fact is race is a part of our culture (Sussman, 2014) and with it comes racism. Emancipation was little more than words to end slavery; it did nothing to raise up the Black communities or honor the rights to which they had been told they were entitled. Although Blacks were set free and given "the right to vote" and "equal protection under the law," they were legislatively barred from using these rights" (Alexander, 2020, p. 36) and the Jim Crow system of segregation emerged—a system that put Blacks back into near slavery conditions.

Continued racism causes anxiety, fear, horrific acts of cruelty, the crushing of dreams, and untold suffering in Black and other nonwhite communities, a state of affairs that sits in stark contrast to the supposed moral superiority of many white Americans, the Republican party, and the sitting president. This continued racism hurts the nation, as well as communities of color and other minorities, in that the United States' failure to accept its responsibility for slavery and the Native American genocide, or to make efforts to repair the damage, continues to prevent the United States from being a moral leader in the

world (DeGruy, 2005). Over 400 years of violence and oppression against Blacks has come at a great price for many Blacks who suffer from Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (DeGruy, 2005). “One of the most insidious things about Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome is the adoption of the slave master’s value system, [a system] that is founded in the belief that white and all things associated with white are superior, while all things black are bad (DeGruy, 2005, Chapter 4, para. 6). This sense of superiority, for whites, is what drives and maintains white privilege.

Currently in the United States—even in the midst of a global pandemic—unarmed young Black men and women are being shot by police at an alarming rate. CBS News (May-August, 2020) reports that 164 Black people were killed by police in the first 8 months of 2020. These crimes take place usually without immediate arrests, if at all. This is happening while angry white men and some white women, armed with handguns, semi-automatic weapons, and bazooka-like hand-held rocket launchers, invade the Michigan State Capitol to protest a stay-at-home-order from the Governor (Censky, May 14, 2020). If it had been a group of Black men, angry or not, bringing AR-15 assault rifles and rocket launchers into a state Capitol, the outcome would have been vastly different. This difference is white privilege.

White Male Entitlement

We can see a “linear relationship of racist ideology though the centuries,” “a historical pattern of prejudice and hatred” currently “cloaked in the rhetoric of modern racist intellectuals, politicians, and their financial backers” (Sussman,

2014, p. 304). Speaking specifically about men, “even if we don’t think of ourselves as privileged, we felt ourselves entitled to privilege, entitled to occupy the leadership positions” (Kimmel, 2017, p. xxi). Systemic prejudice and racism are clashing with the growing American multiculturalism, particularly among white men, who are more than angry about the changes. The leveling of the social playing field is seen as “the end of the era of men’s entitlement, the era in which a young man could assume, without question, it was not only ‘a man’s world’ but a straight white man’s world” (Kimmel, 2017, p. xxi). The guarantee that there is a powerful job waiting at the top of the social ladder because of an assumed birthright is no longer a guarantee.

 Holding and maintaining these racist views make people unhealthy, as the psychological effort of discrimination can raise blood pressure or cortisol levels and heighten the risk for heart attacks and stroke (Metzl, 2019). The price tag for masculine privilege is “poor health, shorter lives, emotionally shallow relationships, and less time spent with loved ones” (Messner, 2000, p. 6). This is a juxtaposition with the far right’s resistance to healthcare and social programs that help the poor, people of color, and immigrants. When a political system asks that people vote against universal healthcare and funding for schools that their children attend while amassing personal arsenals and making decisions that support their idealism at physical risk, “these politics are literally asking people to die for their whiteness” (Metzl, 2019, p. 18). A seldom verbalized story within this dynamic is the rate of white male suicide, overwhelmingly with the use of a gun (Metzl, 2019).

America is a race-based society where whiteness is the standard against which all others are measured (Kendall, 2013). This whiteness has been the dominant culture for over 400 years and “when a racial group’s collective prejudice is backed by the power of legal authority and institutional control it is transformed into racism, it is structural and independent of any one person’s actions” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 20). The dynamic of dominance, as well as submission and the delusion of control. has been at the heart of traditional masculinity; it must yield to an ethic of caretaking or we will not survive. This is important when considering a homogenous group of men who are largely from the same ethnic heritage, generation, economic status, and social standing, because “privilege, particularly white male privilege, is hard to see for those of us who were born with access to power and resources” (Kendall, 2013, p. 22).

Personally, I have learned much from listening to the authors and researchers I quote above. White male privilege is subtle and deeply engrained into my psyche as it is into that of my co-researchers, nearly impossible to see without the ability and desire to search within to find where the conditioning ends and we begin. “Until a man has halted the acting out of his distress, learned something deep about himself” and brought his “mature self to acknowledge and deal with his early wounds,” he will be incapable “to sustain a fully satisfying relationship” (Kendall, 2013, Location 4263). The value of a method, such as the Work That Reconnects, for helping men (people) to introspect, connect with core values and engage in power-with relationships cannot be understated.

Summation of the Literature

I began this literature review with an overview of Western civilization's history with male dominance, superiority, and aggression toward women, nature, and anything seen as the other. I discussed socially created norms of masculine behavior; how adherence to these behaviors causes physical damage in the world; how these behaviors negatively affect men's health, mental wellness, and the ability to connect with and identify emotions; and how these norms maintain the patriarchal status quo. Included in this part of the discussion were the concepts of masculinity in crisis, male tendencies to resist change, and the need for men to address their social conditioning. I framed this discussion by referencing different aspects of the men's movement, namely the Christian Men's movement (e.g., Mankowski & Rappaport (2000), the mythopoetics of Joseph Campbell (2008) and Robert Bly (2004), and the concept of living myth as offered by Michael Meade (2016, 2018).

I followed this discussion with a short treatment on the deep ecology social movement, including the use of ritual, ceremony, activities, and practices that engage the emotions, intellect, creativity, and moral imagination as a means of personal maturing and social transformation. I then moved to a system view of innate sensory feedback loops that, through environmental feedback, helps inform the individual of a need to change, thus opening up the possibility of accessing multiple intelligences: emotional, spiritual, and ecological. This discussion included a conversation relating to scientific advances in cognitive neuroscience and brain plasticity, or how the brain adapts to changing environmental

conditions. I concluded this section with an overview of white privilege, focusing on white male superiority, and its impact on men's health, marginalized and oppressed communities, and society at large.

This literature describes a patriarchal masculinity that is largely culturally and socially conditioned. This form of masculinity is detrimental to men, those close to them, society at large, and the natural environment. Significant numbers of men are seeking a healthier self-identity, better relationships, better health, and spiritual or religious connection. Advances in cognitive neuroscience have demonstrated plasticity—how the brain is conditioned and how brain neuropathways can be rewired to support new or alternative ways of being. The importance of dialogue, self-awareness, safety issues, and authenticity in becoming aware of one's social conditioning is also discussed throughout the literature. Although not stated directly, it is implicit throughout that more men need to become involved in personal growth and social change if we are to have a sustainable global society with naturally functioning ecosystems.

It appears to me that there is a need for theory and methodology that gives some structure and purpose to the dialogue, offering a safe environment, the support of others, and skillful facilitation to guide the process. It also seems that unless there is a sustained, emotional, and embodied effort that supports the rearranging of our neurology and thus biology, when stressed one will simply fall back into their old familiar patterns of behavior. There must be a spiritual foundation that gives meaning and purpose to all life, individual and global; one that awakens the awareness of the interconnectedness of all phenomena and

inspires reasons one would want life on Earth to continue. It is my assertion that the Work That Reconnects represents this kind of theory and method and the driving reason I engaged this study.

Throughout this dissertation I have referred to the work of Joanna Macy (1983, 1991, 2000, 2007, 2014, 2020), as an individual, as well as her authorship with Molly Young Brown (2014) and Chris Johnstone (2012). Collectively, their vision and lead-by-example contributions form the foundation and frame of this study, including the structure and method of applying this body of knowledge in lived life situations. I have spoken of Macy and the Work That Reconnects elsewhere and so will not repeat it here.

I have also brought in Margaret Wheatley (2017), who considers issues such as the wealth chasm, militarization, climate chaos, and political disconnection as well as environmental, social, and economic justice. Wheatley (2017) calls for community activism and the creation of “islands of sanity” (p. 4), or communities of practice in the Work That Reconnects. Set in the intersectionality of climate chaos and the Green New Deal, Naomi Klein (2019) relates how a “systematic and historical analysis of capitalism” is not allowed within the patriarchal social structure, including the “economic inequality, violence against women, white supremacy, unending war, and ecological unraveling” (p. 267) that accompanies it.

This study is the first scholarly inquiry into the Work That Reconnects, although informal questionnaires have occasionally been sent out for participants’ post-retreat feedback. Each of my co-researcher’s experiences with the Work That

Reconnects contains part of a collective picture of how some men seek and embrace wellness, personal growth, and their masculine identity. My contributions to this dialogue are my personal experience, interpretation, and rendering of the data into a form that validates a qualitative approach as sound science; establishing the Work That Reconnects as an integral approach to personal and social change; and relating the findings of the study in a language and form that is easily understandable, as well as applicable, to the reader. A driving goal of this proposed study has been to demonstrate how some men have benefited from participating in the Work That Reconnects, with the goal of encouraging more men to seek connection and wellness using this model.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To inquire into what benefits are gained through participation in WTR practices I used a phenomenological approach (Finlay, 2014; Gadamer, 2013; Heidegger, 1959/2013; Moustakas, 1994). I take the stance that our being-in-the-world, our being-there, what Heidegger called “dasein” (Heidegger, 1959/2013) is not capable of being fully described or explained in words yet defines our relationship to the world. Heidegger and Gadamer’s approach is a philosophical hermeneutical phenomenology that values language and story to express our relationship to life; our active felt being-in-the-world that gives rise our ontological relationship with the world (Moran, 2000). In this tradition, language and story are expressions of a person’s being—how they make meaning and place value to their experiences—which is discernable but incomplete as there is always something left unsaid.

I utilized a three-part in-depth interviews series as described by Seidman (2013) with 10 men who had participated in previous WTR events to inquire into the life history, experience with the Work That Reconnects, and the benefits or value they gained from these experiences. Examples of potential benefits, for example, could be less stress, more self-esteem, better communication, and healthier relationships. How one makes a difference is “inextricably linked to who we are—and to discover that we begin by practicing self-awareness” (M. Brown, 2009, p. 9). It was assumed that this interview series would also help answer secondary questions of why few men were attending the retreats and how more men could be recruited into self-inquiry via the Work That Reconnects. I felt that

if there is to be decisive, long-lasting, and positive social change, men, as a gender, must play a more active role.

I know what conditions brought me to the Work That Reconnects and the changes in my life since my first contact with the work. I wanted to know if other men engaging with the Work That Reconnects had similar, or different, experiences. In this inquiry, I interpreted the stories shared by the men from the perspective of having been through the same retreat situations and conditions. The stories told by study participants yielded insights leading to better understanding of how, by using the Work That Reconnects as a methodology, men can become intimately aware of their inner conditioning, challenge their cultural and socially defined masculine roles to affect personal change.

Procedures

Using phenomenology as an approach, I situated myself in the philosophical framework of Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic-phenomenology and his student Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics of dialogue (Gadamer, 2013; Grondin, 1994). I inquired into the experiences of a group of men, myself included, who attended one or more of three male-participants-only workshops with the Work That Reconnects. This study asks questions that examine their lived experiences of participating in the Work That Reconnects to learn what were their felt experiences, their being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1959/2013): their thoughts, sensations, feelings, emotions, insights, resistances. The lived experience is one's being-in-the-world, what Heidegger called Dasein, the "there is," (Chapter 2, H-7, para. 1) and "being is always the being of an entity"

(Heidegger, 1959/2013, Chapter 3, H-9, para. 2), their personal way of being or ontology. A person cannot define their *dasein*, but they can understand it through the experience of their existence (Heidegger, 1959/2013). It is how each life is lived, how meaning is made, that is open to this inquiry.

Phenomenology signifies “that which shows itself in itself” (Heidegger, 1959/2013, Chapter 7, H-29, para. 1) and what is shown, with keen observation and listening, is the “deepest currents of meaning and knowledge that takes place with the individual through one’s senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgments” (Moustakis, 1994, p. 18). Given this definition, I am interested in the overall experience of the individual arriving at these “perceptions, beliefs, and judgments” in the context of participating in the WTR practices with other men. By understanding these perceptions, beliefs, and judgments, a unifying description of what it was like to have these experiences—the similarities, differences, and potential blind spots—are revealed. The point here is that meaning is being sought along with the understanding of the phenomenology of an event is what makes this an ontological inquiry, by inquiring into core values and world views. That the emphasis is on gaining awareness of the internal world of the seeker as the source of understanding and personal change is in contrast to more externally focused approaches in men’s movements, which seek to change outer circumstances as a means of gaining more control in one’s life.

This study is also hermeneutic in that it seeks to understand what is behind, or unspoken, about these experiences and if the person’s life changed as a result. Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation and understanding (Heidegger,

1959/2013; Gadamer, 2008; Grondin, 1994; Palmer, 1969) with the task of making something that is unfamiliar and obscure in meaning into something near and intelligible to others (Palmer, 1969). Phenomenology is our access to ontology and the phenomenology of Dasein is a hermeneutic (Heidegger, 1959/2013) meaning that interpretation, and thus understanding, is tied to our way of being-in-the-world within our everyday existence. “Phenomenology and hermeneutics both assume an active, intentional, construction of a social world and its meanings by reflexive human beings” (McLeod, 2001, p. 56). With the universal ontology of Gadamer’s hermeneutics of language there are also epistemological and axiological components to the interpretation and understanding of dialogue (Grondin, 1994). Our understanding is limited to our common language and words are not the thing itself but verbal representations of it: “something enduring is already present when the word is spoken” (Gadamer, 2008, p. 7). Any language we live in is limited in this sense, yet “language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs” (Gadamer, 2013, p. 407).

Historically, hermeneutical concepts have been used for the interpretation of biblical scripture and other sacred writing, with application more recently in jurisprudence, art, and literary interpretation (Grondin, 1994; Moran, 2000; Palmer, 1969). The use of interviews for qualitative research has been viewed with a critical eye when juxtaposed against quantitative research by mainstream social scientists and it is seen as not-science by many. However, interviews have been used to gain descriptions of phenomena and contain a certain amount of philosophical analysis (Seidman, 2013); hermeneutic methods are being applied

to make sense of and interpret phenomena, including in medicine, to understand patients' needs using case studies. Kvale (1994) claims psychoanalytic interviews are an innovative form of knowledge production that has remained outside the scientific discussion in psychology (abstract). The range of topics adaptable to the in-depth interview approach is wide, covering most issues involving the experiences of contemporary people (Seidman, 2013).

Kvale (1994) lists and discusses 10 standard responses against the qualitative interview, all of which suggest this form of inquiry could be “sloppily carried out and yield trivial results” (p. 148). “Interview” here can be taken as gathering information from people or groups by asking predetermined questions that can be leading, biased, or insensitive, potentially with predetermined results. Another consideration with certain types of interviews is that the informant could have a reason to be less than honest in their replies, which could skew the results. The way to avoid negative critique is clarity of purpose, specifics of method, and qualities of analytic reflection that bring “new knowledge that is worth knowing” (p. 148).

Phenomenological research makes use of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of an “essence” description (Moustakas, 1994). In this inquiry I have striven to be clear in my purpose of understanding the lived benefits the men experienced through their participation in the WTR retreats, with the overarching goal of offering this inquiry to attract a growing number men in achieving similar benefits in their lives.

For specifics of method, I have based my inquiry in the interpretive phenomenological tradition of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, both well known and respected in the field of interpretive phenomenology, utilizing a three-part in-depth interview process to gather the data for synthesis, a known and accepted qualitative method of research. The knowledge gained is significant as it offers new awareness to men who are seeking more purpose, meaning, and value in their lives. The knowledge gained also validates of the life work of Joanna Macy and the Work That Reconnects, and offers insight into how the Work That Reconnects can continue to grow and develop as a theory and method, as well as how it might expand into new communities with diverse histories, social demographics, and ethnic backgrounds.

My point of departure, albeit a small one, is that I used the three-part in-depth interview process (Seidman, 2013) to generate stories of individual experiences from a specific group of men who have all had a common experience. Instead of answering specific questions, the participants recalled their experiences in stories that included aspects of their life history, sensations, ways-of-being, and their interpretations of the experiences. My assumption was that in a safe, honest, heartfelt, and intentional dialogue a person will intentionally choose the best words they have available to convey what they want to convey. Speaking of Gadamer's hermeneutics, Grondin (1994) says, "The essential linguisticity of understanding expresses itself less in our statements than in our search for the language to say what we have on our minds and hearts" (p. 120).

My interest in conducting this research was rooted in my own personal relationship with the Work That Reconnects, my inner struggle to confront my own conditioning, and my recognition of how hard it is to change. Over the past 16 years, I have observed what I consider to be five factors of the WTR model that were essential for me to feel safe enough to engage emotionally and fully participate in the process and practices (see Appendix B). These five factors are Tradition, Safety, Community, Environment, and Spiritual Foundation. I set out to find if these five factors were experienced by my co-researchers, if they mattered, and if there were other factors important to them. As a researcher, I am interested in understanding how the dialogic processes and practices of the Work That Reconnects act as a vehicle for introspection and truth-speaking that challenges one's inner conditioning and beliefs. As a father and grandfather, I have been interested in getting more men involved in social actions that lead to a healthier, happier, and more sustainable world for our children. This study is intended to help illuminate both interests.

Guidance for Future Researchers

Much personal insight has been gained on using in-depth interviews as a method for an interpretive phenomenological inquiry. Primarily, this approach requires the researcher investigate their inner landscape clearly and honestly with the willingness to face and own what is found there. It is deeply intimate and can touch areas long dormant that are raw and sensitive, unused to the light of awareness. When this happens, the pain can feel like a gut punch at a minimum or losing a loved family member at the worst, and the tears flow. Other times it feels

like one kicked the junkyard dog and the fear swells to overwhelming proportions, to the point that running away becomes an option. My guidance is to have a strong support group of people who can listen and give support as one goes through this process. In this process I learned much about my co-researchers, yet I learned much more about myself. This is transformational work, and not without challenges and growing pains. To the future researcher, I say: hold yourself softly and practice self-care.

Method

The three-interview series (Seidman, 2013) consists of three interviews of 60 to 90 minutes each. Each interview session focused on a specific aspect of the interviewee's experiences: their life history, their experiences with the Work That Reconnects, and the meaning made as lived-life benefits (questions appear in Appendix C). Each interview segment was separated by a period no longer than one week, except in two sessions where my co-researcher's life circumstances required rescheduling by a day.

The first interview focused on the person's life history up to contact with the Work That Reconnects. This conversation set the context for the next two sessions as we explored where the person grew up—their family, friends, education, service, culture, and spirituality. The personal history combined with beliefs and conditioning is what each of the men brought with them to the WTR retreat(s).

The second interview focused on my co-researchers' experiences with the structure, practices, and community of the Work That Reconnects: what

happened, how it happened, what was it like, how did it feel, what were the thoughts, insights, and challenges? I explored the perceptions, reflections, and sensations—what it was like to be them having the experiences. Socially conditioned masculine behavior includes competition, dominance, emotional control, winning, and aggressiveness (Mahalik et al., 2003), and for men to interact with other men openly and honestly regarding issues close to their hearts challenges this socialization.

The third and final interview segment focused on the meaning my co-researchers made from their experiences and how this meaning has manifested in their day-to-day lives: what they learned and the meanings they made that affected their lived experience, their being-in-the-world. I sought to understand the differences in their lives. Did they experience better health, better relationships, more meaning, more self-worth, self-esteem, happier selves, happier families? In this section of the interview, the intention was to explore the inner world of my co-researchers; the sensations, feelings, emotions, insights, meanings, and how those meanings manifest in their lives.

Synergic Inquiry

For the discussion on my findings on each of the five factors and their themes I use some of the methods put forward by synergic inquiry (Tang & Joiner, 2006) to represent my findings and synthesis. “Synergic Inquiry is concerned with finding practical ways to expand human consciousness,” which, for this theory, is defined as “the essential structure of being that defines who we

are and how we behave” (Tang & Joiner, 2006, p. 20). Synergic Inquiry uses three dimensions of consciousness, called

the *visible* ... the physical, visceral, what we see, feel, and taste; the *logical* ... our rational mechanisms, how things work, including theory, concept, and law, and; the *mythical*, beyond logical to encompass our deepest beliefs, myth, faith, spirituality, the unsaid, the unthought. (Tang & Joiner, 2006, p. 20)

This expansion into multiple realms of knowing, beyond the logical/intellectual, fit well with phenomenological research that seeks to understand the fullness of the experience of being-ness.

When a researcher conducts a phenomenological inquiry using an in-depth interview series to inquire into the as-lived experience of an individual, the phenomenon of something, the experience reveals itself in stories. It is the description of the experience of a thing, not the thing itself. The following questions then arise: “How does one analyze that data? It’s not scientific, it’s not measured or weighed. How does one measure an experience? How does one approach it?”

In approaching my data, I found phenomenology and synergic inquiry to be compatible. There is a spiral characteristic with the synergic inquiry process that reminded me of the four stages along the Spiral of the Work That Reconnects, which felt natural to engage with. Synergic inquiry (Tang & Joiner, 2006) gives a framework that allows one to apprehend phenomenological contents in a fuller way, because it looks at multiple realms and multiple epistemologies. These multiple realms, or ways of knowing, provided me with a useful framework with which to approach the massive amount of data from the interviews that allows me to get to the experience of this data. That is the value and role of

synergic inquiry for this dissertation—it got me close to the experience of the phenomenon.

These three dimensions (i.e., visible, logical, mythical) are always active in us. Although people tend to excel in one of these three dimensions as their consciousness style, they are also limited by it (Tang & Joiner, 2006, p. 21). Focusing on one's own style fosters blind spots and unexamined assumptions, causing difficulty in communicating with others. “The task of Synergistic Inquiry is to help us become aware of our hidden assumptions so that we can expand our consciousness beyond our own habitual preferences of visible, logical, or magical” (Tang & Joiner, 2006, p. 21).

In addition, there are three corresponding ways of knowing to these three dimensions of consciousness: *visual knowing* or sensory knowing through somatic reactions, perceptual understanding, and effective modes or emotions; *logical knowing* or logical categories for interpreting experience, including assumptions, values, and beliefs; and *magical knowing*, or our deepest myths, faith, spirituality, the unsaid, the unspoken ... “something we take uncritically and unreflectively for granted” (Tang & Joiner, 2006, pp. 21–22). In synergic inquiry, like the Work That Reconnects, “reflection is the key to expanding consciousness and capacities” (Tang & Joiner, 2006, p. 23) and utilizes the process of differentiating (self-knowing and other-knowing) and integrating (difference holding and difference transcending) to a synergic cycle that leads to an ascending spiral of awareness and capability.

I approached the interview data primarily through the lens of synergic inquiry (Tang & Joiner, 2006), incorporating myself as a lens, which is resonant to self-knowing. When I read visual images appear in my mind's eye, my rational mind analyzes the data, and the symbology and its meaning stimulate somatic responses in my body such as shivers, tension in my gut, and sometimes tears. I do not know where I heard it, but I like the phrase "when tears are present the soul is near." I know I am engaging with the reading when I am emotionally involved with it. Reading this way reminds me of similar events in my own life, or their absence, and causes me to reflect on my own feelings, biases, and beliefs. This is compatible with the synergistic inquiry method, given that our loves and fears happen within a larger story of relationship and culture, stories within stories, expanding our conscious awareness to include more of our surroundings and in a mythic sense, a greater span of time.

Other knowing and difference holding emerged in the Findings chapter, as I wove the experiences of my co-researchers with my own and held those experiences in all their fullness, including where they confirmed or differed from my own self-knowing around the Work That Reconnects. The difference transcending phase emerged in the conclusion, as all the findings emergent through this inquiry are offered as recommendations for future retreats and men's groups.

Feeling as Knowing

Phenomenological knowing that seeks to understand the experience of being is enhanced in this inquiry through the use of an I-Poem (Gilligan, 2015)

style introduction to each section discussing the five key factors. Gilligan's (2015) I-Poem method gave voice to women who have historically had their voices squelched or silenced by male dominance and oppression, empowering them to claim, or reclaim, their sense of identity and personal power. For the discussion on the factor of Safety, I begin with I-Feel statements to acknowledge men's abilities to feel that have largely been stripped from them by following established patriarchal social norms of behavior (Mahalik et al., 2003).

Multiple Ways of Knowing

I also used personal memos and field notes I wrote to myself during the processes of conducting the research, analyzing the data, and reflecting on the experiences. This is a direct application of the hermeneutic circle, where the parts give meaning to the whole and the whole gives meaning to the parts (Heidegger, 1959/2013; Gadamer, 2004, Grondin, 1994).

Approaching the Data

The qualitative in-depth interview series (Seidman, 2013) generated an enormous amount of data that needed to be parsed and interpreted. The interview data are expressions of lived experience, fluid, interrelated, and intersubjective. They are without clear boundaries, and therefore it is impossible to separate safety from community, community from tradition, environment from community, or spirituality from any of them. However, there needed to be a way to discuss these themes and their relatedness, so some categorization was required.

To identify themes found within each factor—as an example, if a co-researcher spoke of how a specific practice within the Work That Reconnects

made them feel safe in a personal context—I themed it under Safety, but if the observation was speaking to how the group felt safe during the practice, I themed it under Community. If one spoke of a spiritual connection being a personal experience, I themed it under Spiritual Foundation, but if the context was about how the spiritual foundation of the Work That Reconnects was instrumental in attracting them to the work, I themed it under Tradition. By using interrelated themes collectively, my intention was to describe the value and benefit of each co-researcher’s experience as well as the challenges and unexpected outcomes. In this process I sought feelings, emotions, and lived experiences that fall into one of the five factors and that validates that factor. Knowing these themes lack definitive boundaries and separateness, I am offering a synthesis of the interview data, not an analysis, based heavily on a synergic inquiry (Tang & Joiner, 2006) approach.

Reading these interviews was as much a mental exercise as it was a somatic experience. I felt what was being said in the context of my life, how it related, what the similarities and the differences were. It is my way to see things through multiple epistemologies, to use different ways of sensing and knowing in how I engage with life or withhold from engaging. This approach to reading also embraces axiology in that it involves the meaning and core values that I give to these experiences; my thoughts and feelings that arose during the reading are intersubjective experiences. This is akin to self-knowing in synergic inquiry, which holds that consciousness consists of a set of beliefs, presuppositions,

assumptions, and values that without introspection we take for granted and are blind to (Tang & Joiner, 2006).

I read these stories with this multi-lens approach and, to a degree, I found that the data supports my main assumptions. However, there were other important themes revealed by my co-researchers in this process—namely, service, inclusion, and celebrity—which are treated as the other themes and discussed herein. This is the other knowing of synergetic inquiry, which considers another's experiences, beliefs, and understandings of the world as it is (Tang & Joiner, 2006).

The current study is a phenomenological inquiry that seeks to convey the feeling of the WTR and to get to the feeling I am moving around the circumference of the experiences, circling, standing at different places around the experiences to get the fullness of feeling. As I encountered the data, my desire to get to the experience of something led me to look at the data in multiple ways and through different lenses: my mind, my heart, my body, what is visual, mythological, similar, different. I do this so the reader can feel the experience and so that I am not just summarizing the data. I am trying to portray the feeling of the experience, not the history of the experience, and therefore there are multiple themes to get the fullness of the feeling of it. This impacts the structure and organization of the Findings chapter. It reads like a spiral, with each theme a spiral in itself: the safety spiral, gratitude spiral, community spiral, and spiritual spiral. Each spiral widens as our awareness and connection deepens.

In attempting to reach this fullness, it is acknowledged that these themes I have described cannot be completely separated from the other themes; there is

some overlapping of concepts and similarities. It is the commonality of the experience that reveals core values. That is really the issue—opening feeling channels enough to connect with their core values. My attempt has been to address the emotional numbness, the alexithymia, that limits men’s lives and represses positive social change. The similarities in these stories validate the significance and meaningfulness of the shared experience. I needed to demonstrate the similarities because I wanted the feelings to emerge—the different positionalities and the commonalities. Positionality is one thing and commonality is another, but they are both important to understand.

Participant Selection: Inclusion Criteria

I used a criterion-based sampling process in selecting my co-researchers for this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) with the intent of identifying commonalities and differences among these experiences. The men interviewed for this inquiry came exclusively from a group of men who attended one or more of the three men-only WTR retreats that occurred between 2007 and 2012. Many of them have attended one or more mixed group retreats as well, and a few of them continue to attend workshops and retreats. Six of these men, as well as this researcher, have remained in contact as a self-organizing and self-facilitated men’s group continuing this work for over a decade. Four were men I had not seen in several years, but with whom I had made a good connection during our retreat.

Through previous studies it has been determined a minimum of three participants should be recruited for a study of this nature “because a sufficient

number of variations are needed in order to come up with a typical essence” (Giorgi, 2008, p. 37). I began with the contact information of 95 men generated from the three WTR men’s retreats. The registration lists from the three retreats named 95 attendees, counting myself. In 2007 there were 26 men, all white; in 2008 there were 43 men, with two nonwhite men, and in 2012 there was 26 men, with three nonwhite men. In three retreats, out of a total of 95 attendees, there were 5 nonwhite participants. I removed the addresses that I knew were no longer active, then sent a recruitment letter to 77 men inquiring into their interest in participating in this study. Thirteen men responded with interest in participating and from this group of 13, 11 agreed to participate. Due to difficulty in scheduling, I was not able to meet with one of these participants, leaving 10 men remaining in the study.

Given a suggested minimum of three participants (Giorgi, 2008) I felt 10 participants was a large enough group to get a diverse sampling to be representative of the men who had attended the men’s retreats. My study group is a homogeneous group, with all the men being of white European descent and the majority of these being middle aged and older, educated, and experienced, with several of them retired. The oldest was in his mid-60s and the youngest was 22 years of age at the time they attended the third men’s retreat. This demographic was self-choosing because, almost without exception, those are the men who showed up at WTR retreats.

This homogeneity has proven to be a benefit to better understand this specific community of men. Due to these similarities, there were common words,

key ideas, phrases, and metaphors used to convey common experiences, which were available for interpretation and understanding. There has been no emphasis on sexual orientation, economic status, social placement, location of residence, religion, or political affiliation. With only one exception, my co-researchers were either from the west coast or the east coast of the United States, which made scheduling interviews by geographic clusters possible.

Participant Exclusion Criteria

The Work That Reconnects is a specific method/theory for personal and social change. In this study I investigated the shared experience of my participants with the Work That Reconnects, and it would be meaningless to interview someone who has not had these experiences. For this reason, in accordance with criterion-based sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), no person was chosen that had not attended at least one of the three Work That Reconnects men's retreats even if they had extensive knowledge with the Work That Reconnects and attended mixed-gender workshops or retreats.

Importance of Dialogue in Addressing Social Change

There "is a vital and synergistic relationship between cultivating personal wholeness and building life-enhancing cultures" (Plotkin, 2013p.23). There are many forms of oppression, such as the fear of pain, fear of despair, fear of not fitting in, fear of guilt, fear of distressing loved ones, and distrust of our own intelligence. Other oppressions may include the fear of powerlessness; the fear of knowing (and speaking); the view of self as separate; one's attention being hijacked by mass media, job, and time pressures; and various forms of social

violence (Macy & Brown, 2014). For a man adhering to social masculine norms, admitting any of the above comes with the risk of appearing out of control, incapable, and weak to peers and society (Baron, 2003; Levant & Richmond, 2016; Mahalik et al., 2003). This, I believe, lies near the heart of the challenges we face as people, as nations, and as a global community.

Authentic dialogue among the stakeholders in an issue is key to success and social transformation (Bohm, 1996), while the costs of denying our fear and repressing the pain are impeded cognitive functioning, impeded access to the unconscious, impeded instinct for self-preservation, impeded Eros, impeded empathy, impeded imagination, and impeded ability to process feedback essential for life (Levant & Richmond, 2016; Mahalik et al., 2003). Without addressing the five factors of Tradition, Safety, Community, Environment, and Spirituality listed in my introduction, I do not think lasting positive change can happen, personally or globally.

David Bohm (1996) suggested that authentic dialogue among the stakeholders is a key to success and social transformation. This may be true, but the how of holding a dialogue long enough—where men can do the needed inner work; speak honestly without fear of ridicule, blame, shame, or other form of judgment; and where they can practice emotional vulnerability, truth-speaking, and perhaps most importantly, to grieve—is still a question. I set out to inquire into the Work That Reconnects as a dialogic, participatory, experiential model of personal and group work that invites sensory, emotional, connections among the participants, where one's conditioning can be investigated in safety.

It is my intention with this study to illuminate the Work That Reconnects as a method for personal and social change as well as reveal how men respond to this body of work and make meaning that results in positive changes in their lives. Understanding more about how and why men change their world views can only help empower those who are seeking a healthier masculinity, better ways of being, and a thriving human presence on Earth. In the following chapter, I introduce five key factors critical to the understanding of my co-researcher's experiences, along with a discussion of the contradictions and concerns regarding the Work That Reconnects as expressed by my co-researchers. These concerns highlight some of the growing edges of the Work That Reconnects and the challenge of bringing it to a larger audience.

I believe the five key factors form an interlacing network or pattern for authentic interaction, agreement, intention, practice, and spiritual grounding that can be duplicated in many places through the structure and theory of the Work That Reconnects. The stories of my co-researchers display the complexity and lack of close male relationships, some insights into this problem, and the essential need for close male friendships. To understand more about the commonalities and connections of how these men experienced the WTR men's retreats, I now turn to a discussion of the five key factors and the themes or threads that were presented by my co-researchers' interview data.

The Emergence of Five Key Factors as Themes for Data Synthesis

To synthesize the narratives of my co-researchers, I utilized five key factors I felt were necessary for me to have the transformation I experienced

through engaging with the Work That Reconnects. Identifying these key factors contributed toward exploring one of my inquiry questions: Was my experience similar or different to that of my co-researchers? It is my assumption that the combination, the overlapping and entanglement of these five key factors, make the benefits of the Work That Reconnects possible: tradition, safety, community, environment, and spiritual foundation. For me, each one of these five factors contributed to feelings of personal safety and well-being, of belonging to a community, deepening my connection with the grandeur of the earth and the sacredness of all life.

Following Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology (Heidegger, 1959/2013) Gadamer's (2008) philosophical hermeneutics adds the discussion of connecting semantics and hermeneutics, both which have their starting point in the linguistic form of expression in which thought is formulated. Semantics "appears to describe the range of linguistic facts externally," while hermeneutics "focuses on the internal process of speaking" (p. 82), both thematizing "the totality of our relationship to the world that expresses itself in language" (p. 83). Semantic analysis points out "the limitations of unambiguous sign and signals (words and language) for logical interpretation ... that in a given context, only one expression and no other is the right one" (p. 83). The hermeneutic dimension makes clear the limits of objectifying anything that is thought and communicated (p. 88), because language is limited and there is always more than what is expressed—the something "enduring that is already there when the word is spoken" (p. 7).

The choice of words and symbols matter. These stories are significant in that each is about the lived experiences of a man who showed up at the men-only WTR workshops, risked being vulnerable in the presence of other men, and participated to the depth of their ability. They tell about who they are, as they are—a person looking for meaning in an increasingly complex and chaotic world. At the heart of phenomenology, as I understand it, is a critical reflection on one's lived experience; these narratives are about a shared experience, viewed and discussed through the multiple lenses of different lives.

They are individual, yet there are common threads that connect and tie them together. Some of the most prominent threads in these stories were the homogeneity of age, nature, music, spirituality/religion (especially Buddhism), family trauma, and generalized shame; shared experiences of having complex male relationships or having a threshold moment or event; and the search for a calling. This is not an exhaustive or prioritized list, but it represents the top threads that held my attention and felt woven into the pattern of my own life experience.

Even though us white men vastly outnumbered nonwhite men, the women attending WTR retreats vastly outnumbered the number of men, who comprised about ten percent of the participants. At one such retreat, when a woman yelled out “Where are the men?”, one co-researcher, Bragi, had the clarity to answer, “Here we are, we are here.” This moment is “what initiated the desire for a men's only Work That Reconnects retreat” (Bragi) with the intention of getting more men involved with the Work That Reconnects.

Even with all the similarity, there is diversity within culturally homogeneous groups and there was learning gained in working with this group of men. Duffy “enjoyed being with a diverse group of men, from different walks of life.” Leon “had never been in the proximity of so many that were roughly the same generation in a context that was so open ... it was interesting to pull the veil off in a group of men.” For them, it was a diverse group—within a context. “It is a privilege and often a white privilege to attend these retreats” (Bragi).

These men are not challenged by “class barriers,” and they have the privilege of “finances, available transportation, time” (Bragi, Rocky, Bogai) as well as the desire, the calling, to apply for a WTR retreat, either in a mixed group or men only. I think it is significant that this demographic of white male America is seeking more in understanding and more in life. It is also obvious that there is a large portion of men left out of this picture because of class barriers such as finances, transportation, and time. This obvious gap is an area of potential growth, personally and socially, and is worth investigating in depth.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS GLEANED FROM THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PROCESS

In this chapter I introduce and discuss each of the five key factors and their corresponding themes individually. In-depth interviews produce a significant amount of rich data that can be looked at in many ways—either as lump pieces or granular. The five factors and their themes revealed here are inextricably intertwined, mutually supporting and validating each the other, creating the “container” that holds the retreat attendee with respect, safety, acceptance, trust, compassion, and confidence in an intentional space conducive for these to transpire.

I began the synthesis of each co-researcher’s interview series by giving each co-researcher a pseudonym and summarizing the salient aspects of each interview into a summary following the same format as I conducted the interview process; life history, experience in the retreat setting with the Work That Reconnects, and the meaning made from these experiences (Appendix D). The interview summaries are important in that they offer insight into the nature of the community of men attracted to the Work That Reconnects: who each co-researcher is, how they came to the Work That Reconnects, benefits they received, and ways other men may be enticed to experience this meaningful work.

Following the synergic inquiry methodology, I used the lenses of self-knowing (my story) and other knowing (my co-researchers’ stories) to place myself in relationship with my co-researchers through the narratives, to draw out the similarities and differences in our experiences. Difference holding and

difference transcendence will be approached using my experience to highlight the tension and differences as well as the way forward. Defining and describing another person's lived experiences accurately is challenging because thoughts, feelings, and emotions are intertwined and overlapped, and one informs each of the others in ongoing reciprocity. The synergic inquiry method supports building a synthesis of the data rather than conclusions using three dimensions of consciousness, or epistemologies—visible, logical, and mythical—which is in alignment with my personal style of meaning making.

From the interview summaries and re-reading the full interview series of each co-researcher, I identify themes that emerge from the data for each of the five factors used as an outline for this inquiry. A significant finding in the process of identifying these themes is the way they relate to Abraham Maslow's (2012) theory of human motivation and hierarchy of needs. When the physiological needs (shelter, food, sleep) are satisfied, and there is a sense of safety and belonging, self-esteem, self-actualization can follow. This is not a rigid or fixed order. We must guard against separating the desires (safety, belonging, self-esteem, self-actualization) from the basic needs as they develop incrementally together. Maslow (2012) states, "while behavior is almost always motivated, it is also almost always biologically, culturally, and situationally determined as well" (Location 32), indicating this process of development unfolds over one's life span. That one's biology and their environment are in reciprocal relationship is also supported in neuroscience, which states that gene expression and neural

pathways are affected by our biology as well as what we think and do (Davidson & Begley, 2012; Doidge, 2007).

In Table 1 below, I list each of the five factors along with their themes in a progression I feel is how my co-researchers came to participate with the Work That Reconnects. This progression is as follows: knowledge of the work (tradition), how they came to engage with the work (safety and community), the retreat setting (environment), and the connection to deeper purpose and meaning (spiritual foundation). This progression seems to reflect Maslow’s (2012) theory that the desire for safety and belonging leads to the desire for self-actualization, or a spiritual foundation in life.

Examining the Key Five Factors

Table 1

Five Key Factors and Their Themes

Tradition	Safety	Community	Environment	Spiritual foundation
Modeling	Nonviolence	Acceptance	Intentional space	Calling
Life history	Nonjudgment	Belonging	Natural	Need
Experiential	Trust	Group bonding	Comfort	Values
Discourse	Intentional	Relationship	Aesthetics	Purpose
Structure	Wellbeing	Support	Equality	Identity
Celebrity	Respect	Mirroring / witnessing Service	Tranquil	Ecological self

Factor 1 : Tradition

I wouldn't have the same sense of myself without the work that reconnects
I go back to the roots of what inspires
I have been inspired by Joanna Macy
I have her as an example
I feel the value in these relationships
I call her Gaia-Ma
(Men's "feeling" poem created through data gathered)

The Work That Reconnects is both theory and method, with a tradition developed over six decades of history and a root teacher that has taught and is beloved in many countries around the world. The Work That Reconnects has not only withstood the test of time, it has grown through making contributions for others, creating and adapting activities to meet changing needs and life conditions (Macy, 2020). This theory and model have a structure, or roadmap, called the spiral, which combines intellectual learning with dialogic group practices inviting participants to embody their experience rather than just grasping it mentally. Generally, a person applying to a WTR retreat has some knowledge of this tradition and Joanna Macy's history and legacy.

Each of the co-researchers interviewed also have their own history of how their life path intersected with the Work That Reconnects and why they were attracted to attend a retreat. Because the tradition or lineage of the Work That Reconnects and the life history of my co-researchers are intertwined, I include how each co-researcher came to the work as a theme to explore and synthesize my findings.

Researcher's Understanding of Tradition

Within tradition I had anticipated the themes of *modeling, history, experiential, discourse, seven generations, and structure* in my research proposal

prior to conducting the interviews and gathering data. The themes of modeling and history arise in discussion of Joanna Macy's work through the years and how her expertise in facilitation adds to the legacy of the Work That Reconnects. Personal introspection combined with group dialogue is recognized by my co-researchers as part and parcel of the work and therefore fits into the criteria for developing a tradition, or legacy, within the Work That Reconnects. The theme of celebrity arises from the data following the interviews and is closely tied to Joanna Macy, her personality, her life's work, and the legacy of the work. To my surprise, the anticipated theme of a seven-generation perspective did not appear in the context of tradition, but rather as a spiritual component, which will be discussed in that section.

I am using the term "tradition" in two ways: to indicate that the Work That Reconnects is a recognized and time-tested theory and method of group work, and to highlight the importance of having a known and respected teacher, —in this case Joanna Macy, who over the years, has demonstrated the core example of living the work. This is not unlike the guru or monk figures in Eastern spirituality, or the wise Elder (or Sage) in many indigenous cultures who leave a legacy for others to follow and build upon. The Work That Reconnects is a large part of Joanna's legacy and gift to the world. Although she is the originator of the Work That Reconnects, Macy prefers to be called the root teacher, honoring the many people who have contributed to its growth and development.

With few exceptions, my co-researchers came to know about Joanna through connecting with this legacy in some way, through her teaching and

writing in deep ecology, ecophilosophy, Buddhism, or systems theory. I had no knowledge of Joanna Macy or the Work That Reconnects until my late 40s, but I had heard of deep ecology in my earlier college studies. I was fortunate that Joanna's personal assistant at that time lived in my community and was close to friends of mine who were involved in organic farming and sustainable communities. I was in a period of life where a divorce and lost access to my children led to a career breakdown and a stripping away of what I thought were reasons to live—protecting and providing for my family. I was seeking direction and guidance on what to do next, how to rebuild my life. I was not, and to a degree am still not, someone to ask for help when I am in pain, but I was in need. I was drawn to this person: he was older, quiet, and smiled a lot; he was close to people I cared for, and so one day I just approached him.

At the end of our discussion he gave me a copy of *Coming Back to Life* (Macy & Brown, 1998/2014), which resonated deeply with me. Then he helped me to attend a three-day retreat that became pivotal in setting my feet firmly on my path to rebuilding my life. This path has led me into my inner landscape, through spiritually enlightening desert adventures, living in the South American rainforest with the Achuar of Ecuador, and directly to this inquiry. At this point in my life I am looking forward to what is next—to new adventures, new experiences, new learning, and a deeper sense of meaning in my life.

How each of my co-researchers came to the Work That Reconnects is also a part of this tradition, or legacy, because somewhere in their life history they intersected with this tradition and it felt harmonious enough to investigate further.

My connection began through a friend in response to a personal crisis as a search for something that could give me meaning and purpose, something worthwhile to do in my later years of life. At the men's retreats I found other men were in a similar state. Suffering the recent loss of his marriage and access to his young son, one of my co-researchers shared, "I was searching for help. I just felt broken and I was dying for some connection ... I didn't know what to do—where to turn" (Mahi). Mahi and I connected through sharing our pain and bewilderment of trying to cope with, heal from, and move forward from this inner devastation.

Although he was not in a personal crisis, Leon came to the Work That Reconnects seeking in a similar manner. He was introduced to the men's retreats by Will, who had knowledge and experience with the Work That Reconnects.

Leon said,

although I was open and seeking, I really had no idea at all what I was getting into and was surprised at the way that it went and the outcome, the power of it the depth of feeling I had during it.

Without someone who knew the value of the Work That Reconnects having introduced us, Leon and I may have never come to the work, or at least we would have come to it later in life. He, like myself, trusted a friend's word about Joanna and the value of doing the work, and attended our first WTR retreat.

Once I was in retreat, I could see the love and respect that other retreat participants gave to Joanna and how she returned that love by bringing her presence and attention to the group. For me it was love at first sight, as if enchanted, and that feeling remains. I had never met someone with such presence of being—who filled the room without ego, who spoke the truth of the pain and suffering in and of the world I loved—yet who offered a vision for a thriving

future for the Earth and its inhabitants. I can say without reservation that Joanna and her late husband Fran were the first people in my life I was inspired by, who I wanted to emulate and to learn from.

Tradition Themes Arising From the Data

Modeling. The theme *modeling* refers to how Joanna Macy’s life history and legacy are examples of dedication to living and working for a vision of a future that is sustainable and just—a vision larger than one’s personal self.

Joanna Macy is a Buddhist scholar and several of the men came to know her through their study of Buddhism, mainly in “meditation retreats and reading her books” (Duffy). Bogai “came across Joanna’s work in graduate school,” which as a student of Zen “immediately resonated” with him. He says, “I think I was in the perfect demographic to get mobilized by the Work That Reconnects. I was ready. I had my previous education, and definitely Joanna is coming from dharma and is thinking in terms of inter-arising.” Matt was also interested in Zen Buddhism and “had read her books and had known people who had done workshops with her”; as an organic farmer, her “environmental thing resonated.”

Joanna is also a living systems scholar, which appealed to Matt as well. He said, “Joanna’s grasp of it was remarkable ... her ability to link the ways it’s all connected, not just to where we live and how we live, but how our ancestors lived, and the way future people will live.” Will discovered Joanna Macy’s thoughts in the book *In the Footsteps of Gandhi*, where she told “her story about nuclear guardianship, [which] resonated with [him] not on an intellectual level, but an emotional level.” Joanna’s ability to use the structure of the Work That

Reconnects, engaged Buddhism, and current social/environmental events “takes us on a journey that we are not accustomed to, especially when you get opened up” (Will).

The recognition that humans and all life arise from a living Earth—that life is sacred. The concern for the future generations is explicit in the Work That Reconnects. These features resonated with my personal views, yet without the language and some clarity into my core values, I had not yet put them together. Bringing these three aspects fully into my conscious awareness and feeling how deeply I held those truths was pivotal in my willingness to go farther into the work and attend more retreats. Joanna is a respected teacher in many countries, yet in my opinion, nowhere more than here in the United States, where she has touched so many people.

I think that without the Work That Reconnects I would not have the sense of self as I do, when I’m asked who are the people I admire Joanna is always up there with a handful ... it’s a no-brainer, in the book I am writing Joanna will be lavishly thanked for inspiration. I call her Gaia-ma. (Bogai)

When it came to facilitating a group of men, sometimes through emotionally sensitive territory, several men spoke of being honored to be in retreat with her (Leon, Matt, Rocky, Wally, and Will) and “in that context Joanna did a really good job of creating that safe container for people” (Bragi). Other co-researchers shared equally complimentary views:

“I think without Joanna specifically laboring on it, her Buddhist emersion has had a huge impact on me through the Work That Reconnects, because she brings that in more subtle ways and sometimes not subtle ways.” (Will)

“Joanna, as a facilitator, is good at using these techniques and it was very effective for me and I was really intrigued by it.” (Mahi)

“Of course, I remember Joanna who is always present and pleasant and really wonderful to be around.” (Rocky)

Joanna is so practiced in really helping us get in touch with the miracle of just being alive and the wonder of our human species and of the non-human life. I never have been so thoroughly in touch with gratitude for being alive. (Leon)

Joanna was also received as a mentor, which is an aspect of modeling.

Will said, “For whatever reasons, getting exposed to Joanna was like, this is where I want to be ... it has enriched my life in many ways.” Leon shared,

So, Joanna Macy as a mentor—I mean, this woman has spent now 60-plus years doing work for the greater good, who even at 88 still brings energy, and focus, and clarity to what the problem is and what we need to do in response.

It is obvious that this group of men had no issues with being led by Joanna; they held her in respectful esteem, as I did and still do. As Leon says about Joanna’s 60-plus years of public service, “this history of continually evolving the Work That Reconnects—while inviting others to co-create with her—means she earned and deserves our respect.”

Life history. The *history* theme is about how aspects of my co-researcher’s life histories resonated with aspects of Joanna’s teachings and the Work That Reconnects; it reflects how they came to the Work.

The work and I shared a connection with nature, life, and social responsibility, and it is not surprising that this is mirrored in the statements of my co-researchers. Wally was active in the environmental justice movement for many years and said, “Dick and Jean Roy would invite Joanna to come and teach at some of the Northwest Earth Institute gatherings ... some of which were annual events ... so, I got to see Joanna five or six times.” At these Earth Institute

gatherings, Joanna facilitated deep ecology and despair and empowerment retreats where she “taught along the way that [eventually] rolled out as the Work That Reconnects” (Wally). Wally and I met at his first exclusively WTR gathering, a 10-day retreat separate from deep ecology. After that, Wally said, he spent 11 years doing “as many things with Joanna as I could, some 3-days, some 5-days, I don’t remember them all.”

Rocky was “familiar with Joanna’s through some of her books” and through his “friend Trebby Johnson’s organization Radical Joy for Hard Times,” which conducts healing ceremonies by making art from things left in damaged places such as forest clear-cuts, toxic industrial sites, polluted lands or bodies of water, or places of human suffering. Having this background, he has

been a fan of Joanna’s for a long time and it was a real privilege, an honor, to be in a workshop with her ... it was reinforcing of a lot of my values and I have carried that forward in my ministry.

Knowing that other spiritually oriented teachers who focus on healing the earth and society have worked with—and respect—Joanna is part of the history and legacy of the Work That Reconnects.

Although he has been to many retreats over the years, Bragi did not speak about how he came to the Work That Reconnects; instead, he said, “I’ve thought about the workshops a lot over the years and how I’ve been affected by Joanna Macy’s work, as well as all the wonderful people through the workshops,” referring to her as a “mentor, teacher,” and an inspiration. Being a living systems scholar as well, Joanna connects past to future in the moment, connecting “the micro-organisms and the soil and the species that have already gone extinct ... her way of expanding the way the whole cosmic soup is connected was really quite

remarkable” (Matt). Connecting, or reconnecting, our psyche with nature has been foundational in the Work That Reconnects since its inception.

Being deeply connected to nature Joanna’s philosophy also resonated with me, and I made a conscious decision to learn from her and those who followed her work. Others reflected this connection as well. When the question of how to soften the landing of a collapsing society arose during one retreat, Bragi recalled, “I like Joanna Macy’s thought that one way to think of this collapse is to softening of the landing, because I think that we’re heading toward the crash.” The answer is to “build community right amongst the people where we’re placed in our lives, right where we’re at—that work continues” (Bragi). I share this vision. It is one I could get behind, because I could see how the Work That Reconnects offered ways to inspire people to manifest that vision in their daily lives.

Of all my co-researchers, Mahi has the closest and deepest relationship with nature. Mahi had lived a simple, intimate life in the natural world, and when his marriage ended, he remembered being “deeply moved” by Joanna’s writing and “how much of it related to grief work and sorrows for the world ... her environmental awareness and her social awareness of the suffering in the world.” Feeling closer to the natural world than the human world, Mahi feels like he carries “so much of that pain for the world” and said “it was really valuable for me to have a place where I could be witnessed.” The love of nature and the environmental focus of deep ecology was a natural connecting point for him, as it was for me and other co-researchers (Bragi, Bogai, Matt, Rocky, and Will).

Mahi's life experience in nature is a contrast to Duffy's; he had lived in a more urban area, was college educated, and had a work-oriented life. While in college Duffy heard "about deep ecology and Arne Naess and it was through his bibliography or some mention of his that led him to Joanna's work." He was working for the Department of Defense as an engineer when he "got involved with Joanna Macy—in meditation retreats and reading her books—before the Work That Reconnects was called that" (Duffy). At this time, Duffy said, the basis of Joanna's work "was teaching from her Buddhist philosophy and systems theory stuff that really stressed *Paticca Samuppada*." *Paticca Samuppada* can be translated as dependent co-arising or mutual co-arising, which has been depicted as two slender water reeds leaning against each other for support (Macy, 1991) and remains at the heart of the Work That Reconnects.

This mutuality of dependence, this co-arising with others, has been difficult for me to accept in my life due to how many times I have been betrayed and left to fend for myself. Yet it was also an attraction, something that I had been seeking without being aware of the seeking. As we see, there were various ways these men learned about the Work That Reconnects: academic resources, spiritual sources, meditation retreats, literature, and, as with me and Leon, through the recommendations of friends. This speaks to the range and breadth of Joanna's interest, intelligence, and desire to make a positive impact in the world, which is an attraction in and of itself.

In WTR retreats everyone participates, even the facilitators. Joanna's style is not to sit back and direct the group but to lead by example, joining in many of

the activities and practices, and enacting more of a peer-to-peer relationship rather than source of authority. This has endeared her to me because I have been given opportunities to see into her heart, deeply, as she has seen into mine. This was never so clear as when near the end of one of the men-only retreats, Joanna got up in front of the group and let us know she had something to share with us. She then began telling a roomful of men about her growing up and not being taken seriously by her father and brothers. It was an intimate moment and a lasting memory for me and several of my co-researchers:

“One memory is Joanna turning in the center of us doing that work about the men in her family. Very much related to patriarchy ... and how it turned out so beautifully.” (Wally)

It was very powerful when Joanna talked about what it was like ... in her family dominated by very strong men of very strong character ... not being treated as an equal by her father and brothers. I felt so honored. It just gave all the more power to the work she has done and to the Work That Reconnects. It honored the vulnerability that us men were dealing with in being there. (Leon)

So, she was in this room full of guys, with all of our unaware sexism, crassness, domineer patterns, and every god damned thing that we were enculturated with. I'm looking around getting that she's the only woman in this room with all these guys and she stood up and she twirled around in a circle ... just twirling and twirling, looking at the ceiling and saying, “I can think, look at me I can think.” You could see how the innocence had been attacked and squashed in her enculturation and how she was just flinging it, just flying off her as she was spinning. It was very beautiful ... and it touches me to this day because she was really in the innocence. (Matt)

That she was able to stand before us and share herself like that has left a deep impression on me and these men. Even though it has been eight years since that event, in writing these words and reliving that moment, the memory is vivid and ignites an emotional response in me. In talking to me about this event she said that she “wanted her father and brothers to see her through our eyes” (personal

communication, July 2019). She was very aware of our love and respect for her and wanted her father and brothers, in spirit, to see and feel her through our lives, through our eyes, and through our love. For her to take that risk in front of a roomful of men was both a gift and blessing, touching us in a memorable way with her presence. It is also an inspiration for embodying this work.

I'm not going to be another Joanna Macy in the world, but I don't need to be ... I have her as an example. So, it gives me an opportunity to reflect on "how am I doing with this? How am I integrating this? (Bragi)

This self-inquiry is part of the transformative process of and living into the Work That Reconnects. To answer these questions, one must self-inquire and find them. I see self-inquiry as a learned ability; in my mind, it is a goal worth striving for, because transformation then happens as a natural extension of the process of self-inquiry. It is my experience that the honest self-inquiry and discovery of what moves me, what I love and value, what I will stand up for, and what I will not support is the transformative move. It is counter to the patriarchal industrial capitalistic structure of governance, subversive, and challenges the validity of the social masculine norms.

Experiential. The theme of *experiential* means engaging the senses and not just the mind: something embodied, viscerally felt, experienced with inner and outer awareness, a gut feeling, or a somatic reaction.

I feel that when I speak about what I discover of my core values—beyond my cultural conditioning and social definitions of male values—to others who hear and accept me, I bring my values more energetically out of my private inner world and into the material world. Allen Johnson (2014) says that “to go deeper, we need both inner and outer awareness” (Chapter 1, Deep Structures and the

Way Out, para. 2)) and continues by saying, “men’s reluctance to open themselves fully to their inner emotional lives, for example, is based far more on fear of being vulnerable to other men, or seen as insufficiently manly” (Chapter 7, Men as Victims, para. 5). For highly engaged activists, burnout is all too common and according to Duffy, “I think Joanna’s work is really effective, not only to get people out in the field, to feel that they can slow certain things down, but to recharge afterward” (Duffy). The structure of the Work That Reconnects, the spiral and the practices, invited this self-introspection into my heart-mind, which for me, illuminated my core values as being clearly separate from my social conditioning. This was an enlightening moment for me, yet it did not solve anything. There is much inner work still to be done, but it was an awakening to a personal truth and pointed at the work I needed to do.

The practices of the Work That Reconnects are key to setting up the opportunities for this introspection that leads into the heart. The spiral begins with activities that invites connection with gratitude, which gives us the courage and strength to go into the painful areas or honoring our pain for the world, which is the second stop. After honoring the pain, the third stop along the spiral is seeing with new eyes, recognizing the work being done on behalf of the earth and Life by individuals, groups, and organizations around the world. It is finding who we truly are within the interconnectedness with all life through space and time. The fourth stop is Going Forth, networking and bringing the Great Turning into mainstream culture, which may or may not involve the Work That Reconnects. The three pillars of the Work That Reconnects are (a) holding actions (actions that

preserves life and slows the damage); (b) creating new structures and institutions; and (c) helping to shift consciousness, recognizing there is place and way a person can manifest change in the world. We then go back into gratitude and begin the spiral again, but from a more knowing experienced perspective.

The Work That Reconnects, is a good analogy for me. I became willing to look at how fucked up things were in the world and with the spiral I was able to face that and face it in community that let me grieve with others.
(Leon)

Expanding on the Work That Reconnects, Rocky said, “I think that Active Hope is a really useful framework for people, because it gives this reflection cycle, which I think is really, really, powerful and people can apply it in any kind of activism.”

The framework and practices of the Work That Reconnects, going around the spiral, offers many ways to engage with the work and many lenses to look through as one self-inquires. What worked today might not have the same impact tomorrow; people and situations change. However, for some, it seems there is an expectation that one should always be affected or impacted the same way by the same activity each time. “I’ve noticed that in the workshops that I went to with the Work That Reconnects, sometimes exercises that worked the first time doesn’t work as well the second time, or vice versa, but some of them were really powerful” (Mahi). Wally said, “I did get fully engaged in my first Council of All Beings, it was fucking wonderful, it really fucking worked for me ... for the other ones to fall flat like that was like, oh my god.” Wally has been studying with Joanna and deep ecology for years before the Work That Reconnects received its name or the Spiral came into being. He says, “I’m one of those people who’ve

been late learning the spiral, it was rich enough without it ... I even told some newbies that the spiral was not important to me.” One takes from the work what works for them and what is practical for them, each in their own way.

When I was introduced to the Work That Reconnects, the spiral concept was unfolding and being regularly used to guide the retreats. The beauty of it is that each revolution brings new self-knowledge and understanding, insights, and epiphanies, resulting not in a circle but in an ascending trajectory in an ever-widening spiral pattern. For me, this speaks to the vision, value, and validity of the WTR model as well as the creativity and diversity of the practices.

Active Hope (Macy & Johnstone, 2012) is an extension of the Work That Reconnects, which presents this model in terms of participatory social activism, supporting those people actively working in their neighborhoods and communities where times, needs, and life conditions change. Being participatory, active hope activates a need for ongoing evolution of the work as people use it in their lives.

I think the Work That Reconnects has been a real useful framework, it helps a lot of folks and the newer book *Active Hope* (Macy & Johnstone, 2014) crystalized some of the process pieces—because it gives this reflection cycle, which is really, really powerful—the spiral is challenging but I think that gratitude is really key, a grounding practice. It about connecting to your own pain, your own disconnection, your own grief and acknowledging that. Being grateful softens me ... gratitude makes it easier to approach things in a more positive manner. (Rocky)

Discourse. The *Discourse* theme is about the power and value of dialogue, of sharing one’s thoughts and feelings with another or others to gain a deeper, wider perspective and understanding.

I found that speaking about the things that I was grateful for was emotionally moving as well as liberating. Hearing similar thoughts reflected by

others gave me a feeling of commonality with the other men. Rocky said, “Reconnecting the world through new eyes. Then going forth, you know, it’s just a wonderful template, that really brings the grief piece and the discomfort and the overwhelm piece and all of that kind of stuff together.” This “template” is easy to learn and apply:

You don’t have to be a great facilitator it carries its own agency. You can be a half-assed facilitator and see people rise to it and getting it. Joanna would tell us, ‘Oh, anyone can do it, trust it to work, it and them will surprise you.’ (Wally)

People who come to a Joanna Macy retreat, for example, are probably going to be people who are looking at life through a different lens. “The focus on gratitude was helpful [because] in the Work That Reconnects it might be idealistic to say you’re leaving everything at the door when you enter that space, but it might be this gradual leaving of things.” (Bragi)

The structure is important for long-term commitment to the process. I found gratitude hard to find when I was struggling with painful feelings or struggling in life; negative feelings seemed to take over, as it did for others. “I often have a difficult time with feeling gratitude when I’m having really painful feelings ... it’s like they don’t go together” (Mahi). However, it is also true that “reconnecting is about gratitude” (Rocky).

It’s easy to witness what people are sharing “because you’ve already made room for your own, and you can just assume that people are going to share from a deeper level to start” (Bragi). It is my belief that these people, many of them environmental, social, and political activists, choose to be there because they know the history and value of the work; they are willing to engage physically and

emotionally. Speaking as an activist, Leon—one of the Valve Turner Five who shut down four tar sands oil pipelines coming into the United States from Canada—said,

I think most activists are touched when they hear about the Work That Reconnects and are drawn to the potential of getting past the feelings of being defeated and overwhelmed and hopelessness that comes from working any length of time, especially trying to raise awareness about climate change. (Leon)

I feel that the Work That Reconnects has personal therapeutic value because of the introspection component that is needed to fully participate in the practices. As I will discuss in a later section of this dissertation, the practices of the Work That Reconnects have a neurological connection as well in terms of brain plasticity, rewiring neurons and brain circuitry, and cognitive development. As developed, however, the Work That Reconnects was not meant to be a therapy: “Joanna will be the first to say this is not psychological work, but if you put it in the realm of depth psychology and ecopsychology it is” (Will). There “is really a lot of inner work” in the work That Reconnects method, Will continued. “It kind of opens that stuff up, like examining the difference between power-over and power-with ... those were just some of the concepts and ideas that started to integrate” (Will).

Mahi said,

[I] was amazed by doing the practices ... they're designed to switch you out of whatever zone you're in and you can be in this other space. And all through the whole gathering there were these techniques available to us as a group and as individuals ... you can become playful and laugh and lighten up and at other times you go deep into something that stirs a lot of sorrow or really intense emotion. I think the process, that part of the spiral, really takes you out of the intellectual space and more into a heart-felt space ... it gets really raw really quick.

The “heart-felt place” that Mahi and others speak of is an indication that there is a disconnection from the heart, the place of feeling—the place of care and compassion for self and other.

Structure. The *Structure* theme has to do with the spiral framework of gratitude, honoring our pain for the world, seeing with new eyes, and going forth, as well as the activities and practices that are experienced in each stage along the way.

The practices of the Work That Reconnects vary by topic and focus as well as the size of the group, from the full assembly to triads and dyads. For myself, as for several of my co-researchers, the smaller groups made the experience more intimate and personally powerful.

Where I’m going with this is the dyads and triads. The small one-on-ones, the groups of three or four that she put us in, where we talked future beings, and our ancestors, and played different roles in those groups. Those exercises were so powerful to help me look at the truth of how things are. (Leon)

To look at “the truth of how things are” has not been an issue for me; the issue is that I have always looked at the “how it is” with a negative perspective, rather than being empowered by it. Because of this negative perspective, it was difficult for me to engage with me pain for the world or the “shadow work,” as my co-researchers referred to it. I told myself for years that if I allowed myself to truly feel the emotional trauma inside of me that I would be swept away, lost to myself, and never come back from the grief. This fear was alive for me at my first retreat and I held back because of it.

The Work That Reconnects, “the spiral itself, that whole construct is forever repeating itself and is such a beautiful strategy for doing the work, for

surviving the heartache and the pain we are running into” (Leon). If men are going to be vulnerable, if they are to introspect and report honestly on what they find and feel, then there needs to be rules and some structure. Wally, however, wondered, “Does it become a deal-breaker for the group that some people need to do it in a different way?” Wally feels very insecure without structure and rules, whereas Matt needed to do it in a less structured way with more freedom of rules. It takes some courage to trust the structure and engage in the process, yet that is where the transformation lies.

I had no realization during the workshop, but I think that it helped me reevaluate those very old primitive childhood assumptions [that] women were more trustworthy and safer than men. I grew to realize the huge level of diversity in the men around me ... I developed, I think, my very first trusting and close male friendships. (Leon)

My co-researchers and I hold Joanna Macy in high esteem and with deep respect, yet not everyone was completely comfortable with all aspects of the spiral. Almost universally, the second stop along the spiral—honoring our pain for the world—was the most uncomfortable and resisted, yet it often elicited the most memorable experiences for the men. Matt, who is a retired clinical psychologist, said

the theory is not new and I have some discrepancy I guess in my own thinking at this point with that particular model ... that stuff in other settings is like highly re-stimulative of homophobia and stuff but it was cool, it led to a certain level of closeness and trust.

Rocky has “mixed feelings” about facing painful feelings and memories, and said, “I’m not convinced that it’s useful or wise to always be stirring up the shadow ... father stuff, that kind of shadow can have really complicated relations.” Having said this, he continued, “I think honoring our pain for the

world, doing the shadow work, is important, but I think people need to approach it at their own speed.”

Facing the unknown of my unexplored inner world was frightening and I was hesitant to be honest with myself about how I felt. My feelings are reflected in Leon’s statement:

there’s so much pain in facing how bad things are that its very common for activists doing the work, to burn out pretty quickly and reach a crisis point. The challenges are so great ... especially in trying to raise awareness about climate change.

To have a structure and method capable of framing and containing a dialogue of this nature is essential; it is “a chance to explore another avenue, another vision of the future, another way of looking at the world and understanding the meaning of things and how I might contribute” (Leon). Although feelings of vulnerability of engaging in topics that can stir up strong emotion can be frightening to men, there is recognized value in of engaging with the pain and wounding. The “emotional catharsis—feelings of shame—feeling that something was wrong with me didn’t stop me from showing up workshop after workshop” (Wally).

I feel this validates the structure and method of the Work That Reconnects as a means of inviting, yet containing, the intensity of feelings and emotions set free by honest self-introspection. By speaking our truth of what we discover to others, beyond the confines of social conditioning and social expectations, common ground and shared values can make themselves known. Rocky said, “I think what it does is it psychologically grounds people, it gives them a way to deal with uncertainty and it fits so beautifully in the medicine wheel,” which is an indigenous, integral way of relating. “It’s a process thing and because it is a spiral

it just returns back ... coming back to gratitude. It's just a process thing. It's a circular thing, a relationship thing. It's the web versus the hierarchy" (Rocky).

"It's about connecting with your own pain, your own disconnection, your own grief, those kinds of things, acknowledging that" (Rocky). For me, grounding myself in gratitude has been necessary for engaging in the process of honoring the pain I carry for myself, my loved ones, and for the world; we only protect what we love. Greeting personal pain and grief for self, others, or the world is not validated in patriarchal society, and yet that is what we must do to heal.

Celebrity. As a theme, *Celebrity* concerns itself with how Joanna Macy's status can be elevated by followers, the WTR culture, and multiple forms of media coverage. It is a larger-than-life image that can be projected onto a person seen as a prominent individual, in this case onto Macy and her legacy.

A worldwide respected teacher, visionary, and social activist who created a theory and model that is time-tested and validated by many for in-depth group interaction also creates a tradition. With over half a century of social and spiritual activism, Joanna has established a legacy that will live on after her passing. Having a legacy such as this can inspire people into taking personal action for social change; however, it can also lead to a sort of celebrity status, even to the point of worship.

Part of the exhilaration was getting to work directly with Joanna to hear her say it ... feel the rightness of that, over and over and over and over and fucking burn it in before she's gone. I wanted to be a disciple and she doesn't have disciples. (Wally)

These feelings are not foreign to me. I have come to love Joanna as my teacher, an inspiration, and a mentor. I am fortunate beyond measure to have a degree of

access to her and to be able to call her friend. Barring personal tragedy, I will both bless and grieve when it is her time to join the ancestors. Like many people, I could sit and absorb her wisdom until I understood it all, regardless of the time needed, but I cannot live forever either. Although we have not discussed it, my assumption is that Joanna is well aware of her status in the eyes of many of her followers and yet emphatically rejects any claim to celebrity. I feel her humanness and humility are prominent factors in why people love her and hold her in such high esteem.

This celebrity status, wanted or not, can make introducing the Work That Reconnects in our communities difficult at best. On numerous occasions, when planning a workshop, I have been told, “Tell me Joanna Macy will be there and I’ll go.” For myself, being a grassroots activist and facilitator of this work is a labor of love, not a career move. It is disappointing to see the need for and value of this method and practice while seeing too few registrants to be able to pay for the venue. Lacking funds to rent a hall, I have had done many mini-workshops with three or four people, sitting in a park or in someone’s living room, at my personal expense to introduce people to this work. I feel it is that important.

Leon sees

the Work That Reconnects and the work of the Great Turning as being a gift ... not as a child Joanna has given to the world, but as a family of children because there are so many ways of teaching and applying the Work That Reconnects. (Leon)

Bragi says,

When she’s no longer walking among us, when she’s in the next world, people will have to find ways to unfold this in their own way ... not to create a new religion, but to try to find new ways to hold this creative process that keeps unfolding. (Bragi).

The Work That Reconnects is physically “in world as our children are, each of them different in sometimes very surprising ways” (Leon).

Joanna’s invitation to me and others was to take the Work That Reconnects and make it their own, yet stay true to the process, the theory, and the tradition. Some participants, however, think that change is inevitable:

I don’t think that any attempt to manage and shape and control the legacy that Joanna is leaving is possible. I celebrate and applaud the work that’s being done to sustain these adult children as they go forth, because we really need the different flavors [when] one considers the Work That Reconnects is a global community. (Leon)

“Someone else is going to bring this process forward in their own way—these little seeds have been plated and will blossom wherever you are.” (Bragi)

It is my intention that this inquiry and dissertation becomes water and nutrients that nurture these seeds and contribute to their flowering.

After decades of dedicated laboring, caring, loving, creating, and developing the Work That Reconnects, I feel those of us who have been studying, learning, and facilitating this work have an obligation to carry it forward: to get in into common discourse, to make it available to as many people as possible, to keep cultivating and evolving the model, to expand its audience and accessibility. There are many ways to do this, and people are offering their skills and talents to help bring this about. Will said, “My involvement now is I’m part of this core team for the Work That Reconnects that’s been thinking about what happens when Joanna passes.” There are some video clips, interview segments, and training videos of Joanna, and I agree with Will that “film is a very powerful medium to tell a story.” He said,

if I had infinite money, I really would like to put together a team that could tell Joanna's story as she gets older—we don't know—that story needs to be told. As reluctant as she is to have it told, still, it needs to be told. (Will)

Although Joanna's latest book (*A Wild Love for the World*, 2020) and her memoir *Widening Circles* (2000) tell much of Joanna's story, I agree with Will that her full story has yet to be told.

Discussion of Tradition

There are many kinds of traditions. Take, for example, cultural traditions such as Labor Day, where we honor our working class; Memorial Day, where we honor war veterans and fallen soldiers; or Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) in Latin American cultures, which is similar to our Halloween. There are the monotheistic religious traditions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam; the more philosophical traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Wicca; and various shamanic traditions from around the world. There are also indigenous traditions of using story and myth for guiding human actions and respecting nature. There are scientific traditions embodied in astronomy, mathematics, and the scientific method. Academic traditions include philosophy, biology, and hermeneutics; the California Institute of Integral Studies follows the tradition of Sri Aurobindo and his integral theory of education. In this sense, a tradition is something that connects us to something larger than ourselves.

This dissertation uses the tradition of storytelling to peer into the lives of men who participated in men-only retreats in the Work That Reconnects, which is itself becoming a tradition for inquiring into personal and social wellbeing.

“Traditionally, it has been the function of myth to wrap people in stories that

make intuitive sense of the world and point to meaningful ways of being part of it” (Meade, 2008, p. 64). Traditions “help form the structure and foundation of our families and our society. They remind us we are Part of a history that defines our past, shapes who we are today and who we are likely to become” (Sonnenberg, 2014, p. 156). The Work That Reconnects is rooted in the millennia-old tradition of Buddhism, which “is founded on the bedrock of concern of all beings” (Dalai Lama, 2006, p. 3) with a focus on “how we strengthen and support our intention to act, so that we can play our part, whatever that may be, in the healing of our world” (Macy & Johnstone, 2014, p. 3).

From the discussion above we can see that having time-tested frameworks and practices, along with quality facilitation, are significant parts of creating a lasting tradition. Frank Sonnenberg (2014), a leading marketing and business consultant, said, “Tradition contributes a sense of comfort and belonging ... provides a forum to showcase role models and celebrate the things that really matter in life ... [and] offers an excellent context for meaningful pause and reflection” (p. 160). All of these attributes are mentioned in the context of the WTR framework and practices, as well as in relation to Joanna Macy as the root teacher.

“Real leaders are visionaries [who] confront issues and obstacles head on”; they “recognize that their stance represents something much larger than anyone individual—such as, they put their egos and self-interest on hold” (Sonnenberg, 2014, p. 56). Sonnenberg (2014) continued, “a compelling vision provides direction, promotes excitement, and inspires commitment” (p. 58) in

those seeking change and success. We can see by the way my coresearchers speak of Joanna Macy that she is a visionary leader who will leave a legacy behind her that is larger than herself.

In the phase of life he calls “the Grove,” Bill Plotkin (2008) speaks of a time when a “Master” is looking toward the end of their life and what they want others to know before their passing.

In the grove she begins to see, more specifically, the end of her soulwork days. She lives with the knowledge that she will relinquish her place to others. What does she wish them to comprehend? What aspects of her soulwork will she choose to pass on? Which tools and techniques? Which principles and perspectives? Naturally her orientation now leans toward training and mentoring. (p. 369)

This has been Macy’s focus over the past decade as her ability to travel, put in long hours, and maintain her health diminishes. In the last of the three men’s retreats, I suggested that she sit in the position of mentor and teacher while us men picked up the day-to-day needs of the retreat and the facilitation. This made it possible for her to guide us in the work, refine our facilitation techniques, and see that her legacy was being respected.

With any charismatic and visionary leader, it is easy to imagine how they can become larger than life to some of their followers; this may be especially true in monotheistic religious traditions. We see in this discussion that this is true for Macy as well: she has a worldwide following and is beloved by many. It will be seen over the next decade how deeply people rely on Macy’s leadership as the ground of their participation. It will be the responsibility and work of those facilitators who continue the work to see that her legacy flourishes. She said,

although there are millions of people already involved in the Great Turning, the movement needs to grow, and the attractiveness of

participation grows when it is recognized as a path to deepened aliveness and a more satisfying way of life. (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 213)

To accomplish this, she suggested five strategies that will help:

(a) recognize enthusiasm as a valuable and renewable resource; (b) broaden our definition of activism; (c) follow our inner compass of our deep gladness; (d) redefine what it means to have a good life; and (e) see success with new eyes and savor it” (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 213).

It is my fervent hope that this dissertation and my work with men in general will add to the momentum of the Great Turning, help move this theory and practice deeper into public discourse, and continue to build on Joanna’s legacy of the Work That Reconnects.

Factor 2: Safety

I feel when men bump up against each other it becomes threatening
I feel hesitant to share myself emotionally with other men
I feel disadvantaged because I’m skinny
I feel frightened
I feel better when it’s structured and there’s a leader
I feel the intentions were good
I feel a sense of openness I can trust
I feel these guys are going to be able to hold me
I feel less vulnerable, an inner peace, a deeper sense of self
I feel safe

(Men’s “feeling” poem created through data gathered)

Being in the grip of strong emotion, deep thought, finely focused attention, or rapt attention of any kind are forms of distraction that in certain circumstances can be dangerous, if not fatal. As I think of it, safety implies nonviolence, nonjudgment (or at least the suspension of judgment), trust, deep listening, witnessing, respect, confidentiality, and being authentic, which arise as themes from the data. Some of these themes are agreements, such as nonviolence, nonjudgment, and confidentiality. Some are skills, such as deep listening,

witnessing, and conflict resolution. Others are conditions given or gained through experience with others, such as trust, respect, like-mindedness, and being authentic. Feeling safe is not a place or thing but a state of mind; it is the combination and interaction of many conditions, agreements, and skills that take place over time and with experience. I can easily give people the benefit of the doubt but feeling trust and having an accompanying sense of safety comes a little slower for me.

Safety is a complex concept, more a lived experience than a static, well-defined thing. The concept of safety can be described generically as a condition where one is free from being harmed, from causing harm, or suffering a loss, mentally or physically. Feelings of safety are manifested in different ways for different people. Safety can mean different things, yet there is commonality in experience as well. As a condition or state-of-perceiving, feelings of safety can be influenced within any given environment or situation. If voices were screaming, sirens were blaring, and repeated gunshots were heard, one's feeling of safety would feel very different than if one was visiting a Buddhist retreat center hearing flowing water and birdsong.

Researcher's Understanding of Safety

In this discussion, safety implies both physical and emotional safety. Physical safety requires an agreement that there is a commitment to nonviolence: no gestures of threat, no teaming up to oppose another, or action that initiate a fear for bodily harm. A method of conflict resolution, trust, authenticity, adequate shelter all contributes to a sense of safety. Emotional safety implies personal well-

being, respect for self and others, and a nonjudgmental environment with plenty of rest, relaxation, and deep listening. Physical and emotional safety are essential if men are to gather, bear their truth, their vulnerability, and their wounding in front of other men because of social conditioning that calls for men to go it alone and be the Lone Ranger (hooks, 2004; Macy & Brown, 2014).

Social conditioning trains men to be competitively aggressive with other men as a definition of masculinity, which inhibits close relationships with other men. Men who share their pain with their male friends can be met with silence, shaming, or alienation. Discussion about male pain between men are generally reserved for their relationships to family, work, and social friendships, so as not to risk other men's silence or alienation (Golden, 2013; hooks, 2004; Meth & Pasick, 1990). This can cause denial about addressing symptoms of illness, depression, and other forms of emotional suffering (Meth & Pasick, 1990; Real, 1997). Both Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) in his *Ecological Theory* of child development and Eric Erickson's (1950) *Theory of Psychosocial Development* add their voices to Abraham Maslow's (2012) stage of safety, which includes security of body, morality, family, health, and property.

Safety is a necessity for proper human psychological development and interpersonal relationships. An essential part of safety, physical and emotional, is nonviolent communication, which "helps people communicate strong feelings without accusation, blame, or put-downs" (M. Brown, 2009, p. 83). A compassionate languaging of our intentions and support is imperative for people to explore their inner landscape and to freely communicate what they find there.

To facilitate the compassionate environment necessary for this exploration within the WTR retreats, agreements are made at the beginning of a retreat that there is to be no cross-talk, fixing, or explaining to another what has been said. This is necessary due to the emotional sensitivity of certain practices such as the Truth Mandala.

For most of my life I have struggled with depression and feelings of inadequacy, shame, anger, and unexpressed grief from accumulated trauma. These are tender areas not to be exposed publicly. I have protected myself with distance, evasion, withdrawal, isolation, and unfortunately, when perceiving immediate danger, through violence. Because I dread confrontation, I watch for signals, language, tone of voice, and body language that tells me what another's state of being is. I get nervous with the first signal and get out of the area before whatever is happening can escalate into something damaging. I don't trust easily, my respect needs to be earned, and I tend to withdraw around forceful people.

My hesitancy, caution, and need for safety to engage in emotionally charged situations are valid, having been well learned through experience. As it is with many people, my life history is full of experiences where my personal wellbeing, trust, and safety were not only not respected but were violently violated. I am an introvert and while very young I was physically and sexually abused by people who were in charge of protecting me. This caused me to be very fearful of others, to not trust, and to be invisible. As the youngest and smallest of four siblings in a patriarchal blue-collar household, I was shamed into keeping

silent, to not question power, and to stay in my place at the bottom of the pecking order.

I learned that nobody was to be trusted or believed and always sat with a wall or a corner to my back. I learned to be unobtrusive, hypervigilant, self-sufficient, obedient, and if unsuccessful at being invisible, to be able to disconnect from my feelings and go numb until “it” was over. These events led to the decision that I would be doing people a favor by committing suicide, which I attempted at the age of 10. As an adult (like many people), I have been cheated, lied to, robbed, and betrayed by family, friends, and work associates. By the time I came to the Work That Reconnects, I had no community to speak of outside work: I had few friends, little social life, and two failed marriages. I did not feel wanted or safe among people and I warmed up slowly to the practices at first.

Safety Themes Arising From the Data

Nonviolence. *Non-violence* as a theme recognizes the need for physical and emotional safety, especially among men, to risk vulnerability and feel intense emotion. It also recognizes how it feels to be in a nonviolent environment with trusted people.

I am not alone in being reluctant to take a risk in a group, which is reflected by Leon, who said, “I primarily listen and observe until I get some kind of feel and understanding of where I’m at and what’s going on.” Until there was a feeling of being grounded, Duffy reported, “I guess I just found it easier to be more passive and to be in the background and not speak much.” Because I have a fear of conflict of any kind, I don’t project myself fully into the world and this

hinders my purpose, identity, and relationships. If I, or men in general, are going to honestly address this conditioning, for me the space where that transpires must be an intentionally safe space.

As I stated above, when I was a child there was familial abuse, fear of others, and hypervigilance. These states of being arose in the stories that were shared by others as well: “I’m not good with it because of how I was hurt and how I was dominated and humiliated, and physically hurt, in my youth” (Matt); “[I grew up] being totally overwhelmed and overshadowed by domineering men, male energies are things I always had to shield myself from and retreat from” (Duffy); and Leon shared, “We never knew when my dad was just going to go ballistic. He beat us with a belt, raised bloody welts on the back of our legs.”

Additionally, most of us had gone through divorces (Bogai, Duffy, Leon, Mahi, Rocky, Wally, and Will). It seems consistent that when we learn we can’t trust those close to us in childhood—family, extended family, and friends—the lessons stay with us for years, if not for life, influencing our ability to trust and be in healthy relationships.

Having the retreats be men only was a new experience, and one that I both anticipated and yet dreaded due simply to the unpredictability of a group of men. With no women attending, I had an acute awareness around my sense of need for physical and emotional safety, which otherwise was less an issue or nonexistent. In general, when women are also present in a retreat, I feel it is highly unlikely there will be any serious confrontations between men. Others also felt a difference. “With the absence of women there, I felt a little bit more at ease on

some level, but I also felt a lot more hesitant to share myself emotionally with other men” (Will). Another participant felt this difference as a sexual attraction component:

we took out that dynamic ... where you start to pair with a woman that you have a certain energy with ... it can be a distraction from the work ... we just focused upon the work itself and not getting drawn off on these side paths of distraction. (Bragi)

There was also a uniqueness in being men only: “it was more powerful because ... a group of men are different in terms of their focus, their behavior, [and] their interconnection, when it just men versus when it’s a mixed group of both men and women.” (Leon).

The social masculine norms inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003) includes domination, control, control of emotions, control of women, aggression, and playboy among the social norms all of which can play a role in these feelings and reactions. Physical or emotional vulnerability are weaknesses too often exploited among men (Eisler, 2002; hooks, 2004; Mahalik et al., 2003). The social conditioning of dominate or be dominated is a subtext when men gather. I feel it safe to say that women are seen to hold the emotional and nurturing safe space, although there is the patriarchal conditioning that demands men control women and be the playboy.

Without women in attendance, the male conditioning to either dominate or impress did not arise. There was no chest swelling and shoulder squaring as part of the male ritual, as we heard above. There were also not women there to balance or ground the male energy, which added to the uncertainty or unpredictability of the group. Without women, we men had to interact with other men, expose

ourselves to other men, and that began to expose our conditioning, which made it available for examination.

Nonjudgment. The theme of *nonjudgment* is about not critically comparing people or events to one's personal point of view or belief system. It can also be considered as the suspension of judgment, the deliberate decision of putting off judging for a later time, if one is compelled to judge, so others can feel free to express what they need to in the moment.

When considering why it was that I was able to engage in the WTR activities and practices so deeply with a virtually unknown group of men, safety was foundational for creating that possibility. It was the implicit and explicit agreements with the men that invited me to risk vulnerability, trust others, and speak the truth about my core values, principles, and where I take a stand. The Work That Reconnects provides an intentionally safe environment, a framework or structure, and a facilitator, usually Joanna, to guide participants through a process of self-inquiry, discovery, and disclosure. "Safety is one of the things in the Joanna-led world, there are some rules, we know how we're behaving toward each other" (Wally), and many times a method of conflict resolution called Restorative Circles, a subset of restorative justice, is agreed upon at the beginning of a longer retreat. There are also agreements that what transpires during the retreat, specifically what is said during the activities and practices, is confidential. It is recognized that confidentiality is necessary for trust to develop between individuals and within a group, and essential for honest relationships to evolve (M. Brown, 2009; Macy & Brown, 2014). There is no crosstalk, no fixing, and no

explaining allowed; if a person wants to comment on something someone else said, they must get permission from that person. If they say no, it means no: it is off limits. One co-researcher said he was “flummoxed by Joanna’s assistant posting rules having to do with not referring back” to what a person had said: “I couldn’t understand why” (Wally).

Due to the intimacy of the introspection/truth speaking cycles people engage in together, bonding between participants can happen, and people fall in love during longer retreats. There is an agreement that people who do not arrive together as a couple do not “become involved physically,” because “you’re going to fall in love with people here” (Wally). In case of sexual attraction between participants, at the outset, people agree to wait until after the retreat to consummate that attraction. This is not always agreeable to all people involved, but it is intended as a means of reducing the possibility of conflict arising during the retreat, which would diminish the sense of safety.

I found, as other men did, that the people who attended these retreats, for the most part, had good intentions and were there to experience learning from and participating with a beloved teacher in a group of likeminded people. Several statements reflect this evaluation:

I think without the Work That Reconnects I wouldn’t have the same sense of myself as I do. If I’m ever asked, who are the people I admire, Joanna is always up in there with a handful, so at this point, it is hard to say whether it’s an inspiration or conformation. (Bogai)

“It was like sitting with her the ego just kind of goes bloop gone and you’re kind of left with this ... like spiritual transmission of what it means to be living from that kind of awakesness. (Matt)

“I wanted to be a disciple, but she really doesn’t have disciples.” (Wally)

After many retreats with the Work That Reconnects, I and others don't know what to expect during the practices, yet there is a recognition that there are qualities to the people attracted to Joanna and these retreats. "I felt pretty safe from the beginning. I felt like the intention was good. There were good intentions with everybody there" (Mahi).

Trust. The theme *trust* recognizes the necessity of developing relationships before there can be risk and emotional sharing. I see trust is a multilayered concept or faith in another's integrity, morals, ethics, and consistency in their words and actions.

Of this group, trust appeared as foundational for creating "the container strong enough to contain what you are sharing at a deeper, less superficial level" (Bragi) and setting the stage for deeper group interaction.

I think at first it takes a little bit of trust amongst the participants ... then you begin to let your guard down a little bit more and then hopefully you begin to trust each other more and you can share what's really going on and know it's going to be listened to and respected. (Bragi)

As noted in the individual interview summaries (Appendix D), all but one of my co-researchers knew of Joanna Macy and the Work That Reconnects in advance of the first men-only retreat. They did not know what would happen, yet they had a good idea of the process and structure of the work. It seems men who were attracted to enroll in the men-only retreats were not there with ill intentions. Mahi reported, "I felt pretty safe from the beginning, I felt the intention was good, there was good intentions by everyone there ... I felt there was an opening up right away." Rocky said, "Everybody seemed pretty comfortable with each other,

open, willing to share and be vulnerable ... I remember feeling comfortable there.”

However, establishing trust is not always an easy process for everyone because, as Will said, “the vulnerability was a big issue ... I can’t hide this vulnerability, or sadness, or grief, because I’m open emotionally.” It is to be expected that people have different stages of readiness for taking risks, like Wally, who said “[I] didn’t feel like everybody was safe or that everybody was approving of me and I was really nervous.” He needs the structure, rules, and agreements to feel safe. Wally “always feels like an outsider ... like [he doesn’t] belong.” He reported, “it feels better for me when it’s structured and there’s a leader” or more directly, “We need leadership and we need rules.” Being vulnerable, to me, means less control of being able to protect myself from being hurt, physically or emotionally—vulnerable means not in control.

Another big issue, as a male, I still deal with up to this moment, is letting go of control ... to open up in fact, is difficult for me ... feeling that if I open up to grief, with all these men, I’m vulnerable, I’m just there exposed, it’s like cutting a fish open. (Will)

Yet, to allow exposure and to “have the ability to share our anger, sadness, fear, numbness, emptiness—it’s a gift, if I can let myself get to that place” (Will).

Having stated rules or agreements, about how we interact with each other as well as some structure to frame, design, or guide the process appears integral to how the men attending these retreats were able to be present and engage in the work. This was certainly true for me.

It is recognized that men’s behavior can be unpredictable: “It can turn very quickly from joking about something to someone coldcocking you” (Matt). This

uncertainty played a large role when the men were first gathering for the retreats. This is the uncertainty of my hypervigilance; the not-knowing from which source, at what time, in what form, and for what reason the danger or violence would come. It was the perpetual backdrop to every engagement with another male or group of males. As Matt says above, although events might be going peacefully in the moment, a group of men can be unpredictable, and things can quickly shift for the worse. Therefore, I prefer some structure for my engagement, some agreements on conduct and how we are to relate to each other. Not too much structure and not too many rules, though—I want the flexibility to adapt to the needs and the flow of energy in the moment, and I want to be able to release some of the hypertension and the hypervigilance that stems from the uncertainty of erratic male behavior.

Intention (Behavioral). For me, *intention* is the conscious, deliberate, commitment to engage with and learn from the Work That Reconnects or any such model and practice. It takes courage and strength to face fear of the unknown. In this section I use the theme of *intention* to refer to the way my co-researchers made this conscious and deliberate decision to engage honestly in the work and to risk being vulnerable.

The presence of this uncertainty seemed to be felt most in the beginning stages of relationship building: “You’re putting something out there, you don’t know what other people are thinking about what you’re offering” (Bragi). Uncertainty also plays an important role in the early stages of meeting, as “there’s always the sense you’re just sizing people up ... like who’s a threat and who’s

not” (Mahi), or where the potential for violence might be. “How frightening and truly dangerous it is to guess wrong on how you’re interacting with male rigidity” (Matt). This fear was echoed by Wally: “I couldn’t go any deeper, it never being safe enough to expose that little kid who was hurt so bad.” A thread throughout all of my co-researcher’s stories is having difficulty with male relationships, which for me makes safety the underlying ground condition for these men to risk vulnerability and engage emotionally.

As stated previously, my sense of safety has deep roots in my childhood experiences and so it is for my co-researchers. Difficulties with male relationships have their roots in childhood, often with dysfunctional or violent relationships with fathers or a stepfather. “I grew up in a whole patch of bliss and terror,” said Duffy, “being totally overshadowed by domineering men” (first his father and then his stepfather), so “male energies were something I had to shield myself from and retreat from.” Leon related how his father used a belt and “put bloody welts” on the kids’ legs, and said, “we never knew when my dad was going to go ballistic ... it’s just the volatility, you never knew, it engendered a kind of hypervigilance.” It wasn’t just fathers either. “I was hurt so badly that it’s still not safe,” Wally said, and because it was his mother’s rejection, he said, “[I] always [feel] like an outsider, like I don’t belong.” When it comes to men meeting men, Will said, “I think sometimes in gravitating to a male community, or more men, sometimes it felt threatening to me,” while Matt reported, “Too often I feel when men bump up against each other it quickly devolves into chest-bumping and it becomes threatening.” Leon summed up the general feeling by saying, “I grew up

thinking men were less trustworthy than women in terms of character, integrity, and impact on the world, women were generally better, men were not as good it was much safer to trust a woman than a man.” Under these influences it is small wonder that us men have safety issues and difficulty establishing healthy male relationships.

Speaking to intentionality as a theme of safety within the Work That Reconnects, Wally said, “Safety is one of the things in the Joanna led world, there are some rules, we know how we’re behaving toward each other.” In creating intentional space, “we create the space we need” (Bogai) with trusted facilitation where “Joanna did a great job of creating that safe container for people” (Bragi), with the intention of learning. “I was not viewing these fellow men as a threat, or an ordeal, or a challenge that I needed to preserve against, but to be in community with, to understand the commonality of experience” (Leon).

Others stated they could engage in the work because “the safety was there, everyone was supportive” (Matt), or they “really didn’t have any uncomfortable feelings about physical safety ... there was the feeling like you can trust them, a sense of safety and openness” (Mahi). “In the Work That Reconnects men only workshop I didn’t need that safety structure” (Leon) and due to the “framework” of the Work That Reconnects “it wasn’t a problem for me to drop in and be vulnerable and sharing what was up for me or how I was feeling” (Rocky).

As described above, the balance between structure and uncertainty helps to create a sense of safety that opens the possibility for risking deeper engagement, being vulnerable, or speaking a core truth, while supporting others to

do the same. When I am experiencing this balance of structure and uncertainty, I can remove some armor, let down my guard, and allow myself to engage with meaningful introspection with a sense of well-being.

Well-being. As a theme, *well-being* is a sense of safety, comfort, ease, acceptance, and belonging in the world. It also includes the feeling of what it can feel like one is without feeling safe and accepted, to not feel like one belongs.

This sense of well-being also builds from agreements of nonviolence and nonjudgment, which are crucial in having a sense of safety and thus “realizing how frightened I am in the world, how frightened” (Matt) or “like it’s not possible to have relationships with men” (Wally). Well-being in my usage simply implies a state of being comfortable, at ease, and happy both physically and socially. Feeling at ease means one is “able to jump off” of their reservations and “kind of trust” (Bogai) the process as it unfolds. This was important at the men’s retreats where “there was not a single instance of chestiness” (Bogai) or “twenty-seven guys and there were no dickheads among them,” and “it was a relief to be among men who were not jockeying for position” (Matt).

Part of the structure of the Work That Reconnects is that there is no fixing or crosstalk, and what is said is held in confidentiality. These features, combined with no threats of physical violence, invites taking of risk and being vulnerable. “I was using that experiences as an excuse to emote, to do free, true, expression ... a chance to act out ... like wailing, just tears flowing; that’s a rare opportunity” (Bogai). Freedom from judgment invites “the abject honesty and vulnerability of being in that circle of men and choosing an area of our truth to talk about and

have the men there hear it” (Leon). Wally said, “I just need to be with somebody else who can look at the world this way and not try to tell me there’s something wrong with me or I’m nuts.” Worry about conflict, Bogai said, “influenced how I interacted, how I participated. It touched into how I expressed my emotions of pain and suffering.” It was good to know that “even if there is some disagreement, you know that you’re going to be heard and respected for what you are sharing and not be criticized” (Bragi).

Respect. The theme *respect* is about being given the time, attention, and space to speak, act, or emote—to be heard with acceptance, not judgment or disapproval.

“To be heard and respected for what we are sharing” (Bragi), with a sense of safety and nonjudgment in an intentional space that encourages meaningful introspection and invites truthful authentic dialogue that promotes a sense of trust and well-being; is that not a large part of human seeking? It is not monetary wealth, or social privilege, or the ability to be violent that creates safety, but a sense of inner knowing and acceptance. It makes sense that well-being is knowing there is pain and suffering in the world and yet also knowing “there’s an inner peace and sense of self, I guess, that makes me feel less vulnerable than I would otherwise” (Leon).

The stories of the men highlight how the structure and method of the Work That Reconnects helps create or invites a place of trust and safety where deep introspection and group sharing can lead to discovery and personal change.

A place and opportunity, Bragi said, where “you might take more risk because you have this trust that people are going to be supportive.”

Discussion of Safety

It is apparent that in creating the opportunity for men to gather for the purpose of self-inquiry into issues of deep personal meaning and then speaking their personal truth of what they discover—to engage their joys, pains, and sorrows and share them with other men—there needs to be structure, rules, and agreements about safety from the beginning. Agreements are needed because “structure” means different things to different people, from rigid control to spontaneous self-organizing in the moment. Structure also suggests a leader or person in charge to enforce the structure. Just how much structure and who that leader might be can be sources of disagreement, as both are part of the male social conditioning of dominate or be dominated.

A known structure and set of agreed-upon rules aids in lowering uncertainty, raising predictability, and building trust, which builds the container or space that feels safe enough in to risk being vulnerable in a group of other men. This container includes feelings of good intentions, acceptance, being listened to, being supported, and respected. The flexibility within the structure of the Work That Reconnects invites adaptability in the moment as well as opens opportunities for growth and a multiplicity of applications in yet unknown circumstances and conditions.

My co-researchers valued their experiences with other men without the chest thumping and posturing for position. The idea of physical violence didn't

enter the thoughts of most of the men, and they repeatedly said they felt comfortable and at ease. “Relationships rest on a foundation of trust, respect, and commitment” (Hanson, 2018, p. 217). The ability to trust is a form of glue that holds all these attributes together, creating a sense of safety among these men such that they allowed themselves to be vulnerable, risking “the ridicule that men direct at other men who show signs of vulnerability or weakness” (A. Johnson, 2014; Loc. 990). It is notable that there was no overt aggressive tension at any of the three men’s retreats, a testimonial to the Work That Reconnects as a model and to the quality of men participating in them.

This is not to say that there was no uncertainty about what another was thinking, or what they might do. Although not overt, it was apparently in the background of my co-researcher’s minds as a sort of potential, something possible but not likely. There is an unspoken fear of other men and the damage they can do running through all the stories in the form of family dynamics, competition in school and work, and commitment in marriage, yet there is also the fear of letting go of their own sense of control in the moment (Golden, 2013; hooks, 2004; Katz, 2006). It is part of patriarchal social conditioning.

Not every man can be in charge, and “most men are dominated by other men, especially at work, and yet judge their manhood by how much control they have in their own lives” (A. Johnson, 2014; Loc. 1446). A. Johnson (2014) says, “What patriarchy accomplishes is to make men fear what other men might do to them” (Loc. 1262), which is crucial “because patriarchy is driven by how men both cause and respond to that fear” (Loc 1269). Men are wounded by their

patriarchal conditioning, yet because of “institutionalized privilege,” they continue to support and maintain it even though the cost is “poor health, shorter lives, emotionally shallow relationships, and less time spend with loved ones” (Messner, 2000, p. 6). I see men developing healthy relationships with themselves and other men as potentially beneficial in improving these health statistics.

A sense of safety and fear appears to have its roots in difficult relationships with fathers and issues with developing healthy male relationships overall (Katz, 2000). Being older men, most of my co-researchers spoke of their fathers being in World War II, or the Korean war, and they were damaged psychologically because of it. This trauma is generational, handed down from grandfathers to fathers to sons, engendering emotional isolation from other men, which acts as a mechanism to prevent men from becoming emotionally aware (hooks, 2004). Male violence as trauma is also handed down from father to daughter and as we see in one co-researcher’s story, from grandfather to granddaughter, which caused lasting and continuing emotional harm.

If patriarchy is grounded in a “great lie” that tells men that the answers to life’s challenges are to be found in “disconnection, competition, and control rather than in connection, sharing, and cooperation” (A. Johnson, 2014, Chapter 3, *Missing Links: Control, Fear, and Men*, para. 11) and the “most strongly enforced taboo is the taboo against knowing who you really are behind the mask of your apparently separate, independent, isolated, ego” (Watts, 1966/1989, p. 12), then these men are challenging their patriarchy conditioning and the fear of other men

they hold inside to discover their authentic and true self, in order to find meaning and value in their relationships. This is noble work and needs to be valued.

It has also been recognized that there is safety in white male privilege by being insulated from the injustice that it constantly perpetuates on communities that exist beyond the male white norm, which includes members of the LGBTQ community (Steg & DeGroot, 2019). This state ties together privilege, safety, and access to justice. Our society bestows privilege on white men, wanted or not, just for being white men. The intersectionality of social drivers such as class barriers, ethnic barriers, cultural and religious beliefs, racism, and sexism (Steg & DeGroot, 2019), as well as time, access to information, and available transportation not only contribute to a sense of safety, but access to personal and social growth practices such as the Work That Reconnects.

The intersectionality of these social barriers and drivers are discussed in later chapters, yet it is important to recognize them in terms of helping to create social situations with a diverse group of people, especially men, and a sense of safety for all. These drivers matter in the creation, building, and maintaining a sense of community, which I discuss next.

Factor 3: Community

I feel my relationship and interaction with other humans as separate
I feel like a neophyte, not understanding the playing field
I feel the wholesomeness I have been wanting
I feel a very fond feeling, the connection is very genuine
I feel these are people I want to get closer to
I feel more hopeful, connected
I feel held and listened to
I feel exposed and heard, most at-one-with
I feel we can right away go into a deeper conversation
I feel lucky because the work has brought me into a bigger community

(Men's "feeling" poem created through data gathered)

In retreats and workshops the practices of the Work That Reconnects are done in group, not as an individual process. As participants speak their truth, listen, and mirror for each other, relationships develop and community is created. I was surprised at the level of trust and compassion that can be created during the activities, especially the small group practices. In these smaller groups of three or four people gain opportunities to get to know each other deeper than is possible in the large groups. As the group bond intensifies, the trust becomes a container that holds the members while they lean into the activities and stretch their comfort zones together.

In the WTR community there are senses of belonging, relationship, support, and acceptance through witnessing and being witnessed. It was a place and environment where participants were invited to relax and feel safe, let their hair down, and embrace the activities. I think of community as being similar to Maslow's need for love (friendship, family, sexual intimacy) and esteem (self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world; see Maslow, 2012). Removed from other distractions, participants can focus individually and together long enough to explore their deeper responses to the realities of their world. The group provides support for challenges too great to face alone (e.g., climate change, nuclear war), and becomes a haven where we discover our emotional responses are widely shared, creating a rare sense of community (Macy & Brown, 2014).

Researcher's Understanding of Community

The term *community* can have different definitions depending on the purpose for which it is being used. I tend to think of community as a group with shared values and shared risk, with something to lose if they don't come together and something to gain if they do. I care for them, share their concerns, learn from them, teach where I can, give support and comfort when needed, and know I am accepted in return. Community can be defined as a geographic region, a defined neighborhood, a certain group of people, or a national or global community. To describe different aspects of community I felt after attending numerous WTR retreats and workshops, I identified the following seven themes, *acceptance*, *belonging*, *group bonding*, *relationship*, *support*, *mirroring*, and *bearing witness* as important to me; these were identified in my research proposal. The themes of *service* and *inclusion* arise from the data.

Regardless of how others define it, I feel community is a sacred thing. I am grateful for those rare moments when I feel I am in community, however fleeting that moment may be. When young and for most of my life, I felt I could not trust anyone, not even close family members. I simply stopped trusting other people and decided I could only trust myself; others would let me down or betray me. Lacking this, I felt a void where I wanted to feel bonding, support, belonging, and being a part of something meaningful. I wanted to be in relationship with other people, yet I could not trust people not to take advantage.

Without a sense of community, I feel isolated and unwanted, which fuels my self-doubt. A WTR retreat was the first place I felt that sense of community

with total strangers, if only for a short period of time; yet because of it I knew heart-felt community was possible and that was a pivotal moment for me. It was pivotal in that it turned around my thinking, opened my awareness, and set me in a better direction. The work is not complete, however; it's ongoing and I am still seeking belonging. I want to be where I feel I can contribute with people who share in the risks and benefits of learning to work together for the common good.

The idea of community in its various manifestations—extended family, like-minded group, neighborhood, spiritual tradition—is worthy of discussion here, and so I begin this section on themes with how some of my co-participants sensed community. WTR practices are done in groups of various sizes: this could be the whole assembly, a dyad, triad, or larger groups of four or five; it varies with the particular practice and the number of people attending. As participants speak their truth, practice deep listening, and mirror for each other, trust is created that can lead to a sense of community. When I have a sense of community, being in caring relationship, supported, and accepted, it is more likely I will engage in a deeply honest and emotionally vulnerable way. For me, as temporary community, the retreat group provides support, encouragement, and inspiration to fully engage in the work—to feel in my body as well as my mind an important issue, be it a personal, regional, national, or global in scale. Whether it is to feel joy or to grieve, it is the embodiment of the experience that is transformational for me. These experiences are intimate in nature, soul to soul, which over time builds trust and a sense of safety so that a deeper truth can be spoken.

Types of Community

Types of *community* arose from the data and is a complex concept. This section recognizes the diverse ways in which community was discussed by my co-researchers.

Not everyone experiences community the same way. There are many kinds of communities and different ways to be in community. “I think it’s more of an issue for a lot of people than it is for me to belong in community. When I think of community, I think there’s different types of community” (Mahi). To a city planner, a community can be a geographical area; to a parent with school-aged children, community could be represented by the school district and other parents in the neighborhood. Long-term communities can be a church parish, advocacy groups, or local political groups, while temporary communities can arise at retreats, seminars, festivals, healing circles, policy groups, and groups formed to restore a local wetland or clean up a section of river.

From an ecological perspective there are nonhuman or natural communities (LaConte, 2010), communities consisting of microbes, bacteria, fungi, plants, animals, birds, rivers, mountains, landscapes, and the world, up to and including the cosmos. For some, short-term communities such as a retreat “doesn’t feel the same as a community where you’re living communally and sharing things all the time and living with each other day after day” (Mahi). This is as it should be, as each has its own intention, purpose, and way of being in a community. Human communities, however, are difficult because “at any point in chronological time, and within virtually any community, you can find people

living in the same year but whose thinking is rooted in very different eras” (Beck & Cowen, 2006, p. 53). It depends on their “*life conditions*: the times, place, problems, and circumstance” they live in (Beck & Cowen, 2006, p. 54).

Having the support of a caring community is important to me in that it helps me deal with adversity and changing life conditions. “In many ways our culture is seriously impoverished and cut off from vital energies and connections,” said Bogai, which I believe makes resilience difficult during times of adversity.

I’d never been around a setting where I was thrown in with people I didn’t know, people with a variety of different perspectives and context of life. All of us participating in an open-ended exercise where it wasn’t exactly clear where it was going, but through doing the exercise there was a lot to learn, not only about the individual contexts and perspectives, but of the people in the dyad, or triad. (Leon)

Community is more than humans and human activity for some people and Bragi gives voice to this saying,

In the nonhuman community there is that sense of interconnectedness with everything else, or at least you have the opportunity for having that recognition of connection with these other living things that [indigenous] people historically have had up until now ... this whole family of relations with other living things. (Bragi)

Not only can humans sense and interact with the nonhuman world, they also have the opportunity to consider the health and wellbeing of the nonhuman entities and the world.

I go back to that wind generated energy, there’s a lot of pluses for that, it’s clean, but how do we address the challenge of how it’s affecting the bird community? They deserve to have their lives on this planet. (Bragi)

For some of my co-researchers there is also the recognition that we humans live in a global community and it is our responsibility to keep it healthy and thriving:

It's not going to be like any one person can do it, it's going to be a whole bunch of people around the world ... who are aware of the problem and who are trying to make things better [right] where they're planted. (Bragi)

I definitely have a sense of responsibility and resonance for the problem of both the houseless in our country and who I look at as part of the worldwide refugee problem. These are people just like us, with fathers, and mothers, and brothers, and sisters, sons and daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, that don't have the security of shelter, or their basic needs, food, and water. And so, I can see the possibility of doing some work in that regard. (Leon)

Communities can become divided, as individualism and self-importance can wear others down and derail efforts to maintain a sense of community. "I've run into people who were what I call circle breakers. When people won't agree to hold the commitments that this circle picked and they keep violating those commitments, they can take the circle down" (Wally). Will said,

I would say that most, or a lot, of the problems that our culture is facing is the breakdown of community. Technology, in some ways, is getting us more isolated and there is more fear in our culture. Instead of connecting and building community it's much easier to isolate and just hang out in social media.

It might seem natural to think that people who live in and share the resources of a region or place would be able to discuss the future of their communities sensibly, yet the divergence of world views makes this difficult. Bragi posed the following question: "Why can't we sit down together, in our communities, and in a circle with people who run these places and have a conversation? People from all these different perspectives, about how we go about living in this particular place?" (Bragi).

There is a need for people to learn and practice how to dialogue and share their thoughts and experiences without falling into defending their opinions and belief systems. This is especially true for men, who are socially programmed to be dominant, to win, and to be in control of their emotions as well as other people (Mahalik, et al., 2003). Bragi asked, “How do we continue to have those kinds of experiences now that the retreat is over? Where we have those opportunities to get together.” I see establishing communities that intentionally get together on a regular basis to do the work, to practice the spiral, as the most effective way to get the Work That Reconnects to people and into communities that wouldn’t normally have the resources and time, or are faced with class or cultural barriers that keep them from participating.

In the Work That Reconnects there is the idea that we call communities of practice (Macy & Johnstone, 2014), caring communities (Eisler, 2007), or islands of sanity (Wheatley, 2016)—communities of people who, as with the Work That Reconnects, gather on a regular basis to go through the spiral and develop the skills of honest dialogue and community facilitation. There is a need for continued practice in ongoing community to enrich that community and expand the work into new areas. “The choir does need to get together and sing together. Preaching to the choir is fine, it’s just different-than” (Wally). Daniel echoed that thought: “Maybe it starts with a retreat for the Work That Reconnects, but with the intention that these people will be in dialogue for a year for two years and be studying and transforming together.”

Community Themes Arising From the Data

Acceptance. As a theme, *acceptance* has to do with feeling an offered welcome, a like-mindedness, a recognized shared risk. This theme intertwines with *belonging* in that belonging begins with the feeling of being accepted by others.

Being accepted into a group or community of people is very important to me and something that I have rarely felt. Entering a preexisting community can be challenging, as can finding one's place or where one fits in. "I'm not sure where I fit into community or in what kind of community ... I'm always real observant of the dynamics ... wondering how I fit, if, or when, I might fit into a community" (Mahi). If I am not feeling welcome, wanted, needed, or accepted by the people I am with, it hurts emotionally. I think of cultures that have used shunning and other practices as punishment for breaking the cultural rules, such as dereliction of duty or abuse of power. Acceptance can be given by a community and it can also be taken away.

When forming a temporary community, acceptance can begin with a feeling about a place or location. Bragi said, "I had a very strong feeling, the whole time, of being in California and of the culture of connection":

You start these connections—they are woven like this cosmic spider, there's just unseen weaving of all these webs of connection before the retreat even begins. It's all of us, we have to do what we can and build connections with people.

By looking for opportunities to connect rather than for flaws or differences, common ground can be recognized and one's experience can change.

When you connect with someone, a group of men, on a heart level over a period of days and do this kind of work, there's really an opening up a lot

of these biases and first impressions they really melt away and I could see people on a deeper level, feel more of a connection to them. (Mahi)

“That was where I felt most exposed and most heard, most at-one-with ... I felt held and listened to ... that feeling is still with me, after all these years.” (Bogai)

Speaking about his first WTR men’s retreat, one co-researcher said, “I really felt like a neophyte, a new monk entering the monastery, the guy just coming onto a workplace the first day, and really just not understanding the playing field” (Leon). Knowing a bit about the history of the Work That Reconnects and the kind of person who attends these retreats helps prepare the way for accepting other participants. Mahi said, “[It’s] just a real good feeling. I would describe it as just the perception of a person’s goodness, just their basic goodness. Their graciousness, their good intention.” Wally recognized that there are “different degrees of readiness as different folks come into a group,” that “people come in with all kinds of backgrounds, some are ready to soar”—and some may just be beginning their journey.

As if speaking directly to the purpose of this study, one co-researcher said, “I think that’s maybe a bit of a skewed sample for your research, that men who are drawn to this type of thing tend to be more sensitive, more attuned to their connectedness, to everything, and each other” (Matt). Indeed, why is it that the Work That Reconnects attracts these men? Perhaps it is because

you get these different people from all different backgrounds coming together and we find this commonality around this work [and] the value is just that heightened awareness or deepened awareness of finding the language for describing this to people we meet in a way that’s going to be understood, that doesn’t divide. (Bragi)

Will said, “I think it gives all of us to be heard and in ways we might not be heard otherwise, and just having the continuity that we can see all our flaws and strengths as they evolve.” Choosing to change our views and habits is no small task; it takes people willing to face difficulty and persevere.

Feeling accepted by people into a group or a community is a good feeling. I feel a sense of belonging and support that helps me face and deal with adversity. It also gives me a place to celebrate the personal wins as I learn and overcome adversity. Bragi reported, “I feel more hopeful when I can be connected with people who are trying to make changes right where they’re at.” “That’s the natural state, the connected state is the natural state and we’re just trying to re-gather. I’m feeling a very fond feeling, almost tearing up, because the connection was very genuine” (Bogai). These connections that were made among the men were made in the truthful, heartfelt, moments and have remained quite strong over the years.

According to Wally, “The thing that was so valuable to me by having those experiences with the other men was understanding how much we need to figure out how to get our hearts open,” and for Will, “that came out especially in the men’s group, where there’s so many issues around fathers.” Collectively addressing these father issues “really built a cohesiveness in the community, because now we are here sharing something collectively that we may have privatized” (Will). Several other responses echo these reports:

I realized that the only way to look at that [suffering] and truly grieve it is in community. Up to that point I didn’t have any community that would allow me to really grieve and a framework for turning that grief and understanding into a focus. (Leon)

“To have other men seeing me doing this process gave me a sense almost like I was digesting that grief. I was getting it dealt with and carrying it a little less deep in my body.” (Will)

During the men’s retreat, having “community [where] I could grieve that, I stopped just observing and holding back and really became engaged with those small group exercises” (Leon).

It all comes down to developing honest, authentic, relationships for me. Similarly, Mahi said, “So much of the benefit of it comes from being around other people, connecting with people on this deeper level and trying to broaden your understanding.” To connect as a diverse and inclusive community, to join to give thanks and gratitude for our food or to create ceremony, can be seen as a sacred act of union.

“That’s kind of an intimate thing, to stand there in that setting with people you don’t know holding hands, it creates that sense of interconnectedness amongst us.” (Bragi)

“I remember the feeling of wholesomeness and thinking this is what I have been wanting.” (Daniel)

“It’s like we have this connection that doesn’t go away. And it’s always a pleasure to get together with these guys and hang out and spend a weekend, or however long it is.” (Mahi)

“And in the case of the WTR, I tried to bring it home and create some community around it in Boise, because I needed it and the world needs it or it’s a good thing to do ... I met some wonderful people right in my back yard.” (Wally)

Belonging. I use the theme belonging to indicate a personal connection and acceptance of or to a place, with its diversity of occupants, human and nonhuman, that leads to the creation of community.

Part of my reasoning for conducting this study was the recognition that there was a separation between many people and where they lived: their place,

environment, or other people, as if they were uprooted and adrift. I feel a deep sense of connectivity to where I live in Northern California—the mountains, river valleys, the coast, the redwoods, and the ocean. When I leave, I feel the distance, and when I return, I feel welcomed by the land itself. I believe this love for the land can have a bonding impact and serve as a connecting point for people who are from another region, culture, or country. “The citizenship of the future is going to require a shift in consciousness, a belonging, an un-separation from the rest of the planet” (Bogai).

In the *Work That Reconnects*, this shift is called the Great Turning (Korten, 2006; Macy & Brown, 2012), also known as the Great Transition (Brown et al., 2007) and integral consciousness (Gebser, 1985)—the transition from a “me” to a “we” worldview, from domination to partnership (Eisler, 2002). Rocky’s statement exemplifies this shift: “I have a men’s group here in Santa Fe, we’ve been together almost three years now. It’s really a great group of guys, I don’t know what I’d do without them.” Leon said,

I was looking at what kind of study I might want to do after retirement. I was looking at changing my lifestyle, downsizing, reducing my carbon footprint, being more in community and as I was influenced by those two WTR workshops, I began understanding the greater value of relationship and community. (Leon)

Community is an antidote for feelings of isolation and loneliness.

At the 2012 men’s retreat we had an intergenerational council where the younger men could ask us older men questions about adulthood, manhood, and masculinity. That event remains a memorable experience and highlighted the need for a mature masculinity to mentor young men as they grow. Daniel recalled, “I remember the natural process of asking elders and the way wisdom can flow

through in that format. It flowed in a way that I could integrate and take from and resonate with, disassociate from.” Mentoring is a way to expand the availability of the Work That Reconnects and the spiral into more communities.

“Looking back, what was lacking from my conditioning was an explicit rite of manhood” (Bogai; also reported by Rocky and Will). Bogai, who spoke about working with the Maasai in Africa as they were “going through their initiation,” said “they become heroes to their people. Imagine if we could hold up our young like that and make heroes of them all, just because they belong to that age set.” According to Daniel, the men’s retreat

flowed nicely, because being around initiated men talking about their own initiations in life made me realize that I needed to be on my own initiation, my own journey ... it was just like being around the men made me realize I had to do some work in order to become the man, the human, that I wanted to be.

Properly done, self-initiation can be a good way to begin one’s journey and “by taking *any* action grounded in these experiences (answering one’s calling), no matter how small, you begin to live your new story into the world” (Plotkin, 2003, p. 326).

Will said, “I think younger generations, for me, from my own experience, is full of passion, they’ve got all this energy and passion, but a lot of times it gets misguided.” This statement suggests there is a role for a healthy, mature masculine influence in community with younger generations, and that there is something for the youth to give in return. “I think of how I can learn from what intergenerational councils can mean in life if everyone has access to it” (Daniel).

I had gotten involved with a sweat lodge community ... and there’s this practice we use a lot called The Way of Council which is this eco-psychological model of human wholeness ... and you have men who

haven't learned to talk, or listen, or do self-introspection, and they're dangerous. They're dangerous for the world. (Rocky)

And yet, "over here, we have adults, mature men and women—they've been through that inner journey and they waded through shit" (Rocky); these people are capable of being wise mentors.

Group bonding. It was recognized that there was a group energy that developed during the men's retreats that developed into bonds between many of the men, some of which remain quite strong. Group bonding as a theme speaks to how my co-researchers felt and responded to this energy and the connections involved.

Rocky said,

When a group of people get together there's this field, there's this group mind, there's this presence, or such, created out of people being together. And you can call it whatever you want to, but it's there and you can invoke it and you can use it, and you can work with it.

In the section on safety, there was discussion of what was called the container, the group trust, that can contain whatever emotion, sensation, or somatic release that might happen. Several co-researchers talked about this container and the connections that resulted from it:

It's when you can share some deeper emotional aspects of your life with another man—I don't think is very prevalent in our culture—but when somebody really cracks open and starts weeping, really showing this deep emotion or pain or grief it really sends the group in another direction. Everybody is instantly out of their heads and it creates a sacred space, or a more powerfully profound space.

"I felt like these were people that I wanted to be closer to, not just in this retreat but in my life." (Daniel)

I think I would describe the quality as a, I don't know, a gentleness, a sweetness. I don't know, a type of love, I guess. I just see such basic goodness in so many of these people I've been involved with. (Mahi)

There was a lot of presence in all the men I was meeting. People were bringing their presence into contact rather than their personas, or their egos, or their stories. They were bringing a sense of appreciative awareness into their contact with each other and as groups. (Matt)

“We share a common perception of where we’re at and where we’re going with that work and that we have this with the other men, that’s a precious community, and a precious perspective.” (Leon)

This appreciative awareness and precious perspective has kept me traveling between Northern California and Portland, Oregon, to attend our men’s gatherings for 10 years. Will feels similar saying about the common perspective “to me [this] is quite a gift, and I think that is one of the reasons I keep coming back to our men’s group” (Will). Other coresearchers felt similarly.

To be in community with these men, to understand the commonality of experience, the soulfulness, the fellowship, the community, that is what I took away from that workshop. This group of men has maintained a sense of fellowship, probably a core of 10 or 12 of us that have stayed in touch for the ten years, since that 2007 workshop. (Leon)

“So now, when we get together intermittently, I feel pretty comfortable with the men. It’s the familiarity we have built up, we have this somewhat loose community, but we have a lot of history together.” (Will)

“Community can come out of commonality of experience and so in really getting to know, in an intimate way, the individual lives of the men in the workshop.” (Leon)

One of the most powerful experiences I had at Westwind was when we got together and did a big project to bury some common kind of grey water pipe. How beautifully it came together and how good it felt to do something like that as a group. (Duffy)

I just remember it feeling like it met this need. I feel with all of us, we can right away go into a deeper conversation, because we have this shared experience and I really long for that in my daily life. (Will)

“I have to just be where I’m planted and build relationships with people where I’m planted and do what we can right where we’re at.” (Bragi)

Men oriented toward doing, working together side by side toward a common goal, is one way they can relate to others, open up, and heal (Golden, 2013).

Workshops and retreats that are organized around a project requiring some physical labor, such as installing a water line, could help build community and promote meaningful engagement among certain men.

Relationship. I have developed many long-term, honest, relationships with some of these men, which have been very important in my life. Relationship arises as a theme because my co-researchers felt much the same about how they experienced relationship in general and how the relationships they developed mattered in engaging in the work and in their lives.

It is difficult for me to trust on more than a superficial level and therefore relationships equally superficial in terms of the emotional depth of the interactions. I am great at meeting schedules and expectations in a professional manner, usually on time—and yet the relationships I have, although sincere, lack depth and emotional intimacy. This is a growing edge for me. The ability to immediately drop into deep and heartfelt communication with my co-researchers is what keeps me involved with the men’s work. We do not always agree, but we have a history together, we are committed to each other as brothers, and this will remain so beyond the length of time we continue to gather.

This seems to be relatively true for my co-researchers too:

Being with all these men has helped me see how every person, each individual, is expressing the same feeling, in their own specific, personal way, in their lives. I don’t think I’ve ever been in a company of men of such one-heartedness, you know, one heart mindedness of orientation. (Bogai)

“I would say it’s our chief values about those connections with other people that we formed and that awareness that we’re not alone in this work.” (Bragi)

“Community of like-minded men that share an understanding, an intimacy if you will, the commonality of spirit and the commonality of work and meaning, of possibility.” (Leon)

“Even though I was transmitting, I still was able to hear the harmony, the harmony of the whole circle.” (Bogai)

“I’ve seen the best of men, in these men’s circles through the Work That Reconnects. I’ve experienced what it feels like to really honor other men and respect them and just be glad to be in their company.” (Mahi)

“So, over the last decade, a certain amount of my focus has been doing like my personal work as being a man. Being part of men’s communities doing men’s work.” (Rocky)

I can’t see how you could do this work alone. First of all, being in community and having those three days as you progress through time on that weekend, I feel in myself there is a softening, maybe a part of me that took a while to emerge, then you see this collectively with everybody else. (Will)

“So that’s one of the values for me, the sense that we are not alone in this ... we’re not going to be totally isolated. This is an effort that we are all engaged in.” (Bragi)

One of the really important outcomes of the workshops was this community of wonderful men and that shared a sense of value and purpose. Being in community with men and women that shared the values that I had that had been coalescing, and that the Joanna Macy workshop emphasized, and that opened doors for me to put my arms around. (Leon)

“We need to be in the presence of those other people who are flexible and high-functioning and able to take stuff in and be expansive.” (Wally)

“Because we have to sit down in the circle and listen to what everyone has to say in relation to what we’re going to do together.” (Bragi)

“But the community, our larger community, all of us that understand the problem and are doing what we can toward a life-sustaining civilization, that sense of mutual understanding and community work and connection, and support for each other.” (Leon)

“I mean, the idea is you take what you’ve learned there, your experience, and you go out and you try to see what you can do in your day-to-day, 9-to-5 life.” (Bragi)

I feel lucky because the work has brought me into a larger community from the men and women of the Work That Reconnects, into the climate

activist community and, by-in-large, people that are drawn to that work out of love. Love and respect for life, it's a privilege to work with people that come from that place. (Leon)

“There was a part of my soul that knew, that hungered, to be with men that had looked at themselves and the world and were struggling with the biggest issues in a humble way.” (Daniel)

Could be with other men or other men and women who can talk that language and talk about what's going on. We don't have those regular opportunities to do that face-to-face and that's really hard for me, not to have those opportunities, a person can feel kind of isolated sometimes. (Bragi)

“So, part of this work is the connection to other wonderful people. It connects me to people who have like views and that I can confide in and I can get support from.” (Wally)

The above are not the words and statements of men trying to adhere to the social masculine norms listed by Mahalik et al. (2003), none of which is relationship. As I see it, for men to have deep, authentic, and honest relationships with other men goes counter to the patriarchal, dominator structure of Western imperialism and industrial capitalism. I believe that within these relationships is healing, and as Mahi said, “a kind of love” between myself and my co-researchers. They are all kind, caring, and dare I say, loving, men. I agree with Leon when he says, “it's a privilege to work with people that come from that place.”

Support. In my life I tend to stand alone without the support of others, yet I felt very supported by the men in the retreat. This was a pleasant surprise for me and arose as a theme because other men shared this experience of support.

Support can come in many ways (e.g., moral, emotional, encouragement), and as a theme it validates how support was felt by my co-researchers as well as its importance to them.

When I chose support as a theme for community I was thinking about how in individual practices such as the Truth Mandala, which can be emotionally charged, most of the men attending were very attentive to the needs of others, caring, and supportive. For those of us who have taken the Work That Reconnects into our communities as facilitators of the work, there is a need for ongoing support outside of any individual retreat setting. This is where personal growth overlaps into social change, where the relationships we build extend beyond the retreat space to connect communities, sharing goals and risks. “Rough weather network” is a term that can be heard in WTR facilitator circles; similar to “communities of practice,” it is where conscious effort is put into creating intentional space to practice this work and support one another in our lives and neighborhoods.

“If we’re trying to build some network of people in our communities, when the collapse happens, we will do what we can on a local level to take care of the ground we’re living on to the extent possible.” (Bragi)

“This was the first time that I was in community and was able to really understand the crisis that we face. That we have these wounds and the need to grieve, but without community we’re stuck.” (Leon)

Community becomes a place where we can see ourselves mirrored back to us, reflected in the faces, words, and actions of other community members.

I needed a place to where I could feel like I could be myself, be accepted, [have] people be honest with me and catch me on my little tricks I play on myself ... that allow me to turn my head from what needs to be looked at. (Duffy)

Will reinforced this idea: “So, this validated this area of what it’s like to be male, that it’s ok to show your feelings. Even though it initially was hard work, again, when you do it collectively you get the support.”

In a retreat setting, with people of like mind who have similar values, inclusion of other ways of being and knowing is easier to accomplish than in most other areas of life, because it is a special intentional space. Bragi said, “I’m very appreciative that I was able to incorporate care and love for nature, in that context, and not have it ridiculed, but to have it embraced.” It is also a space where one can openly face the heartbreak that comes with acknowledging the suffering in the world: “We’ll still see the clear-cuts happen anyway, you know, but in that community there’s support for one another as activists and that’s really powerful” (Duffy).

However, Bragi noted that at the end of a retreat, “you don’t leave retreat participants open and vulnerable, and there’s certain processes which unless there is a really strong container, could leave people really open and vulnerable, leaving the place feeling pretty raw.” Support also means bringing the process to a recognizable conclusion and helping people find closure in their personal process before leaving the venue. The dismantling of the altar and speaking a word of gratitude serves as a good closing ceremony for me.

Ongoing support for the work and the facilitators is critical if there is to be mass exposure of the Work That Reconnects.

I’m happier now in my 60s than at any time prior in my life and more joyful and more in community, and I just feel really grateful for the part that the Joanna Macy workshops had in getting me to this point. (Leon)

Support within the organizational body of the Work That Reconnects is needed as well:

I’m part of this core team that’s maintained the Work That Reconnects Network, which is building a collective, connectivity among facilitators.

We're just trying to create an organization where people can collaborate together and get the word out for their workshops. (Will)

I like it when support comes silently, developed through interaction and deep sharing. It is near impossible for me to ask for help and support. This is not only a patriarchal norm as a sign of weakness, not being in control, or being incapable; it has been reinforced by rejections and abandonments of the past.

One example of quiet support came from Wally. At the first men's retreat in 2007, the price per attendee was miscalculated and there was a significant shortage of money to pay the bill. Wally said,

And I had to go back and tell people, "This is how it was priced, I got the price wrong, if you have it in you to kick in more," and some people were quite generous, I didn't get terribly stung.

I have been in retreats funded solely by donations given at the end of the session that generated more income than the usual registration fee. Generosity in this respect is a means of support.

Mirroring and witnessing. Mirroring and witnessing as themes arose as my co-researchers; I felt listened to by another person who was present and attending to their words in a way they knew they were being heard, which was a powerful experience. To be a witness for another was an equally powerful concept in my co-researcher's narratives and therefore I list them together.

I have placed mirroring and witnessing together as they are two sides of a process, intimately entwined and for the purpose here, inseparable. I see true witnessing as necessary to be a polished mirror for each other. In my mind, a person who is not positively attentive, but being superficial or insincere—they cannot act as a mirror. They can project, but they cannot mirror. It takes the polish

of honest self-introspection and experience to become a good mirror; a person has to know some truth about themselves.

I think in men's work, it's useful for men who have made that journey. To mirror that to other men. Right? So, that we can be in touch with those feelings and we can articulate them. I think it's just part of the journey into adulthood, and to masculinity, I mean, to a full, mature masculine.
(Rocky)

"Men need then to sit in a circle with each other and get that this other person is a mirror for them. So, we're not projecting this stuff at each other all the time." (Matt)

Paying close attention while another speaks or emotes or sits silent can be like an elixir for the person being witnessed. Being a witness for another is a powerful moment and can move me as deeply as discovering a deeply held pain or joy—there is magic in the act.

When someone is doing some kind of work in front of a group, facilitated or not, the more people that are paying them really good attention, it's not additive, I don't even know if it is multiplicative, it's more like a power function. (Wally)

As a general rule I do not want other people's advice on my challenges, I just want to be heard and seen. At the same time, I want to hear if they can relate to me through their own experience, wounding, and gifts.

But it isn't just the interaction, there's something about verbalizing it, something about visualizing while verbalizing it, then the interaction made the potential future so much more real, made the crisis of where we are so much more real, made it palatable and understandable in a way. (Leon)

This brings me back to mirroring for each other. I posit that the intentional, caring acts of deep listening to the embodied, truthful verbalizations and actions of another sets up an energetic resonance between witness and witnessed that invites the emergent properties contained in the "tension of opposites" in the moment.

For me, this is where any wholeness is greater than the sum of its parts, "the

hidden third and unifying thing” (Meade, 2012, p. 30). Mythologically, the third thing is the “charm,” meaning “magic spell, incantation, or song of enchantment” (Meade, 2012, p. 31).

Service. Service, as a theme, arose from my co-researcher’s narratives as an important aspect of their lives and work experience. Seeing service as ways to build and support community allows one to be part of something larger than one’s self.

Several of my co-researchers have a history of service-oriented work when they were younger, before they came to the Work That Reconnects. Bragi reported, “I went to Lutheran church camps as a kid, worked as a camp counselor, then as a camp director into my mid-20s.”

My whole interest has been giving a voice to people who have no choice, no power, and no, or very little opportunity to be heard ... to see through the foreground story to, is there a voice in this community that’s being drowned out? (Bogai)

Continuing a desire for social justice and equity, Bogai said,

I want to mentor folks from communities where people lack access to this kind of training because of the way the system works ... I’ve been fantasizing for maybe seven or eight years already about how to bring the Work That Reconnects into jail, prison.

The desire to be in service to a larger vision, environmental, social, or political, is strong among my co-researchers. “I got really involved in the Wilderness Guides Council, the Gathering Council and our advisory council, our Board of Directors, and then became an executive director” (Rocky). For his part, Leon said,

I really get so much reward out of a sense of contribution [to] see how some of the public service work I was doing was contributing to the greater good, to things being better for people in my community. I really

connect through, connect to, community through working shoulder to shoulder with other people to contribute.

In this way community is about relationships and connections, sharing and struggling together to achieve something worthwhile to all.

I understand community organizing as being in service to the social organism and one co-researcher comes by it naturally:

I organized a coalition of high school activists, at the county level, we invented a piece of legislation ... for twenty percent clean energy at all county municipalities ... got it adopted and got it passed. I was also substitute teaching in Hebrew schools, teaching in summer camps, and developing communities of adult self-directed learners. Home-school groups for adults. (Daniel)

After meeting other youth through the Work That Reconnects, Daniel “jumped onboard and organized this project called Bust the Change that basically took this wake-up experience on the road to high schools and colleges across the country.”

Now that that project is over, Daniel said,

I want to create a group for boys that I’ve named Soul Scouts, where boys learn consent, learn about their hero’s journey, learn about their purpose ... how to work together and build knowledge together ... decentralized community groups for boys in need of social relation training and repair.

Others were involved with public organizations such as the Earth Island Institute (Duffy and Matt), which is service to the global organism. Through his Unitarian Universalist ministry, Rocky wants “to reduce my suffering, reduce other’s suffering ... that’s how we do it. We don’t want to cause suffering we want to reduce suffering. I’m going to try to make sure everybody suffers less and that’s the goal.” Will shared, “What comes up for me is not my generation, but the younger generation. What can we do, what can I do to contribute somehow in a positive way, from our life experiences to the younger generation?” It is

interesting for me to note that the desire to be in service is so prevalent in the men who were attracted to attend a Work That Reconnects retreat. It is a widely shared trait that may play a significant role in attracting men to experience the Work That Reconnects.

Inclusion. Inclusion as a theme also arose for the interview data in terms of collective actions that recognize not all people have open access to the resources to go to a WTR retreat. Inclusion is recognized as being connected to privilege and these thoughts are offered in this section.

As I see it, reconnecting and re-memembering the fragmented parts of our selves is also reconnecting the fragmented parts of society and the larger world. For me, this is the goal of the Work. Using the metaphor of life as a tapestry, it is the weaving of the different colored threads that creates the picture as an integrated whole. To make a tapestry or to create meaning in one's life, different and various and diverse threads needs to be woven together. Bogai expressed, "I think the main expressions now are of oneness and solidarity and inspiration and nourishing, resourcing, connecting, and possibility, on one hand, and how that manifests in my life, one the other hand." Bragi echoed the sense of connection by saying, "It's not like it's just me against the world, it's a whole bunch of people worldwide who are trying to make changes in their lives as a starting point and trying to make changes wherever they live."

Knowing there are people from all walks of life, in distant parts of the planet, can be empowering as well as inspiring. "I am feeling this groundswell of agreement and feeling and energy and health, and benevolence and wisdom and

compassion, as a field of empowerment” (Bogai). Having this knowledge is one thing, yet bringing it to a larger audience or the masses is still a challenge. “

How can this work be more relevant for all of us across the cultural divide? How do we make it relevant? And people from other cultural traditions who may not have the money, they’re just struggling too, like migrant workers who are working 15, 16 hours a day just picking our crops ... how do we listen to what their concerns are? (Bragi)

Another related concern that I would add here is to ask what type of support or solidarity this group of men can offer communities beyond the homogenous community of coresearchers who are doing culturally congruent work that is similar to the Work That Reconnects.

Having a career as an art therapist in the mental health industry, Bragi has “often thought about people with psychiatric disabilities, they could never go to a retreat at Breitenbush, they couldn’t afford it. How do we talk about this kind of work that’s going to be relevant for their lives?” These are very important questions to consider when thinking about offering tools and methods for personal and social change. When considering why, how, when, and where I choose to do my work, be it personal, environmental, or social, it is good for me to remember there are no guarantees of success or failure and seek to be humble. This is mirrored in Leon’s words: “There is less certainty about the importance of my own work ... and more understanding of how dependent I am on community and on the contributions of the people around me.”

Discussion of Community

As we see, the concept of community covers a lot of territory. Throughout was the feeling that after the initial dropping of pretenses and building some trust, the coresearchers felt deeply connected and were grateful for the feeling. This

connection has kept us gathering periodically for over 10 years, wanting to be in each other's company. A few of us are also working toward getting more men involved in the Work That Reconnects. For me, it was wanting to belong to a worthy and meaningful cause or a purpose, in order to make a difference and leave a legacy of having given more to life than I took.

Being in community with other men is important to my co-researchers; this is evident in how they speak of their connections to the other men. Our Lost Valley men's group has been meeting physically for over 10 years and maintains a connection via the internet. There was some talk about having another WTR men's gathering to extend our community. There was a recognition of the commonality of experience in family history and that when one was vulnerable and spoke their truth, they were speaking for others as well. The connection and trust were strong enough that grief was given space, respected, and supported, which is necessary for men if they are to heal (hooks, 2004). To develop healthy male relationships, and "to go deeper, we need both inner and outer awareness, which flow from different yet related kinds of insight" (A. Johnson, 2014, Chapter 1, Deep Structures and the Way Out, para. 2) Facing the impacts of patriarchal social conditioning, such as the competitiveness to win, to be aggressive, and to be in control allows men to see their commonality with other men and to trust them.

In her research, Brené Brown (2019) says her research participants "want[ed] to be a part of something—to experience real connection with others—but not at the expense of their authenticity, freedom, or power" (p. 33). As

independent as this sounds, we are social creatures: “no individual ... no family, or single-species group, no matter how strong and well protected can live on its own” (LaConte, 2010, pp. 131–132) and there is a balance between independence and collaboration. We need each other, yet “the core problem [is] we don’t know how to live together in a changing world ... which today inevitably results in one group trying to impose their truth on another” (Senge, as cited in Bohm, 1996, Location 100).

This results in a struggle for dominance and “as a result, the very attempt to improve communication leads frequently to yet more confusion, and the consequent sense of frustration inclines people even further toward aggression and violence, rather than toward mutual understanding and trust” (Bohm, 1996, p. 1). Given the social masculine norms, men are not encouraged to trust each other, but to be in competition, to take risks, to win, and be aggressive. “Building trusting relationships is a process that can best be described as stacking layers on a foundation one at a time in such a way that each layer bonds on top of the prior one before another one is added” (Sonnenberg, 2014, p. 91).

Given the myriad differences and problems of the day, “the very attempt to improve communication leads frequently to yet more confusion, and the consequent sense of frustration inclines people even further toward aggression and violence, rather than toward mutual understanding and trust” (Bohm, 1996, p. 1). Community is about developing meaningful relationships where we feel we belong, and “relationships rest on a foundation of trust, respect, and commitment” (Hanson, 2018, p. 217). Said another way, “it’s relationship that brings us back to

health, wholeness holiness” (Wheatley, 2017, p. 240). We need to be in community because “other people are a mirror; the group is a mirror. You have to see your intention. Dialogue will help collectively to bring about a different kind of consciousness” (Bohm, 1996, p. 29).

I think it is important to note that for one of my co-researchers, doing a work project was one of his most memorable moments at any WTR retreat he had been to. Men tend to “link eye contact, particularly with other men, as a sign of confrontation or challenge” (Golden, 2013, Location 39) and are “more likely to feel safe and connected when shoulder to shoulder” (Location 98), engaged in a sport or project. A novel approach to getting men involved in a WTR retreat would be to design the retreat around doing a project of some sort. My co-researcher Duffy helped to bury a water line, but it could be almost anything where men could work side by side or nearby, possibly trail building or maintenance, restoring a campground, or providing a service to the elderly—the possibilities are many. Combining a self-organized work project with planned experiential practices requiring self-exploration could provide an inviting environment for men to engage in community ritual.

There was a strong current of being in service to the greater good, be it to nature, underprivileged communities, the incarcerated, or people needing mental health services. Providing facilitation as a volunteer for community groups, at-risk populations, migrant workers, and other groups that would otherwise have no or limited access and resources could be another way to increase the use and availability of the Work That Reconnects in our communities. The more one gets

to know their community, the more they can assess the needs and concerns of the community. This is also an intimate, soul-exposing, truth-seeking journey that I see as sacred work. I see it as something to approach with intention of creating sacred space, space where the larger than human world can enter and participate. The environment that the work is conducted in matters—place matters, space matters.

Factor 4: Environment

I don't remember how the retreat started
I remember the workshop area and the truth mandala
I remember all the redwoods
I wanted my feet to feel the earth instead of carpet
I loved where the trails went back into the forest where I was alone
I was communing with this tree using it to touch into deep time
I wrote a poem from the perspective of a tree talking to a gnat
I think of kids who've never seen the stars, a cricket, or a frog
I think the workshop was one of those peak experiences
I could always feel like the land was holding us
I came away with a love for the land and the beauty

(Men's "feeling" poem created through data gathered)

To facilitate a group such as those attending a WTR retreat, where sharing deep truths and emotional vulnerability happens, special attention to the environment and setting of the location is necessary. This includes the natural environment of the land as well as the space where the activities are experienced; it requires comfortable environs, intentional spaces, easy access for the elderly, clean sleeping quarters, healthy food, and accommodations for those with special needs. Many facilitators like to create an altar in the room, inviting people to bring special objects and photos to place on it as part of an opening ceremony. Plants and flowers add beauty-bringing nature into the room.

I consider the environment of place and space for these retreats as being related to Abraham Maslow's (2012) physiological needs: breathing, food, sleep, homeostasis, sex, and bodily needs. Chairs and cushions are arranged in an oval or circle, depending on space, or in concentric arcs if it is a large crowd. Other items such as flip charts, markers, art supplies, important books, and a sound system (boom box, computer, microphone, and amp) help to make the environment relaxed and pleasing (Macy & Brown, 2014). The environment should be spacious and comfortable, closed to outside disturbances, have access to nature, and be as free of toxins as possible for people with environmental sensitivities.

Researcher's Understanding of Environment

The location where the WTR men's retreats have been hosted, as with other retreats I have attended, has impacted the depth of my experiences. The environment is not only the venue and the surrounding area but the overall setting, tone, and feelings of being welcomed and invited to relax and connect. This extends from the physical landscape to the accommodations, the food, the layout of the buildings, and the aesthetics of the place where we gather, to the staff, the availability of quiet space, and the access to natural areas for reflection and solitude. Recognizing these elements, in my research proposal I listed my themes for Factor 4 (Environment) as *intentional, natural, aesthetic, comfortable, equal, and tranquil*, all of which were important to me at each retreat venue.

The quality of the housing, the sleeping area, the bathrooms, a clean shower and the means to practice healthy hygiene go a long way in helping me

feel safe. The retreats I have attended are usually held in peaceful locations with good accommodations. Personal needs are cared for, the food is vegetarian, special needs are accommodated, and the meeting space is inviting. The environment impacts the intention of the retreat, which includes the intention to invite and accommodate participants, and the intention to create a space for meeting that is conducive to the work at hand, including space for teaching as well as for conducting the activities and practices.

There is also the intention of the individuals who apply to come to the retreat or workshop. Many of them are seeking more meaning and value in their lives, finding purpose, exploring their spirituality, and generally wanting to have a deep and meaningful experience. Supporting these intentions requires the availability and value of being able to access nature, such as a forested area, a beach, or place with a viewshed—it could be a park or botanical garden—someplace near the retreat venue where one can get out for a time to contemplate their experiences and integrate their feelings. This contemplative environment is also impacted by aesthetics and comfort, which have to do with the accommodations and the creature comforts that are provided.

By the theme of *equality* that is included in this factor, I mean that the environment creates the same opportunity for everyone to participate, speak their truth, be heard, and respond to the needs of the body and self-care. All the men share the sleeping quarters, usually two to four per room depending on the venue. *Tranquil* recognizes the need for solitude, a space for quiet meditation or reflection. This can be in a forest, by the sea, in a private garden or landscaped

area (possibly a community park), or in a meditation hall among spiritual artifacts, candles, and intentional silence. For me, it is the introspection, the honest self-inquiry, that is the skill and strength that creates the transformative moment and being in a natural setting helps me in that process.

The Covid-19 pandemic has kept people from physical retreats, moving the WTR activities to a digital online format. The need to create a conducive environment is still critical, as is the need to be in a place and space that is secure, safe, and inviting for participants to engage in an open, honest, and emotionally meaningful way. However, for this study, the men's retreats were held before the Covid-19 pandemic and so the online aspect of conducting the Work That Reconnects is not discussed at length.

Environment Themes Arising From the Data

Intentional (space). I found the amount of thought and consideration that goes into hosting a retreat—the logistics of advertising and registering, food and accommodations, and making the meeting room welcoming—took a tremendous amount of energy and dedication. In this section, intention arises as my co-researchers' experience with the place and the importance of place in terms of other people's efforts to make the event space hospitable, comfortable, and meaningful.

The location and environment of a WTR retreat or workshop needs to be where participants feel welcome and safe enough to engage in the process. For me, having the men's retreats in rural settings close to nature minimized the

distractions that come with our fast-paced society. This was true for others as well:

I think the Work That Reconnects workshops, in some ways, may be one of those peak experiences, or mountain top experiences. You're out here and you're away from the built environment and you're not as distracted by all the technology and advertisements which distracts us from the experience of being human in this world. You can really focus in and get closer to what's going on at a deep level. (Bragi)

This was evident at the Lost Valley Education Center in Oregon, where

the place was very familiar, but there was a newness to being on my own ... I had been a part of various men's groups during those 15 years, none of them had been like break out of your life ... really step off the merry-go-round and take a look at what's going on. (Will)

Having places where one can find quiet solitude was also reported as being an important aspect of the location.

There was like a meditation at the beginning of every morning, that was part of what I was interested in, was sitting in the mornings ... it was kind of a place to get centered and being with the newness of it. (Will)

This intentionality can be reflected from the participant back into the environment, making the connection reciprocal. One co-researcher said,

I wrote a poem from the perspective of a tree, a dialogue between a little gnat and the huge redwood, a being with the existence of 24 hours. I remember spending a lot of time with this tree and using it to really touch into deep time. (Bogai)

We can bring this intentionality to our relationships with all things and enrich our lives.

At the beginning of a retreat session, as part of introducing ourselves, the room or meeting hall is often decorated with wall hangings, prayer flags, mandalas such as the Sri Yantra, the Flower of Life, or other spiritual symbolism. An Earth flag showing the thin layer of atmosphere is always near where Joanna

would sit and teach. Flowers, apple blossoms, and certain tree branches are common in season and can add a touch of color to the space. Participants will gather and collectively build an altar together by bringing something they love, sharing the importance of the object with the group one by one. This process is reversed at the end of the retreat and as the person collects their object, they offer a gratitude for a special moment they had during the retreat or give a blessing. Opening a retreat with this degree of intention made it a lot easier for me to take risks and engage in spirited self-examination.

All of this was very important to me, as I had the opportunity to witness people in a moment of risk and get a glimpse of their spirit inside. This moment was also fearful for me, because I knew I was going to do the same thing—take the risk of offering something close to my heart that I held dear or sacred. I grew more nervous and emotional as my turn neared, at times choking up as I tried to speak because of the raw truth of the moment, because we, as Bragi said, “do not know what other people are thinking about what you are offering.” I felt that self-consciousness of not knowing if it would be accepted.

It was felt because when “putting oneself at risk,” as Bragi reported, one worries. “Is it profound enough ... an appropriate piece for the altar ... is what I’m saying significant enough?” Some who were more familiar with this sort of ceremony were less nervous, “as long as you are not the first in the circle to express” (Bogai). It is “offering something of yourself ... the object itself and sharing your heart in relation to it” (Bragi). And where I felt increasingly nervous as my time neared, Bragi feels that “the guys going last have the benefit of

hearing all the different ways people present their pieces versus the first person to put his toe out there.” I have usually enjoyed bringing my pieces to the altar; it has been the not knowing what others are thinking about me and the piece that was nerve-wracking.

Having the deliberate intention to create a safe space for personal interaction invites or encourages openness to larger fields of possibility and connection. Mahi said, “I really enjoyed it. I had a real positive experience at these different settings. They really felt like a container. When I would walk outside or we’d take a break, I could always feel like it was still holding us.” There is also the invitation to stretch one’s comfort zone, to creatively engage with the process and add novelty and perspective to the group. “I mean, we’re socialized as men in a patriarchal society,” Daniel said, and when he recognized this, he shared, “I was emboldened to cross-dress at the open mic and that felt good to bring some more womanly presence to the open mic that I helped facilitate.”

Knowing there is the intention to create a safe environment in which I can choose to stretch beyond my comfort zone is a critical factor for me to engage on an emotional level. Being an introvert, stretching of my comfort zone takes a lot of mental and emotional energy. To balance my energy level with my willingness to engage in the activities, I need to recharge; for me this means quiet time with nature. Not everyone at these WTR men’s retreats were introverts yet having access to a natural area was important to the other men as well.

Natural. Whenever possible, WTR retreats are done in or near access to nature. As an introvert, I appreciated the quiet time in nature to recharge and integrate my experiences after doing the emotionally charged work that was available at the retreats. Natural as a theme identifies how my co-researchers feel about nature and access to natural areas for the integration and assimilation of thoughts and feelings.

Having alone time in a forest or by the sea empowers me and recharges me. The grandness of it humbles me. It helps me make sense of and find meaning in my experiences, my emotions, and my feelings. It has been that way since my youth. Some of my fondest memories are not of human interactions but of interactions with the farm animals and local wildlife. That is where I felt safest, and to have a natural area available to me during the retreats gave me a place to go to for the quiet needed to integrate my experiences. The coresearchers' individual stories (Appendix D) disclosed a common theme of the importance of being in nature as a youth. This is a common thread that weaves through all the lives depicted in these pages.

In whatever way the men tuned in or connect to nature, this activity was a significant part of the retreat experience for my co-researchers. The intentionality of

making room for integrating this deep connection with nature into the work is part of it, is part of healing. It's something that I'm recognizing that's an integral core piece and if we take it out of the process, you're leaving out this very important piece of what we are as humans. (Bragi)

One can leave the room where the activities are being held for a break. “And then to go straight up into the greenness, that was enchanted for me. I think I was communing with trees” (Bogai).

Having the intention of making the natural world available for people to see and experience the beauty of the world around them is a powerful thing.

I mean, the daily regular experience for many people is alienation from the natural world. I think of kids who grow up in the city who’ve never seen the stars in their life or heard a cricket or a frog. (Bragi)

Without experiencing nature, without seeing stars and hearing frogs, how can one make informed decisions about protecting, or developing, a watershed? “I often think when I’m in these retreat settings that it’s hard for me to be inside when we’re taking about a retreat that wants to move us toward rekindling our connection with Mother Earth” (Bragi). And Daniel said,

I remember my walk in the woods. We took a two hour walk one day and the invitation was to see the land as alive, as an active interface, to see what seeing nature as a living system that is allowing you to walk through her could be.

Being in a natural setting just feels good and invites connection, as my coresearchers mentioned.

“And so, for me, that’s part of the experience of being out where you start to recognize certain trees, certain places in the landscape, where you can go to be by yourself.” (Bragi)

I just remember little things about the property that are really vivid in my memory, little glimpses of the place and interactions with the staff there. I set my tent up there one time ... I remember it was real frosty cold and I was just really comfortable out in my tent. (Mahi)

Sometimes it was a specific memory, as with Rocky: “I remember driving in. I remember all the redwoods.” Sometimes nature was a portal into another state of being, as with Duffy: “One thing about Land of Medicine Buddha I loved were

the trails back into the redwoods, back into the forest. That's important to me, a place where I can be alone."

I know it is true for me and I suspect it is true for many of my co-researchers that when engaging in intentional activities that invoke our emotions and feelings, be it art, ceremony, dance, or honest introspection, having access to an environment free or relatively free of human manipulation is supportive for integrating those emotions and feelings.

There's a certain kind of connectedness that you have the opportunity for, more when you're away from the built environment, the city-scape, with so much cement and noise and all this stuff ... I think it's pretty essential to have these retreats away from the built environment. (Bragi)

This closeness to nature invites connection on many levels yet may be difficult to achieve in urban and city environs.

Locating a retreat space, usually indoors, that is accommodating to many body types, ages, and abilities can come at the cost of connecting with nature. Bragi said, "I often think when I'm in these retreat settings that it's hard for me to be inside when we're talking about a retreat that wants to move us toward rekindling our connection with Mother Earth." An important aspect of the Work That Reconnects is this intentional move toward making the natural world available to participants as much as possible. It is a delicate balance between personal comfort and being taken care of, and yet being in a location that invites connection with the rawness of nature not touched or lightly touched by human hands.

Comfort. I do not do well sleeping in strange places and I appreciated the efforts to have comfortable accommodations at the retreats. This theme looks at how my co-researchers responded to care taken to meet their personal needs.

Comfort comes in many forms, but for me, comfort comes with familiarity. It comes from knowing I am welcome, that I will be taken care of and my needs will be met. For a Zen meditation teacher, having a retreat at a Buddhist education and retreat center was a comfort. “How cool that it was a Buddha-named place? That made me feel very at home” (Bogai).

When the planning bears the intended fruit of engagement and connection, participants feel “it was a pleasant experience” without “anything unpleasant or scary about it” (Mahi). Mahi continued, “It just felt so contained in some way. I didn’t have any problems, the food was great, I slept well, I was comfortable, beautiful surroundings.” Having one’s comforts fulfilled without personal effort can also to lead ambivalence and expectation, however:

I don’t think it’s as important for me, the sleeping quarters and arrangements. I mean, the food being healthy food is a given, we need and for it to be there, of course, [and] not to having to worry about creating it is really important. (Duffy)

It is difficult, at best, to plan and accommodate every personality, but there is an intention to do just that. Although he could not remember the housing situation, Leon recalled, “The food was wonderful. It was vegetarian, and delicious and plentiful and very in-keeping with the emotional feeling of the place ... the food’s nutritional value matched the emotional value.” Rocky, on the other hand, said “I don’t remember the food.” Similarly, Duffy shared, “I don’t know if

the sleeping arrangements are that important to me and food is nominally important.”

Feeling comfortable can come at a cost, however, when for the sake of comfort so that people feel they can engage in the retreat practices and activities, we stay indoors, “contained within a space which is kind of keeping everything else out” (Bragi). Fortunately, we “had the windows open and be able to hear some natural sounds coming in” (Bragi).

There is an obvious balancing act that happens in providing a comfortable space that feels safe and inviting of personal emotional risk, and yet also invites connection with the natural world. This can be incrementally more difficult when the weather forces everyone inside. “The days when it rained, we were all stuck together, 52 of us, plus Fran and Joanna ... we didn’t have adequate indoor covered commons facilities ... very challenging, but wonderful” (Wally). Even when roommates were not exactly compatible in their sleeping habits, it was a chance to be flexible and see beyond the inconvenience in the moment. With a shrug and it-wasn’t-so-bad, one co-researcher said, “But it was cool, we were both so exhausted from the richness of the experience that it was no problem sleeping” (Will). Other participants were more in tune with their needs more than others; Duffy, who lived in the desert and went to Oregon, said that if “the actual housing and stuff—if it’s warm, warm is good.” He added, “It was important to me to stay warm.”

I have volunteered to help in the kitchen to help pay for my expenses and know firsthand the value of the food that is prepared for retreat participants and

the center's staff. It is always fresh vegetarian and vegan, delicious, and lovingly prepared. I was surprised by how little attention my co-workers had paid to the food, as well as the accommodations in general. After some prompting, the few comments were positive overall, yet lacking my joy in being so well taken care of. This has caused me to consider that having lived a simple life and having gone to sleep hungry many times, I am very grateful for the bounty we are given.

My co-researchers seemed vague in their recollections. "I think, if I remember, it was at Lost Valley, and we met in a large building. And then, I think we had some pretty basic lodging, we were fed well" (Will). He is not alone in this fuzziness. Leon said,

Isn't that funny, I don't have any recollection of it ... I don't have any remembered discomfort, or dissatisfaction, and I don't remember any particular pleasurable memory about the way those arrangements were set off. I do remember feeling very comfortable and well fed.

Wally, however, stated, "I came away with a love for the land at Medicine Buddha and the food and the beauty." These experiences seem positive to me because there is no mention of having a bad experience, but what I find interesting is that there was no depth to the experiences. There was recognition of the comfort without placing much value on what it takes to provide for such a large group of men.

It appears to me that there may be a blind spot in these men around household or housekeeping rituals such as cooking meals, cleaning up after the meal, noticing their sleeping space, and recognizing the needs of others. It may be my hypervigilance that keeps me attentive to my surroundings and comfort. I remember more of the details of the retreat venue (e.g., the surroundings, sleeping

arrangements, the food, etc.) than my co-researchers. “I remember being in the dining hall with everyone, and I remember in the workshop area where we had the truth mandala, where we broke out into the small groups, I just don’t remember the rest” (Leon).

Perhaps because I have lived my life very simply, I make no demands about being made comfortable. After living out of my pickup truck for 10 years, I can make do with very little: all I need is a place where I can be dry, warm, and relatively safe. Of course, it is also nice to be in a place that provides for all my needs, one that is welcoming and pleasing to the eye.

Aesthetics. I appreciated that the retreats were held in visually pleasing surroundings with building that fit into those surroundings. Aesthetics help me relax and are a big part of my sense of place; here, it refers to how these surroundings were or were not as viewed by my co-researchers.

Aesthetics are closely related to comfort. The space where the retreat participants engage with each other in the activities and practices of the Work That Reconnects needs to be clean, have windows for ventilation as well as natural light, have adequate lighting for evening work, and be large enough to hold everyone without being cramped for space. Such things as mold, mildew, evidence of rodent occupation, offensive odors, flaking paint, or other structural problems are to be avoided at all costs. This is partly true because Joanna has asthma and can become terribly ill around mold, mildew, dust, and other unhealthy particulates in the air. This can be true for sensitive people attending

the retreat as well. It is also true because these undesirable elements are a distraction from the comfort needed to fully engage in the work.

I was surprised when there was no mention about any topics that pertained to the aesthetics of the retreat center where we gathered. It was if there was no notice that the rooms were clean and prepared for our arrival, that healthy food was lovingly prepared for us, or that we had clean sheets, towels, and bathrooms. Leon seemed to sum it up in his comment above about not having any “discomfort, or dissatisfaction” or “any particular pleasurable memory” about the venues—the venues just *were*.

Equality. I felt *equal* among my peers at the retreats, which was a big part of my developing trust and sense of safety. This theme identifies how my co-researchers felt they were seen by other men in the retreat setting.

For me, equality is not separable from safety or intention. Feeling equal to others allows me more freedom to engage and take emotional risks as well as relax during personal time spent socializing with the men, dining, meditating, or just talking while not in session. I have spoken about the men feeling heard and listened, which has been covered in the section on safety. However, it is appropriate to mention a bit of that here, because feeling equal and welcomed is a big part of settling in at the venue and feeling good about the overall retreat environment.

Building a sense of connection and equality begins as the retreat participants arrive at the venue, as my co-researchers reported:

You just kind of check everybody out, I remember that part of it. That was when I first arrived and I was still kind of settling in, figuring out where I

was going to be sleeping and that kind of thing ... it was all new to me and I was just curious and open to it. (Mahi)

So, here now I got this roomie. We're bunking in these little rooms, two to a room, and the bunks are really small ... I'm going like, "Wow, ok who is this guy? And we just like fell in love with each other. It was great."
(Will)

"My roommate was beloved of many guys and that made me feel good and kind of accepted, to be sleeping in the same lodge with my uncles."
(Bogai)

As the retreat develops, connections are made and the space is shared. As a group of older men far away from high school and college sports,

it was interesting to be thrown in with a bunch of guys again, the locker-room and shower kind of scene, and all that. Mostly what I remember was the men I was connecting with ... there was a quality of the connection.
(Will)

Feeling the quality of connection helped with the ability to participate in the activities. "I made some other connections with some of the people and despite being an introvert I interacted to a high degree" (Wally). Establishing and building meaningful connections with the other men, seeing them in their vulnerability and knowing they have faults—that they carry physical and emotional wounds, and accepting them as they are—is, in my opinion, the first few steps in recognizing that equality is achievable.

Tranquility. I am an introvert and I need quiet reflection time to process, integrate, and recharge my emotional state after sustained interaction with people. In my co-researcher's stories, it came out that *tranquility* was important to my co-researchers as well, validating it as a theme for understanding their experiences.

The last theme for the retreat environment is about having a tranquil place for solitude and integrating one's feelings and experiences. Having the time and

opportunity to be tranquil, to reflect and to be still, is very important to me. Many of the men speak about their love of being in nature, but there were few words about the need for solitude and time to reflect while in it. Though few, the words are important: “I loved where the trails went back into the redwoods, back into the forest. That’s important to me. A place where I can be alone” (Duffy).

If one is observant or just lucky, Bragi said,

there’s a certain path that you follow to find a place of solitude. You start to hear some of the other voices that are present, not just human voices, but some of the resident birds, or other living things that occupy that space.

During the 7 and 10-day retreats there is often a solo day in silence with nature near the middle of the schedule to integrate our thoughts and experiences. I have found some lovely places to spend my time and think, write, and listen to the sounds around me.

It’s just so easy for me to fall into that place of gratitude when I’m connected with what some call the more than human world, the trees, the mountains, the rivers. Before the Work That Reconnects, I didn’t have the words for the experience. (Will)

For many of my co-researchers, nature is very important to them, as it is to me, yet it seems for them to be a place for activity and participation, not quiet introspection. For me, it is the introspection that is the catalyst for transformation, be it group or in solitude.

Discussion on Environment and Place

In this section I have described my personal experience of the retreat environment and those of my co-participants, referencing both the natural environment of the surrounding area, the physical comforts of the facility’s accommodations, and the space we occupy for the retreat sessions. To aid in this

discussion, I used the themes of *intention, natural, aesthetic, comfortable, equality, and tranquility*. Although the data supported my assumptions, there is some difference between my experience of the overall retreat environment and those of my co-researchers. To a degree, this is to be expected, we are different people with different histories and life circumstance. One person's experience of a site might be very different from another's and thus produce a significantly different experience of place (Gruenewald, 2003).

To get the most benefit from the work, how we choose the place and how we occupy that space needs to be intentional and conducive to the purposes of safety, sacred work, and community. Given this, we see that “environment” is more prominent for my co-researchers as the natural community of the place—trees, animals, redwood forest, coastal beach, rolling farmland—a place to get away for solitude and reflection was important. The physical spaces of the venue, sleeping quarters, dining hall, buildings, and meeting space were vaguely noticed, if at all. There was little awareness of those who cleaned our rooms or cooked, served our food, and washed the dishes, but I thanked, appreciated, and remember these people. I do not remember their names, but the feeling of gratitude for their presence and service I can still connect with.

I do not sleep well in unfamiliar places and so I am very grateful for comfortable spaces, good food, and quiet sleeping quarters. This is supported in neuroscience in that brain plasticity (the brain's ability to change) is affected by sleep, as it allows us “to consolidate learning and memory—when we learn a skill during the day, we will be better at it the next day if we have a good night's

sleep” (Doidge, 2007, p. 239). In this way, over the course of a longer residential retreat, communication and listening skills can increase, elevating the quality of the discussion, building trust, and adding to the depth of the relationship bonding.

As a group, my co-researchers felt comfortable and given there was no competition or chestiness they felt to be among peers, equal and at ease with the other men in the retreats, and willing to engage in the process. When we open up, other men are invited to feel safe and join in the conversation (Golden, 2013). When we are with like-minded people doing work in common, being flexible, tolerant, and accommodating can be a lot easier. “It’s relationship that brings us back to health, wholeness, and holiness” (Wheatley, 2017, p. 240). This is not always comfortable work and according to Golden (2013), “if an action does not help the person get in touch with the grief and loss then it is not the masculine side of healing” (Chapter 1, The Safety of Action, para. 3). This kind of work cannot take place in just any kind of location or environment as it can be intimate and emotional. That’s not the coffee shop—place matters.

The WTR men’s retreats were the result of intentional action by a group of men wanting to see changes in the world around them. And “if every gathering is an occasion for producing for ourselves a future we want to inhabit, then we need to design it for that intention, and we need art to accomplish this” (Block, 2018, Chapter 14, Bring in Art and the Aesthetic, para. 2). There were efforts to create a certain space at these and other WTR retreats. I describe above a general opening ceremony that simultaneously introduces each participant and builds an altar that will stay throughout the retreat. In a ceremonial sense, “intention is about making

a decision about what the ceremony (retreat) means. What is its purpose? Healing, transition, or celebration?” (Farmer, 2002, p. 33). As much as the retreats were about getting more men into the Work That Reconnects, I think it was also about getting those men who showed up to get in contact with their emotional self and feelings.

This sort of meeting space is not your average corporate business meeting atmosphere. “Meeting rooms are traditionally designed for efficiency, control, and business as we know it” (Block, 2018, Chapter 14, The Physical Space, para. 1). “A platform or stage creates a demand for performance and judgment; It looks like the throne of the monarch, the bench of the judge. This is not the arrangement for democracy or community” (Chapter 14, Level the Playing Field, para. 1). In the Work That Reconnects we sit in a rough circle or oval, depending on the shape of the room, either on chairs or on cushions. Emphasis is put on everyone being seen and everybody being heard. “Ultimately, the kinds of places that we acknowledge and make possible will determine the kinds and the quality of human and nonhuman life in our communities, bioregions, and on our planet” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 637).

Even my co-researchers who directly participated in organizing one or more of the retreats could not remember much about aspects of the retreat settings, such as the food, the sleeping quarters, and other aspects of the overall location and environment. However, I am grateful that Joanna Macy knew of the importance of creating intentional space, including items that held meaning, such as mandala wall hangings, prayer flags, and a flag depicting the earth with its thin

layer of atmosphere. All of these helped create a sense of intention and purpose for me. We were there for a reason and the room spoke to this. “The building and material forms that we create are an outgrowth of our social fabric and capacity to be in community together. They have a powerful impact on our experience and relation to each other. Space matters” (Block, 2018, Chapter 14, Design and Build Opportunities, para. 7).

Although we may not have control over the location, form, or shape of the room, we always have choices about how to occupy the space. The task is to rearrange the room to meet our intention to build relatedness, accountability, and commitment (Block, 2019). Even though we met in the same room for three days, there was little attention was given by my co-researchers to the aesthetic, artistic, and symbolic nature of items occupying the physical space with us. The spaces we occupy are not only centers of experience, where our lives manifest into the physical world; places can also be said to hold our culture and even our identity (Gruenewald, 2003). Finding ways to increase the awareness of intentional space may be a good practice for men to do.

Being aware of these activities are second nature to me. Growing up on a farm, my list of chores each day included housework as well as taking care of the farm animals. I would do preparation work for the kitchen: peeling potatoes, cutting vegetables for soups, salads, and side dishes. I cleaned the table, washed dishes, and learned to cook. I am not a neat freak, yet I do keep my living area orderly, I make my bed each day, and there are no dirty dishes in the sink. Much of this is stereotypically be considered “women’s work” in patriarchal society,

along with the care for children, the sick, and the elderly (Eisler, 2008; hooks, 2004), which is unfit for men to do. This stereotyping has roots in patriarchal structure with its deeply internalized distrust of women, making it harder for a young man to figure out how to be a man (Messner, 2000).

An interesting future inquiry could be into how much influence this stereotypical idea of women's work has on these men being able to see the importance of creating intentional place as well as in care for others; food preparation and service; the cleaning of the sleeping quarters, the bathrooms, the dining area, and the grounds that hold the whole event. It seems that participating in the day-to-day logistics, or benefiting from others doing them, may not be an awareness in their day-to-day activities and they might gain perspective from participating in a more hands-on way.

It needs to be stated that environment, as in the natural environment, is not always seen as a calming and peaceful place. Although "landscapes are important for people's identity and well-being, and exposure to landscapes can even help you recover from stressful or challenging situations (Velarde et al. 2007, as cited in Steg & DeGroot, 2019, Chapter 5, 5.1 Introduction, para.1) and given that people can "gain a sense of purpose and self-identity in life by feeling they belong to the natural world" suggesting the "natural world plays a role in restorative environment experiences" (Chapter 7, 7.4.2 Connectedness to Nature, para. 1) this is not necessarily the case for people living in urban and city environs. Another side of the story is that "for most of Western history, wilderness was viewed as a

place to fear and avoid” (Steg & DeGroot, 2019, Chapter 8, 8.2 Historical Overview, para. 1).

This does not come from a hatred of nature or biophilia, but is the result instead of a lack of knowledge, a common characteristic of individuals who display negative feelings and anthropocentric thoughts about nature and wilderness is that they are less able to buffer themselves against the existential anxiety evoked by the reminders of death that are present in nature. (Steg & DeGroot, 2019, Chapter 8, 8.6 An Existential-Motivational Account, para. 2)

This existential fear of death can possibly contribute to the reluctance of doing the shadow work and feeling the pain and suffering of one’s self and the world. Strong emotion could feel like potential death for those without the buffer capacity to balance the angst.

Even if we cannot be in a natural area, we can still invite nature into the space we have. “The room needs to express the quality of aliveness and belonging that we wish for in the community ... arrange the room as the Shape of Things to Come” (Block, 2018, Chapter 14, Bringing the Room to Life and Life to the Room, para. 2). Block (2018) has additional advice: “Bring in plants, even if they are artificial (Chapter 14, Welcome Nature into the Room, para. 2), even one flower or one candle in the room changes everything” (Chapter 14, Welcome Nature into the Room, para. 3). “There can be no transformation without art ... art in the form of theater, poetry, music, dance, literature, and sculpture. Those who want to heal the wounds of a fragmented community initiate hundreds of art projects for those living on the margin. Art brings these voices into the mainstream” ((Chapter 14, Bring in Art and the Aesthetic, para. 1). “Put life on the wall. There is nothing as lonely as an empty wall” (Chapter 14, Put Life on the

Wall, para.1). We can make the space we desire with intention, planning, and effort.

These environmental factors are important to consider when planning a WTR retreat or workshop. It may be difficult to find an urban or inner-city landscape where this work could be done, yet it could still have a positive impact in those communities by intentionally creating a desirable setting in what space is available. From my co-researchers' comments it is evident that the overall retreat settings added to their experiences rather than detracted from them, even if some aspects of the place were not that memorable. It is also notable that they took advantage of being near nature, connecting with the nonhuman world, even though they did not generally seek solitude and introspection in it. The importance of the intention behind the retreats, their location, access to nature, the physical comforts, and to a degree, the aesthetics of the overall environment, cannot be denied.

The cost of retreat venues that meet these conditions also cannot be denied, especially for multiple day retreats. This drives up the cost of attendance, which is a barrier to many people who may otherwise attend, even if they have the time and transportation.

Factor 5: Spiritual Foundation

I was steeped in teachings from the Old Testament
I came to the point where I thought that church sucked
I was looking for meaning in my remaining years
I was doing engaged Buddhism at the time
I was looking for a calling
I began a spiritual exploration, looking for some guidance
I began assimilating, digesting, the core teaching of world religions
It's more soul based, but it's not painless

I mean, self-cultivation is also the Work That Reconnects
I am doing a bodhisattva job
I hope for this expansiveness for the future generations of all species

(Men's "feeling" poem created through data gathered

In this context a *spiritual foundation* includes participants' values held in common, recognized need, purpose, goals, self-identity, unrest, a calling, an ecological self (Macy & Brown, 2014), and the belief one can make a difference, or has a part to play in the world. Molly Young Brown (2009) defines *spirituality* as "pertaining to the realm of human experience involving values, meaning, purpose, and the unification with natural principles, patterns, energies, and the Divine" (p. 205). Spirituality can be understood as a person's connection to the unseen aspects of reality that are beyond the physical and which bind us to the animating energies of the cosmos, however one sees them; the ground of being (Vaughn, 2002).

The connection to something larger than our human world embeds us in a living universe that is filled with potential and meaning. A spiritual connection connects us to the wholeness of being and inspires us to care for the world and for future generations, but it also has an impact on the individual. We are not brains on the end of a stick, but flesh-and-blood beings. Ideas become real for us through our senses and imagination—through stories, images, and rituals that enlist our capacity for devotion, our tears and laughter (Macy & Brown, 2014). Maslow (2012) comes close to spirituality when he speaks of morality and the progression toward his stage of self-actualization: morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and the acceptance of facts. When one acts from a

sense of connection, self-worth, gratitude, and love for life, one makes decisions based on connection rather than separation.

Researcher's Understanding of a Spiritual Foundation

In considering the spiritual foundation of the Work That Reconnects for my research proposal prior to conducting the interviews, I listed *Calling, Values, Purpose, Identity, Ecological Self*, and *Need* as themes that could help frame the discussion. My use of the term *spiritual* implies a direct, personal experience of nondual reality and universal connection with all that is; not as literal but intuitive. I see spirituality and religion as inter-related but not synonymous. A doctrinal approach to religion has a code, a creed, a literal interpretation to the written word, whereas spirituality, for me, is more a conscious relationship with a living universe.

My personal spiritual views come directly from my relationship with nature, interactions with nonhuman species, and the living Earth. It is my belief that at their core the teachings of major religions as well as spiritual philosophies, such as Tibetan and Zen Buddhism, Taoism, and Indigenous beliefs are similar in the sense they all speak of kindness, tolerance, care for the less fortunate, recognition of the sacredness of all life, finding one's purpose, and universal love, to name a few elements.

The way one senses their relationship to the Divine, that which makes life sacred, is welcomed within the theory and structure of the Work That Reconnects, which stresses the interconnectedness of all things to all things (Macy & Brown, 2012). The Work That Reconnects is “an evolving body of group work practices

based on systems theory, deep ecology, and Buddhist teachings (Macy, 2007, Introduction, para. 5), and the awakening of “what philosopher Arne Nass called the ecological self, coextensive with other beings and the life of our planet” (Macy, 2007, Chapter 14, The Greening of the Self, para. 2). With this realization we sense we are not separate from our world but that we arise from it. Ken Wilber (2017) states there are two forms of spirituality, “spiritual experience” and “spiritual intelligence,” where the former “is a 1st person state” and the latter is “more intellectual, or intelligence oriented” (p. 197), as with codified religion.

Growing up on a working ranch in rural Northern California, I had plenty of time to be in nature and with the farm animals, many of whom I felt were close friends. The philosophy of interconnectedness fit well with my personal experience and beliefs, although at the time I had no vocabulary with which to explain these experiences and beliefs. I was not raised in what I think of as a religious family, although my mother was interested in it and would occasionally attend a service at any one of the local churches. She was somewhat of a spiritual butterfly flitting from Baptist to Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, and my personal favorite at the time, the Baha’i. I remember she had a huge tome of the Old Testament, with full page colored pictures of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, and other religious figures and events. She lived her life through “a veil of tears,” which I could never identify with. As I got older, I longed to find beauty in life.

I gave up on religion. I could feel there was something missing in my life. I could feel it, but I could not identify what it was or where it was coming from. Religion advocated release from this world, a flawed and sinful place, for the

purity of heaven, which I could not understand, as I clearly saw the beauty and marvel of nature. I also saw human relationships more as power struggles instead of as interconnections; heaven was for the chosen few, not for all. There was a disconnect, an omission, that both plagued me and followed me through life, but it eluded me at the time. In thinking about my connection with nature and my disconnection with human relations, I can understand why I went into agricultural education as my first career. I wanted to heal the disconnection I saw in the world through the only method I knew, farming. As I look back, I see that I carried this disconnection within myself. I didn't see the problematic nature of large-scale farming, the use of fertilizers, disturbing natural habitats, and displacing the native and migratory wildlife. In seeking an answer to an inner questioning, I went from job to job, moving away from commercial agriculture toward resource management and environmental education.

It was not until I experienced the Work That Reconnects, with its roots in deep ecology and systems thinking, that I identified the calling within me and began the journey that has brought me to this inquiry and dissertation. I learned I was a natural systems thinker; I saw the interconnections, learned the vocabulary of deep ecology, and began my soul work. My co-researchers, like me, were at these retreats for a reason or reasons. Some life event, or in my case events, had to occur in their lives to get them to register for and attend the retreat. There was something we were looking for or a question we were trying to answer through the experience. I suggest we were following an internal signal/impulse/feeling, consciously or unconsciously, that I am referring to as a *calling*.

Spiritual Foundation Themes Arising From the Data

Calling. Calling as a theme recognizes an urge felt deep inside that asks or calls one to seek purpose or meaning in their life. Answering that urge can come early in life or be when the urge to drop engrained defenses and engage with the activities in the Work That Reconnects, or similar work, activates.

As I use it here, the theme of a calling can also be considered as a seeking as well. It is the awareness of an inner questioning, what might feel like an omission, a lack of something vital, that one tries to answer, fulfill, or find in order to feel more whole, find value, and make meaning. It can also be the voice of the Muse, a re-occurring inspiring thought or undefined inner urge. For me, the calling can be an inner knowing, maybe hearing a voice, that inspires one to action. By the time I was introduced to the Work That Reconnects my calling was screaming at me, yet I was not hearing. I was in the midst of a three-pronged mid-life breakdown; family breakup, career collapse, and a spiritual crisis, because I had no vocabulary to define or tools to use to deal with the complexity of my situation. However, I was actively seeking a way through, trying to find something to live for—my purpose, my calling.

I was ready for something like the Work That Reconnects to come into my life. I was ripe, one might say. My co-researcher Bogai, a Zen meditation instructor, had his previous Buddhist studies as a foundation and felt he “was in the perfect demographic to get mobilized by the Work That Reconnects, [he] was ready.” Although not driven by harsh life experiences, Leon said, “I began a spiritual exploration, looking for some kind of guidance, knowing the years I have

left are so few compared to what I've lived. I was looking for a calling." Mahi also mentioned searching: "The mainstream [culture] is so damned screwed up, I've always been seeking something else ... that feeling of wanting to belong, wanting to be accepted. I've become so aware of that doing this work." I think that having the opportunity to engage in honest self-inquiry helps illuminate and clarify the voice of our calling.

Several co-researchers were inquiring into different religions and approaches to spiritual practice, the common approach being Buddhism, which is foundational to the Work That Reconnects.

What fascinated me the most was the commonality at the core of the teachings of the major religions. Looking back now, the Work That Reconnects and the elements that are needed for a life sustaining civilization are very connected to those core values. (Leon)

There's a way to address the human problem, the promise, the crisis, the opportunity. There's a way. What is required is we evolve. We have mastered survival as a species. So much of our conquest energy that we have used to conquer is extra, we don't need that anymore. We should be conquering inward. (Bogai)

Not all of my co-researchers had a positive view of religion, however.

Mahi stated, "The church thing was always a negative for me. I just saw them all as basket cases and hypocrites." Growing up in the deep South among devout Southern Baptists, Wally said, "I came to the point where I thought that church sucked and threw the baby out with the bathwater about the potential for the spiritual, because the church was such bullshit." Bragi noted, "I'm speaking in Christian-centric terms briefly here, but if God created the world good, well what are we doing to fuck it up? What's our responsibility to make it right?" Even with these difficult experiences with organized religion, they all gravitated to The

Work That Reconnects, and Bragi and Duffy were instrumental in creating the first men's retreat in 2007.

I am seeking meaning and value in my life before it's over, to make a difference for the good as part of my end-of-life exit strategy. In this I am not alone. Leon said, "I was looking for meaning in those remaining years." Knowing there are fewer years left than those already lived, he said, "I was looking for a larger way to contribute." The point is "we want to reduce the suffering, that's how we do things" (Rocky). A question that comes up for me is as follows: how do we reduce the suffering in ourselves and in the world if we do not acknowledge it and face it? This is the second stop along the spiral, honoring our pain for the world. Facing the pain and suffering is not easy to do, and several of my co-researchers are cautious about doing "the shadow work" (Matt, Rocky, & Will). When describing the WTR approach to addressing the pain and suffering, Will said,

I think the best way to describe that is it's a little more soul based. It's not painless, there's a despair that goes with that too because there's a part of me that wants everybody to see the world that way, but that's not the way it is.

Not everyone is willing to face the reality of the pain and suffering that is ubiquitous in the world, to feel it in their bodies and to grieve together, but there is a need for us to do just that.

Need. When I was introduced to the Work That Reconnects, I was in crisis—in need of connection and a direction. The WTR retreat was a place to explore this need with others, which was transformational. This theme identifies if

and how others were driven by crisis or need when they came to the Work That Reconnects.

There is no doubt that we are living in a time of crisis: social upheaval, climate chaos, catastrophic fire, rising fascism, white supremacy, a growing wealth gap, totalitarianism, abused children placed in cages and left to die, war, and an impeached American president who committed crimes against our country, supported by a corrupt Senate Republican majority disregarding the law and the Constitution. In my personal circles, the possibility of human extinction, along with that of most if not all higher life forms, is a common thread of discussion. Our need is great: “the citizenship of the future is going to require a shift in consciousness, a belonging, an un-separation from the rest of the planet” (Bogai). WTR practices are experiential in that they are lived and shared experiences that are embodied; they are felt in our bones and muscles, expressed in tears, creativity, and gratitude. They are not simply the rationalized gymnastics of a conditioned brain.

There is a need to be persistent in our self-education and social change efforts. Joanna has been a social activist for over 60 years and the work has never been more important; now is when it is needed most. It is easy to get discouraged.

I recognize all this work we do in these Joanna Macy retreats and yet what’s it going to take. What’s it going to take before people who are in positions to be able to have an influence at a grand level to wake up?
(Bragi)

I have been aware of the importance of three things in my life the whole time, which is nature, spirituality, and social justice ... I still get angry at injustice and I try to always make a voice for people who don’t have a voice. (Bogai)

Recognizing a generational as well as social need can be a deeply personal experience for social activists.

I see the sickness of patriarchy and the sickness of our society and our youth ... the boys are at such a lower emotional intelligence, comprehension and all the girls are present, capable, self-starting, driven, know what they're doing ... showing up regularly and they can hold themselves accountable ... so many of the boys that I work with are caught in where do I get validation? (David)

There is a need for intergenerational work and interaction. In guiding youth on wilderness excursions and vision quests, one of my co-researchers said, "to be in basecamp and watch these young people come down off the mountain with just gleam and this roll to their step. They're, all of a sudden, they're like changed. Totally transformed" (Rocky).

Intentional ceremonies, such as a vision quest, can play a big role in personal and social transformation, yet "people in our society have really been taught to mistrust ritual and ceremony but ceremony is a way of encoding these things and embedding them in the psyche, because you can't do this stuff intellectually" (Rocky). Ceremony can also be important for releasing pain of loss and trauma in those who are suffering. Bogai said, "My father died that year; my youngest brother died that year ... I had a fresh episode of pain and suffering that was influencing me at that time." A ritual such as the Truth Mandala is a space where one can "freely emote."

I remember I was sitting on the floor and I was using one leg to push myself around so I would be facing different parts of the mandala ... I was just spinning, spraying like a sprinkler ... in my emotional memory that's the process that was the most meaningful to me. (Bogai)

Others have had similar experiences in the Truth Mandala and found that allowing the pain was transformative.

And so, how do we continue to have those kinds of experiences now that the retreat is over? Where we have those opportunities to get together. There's not really a place, it's hard, we don't have those regular opportunities to do that face-to-face. (Bragi)

To grow and fully utilize the Work That Reconnects for personal and social change there is the need for "Communities of Practice" (Macy & Johnstone, 2014), groups of people in communities that gather often to set an intentional time and create intentional space to do this work together.

Values. I benefited by clearly connecting with my core values and recognizing that many of the ideals I held were socialized and not mine at all. This theme is about investigating how my co-researchers felt about their values, and whether by engaging in the practices and activities of the Work That Reconnects they recognized any social patterns or teaching they held.

For me, my values are like lenses through which I look at the world to construct a world view—how one looks at and interprets the world around them. A quick internet search will show that there are hundreds of personal values, which can be different for different people, creating very different ways of making decisions and relating to other people and the world. Some of my core values are accountability, acceptance, courage, honesty, integrity, respect, service, and most importantly, love. Knowing how my values and learning the values of another makes it easier for me to relate to, understand, and communicate with that person. I can learn about another's values by listening deeply to what they say and do while participating in the WTR practices and activities. I can learn more about my values through honest self-inquiry and finding what moves me emotionally.

Saying I feel someone is likeminded means I feel we have a certain amount of values in common.

Spirituality is a core value of the Work That Reconnects, and it attracts people who share this value.

I think about Joanna's description of her own journey from a very fundamentalist Christian upbringing that she painful, partially, turned her back on, to her affinity with Buddhist teachings, and then a re-embracing of the core values from her Christian background. (Leon)

Mahi reinforced the perception of shared values: "Hearing Joanna's story, learning about her life, her childhood and her connection and her connection with Buddhist philosophy. It just kind of resonated throughout the group somehow or another in different ways, seen and unseen ways." Witnessing another's values in action during the WTR activities can awaken or activate new ways of relating and understanding, as with Leon who said, "I think that may have been the first time that I began assimilating, digesting, the sense of the compatibility and fabric of that is those core teaching of the religions from civilizations around the globe."

A person's values can change as life conditions change. "Joanna has a root tradition of being Christian, but now she's like an engaged Buddhist" (Bragi). Compassion and lovingkindness are strong values in engaged Buddhism and "Joanna is coming from dharma and is thinking in terms of inter-arising" (Bogai). Several of my co-researchers had been studying Buddhism, which "lead to an interest in Joanna Macy. Because with her Buddhist thing, that resonated for me" (Matt) and "she was speaking what I needed and I'm like, I am yours" (Duffy). Bogai, who practices Zen, said, "I would love to hear what Joanna's experience of meditation ... I mean her actual meditation practice. It would be great to hear her,

everybody has war stories and happy stories, transcending stories.” The different traditions within Buddhism share a good many values in common that people on a spiritual path, or who are simply curious, can identify with.

Having accessed or activated one’s core values can change our relationship with our responsibility in life and the kinds of questions we ask ourselves. This was true for Matt, who said,

That’s something I took away from the Work That Reconnects, the “does it have merit” question. “Does what I’m about to do have merit? Is the merit worth the damage that it is causing?” And we cannot escape the damage we’re doing.

Merit is a value, and this internal questioning about an action having merit came into play during the interview and data gathering process.

Here we are, we both drove miles, in vehicles that required fracking to come up with the fuel or whatever. Whatever damage has been done to get us here, to this coffee shop to do this, we’ve done damage. Does the merit of this interview outweigh the damage that was done? I really, really, really, hope so.

I hope so too. In fact, I hope that not only the data gathering process had merit, it is my sincere desire that this dissertation has merit and aids in the making of a better society.

The Work That Reconnects's spiritual roots appealed to my co-researchers and it played a role in their deciding to attend a retreat(s). These roots expose themselves in many ways, and the work can be adapted to fit different times, conditions, and people. “The Work That Reconnects is not some new religion that’s being created, because it has to get translated. Just like there’s all these different cultural perspectives. I mean historically, there are so many different cultures and ways of being” (Bragi). On the other hand, this work can fit in with

religion and different approaches to it. One of my co-researchers, who lives in Philadelphia, saw “how important having intergenerational relationships are to spiritual formation,” so he started an alternative divinity school with some friends and community ministers “to have people who are doing the Work That Reconnects in this kind of community ministry” (Daniel).

The diversity of people and world views at a retreat can be significant. It is not always easy to tell who is thinking what and it can be like judging a book by its cover. For example, Wally said, “There were Wiccan people there who were doing things around me because they don’t want to out themselves to me for fear of reaction.” To have Baptists, Christians, Muslims, Wiccans, Hindus, Tibetan Buddhists, Zen Buddhists, agnostics, and atheists all attending a retreat and sharing from their hearts attests to the value of this inclusive spiritual foundation. Although I am more of a pagan at heart, one of my co-researchers said, “I would say, we can refer to ourselves as soul-brothers because we’re talking [truth], getting beneath some of the superficial stuff” (Will).

Purpose. I woke to purpose through the WTR practices and community. Does this happen for others too? This theme identifies if and how my co-researchers connected to purpose in their lives.

I feel I have a purpose or purposes in life, something I am here to do. This is similar to feeling a calling, the ideal that life is speaking to me telling me there is more than what I am thinking and witnessing in the world—a greater meaning. After years of working in education and with environmental restoration, I became aware of the deep disconnection mass culture had with nature and natural

systems. I wanted to do something that helped people reconnect with nature and stop ecosystem collapse from occurring. This remains a strong impulse for me. When I was introduced to the Work That Reconnects, my purpose was to find a way to begin healing the inner wounds I felt as a result of my mid-life crises.

Pain can be a motivator, letting me know I need to change something in my life. People have told me that they do not like looking at or thinking about troubling issues such as climate change or asylum-seeking immigrant children being put in cages, because it upsets them. However, pain “upset, anger, disappointment, and fear are all signals that can alert us to the need to tackle an issue” (Johnstone, 2010, Loc.492) and motivate us to action. Mahi reinforced this idea: “I was searching for help, I just felt broken. I was dying for some connection, some guidance, some help ... I didn’t know what to do, where to turn.” A personal health crisis can also be this kind of motivator:

I lost a kidney to cancer in 2011. I remember doing a [drum] journey before I went into surgery and it informed me. It put me in a much better place by inviting being open to what that journey presented in itself. (Will)

Dissatisfaction with our culture, continuous war, climate inaction, and other social ills can also motivate people into action; this is called “inspirational dissatisfaction” (Hill & Stone, 1990, as cited in Johnstone, 2010, Inspirational Dissatisfaction, para. 1). When speaking about the need to directly face the pain and suffering in the world, as well as in one’s self, one co-researcher said,

Well, I think that came as I got to learn more about the work. Somebody else might say, “I’m not going to do this, it’s too heavy,” but I actually welcome the work. I think it shifted when I had a chance to share in that kind of [retreat] setting. (Will)

In reflecting on “the value of the workshop,” Bragi reported, there are

many people around the world that have a similar burden for finding a way back to a sane way of living on Mother Earth. But it's going to have to be done in different places around the world that are owned [by people] in their own way, that work in those particular places.

Leon, for his part, said,

I grew up in the Baptist church, there's different places [in the sermons] where they used an analogy of scales falling from their eyes. The Work That Reconnects, I think, is a good analogy for me. I became willing to look at how fucked up things were in the world and with the spiral I was able to face that and face it in community that let me grieve with others about where we are.

In healing the environmental damage, Bogai suggested, "there's many occupations and activities that one could be said to be doing the WTR. I think it's a literal translation of Tikkun, reassembling, piecing it back together." When the various aspects of a retreat come together, "it all flows together, I couldn't really separate it" (Mahi). "It's one of those awakening experiences. I think the workshop itself, the Work That Reconnects workshops, in some ways, it may be one of those peak experiences, or mountain top experiences" (Bragi).

Through the "piecing it back together" (Bogai) and the taking action where one lives, "where one is planted" (Bragi), one can find the motivation and discover more purpose, more meaning, in one's life. C. Johnstone (2019) stresses that motivation is powerfully influenced by the way we look at a situation and the Work That Reconnects offers tools and practices to inquire into the situations and conditions in our lives. This is acknowledged to be difficult work and having a space to integrate the learning with one's sense of purpose can be quite helpful. "The Land of Medicine Buddha is saturated with the Buddhist vibe ... I enjoy[ed] getting up at seven in the morning and just sitting still in the room, I just enjoyed

being in that space. It was powerful to be there in the morning, in a quiet meditation” (Mahi).

Identity. Identity is important to me because I had lost my sense of direction in life and the Work That Reconnects helped me locate my authentic self. As a theme, identity looks at how my co-researcher’s sense of identity was exposed or changed through their experiences.

For me, self-inquiry is about self-discovery; discovering more of who I am beyond my social conditioning, education, wants, and fears. My sense of an identity has been attached to my relationship with the natural world and the jobs I have held in my life—production agriculture, agricultural education, sustainable forestry, watershed management, environmental job training programs—have all reflected this truth. Another aspect of my identity was the sense of being a victim of hurtful acts by others, neglect, and assaults of various kinds. Bill Plotkin (2008) speaks of “pathological adolescence” where “some prepubertal children” are “involved in sex and drug addiction, homicides, and gang warfare” (p. 10). To this list I would add suicide. I have described some of my childhood experiences and wounding elsewhere, so I will not repeat it here. I will say, however, that it is largely to those young formative years that I go when I inner seek for answers that heal.

Will evoked the idea of chipping away at the conditioning covering our golden nature:

There was a story I heard about a Buddha [statue] that was covered with clay so a rival group wouldn’t steal and destroy it. And so, it was covered with clay for years and years and this little town had forgotten, they didn’t know the value of this Buddha. Then there were some kids in the lap of

this Buddha statue and they were chipping away at it, or something broke off, and they saw the gold underneath. In a way, that's a great metaphor of how, as soon as something cracks in us, we have the sense of our own gold, that's why we have to chip away. And, I think, in some ways, the Work That Reconnects is a process of doing that.

I see the patriarchal capitalistic structure and the requisite social masculine norms as the clay covering this golden Buddha, the inner gold that men and all people have within them. This chipping away at the clay, or patriarchal conditioning, shifts my identity with each chunk that falls. My co-researcher Bragi said,

My spirituality has probably deepened and broadened. But I've been on that path for a long time, for broadening that whole conception of how I'm appreciative of my life, where I was raised, what I learned, experienced, how I benefit from that experience. But that doesn't mean I've evolved from that now, but my sense of spirituality has broadened.

Speaking for myself, we're all works in progress.

Many of my co-researchers have been on the path Bragi spoke of for years (Bogai, Bragi, Daniel, Matt, Rocky, Will) and came to this group with each having reached enough knowledge and experience to be seeking more from life. Bogai says he "was doing engaged Buddhism at the time" while also being "an environmentalist and a frustrated activist." His identity as a Zen meditation student and instructor orients him in "doing a bodhisattva job," which he can "overlay that bodhisattva job description and ... mesh [it] with the Work That Reconnects." Bogai ended this thought by saying, "I have to pass along the vision."

My youngest co-researcher, Daniel, was also the youngest participant at the 2012 men's retreat and identifies as a "social activist and community organizer" who "gets shit done." He has been politically active since his mid-

teens and through all of his actions he has been “so aware of a deep and pervasive need, the suffering of fragmented, small, lustful, caught in the trap of desire, unaware of self, and other ... how much [he] was unconsciously at the mercy of the lust and desire.” He was able to work with these impulses in a group of men and as a result “of that initial retreat,” he said, “I was following a deep ancient soul longing to find elders to initiate me into my adulthood,” perhaps a calling to find self and clarify his identity. He said, “the value for me is not the retreat or facilitation ... what actually helped my life was the long-term relationships” (Daniel). More awareness and meaningful relationships—these are values of doing the work together. “I mean, all this self-cultivation is also the Work That Reconnects” (Bogai).

Relationship between generations is important in creating a sense of self, as with Will, who said “a lack of male mentors, I think, put me on shaky ground in terms of my identity.” Mirroring this, Daniel shared, “I’m passionate about intergenerational mentorship structures on the city level, so people can learn from others in their neighborhood, in their community.” Bogai, speaking of his “charges in Springfield,” said “I’m seeing young men ... that’s the Jonnie-Too-Bad set of being violent in the city ... I’m going to be working with these young men, absolutely.” Rites of passage, initiation/acceptance into adulthood, and ceremonies that celebrate our shared experiences (e.g., dawn, dusk, water, cultural diversity, the nonhuman world, and the Earth) brings meaning and value into my life. I use the term *ceremony* to mean the spontaneous creation, in the moment, of an activity, celebration, or the bestowing of a blessing of something or someone.

Dreams are another way humans have looked for guidance “from the earliest times, believing they contained wisdom from the spirit world (M. Brown, 2009, p. 24). For example, ceremony and dreams are woven into Will’s identity as well as his involvement in the Work that Reconnects.

It was just the day-world sometimes feels pretty flat and if you start to bring in dreams, you bring in ritual, that’s almost like going from black-and-white to color ... these are ritual, dream-world things, some widening of the circle of communicating between humans to humans. Let’s take an example of when we did a drum journey with Kahn. These are all, to me, doorways to opening soul, to greater awareness, that feels almost like some of the most important work, because it gets us out of our normal realm of thinking. It moves from up here [in the head], down more to the heart, to the gut.

For Duffy, it is a sense of interconnection ...

Before I got involved with the Work That Reconnects, Joanna’s Buddhist philosophy and systems theory stuff really stressed Paticca Samuppada (dependent co-arising), which enlightened me in a sense, to some degree ... in the old sense in that I mentally grasp it ... this inner connection of everything.

Intellectual knowing is a valuable asset, yet for me, the real power is in the introspection. According to Duffy, however,

[I] had to work on my compassionate side because I kind of had this colder crystalline understanding of the inner connection of all things and this dependent co-arising was what really drew me to the Work, because even though I consider myself a compassionate person, I really didn’t understand. I didn’t really exercise it.

Getting in touch with his compassionate side “as a direct result of the Work That Reconnects” gave him “the confidence” and enough capacity “to have some integrity” to quit working on military contracts and follow his dreams in music and performing. He also dreams of “taking people into nature who want to express themselves through their voices and instruments” as healing tools into

damaged places, such as forest “clear-cut or where a dam may be broken down.” This is a far cry from the “cold and crystalline” identity he once held.

Although we each have some form of identity, “we’re not special or privileged. We’re there because generations of our ancestors lived and died and managed to pass on their genes so we could be here” (Rocky). Rocky continues, “the journey into the depths of my soul, the soul journey, that deep journey ... it’s just part of the journey not adulthood, into a full mature masculinity (Rocky). This journey can also be considered as a spiritual journey, even if one has “a very imperfect vision and understanding of what’s divine,” said Leon. He continued, “It also gives me some sense of understanding and peace with what I observe and what I feel and what I experience, and that’s kinda my spirituality.”

Ecological self. The *Work That Reconnects*, deep ecology, and several of Macy’s books introduced me to the language and vocabulary that gave voice to aspects of myself and my intuitive understanding of the world I am a part of. This came up in the stories of my co-researchers, which is why I chose having an ecological view of life as a theme.

A big draw with the *Work That Reconnects*, for me and others, was the idea of an *ecological self*. I wanted to hear more about this concept—an identity that arose from nature, from Gaia herself.

Joanna is also very appreciative and draws from a lot on ancient wisdom, of indigenous Peoples. I think that was also the first time that I was in touch with some kind of framework for those elements, in that kind of beautiful, and life-affirming, energizing way. I guess I see that upon our death, going back into that collective consciousness and coming forth again in the expression of that in biological life, but not necessarily the same being. (Leon)

This idea that life is continual—it is not oblivion at the end of physical life—and that we are embedded in the great cycle of life, death, and rebirth is comforting to me.

Matt resonated with the idea of Paticca Samuppada and the interdependence of all things:

it was a mind-expanding thing, her ability to link the ways they were all connected, not just to where we live and how we live, which I was pretty much already on to, but to link it to the way our ancestors lived, and the way future people will live; future generations. And to link it to both the micro-organisms, and the soil, and species that have already gone extinct. Just her way of expanding the way the whole cosmic soup is connected was really quite remarkable.

Thinking in living systems terms our sense of identity can be expanded beyond ourselves to include the Earth and the entire Universe.

Living in physical form comes at a cost, however.

We all live at the sufferings of the lives of other beings. There's not one of us, vegetarian or not; life eats life. You don't live on dirt. You live on living things that have to die so you can live. And so, there's this enormous debt that goes, you know, all the way back to the first bacteria. (Rocky)

Knowing and having respect, potentially through ceremony, for the lives that are given so we can live, be they animal or vegetable, encourages me to live a life that honors their sacrifice and be the best human I can imagine. This is reflected in Bogai's statement, "In the mineral world there are rocks and crystals; in the plant world there's green plants and flowers; in the animal world there's all these critters, what is the flower of the animals. Let's see what the flower of the animals is." I do not have a problem being an animal and wish for a flowering of humanity into a loving and mature species.

Awakening an ecological self has to be done in

connection with all these other people who are having similar questions in their lives, trying to find a deeper way of coming back to this sense of earth as being sacred. And our having to find a way to live in right relationship to the world, to nature, to Mother Earth, Gaia, if we're going to survive as a species. (Bragi)

Imagination plays a big role in developing a larger sense of self. "A vibrant, active imagination is a requirement for healthy human development ... or a compassionate, just, sustainable world" (Plotkin, 2008, p. 130). Imagination is akin to

the dream world, and ritual, [which] to me is about being in community, has meaning and ... enriches my life quite a bit. So, I think there's a lot of ritual around the Work That Reconnects with the ancestor work where you have the future being and the ancestor present. (Will)

Having an imagination to identify as the planet, as does Bogai who said, "my Dharma name is Bodhigaia, which means Awakening Planet ... I manifest as the Earth," is imperative to healing society's wounds, becoming whole, and creating a sustainable world. It is possible, if our imaginations can hold that vision. There are no guarantees, but it is possible. Matt said, "I hope so because of future generations, in all species. So that expansiveness, being able to get the all-beings thing, kind of pulled that spiritual piece into the Work That Reconnects"; there is hope in that becoming the reality.

Discussion of Spiritual Foundation

I like the definition of spirit given by Bill Plotkin (2013): "the single, boundless, and eternal mystery that permeates and animates everything in the universe and yet transcends all—the land, the air, the animals, all peoples, our human creations, and our own bodies and selves" (p. 41). Brené Brown (2017) says, "spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably

connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion” (p. 34). Molly Young Brown (2009) describes the definition of spirituality used in psychosynthesis as “pertaining to the realm of human experience involving values, meaning, purpose, and the unification with universal principles, patterns, energies, and the Divine” (p. 205), which includes the themes values and purpose. These descriptions of spirituality offer or invite an actively lived relationship with the wholeness of life and the creative fullness of the Universe. Knowing we are part of something larger than ourselves and “cultivating a personal relationship to spirit (unmediated by priests, priestesses, or other clergy) is essential to our personal development” (Plotkin, 2008, p. 42).

Work That Reconnects is an evolving body of group practices based on systems theory, deep ecology, and Buddhist teachings (Macy, 2007, Introduction, para. 5), which are directly or indirectly reflected in the statements above. The Buddhist “vision of a co-arising world, alive with consciousness” shows us three important things:

It shows us how profoundly we’re entangled in the web of life, thus relieving us of our human arrogance and loneliness. Second, it frees us from having to have it all figured out ahead of time, for the solutions arise as we walk the path and meet each other on the road. And, lastly, it reveals our distinctiveness as humans: our capacity to choose. (Macy, 2007, Chapter 2, Larger Body, Larger Mind, para. 8)

From my experience I posit that our capacity to choose wisely is dependent upon our knowledge of the core values that we hold and use to build our worldview. To know if a value we hold is ours or someone else’s or socially conditioned, we

must know who we are beyond our conditioning and learning. This is a spiritual journey to discover who we really are.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2006) says, “In order to bring about a great change, we need to revive and strengthen our inner values” (p. 2).

If you do not have insight into the way you yourself and all things actually are, you cannot recognize and get rid of the obstacles to liberation ... without insight you cannot address any problem at its root or remove the seeds that might produce it in the future. (p. 39)

Having the realization that all things are inextricably connected in the web of life is a spiritual awakening. What the Buddha realized under the bodhi tree was *paticca samuppada*: the dependent co-arising of all phenomena, in which one cannot isolate a separate, continuous self (Macy, 1991, 2007). The reason this is important is that this “spiritual awakening moves us to a more expansive context for growing and learning” (M. Brown, 2009, p. 139). We can expand our identity of self to include other people, nonhuman entities, nature, the Earth, even the universe—should we choose to be that expansive.

“The crisis that threatens our planet, whether seen in its military, ecological, or social aspect, derives from a dysfunctional and pathological notion of the self” (Macy, 2007, Location 2329). It is common talk today that humans may be facing extinction along with many other life forms. Historically, humans have faced plagues, wars, and personal death but always within the context that human life will continue. For the first time in human history, we have lost the certainty that there will be a future for humans (Macy, 2007). There is no convincing argument that men are not, through the structure of patriarchal industrial capitalism, largely responsible for the destruction, pain, and suffering

we see in the world. As Katz (2006) states, “we’re not guilty because we’re men, we’re responsible because we’re men—either for speaking out or for not speaking out about other men’s violence” (p. 25). As men, we need a spiritual awakening because men “learn the code early and well, don’t cry, don’t be vulnerable; don’t show weakness—ultimately, don’t show you care” (hooks, 2004) and that cycle needs to be ended.

Spirituality in this group of men covers a lot of territory and largely embedded in an ecological world view. Even when coming from a strict or devoutly religious family, nature was very important in developing the co-researcher’s sense of identity, values, and world view. I consider this quest a spiritual journey and support the idea that “practicing self-awareness is the first step in our journey to wholeness” (M. Brown, 2009, p. 9). Brown continues succinctly “wholeness and spirituality are inevitably intertwined” (M. Brown, 2009, p. 133).

Having a calling or hearing the “call to adventure” can mean it is time to “inherit a greater life,” which is both “a great crisis and unsurpassed opportunity” because “our old way of life has been outgrown ... our familiar goals, attitudes, and patterns of relationship no longer fit our sense of who we are” (Plotkin, 2008, p. 249). For me and most of my co-researchers, the desire for more meaning came later in life, the result of dissatisfactions, obstacles, or life disruptions; in other words, at some pivotal point where things needed to be addressed. In participating in the group activities of the Work That Reconnects, “other people are a mirror;

the group is a mirror. You have to see your intention ... dialogue will help collectively to bring about a different kind of consciousness” (Bohm, 1996, p. 29).

This awakening can be “painful and confusing” as we “may need to face something about ourselves that we do not want to see ... we may be reluctant to glimpse our potential because we will also see how far we have fallen short of it” (Brown, 2009, p. 139). The Work That Reconnects is done in group and

the more we’re willing to seek moments of collective joy and show up for experiences of collective pain—for real, in person, not online—the more difficult it is to deny our human connection, even with people we may disagree with. (B. Brown, 2019, p. 129)

Working together,

if we embed ecological values, if we focus on relationships, if we position learning as a core value, if we seek to behave as partners in life, then we have a strong chance to manifest, to self-organize as individuals living and working purposefully together in healthy community. (Wheatley, 2017, p. 229)

The less we are grounded in a more inclusive understanding of the interconnection of all phenomena, nature, people, and animals, the easier it is to deny the seriousness of the fix we’re in or what it is going to take to fix it (LaConte, 2010).

Native American author and theologian Vine Deloria Jr. (1992) says, “It remains for us to learn once again that we are a part of nature, not a transcendent species with no responsibilities to the natural world” (Introduction, para. 8). But “modern society has foreclosed the possibility of experiencing life in favor of explaining it. Even in explaining the world, Western people have misunderstood it” (Deloria, 1992, Chapter 17, Religion Today, para. 25). We have become

spiritually disconnected [with] a diminished sense of shared community ... the only thing that binds us together now is shared fear and distain, not

common humanity, shared trust, respect, or love. A feeling of “being afraid” to disagree or debate with friends, colleagues, and family because of the lack of civility and tolerance. (B. Brown, 2017, p. 33)

The Work That Reconnects provides a framework and practices to help overcome this disconnection and rebuild our relationships and communities if we choose to do the work.

“We have the ability, through our moral imagination, to break out of our temporal confine and let longer expanses of time become real to us” (Macy, 2007, Location 2906), which allows us to be more inclusive, to have an expanded context for the events and identity of self. “The Integral Approach involves the cultivation of body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature” (Wilber, 2000, p. 26). What is needed is access to this body of work into the mainstream, to make the Great Turning a household term. Somehow, this work and work similar to it needs to get to the masses, into schools, community halls, and churches. “Perhaps the most important role for religion in the modern and postmodern world, [is] acting as a sacred conveyor belt for humanity” (Wilber, 2011, p. 193). Religion can be the vehicle to make this work available to the general public. A spiritual lens allows us to comprehend that

we are quite literally living in relationship with the Spirit we call God in every aspect of every minute of our lives, for we have no existence apart from this relationship. We have only the choice to be true to the relationship or to betray it. (Korten, 2006, p. 262)

The Five Factors: A Synthesis

In this chapter I have introduced and discussed the five key factors that were necessary for me to emotionally engage in the experiential activities of the Work That Reconnects and their themes. I have approached this inquiry using a

qualitative research design (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994) and in the tradition of phenomenology described by Martin Heidegger (1959/2013) and Hans Gregor Gadamer (2008). For collecting my data, I followed the qualitative three-part in-depth interview series outlined by Seidman (2013): life history, experience of the event, and the meaning and value of those experiences. For synthesizing the data, I incorporated methods from the *Coding Methods for Qualitative Researchers* (Saldana, 2013) and aspects of synergic inquiry (Tang & Joiner, 2006).

There is a wide variety of data contained in these stories and it is worth continuing to sift through for deeper meaning and value, gems of insight from lived experiences. In the category Tradition, it was clear that Joanna Macy, herself, as teacher and personality, is an attractor for people seeking this kind of group work, to the point of adoration. It is also evident that the Work That Reconnects, as a group method for learning and growing together, is an attractor of its own after more than 40 years of application around the world. The combination of Macy's person, knowledge, vision, and presence, combined with the Work That Reconnects as theory and method, has provided a powerful and transformative experience for tens of thousands of people in what is called by many the Great Turning (Korten, 2006; Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). This was true for myself and my co-researchers as well.

Intentionality

In this study, I and my co-researchers, with the one exception being Leon, were eager to register and attend these men's retreats because of Macy's presence and reputation, her skill as a facilitator of the work, and the effectiveness of the

spiral and Work That Reconnects. This is the tradition that I am reflecting on in these pages. This similarity among us is demonstrated in our care and love for this amazing woman as well as our trust in the value of the Work That Reconnects. Going into the retreat there was a commitment that was intentional and based on the knowledge of who Macy was and what might be asked of us during the retreat.

There was a common trust, faith, in the structural framework of the Work That Reconnects and the Spiral, the movement between Macy's teaching sessions and participating in small group activities or practices that invites the embodiment of these issues and teachings. There was also faith among us that everyone would honor the few rules that set limits on behavior and conduct, such as no crosstalk, no fixing, saving, or explaining something someone else said. I feel this faith emerged out of respect for Macy as well as the influence of the Buddhist foundation of peace and do-no-harm. Nonviolence, and therefore safety, is expected, which attracts people who are sensitive and amiable to these rules to attend.

Another common similarity between me and my co-researchers is that we were seeking something more in our lives—more meaning, purpose, healthy relationships. I had been practicing Tai Chi for a few years but was new to Buddhist practice when I found the Work That Reconnects. Every one of my co-researchers had some history of exploring and studying different forms of religion or had a spiritual practice, and although not exclusive, Buddhism was the most studied spiritual philosophy among my co-researchers. What is important here is

we all had a sense that we were part of something bigger and greater than ourselves, be it a living planet, or conscious universe, or just an aspect of the natural world. Spiritual seeking seems to be a natural progression of trying to answer the existential question, “Is this all there is?” To have a calling, to seek more purpose and more community, finds good company in the Work That Reconnects as both practice and community.

Trauma

With few exceptions, most of us were engaged with a process of seeking after experiencing some pivotal moment which propelled us into acting positively on our own behalf. As with myself, many of my co-researchers had experienced one or more divorces and loss of access to children. Some had unexpected career changes, a health crisis, or suffered the loss of a loved one or ones. For me and my co-researchers, there was also a common history of child abuse, in the form of neglect, sibling violence, and parental violence, usually but not always from the father. Another similarity among us was the death of a close friend, sibling, or parent, which has had a lasting painful impact on each of us. There is a cultural taboo of acknowledging a man’s emotional pain (Golden, 2013) and to voice this pain aloud, in the company of other men—some total strangers—was frightening, cathartic, and healing for us all. Men are reluctant to open their inner lives to other men out of fear of being vulnerable, or unmanly (Katz, 2006). Using the tools of the Work That Reconnects and the Spiral, my co-researchers and I were able to remove some of the armor, risk vulnerability, speak from our wounded truth and, for some, develop their first close heartfelt kinship with another man.

Having the retreats be men only, except for Joanna Macy, was important in that the men needed to relate directly to each other without a feminine presence in the activities, and it changed the dynamics of the gathering. The similarity I felt with many of my co-researchers was the acknowledgment that there was an increased risk of judgment or violence from the other men present without the women. There was an added uncertainty to the event for me and others who felt safer around women. Consciously or not, women may hold a nonviolent, emotionally safe space for men, thus tempering the possibility of male-to-male violence during mixed-gender retreats. This deserves deeper inquiry as it is notable that the dynamic of the retreat shifts significantly, in different ways, for the men. It was evident that my co-researchers were grateful for and benefited from the relationships they developed with other men.

Vocabulary

It is important to consider the role of alexithymia, the inability to recognize and put words to emotions (Levant & Richmond, 2016), when considering how me and my co-researchers relate to and speak about their inner lives. A shared outcome for many of my co-researchers and myself was our introduction to a vocabulary that we could use to describe our inner feelings and emotions through the small group practices and relationships. It may seem simplistic, yet the inability to identify feelings and emotions or describe them makes for poor communication. Even if I wanted to, if I cannot identify my topic or do not have words to express it, I have little chance of being understood, even

by myself. Mahi expressed this clearly by saying, “I don’t know how to say it, it just feels bad, I don’t know what else to say.”

Having a common vocabulary and the opportunity to practice giving voice to our inner emotions and feelings in a group of men increases our communication skills, our listening capacities and contributes to building community. I feel that this new vocabulary and the ability to express my inner life in fuller and more honest ways had allowed deep and meaningful relationships into my life. It is a caring vocabulary that allows expression of differences and challenges in a way that is more supportive than oppressive, and I see it in my relationships with my co-researchers. I feel this has been integral to our group staying together for 10 years and is most evident when we meet as individuals, as a men’s group, or when facilitating the work.

My co-researchers, each of them, in some way, continues to apply the learning they gained from these retreats. Some, like myself, are actively organizing or facilitating Work That Reconnects; others are growing food, creating community through outreach and organizing, creating digital media and content, making music and theater. Many of my co-researchers spoke of the need for and responsibility of bringing this work, including multigenerational experiences, to other men and the public at large. A goal going forward after achieving my doctorate is to offer WTR workshops and retreats. My intention is to take the knowledge gained by conducting this study into retreats and workshops with the public and with men specifically, which compliments the desire in our group to host another WTR men’s retreat.

Inspiring Appreciation

There was appreciation from my co-researchers validating my desire to inquire into the stories of their experiences. After not seeing one of my co-researchers for five years, he said,

What's really touching me is, first your presence, it's alive! And it's really good to see you. I thought it was gonna be you because you were one of the memorable guys. I would have been disappointed if it wasn't. (Bogai)

I felt a deep sense of gratitude in hearing this because I always try to engage with honesty and integrity. Another said, "Thank you for being the story weaver and gathering all these stories. Thank you for being courageous enough to follow this through to fruition" (Daniel). Additionally, Mahi shared, "I admire you for taking on this project, I enjoy the conversation. I admire the intention of it."

I am humbled by this experience and to be a part of their unfolding.

I'm just really appreciative for what you are doing. It took a lot of courage from the first time I met you. I appreciate this whole process. I appreciate it because it's bringing up an alive part of myself that has been on the back burner, you're doing me a favor to bring up these questions. (Will)

I am blessed to hold the stories of my co-researchers, to know them this intimately, and to share their journey.

Awareness of Place

I was surprised by the minimal awareness of the retreat environments, the accommodations, food, and other comforts by my co-researchers. This is a variance between my co-researchers and me. From my first retreat in 2003 through the many retreats since, I can remember the basic layout of the hosting facility, in a general sense, and the land surrounding it in some detail. The awareness of place and space is important to one's sense of belonging and

connection (Abrams, 1996; Block, 2019) and although my co-researchers spoke of feeling comfortable, safe, and engaged to a high degree, a sense of place was not in their recollection as much as it was for me. I feel that males engaging together to intentionally create a space in which to pursue a specific purpose—be it a classroom, living room, or meeting hall—would help bring awareness to the importance of space and place. This includes the day-to-day chores of cleaning, cooking, serving, and cleaning up again. It may help men connect to a place and maintaining that space would be enhanced if part of a retreat’s activities would be for men to participate in tasks such as preparing food, cleaning their living area, and other daily chores.

CHAPTER 5: CONTRADICTIONS AND OPPOSITIONS HELD BY CO-RESEARCHERS

Contradictions, oppositions, and alternative ways of viewing the data always exist (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Recognizing contradictions and alternative interpretations of the data demonstrates the researcher's willingness to look at different or competing ways of synthesizing the data and to offer a balanced perspective for the reader. Through recognizing contradictions, omissions, and alternative ways of interpretation, the subject being investigated can transform and evolve into something greater than it originally was. In this chapter I discuss contradictions, critical concerns, and unaddressed patterns that my co-researchers held about the structure and practices of the Work That Reconnects.

There were no critical statements pertaining to Joanna Macy or her facilitation; however, there were critical observations about important topics such as issues with a retreat as a model for personal and social change, homophobia, how cultural conditioning can infiltrate the retreat environment disrupting the sense of community, exclusion of marginalized communities, and issues of white privilege. I address each of these concerns below and end the chapter with a brief discussion on what was learned. This examination is done with the goal of helping clarify areas that may be limiting the effectiveness of the Work That Reconnects and to help it evolve as a theory and practice.

Issues With the Retreat Model

Daniel was the youngest member of the 2012 men's retreat held in the Santa Cruz mountains, California, a lifelong East Coast resident. He has been both a community, political, and organization organizer since his high school years and sees through the organizer lens. As an organizer, Daniel did not see much value in the retreat model in general, preferring to organize directly in the communities, build coalitions, and participate in advocacy groups. He said, "I'm wanting to really convey that the value, for me, is not the retreat or the facilitation. What actually helped my life, in the long term, is the relationships." As we have seen in the data, the building of honest relationship during the retreat was an important benefit for the men coming out of the event. Building relationships is a stated goal in the set-up of the retreat space and I think Daniel is missing an important point of the WTR retreat model.

So, I think that the retreat is one thing, but if the retreat can be a mechanism by which we repair the broken relationships in our society then that's so much more important, that's more like transformation and not just change. Maybe it starts with a retreat for the Work That Reconnects, but with the intention that these people will be in dialogue for a year for two years and be studying and transforming together. I think retreat models are too limited and slow for it to happen. I think we should just skip past that and develop intergenerational mentorship in communities and social networks. (Daniel)

I believe there are additional missed points in Daniel's statements.

With the right synergy, the retreat can be the "mechanism" through which we begin to "repair the broken relationships in our society," and this is why there are several methods for facilitator training and support. I feel that learning together, risking together, weeping together, laughing, and being inspired together solidifies the knowing that we are in this chaotic time together. I agree that the

retreat has a limited use: it has a specific purpose, time, and place; a beginning, middle, and end. Therefore, I feel that creating intentional space is so vital for inviting the experiences to be full and rich. A lot of good for the world can be created through these activities and practices.

Secondly, the retreat is not meant to replace direct action in one's community. It can augment it by connecting us with like-minded people to be inspired by in gaining the courage and support necessary to take those actions, but it cannot replace them. The retreat is meant to be a catalyst, an incubator, a training ground that offers a method and structure that can help to create those actions needed in one's community. Whether it is sitting with community members trying to build consensus or sitting in a group of like-minded community leaders intentionally using the spiral to guide their discussions, people need to meet, talk, and come together. It is not community or retreat, it is both. In the *Work That Reconnects* we speak of this as having communities of practice, caring communities (Eisler, 2002, 2008), or islands of sanity (Wheatley, 2017).

We learn to introspect and reconnect with our emotional self in truth, then speak to others from that place, honestly, respectfully, and intentionally, with sensitivity and authenticity. This builds trust that leads to feelings of safety and belonging and leads to communities held together with healthy relationships. This is the healing we need, and it can start in a workshop or retreat if invited and embraced.

Having men interact with each other in a deliberately planned, intentional space where honest introspection and communication is invited; the *Work That*

Reconnects is all about building relationships that grow, thrive, and bring about positive change outside of the retreat. These relationships are developed through doing the practices together, developing trust, and leaning into vulnerability with other men. Raised by a single mom, Daniel admittedly has a lot of resistance to male influence, myself included. “I’m feeling resistance and so it may be residual from that experience or just resistance to this moment” (Daniel). The men’s retreats were largely attended by older, educated, professional white men and I think factored into how he put value on the workshop and his experiences. Although he participated in the retreat activities, I wonder if his resentment and resistance toward older men impacted his experience, thereby reducing the value for him. In an important way, this retreat was a success for him in that he developed a relationship with another participant there who counseled him, helping him realize how he had taken sexual advantage of a young woman and his responsibility for his actions. This interaction has led him into a new way to be involved in healthy community development, but he does not see value in the retreat as a catalyst for this relationship to develop.

Also, to some, retreats become islands of experience. As I mention in the discussion of tradition, Joanna Macy is a worldwide respected teacher and visionary, as well as a systems and Buddhist scholar. For over 50 years she has been engaged in social activism and has established a legacy that will live on after her passing. She is both spiritual teacher and celebrity, and in attending a retreat with her one can assume bragging rights for having done so. This does not imply that there is no benefit for the people who are attracted by her status and legacy,

but it also doesn't imply that these people change their habits and live their lives from a spiritual or ecologically connected state. Attending a retreat can be like a mini-vacation to a rare exotic place with interesting people; it can be pleasant, inspiring, invigorating, eye and heart-opening, and exclusive.

“Joanna's is more of a modern approach, even though it is based in Buddhism, so, in that sense, I usually think of the work with Joanna as islands of workshops. You know, an archipelago of workshops, you might say” (Duffy). Duffy's feeling that a retreat or workshop is like going to a festival, something we experience and then go back to our regular life afterward, is reflected by other men (Bragi, Will). Retreats with Joanna can be like feathers in the cap—look at how many I have been to! One can claim the experience without changing their habits or lifestyle to match the teaching. Although the purpose of these retreats is not to be entertainment, but to change perspective, life choices, and social involvement, it doesn't stop the novelty of being in retreat with Joanna.

There could also be an element of self-deception, faux spirituality, or simply satisfying the urge to feel like one is actively involved in change by occasionally attending a retreat such as the Work That Reconnects. Another way to say this could be that by going to an occasional spiritual or deep ecology style retreat one can relieve the guilt, sense of responsibility, or personal unease they feel inside about whatever it is that concerns them. Attending a retreat can be a periodic antidepressant treatment, a temporary inspirational break where one can feel good about themselves without changing their habits or behaviors. As islands of experience a WTR retreat can be a welcome and satisfying experience without

involving too much risk, but as a training ground for personal and social change, the same workshop or retreat can be transformational. It is up to the individual attendee to choose.

Another concern for some people is they feel the work requires a strong and qualified facilitator to maintain the rules of engagement. Wally is a water treatment engineer and requires control and predictability to allow himself to feel emotionally safe and engage with the practices. He is “more a life of the mind” person and needs well defined rules for engagement. “I’ve been in situations where people don’t want to have a leader or facilitator where it descends into chaos” (Wally). These people are “group busters,” who deliberately challenge the rules because they don’t like rules. I have not seen a group buster at any WTR event I have attended in 16 years. This may become more common as Joanna steps back and other facilitators step up to keep the work alive and growing. More significant here, I feel, is that Wally is not comfortable with ad-libbing and change during a retreat. Spontaneous restructuring is challenging for him and having no structure at all is a game ender. This need for structure is in total contrast to Matt, a retired psychologist and small-scale organic farmer who denies the need for structure and wants no rules at all, total free form, so as not to stifle anything that needs to come up. This difference was too much for Wally, who eventually left our Lost Valley Men’s Group.

Bringing the Work That Reconnects into new communities with a diversity of people and needs necessitates that facilitation become increasingly skilled. This is not due to the difficulty of applying the model or practices, since

“as Joanna says, anyone can do this” (Wally), it is because of the people involved and how they engage with and respond to the work. There is no doubt that the more complex and diverse the community, the more important thoughtful and inclusive facilitation will become. Although stated elsewhere, to remind the reader, the facilitator(s) of a WTR retreat or workshop also participates in the activities—they do not sit separate from and dispense their wisdom from above. I believe this is spiritual work and should be taken as such.

Bragi, through his lens of mental health and art, is concerned with facilitation that sees to the emotional needs of the attendees. People respond differently to engaging in some of the activities, like the Truth Mandala or Deep Time activities that can stir deep emotions, and care needs to be taken to bring participants back into a present state of mind before ending a retreat or workshop.

You have to find a way to gradually bring people back to the present reality again, before they leave that space. You don't leave them open and vulnerable, and there's certain processes which unless there is a really strong container, could leave people really open and vulnerable, leaving the place feeling pretty raw. (Bragi)

Bragi's emphasis is on ethics and quality facilitation, the responsibility to care for the attendees. This is sacred work. Allowing ourselves to truly feel the anguish over the pain and suffering we see in the world can provoke intense emotional responses. It is irresponsible to leave participants in turmoil at the end of the retreat or workshop. Efforts for closure and completion during the retreat emerge through the practice of making room for anything else that needs to be said at the end of each session, and a closing ceremony that includes the dismantling the altar, item by item, person by person. This helps with bringing closure physically,

emotionally, and spiritually to the event, recognizing that our intentional space is complete until the next gathering.

There is a downside that emerges through the men's awakening to the patriarchal social conditioning and exploitive consumerism of our current social order and its history well beyond the retreat. Life decisions can become difficult "in that in some ways it makes it harder because you can't go back [to sleep] without denial—it makes it harder" (Bragi). This reminds me of Drew Dellinger's (2011) poem Hieroglyphic Stairway, which asks, "what did you do once you knew?" (p. 1). It hurts to know the truth about the devastation, cruelty, pain, and death that occurs to people and to nature. After allowing the knowing to arise and the awakening to happen, without deliberate denial, one must live with that knowledge. However, it can be transformational to awaken to gratitude to the pain and suffering, to compassion, and to seeing the challenge as well as the potential to act that we hold in common.

The desire to not acknowledge the pain and suffering is evident when concerning the patriarchal structure of society. "We act as if none of it was there, because the realization that it does exist is a door that swings only one way and we cannot go back again to a state of not knowing" (A. Johnson, 2014, Location 575). I see denial as one of the pillars holding up the status quo of Western white supremacist industrial capitalistic culture, which can be revealed when engaging with the Work That Reconnects.

Concerns Regarding Homophobia

There was a recognition that for certain people issues with homophobia can come up in a few of the WTRs practices, such as The Cradling, done as a dyad where one person reclines on the floor and goes through a guided meditation of how certain body parts came to be, hand, wrist, arm, ankle, leg, while the partner is holding (cradling) that part, ending with cradling the head. Several of my co-researchers spoke about being uncomfortable touching or being touched by another man, even though they are supportive of gay rights and welcoming to the gay men who attended the men's retreats. One of the social masculine norms is a disdain for homosexuality (Mahalik et al., 2003), which has become deeply engrained in the Western male psyche. Homophobia also came up in terms of dinner blessing rituals where attendees stood around the tables holding hands while offering a blessing for the food:

That's something that in another context a lot of guys aren't going to be open to that way of connecting with each other. It's not that big a deal for me, but a lot of guys are going to go, "What kind of guys are you? Standing around holding hands." (Bragi)

Physical intimacy with other men is something men typically avoid at all costs due to homophobia and men's fear of femininity, which inhibits them from developing close relationships with other men (Meth & Pasick, 1990).

All three of our men's retreats were attended by younger gay men and I learned much from having them there; there were no visible outward signs of nonacceptance by any of the men. I remember doing the cradling activity with Wally, who is of medium height with a burly bear build. His hugs are bear hugs. Everyone did that exercise and there was no resistance because of the intention

and trust that had developed in the larger group, yet it was said with a grimace, “but you know that stuff in other settings is like highly re-stimulative of homophobia and stuff” (Matt). Duffy said, “I don’t like being touched by men. Especially in those days, I was younger and maybe a little homophobic—not homophobic—just, you know? But I remember it wasn’t so bad.” Duffy had a violent father and five brothers, and it might not be homophobia so much as a fear of being vulnerable in front of other men.

“What patriarchy accomplishes is to make men fear what other men might do to them” (A. Johnson, 2014, Chapter 3, Missing Links, Control, and Fear, para. 4). Feelings and vulnerability are rooted in the body, which means that in taking men away from their feelings, the pursuit of masculinity also takes them away from a connection with their own bodies” (Chapter 6, Sex in the Patriarchy, para. 22). Feelings that bring tears can be very confusing for some men:

You know how it is when your eyes start leaking and you don’t feel sad yet? It’s fucked up! Clearly, you’re crying, “Oh well, I must be sad” but beyond that, I wasn’t worried about it. I wasn’t worried about someone thinking I’m gay. (Wally)

Daily men face a prohibition against appearing needy and dependent in their relationships, in their family, and in their work. With this probation in place it is obvious that men simply don’t find public or open emoting to be a safe practice; rather, they see it as a place of harsh judgment and shaming (Golden, 2013, Kindle). I think it is a possibility that the reluctance to physically touch another man’s body, to even hold their hand or arm, has less to do with homophobia and more to being, or appearing, vulnerable in front of other men. It

also appears that the WTR structure and practices that can help men, and people, build a sense of trust and safety that encourages one to open up.

Embedded Racial Division

White privilege is widely interpreted as access to power and resources that is bestowed by dominant society, wanted or not (Alexander, 2020; DiAngelo, 2018; Kendall, 2013). White privilege is “an institutional, rather than personal, set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who hold the power positions in our institutions” (Kendall, 2013, p. 62). This privilege cannot be given back, even if recognized, and it can be hard to see for those who were born with access to power and resources (Kendall, 2013). Access to social justice, political power, and financial systems give whites “a privileged position within society and it’s institutions ... granted the benefits of belonging” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 27). Given that all my participants are middle-aged and older white males, it is not surprising that white privilege surfaces in their stories and in their behavior in the retreat setting.

Privilege and white privilege were discussed by my co-researchers in terms of social drivers such as class barriers, racism, limited access to information, free time, extra money, transportation, and health needs. Bogai spoke of his being born into abundance and growing up near Long Island Sound, north of New York City, going to private schools with access to summer youth camps and wilderness adventure activities, traveling, and going to a good college. Because of his access to financial security he was “protected from the injustice out there” in the world. “I’m privileged, so privileged—my encounters—I’ve

been in the wrong place at the wrong time, many times, and I've been told, 'you can go' where my non-white friends were detained" (Bogai).

Bogai, a Zen meditation student and instructor for 25 years, is "very conscious" that he "comes from a very privileged condition" and enjoys "mentoring and empowering people" to "address the human problem, promise, the crisis, the opportunity" and to "bring this work and meditation into the inner-city neighborhoods." Bogai wants to "give a voice to people who have had no choice, no power, or little opportunity to be heard ... to see if there is a community voice that is being drowned out." Due to his privilege, he has "been able to follow his interests," to look for ways his privilege can help inform and support those less advantaged, and bring the benefits of meditation into their communities.

Rocky comes from a military family, a rebellious youth living an outside-the-law life on the fringe of society. He is a pick-yourself-up, dust-yourself-off, and get-back-to-it kind of person. Self-reliance is big with him. After years of researching and working with Wilderness Rites of Passage, he is an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister and youth wilderness vision quest mentor. He lives in the Southwest, where the population is largely Hispanic; there are people from old Spanish families, Mexicans, white people of European descent, and a resurging Native community. There are very few Black people living in or near his community and in his view "so much of racism tends to get binary into the whole Black-White frame" (Rocky). His community struggles with colonialism

and racism as a result of the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors 500 years ago, which continued with the immigration of European Puritan settlers.

In experiencing local racism in more of a Brown–White framework, Rocky said, “there’s a certain amount of siloing going on. The Natives keep to themselves; they’re recovering their heritage; they’re not interested in someone coming in and saving them.” The community “recognizes our Hispanic allies particularly around issues of immigration and economic justice, we’re not there to tell them what to do, they’re perfectly capable, they’ve been doing the struggle for quite a while.” While

the older Hispanics consider themselves white, the Mexicans consider themselves brown ... city government is probably about half Hispanic and half Anglo. There are efforts within the Hispanic community to get their youth engaged in outdoor recreation, but the whole outdoor recreation thing has always been for the whites, people with spare time and money. (Rocky)

Concerning racism, he feels

that for the people involved, it is the most salient thing ... the trauma ... the history [of oppression]. For black people, the cause is anti-racism, for whites in not, even though we’ve benefited and continue to benefit from it. It works if everyone in the room admits their biases, we’re working on them together, but when people come in and say, you over there, whatever your thing is, you need to work on your biases, it just doesn’t work. You have to be more than an ally, or you’re just sort of a passive subordinate partner. Everyone has to be in the struggle for their own reasons and they have to be valid for those people. You can’t be in the struggle riding on someone else’s coat tails because it just doesn’t work. You can lead by example, you can provide pastoral care for people, provide an ear, comfort, but you can’t do stuff for people. (Rocky)

It all comes down to communication and “providing ways for people to connect with their passion, their burning interests” (Rocky). As a minister, Rocky sees his job as giving people the tools and support they need to move forward on their own. If that is “environmental justice, racial justice, or economic justice, I

think Active Hope is really a really useful framework for people, because it gives this reflection cycle ... and people can apply it to any kind of activism” (Rocky). Knowing who we are on the level of our core values and being able to dialogue with other people is key. “Reconnecting is about gratitude. It’s about connecting with your pain, your disconnection, your own grief, acknowledging that—reconnecting the world through new eyes” (Rocky). The more we know who we are at our core and are able to speak our pain and gratitude to others, the more we will be able to address issues such as the systems of structural racism and white privilege in a positive and meaningful way. These systemic structures are larger than one person’s attitudes and behaviors, yet to address them effectively takes self-awareness. In this way, all social change begins with introspection and self-knowledge.

Bragi has been an art therapy counselor working in the mental health industry for most of his professional life. In his youth he went to a Lutheran church camp and later became a camp counselor and camp director; he has had a personal relationship with nature since his youth. As an art therapy counselor in a psychiatric hospital, he has a lot of concern for his charges and their well-being as well as for other people, groups, and communities that are underserved and marginalized. “Not everyone has the opportunity to participate in these kinds of retreats. They’re expensive, generally, and you have to have enough ability to have time in your schedule to participate” (Bragi). Not everyone can take the time off work, have extra money to pay for the retreat, the transportation to get there, support to leave their home during the retreat, or have access to information

regarding the Work That Reconnects or other personal and social awareness retreats.

It's privilege, it's white. I mean, in some ways it's white privilege to be able to have the money and resources to participate in these kinds of retreats. I know a lot of people I work with, in the context of inpatient psychiatric hospital, where people don't have enough money to go to Breitenbush for the weekend. They don't have enough money even to come to Lost Valley for a men's retreat. You know, they're living on social security or disability, some people are working several jobs—migrant farm workers—they don't have that kind of space in their lives. (Bragi)

Bragi is acknowledging that marginalized institutionalized people, as well as those who are working at full capacity to just to survive, could benefit if they have access to and engage in building community with the Work That Reconnects.

However, given the challenges faced by these communities to just survive, Joanna Macy's retreat becomes a privilege outside the realm of possibility.

They're just faced with daily survival and having enough money to feed themselves. Or, the guys living on the streets, you know? In some ways they're the ones living the most simply of anybody (laughs). They aren't driving their Priuses to retreats, they're riding their bicycles. But why shouldn't they be helped, given these kinds of opportunities as well? To have these kinds of experiences. (Bragi)

Bragi said, "They could never afford a Breitenbush retreat. I call it Whitenbush, because it's mainly a lot of privileged, or privileged enough, people of European descent, Eurocentric generally. Most of the people facilitating workshops are Eurocentric" (Bragi).

I agree that the above observations are accurate. Many of the WTR facilitators and retreat participants are white overall; however, I have witnessed that there is typically more ethnic and cultural diversity among women attendees. There is no doubt that there needs to be growth in the area of extending this work

to underserved communities, but efforts to change this are underway. In this dissertation, I approach this condition as an area for growth, not as a problem, and promote the creation of new methods and practices that have value to marginalized groups that have not had the privilege or access to attend a retreat.

As an adolescent during desegregation, Wally went to school in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, at Eastwood, a primarily white school. He then transferred schools after the seventh grade “and went through eighth and ninth grades [at] Westlawn, [an] all black [school] ... bussed into the side of town that had the housing projects.” He said this experience was

interesting ... it's one of the best things that happened to me. I learned what it was to be deeply in the minority and to not be able to just say anything I wanted to say. I really do think that was a very helpful thing.
(Wally)

I can relate to his experience, having lived in the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest in a community of Achuar natives for eight months. I was the only white person within an hour's air flight and I was accompanied everywhere, even in the most personal vulnerable moments. The difference between Wally's situation and mine was choice. I was in a privileged position. I had the financial means, the liberty of time, and social connections to access this Indigenous community. I put myself in minority status by choice, not by some familial, institutional, or cultural framework.

Wally played in the school band and in his first school, Eastwood, “had an awesome band program” where the music program was financially supported and went to music competitions. They even “recorded an LP record” and went “to Atlantis for a contest” (Wally). When he transferred to Westlawn, “the band

program was just OK,” due to less financial and material support. At the time, the reasons for this disparity did not register with Wally, but later in life, experiencing activities in the Work That Reconnects and Deep Ecology, he had the realization of “Oh my god, being in the oppressor group and slowly figuring out what you and people who look like you have done to other people!” (Wally). He then experienced “guilt and shame” for unconsciously “having been in the oppressor role” (Wally). He said his experiences with the Work That Reconnects “helped [him] understand it as part of something more, [a bigger issue] and not sink under the guilt of it.”

This discussion stresses that access to the Work That Reconnects is still limited to a narrow, mostly white, privileged group of people and is not readily available to the mass public, the economically disadvantaged, communities of color, and other marginalized communities. This inaccessibility is largely due to social drivers such as class barriers, financial status, access to information, transportation, and time, to name a few (Alexander, 2020; DeGruy, 2005; DiAngelo, 2018; Klein, 2019). As important as it is to develop and implement ways for the Work That Reconnects to reach communities beyond the white privileged group of people, it is also important to remember the original framework and integrity of Macy’s original intention.

The framework of the Work That Reconnects is represented by the Spiral, the four steps along the roadmap of the work: gratitude, honoring our pain for the world, seeing with new eyes, and going forth (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2014). An original intention of the work, as I understand it, is to help

people, primarily the white, Eurocentric, patriarchal capitalistic socialized individual reconnect with themselves and their place in the world. The need for this is great, evidenced by the division and hatred being expressed by many white males against people of color, minorities, and social justice protesters across the United States and the globe. It is the white, Eurocentric, patriarchal capitalistic indoctrinated people, certainly white males, who need to be awakened to the damage of white supremacy, privilege, and fragility, more than any other group.

As we move to decolonize the language of the Work That Reconnects, I feel it is imperative that reaching those most socialized by the Western white supremacist mindset remain a focus of the work. It is this demographic that needs to be most awakened to the damage of white supremacy, privilege, and fragility.

Society

insulates them from race-based stress ... although white racial insulation is somewhat mediated by social class ... the larger social environment insulates and protects whites as a group through institutions, cultural representations, media, school textbooks, movies, advertising, dominant discourses, etc. (DiAngelo, 2011, footnote, p. 55)

Simultaneously, the Work That Reconnects is being introduced into new communities with a diversity of ethnic and cultural groups, many of which are facing social barriers as well as structural barriers to their ability to participate fully in society. They are facing a different reality than their white neighbors on many levels—economic, political, social. “The work to be done is particular to each cultural group” (DeGruy, 2005, Location 367). This is an area of growth and expansion for the Work That Reconnects.

The Work That Reconnects has proven successful and is ready for other groups to find ways and methods to adapt it to their life conditions (Macy, 2020).

However, “the nature of this work is such that each group must first see to their own healing, because no group can do another’s work” (DeGruy, 2005, Prologue, para. 8). This speaks to the need for ethnically and racially homogenous groups to come together and inquire into their own beliefs, pains, joys, core values, and needs for healing. “We all need to honestly and accurately evaluate ourselves, our actions, and the consequences we produce” (DeGruy, 2005, Chapter 6, Building Self-Esteem, para. 5). As these groups come into more understanding of their own condition and values, the more capable they are to relate to others.

The supremacy and privilege of the white population over African Americans and other non-white people is historical, deeply engrained in the patriarchal socialization, and so ubiquitous and expected as to be unseen by most whites (DeGruy, 2005; DiAngelo, 2013; hooks, 2004; Kendall, 2013). Under the Trump presidency, encouraged by the White House and the Republican party, and too often times ignored by law enforcement, white supremacists have been given a voice in the nation’s capital and this supremacy is on full display across national news (M. Miller, 2020). The 2020 coronavirus pandemic has exposed bare, in painful relief, the long unacknowledged racism in this country for all to see (Rothwell & Makridis, 2020).

White Privilege as Reluctance to Shadow Work

As noted earlier, my co-researchers and I are a highly homogenous group of mostly older, educated, professional white men, which was the norm at all three of the men’s retreats. We were there “with all of our unaware sexism, crassness, dominator patterns, and every god damned thing we’ve been

enculturated with” (Matt) and with that, we were unaware of our white privilege. This was most evident in the overall resistance to doing the shadow work, facing our pain for the world, in terms of the Work That Reconnects. Rocky said, “I’m not convinced that it’s useful or wise to always be stirring up shadow,” and Matt offered this perspective: “It’s frightening and when I’m frightened my perspective narrows ... I want rather the perspective of boundless awareness [of universal connection].”

It is a privilege to say, “I don’t want to deal with the painful things,” or if I do, I want it at a pace that does not make me uncomfortable. Even if they are not gun-wielding white supremacists, it remains “that whiteness is a social location of structural advantage and in a privileged position within society and its institutions” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 27). I am not expert on racism, yet I don’t think many Black people or members of other communities oppressed by the dominant norms can say, “I don’t want to deal with the painful things, it’s frightening.” Painful and frightening are simply part of their daily lives and have been for centuries, if not millennia. “Inequity can occur simply through homogeneity; if I am not aware of the barriers you face, then I won’t see them, much less motivated to remove them” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. xiii). Honoring our pain for the world, ourselves, and each other is necessary to heal and create a life-honoring society (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012).

Although there is reluctance to feel emotions such as grief, fear, pain, and guilt, in the Honoring our Pain for the World activities of the Work That Reconnects, there is also the recognition that it is important to do so for lasting

change, personal or social. “Many men are unable to speak their suffering ... their refusal is rooted in the fear that their weakness will be exposed” (hooks, 2004, p. 139). Pain for the world is natural and a part of our healing. In all life’s organisms, pain has a purpose; it is a warning signal, designed to trigger remedial action. “The problem lies not with our pain for the world, but in our repression of it” (Macy, 2007, Chapter 8, Pain for the World, para. 5).

Matt, the retired psychologist, said,

The thing about the going into the dark part and generating fear, it’s important not to deny it. It’s important to embrace the reality of it. It’s important to do what we can to stop the destruction and the horrors that are happening. It’s important to encourage the upward trend of all the good things happening in the world. And it’s important to spread the consciousness about all that. So, you don’t want to deny it, but what happens for me, what I’ve discovered, and this maybe more where the spiritual piece comes in is, who becomes afraid? The small I. Who’s afraid? Me. What am I afraid for? My life and the life of my kids? Or my whatever? It pins me to the ego, pins me to the small self.

It is interesting he uses the phrase “generating fear” as a part of his explanation. I experience the inquiry process as one of discovery, of finding what’s already there. There is no generating of fear for me, although there may be the discovery of it during my reflection. In facing our pain for the world and allowing our truth to arise in us, we may have to face something about ourselves we do not want to face. What we don’t want to face is what Matt is calling the small self. “The pain of our failure, our denial of the Divine in ourselves and in others, may actually stop us from allowing spiritual experiences into our lives” (M. Brown, 2009, p. 139). Entering into the pain and sorrow is not supported by patriarchal society and “Men are better able to fulfill the demands of patriarchy if they do not feel” (hooks, 2004, p. 70). “It does not take too many times of being

shamed for openly expressing emotions before boys, and later men start finding ways to make their pain invisible” (Golden, 2013, Location, 656).

Matt continued by saying, “There’s a little bit of a pull, I feel, sometimes in the WTR toward the darkness, toward the how bad it is, and how awful it’s going to be.” The second stop on the spiral is focused on looking at the pain and suffering of the world and its inhabitants, and it is imperative that we learn to face it squarely without flinching. I say that one cannot know what direction to go until they know where they are; otherwise, they are just wandering.

In [writing] my book, the realization I came to is that sometimes that’s not helpful because it makes people anxious and then they become more characteristically defended. And it doesn’t invite them out of that into a broader perspective, or next higher worldview. So, part of my thing is that by focusing too much on the dark we miss the light and that’s leaning in the direction of the emerging culture.

So, the dark part ... it’s frightening and when I feel frightened my perspective narrows, my world is smaller, and I don’t like that. I don’t want that. (Matt)

Rocky also had some trepidation about engaging with the activities that involved recognizing the pain and suffering in the world.

I have mixed feelings about that. Partly because I’m not convinced that it’s useful or wise to always be stirring up shadow. I think honoring our pain for the world, doing the shadow work, is important, but I think people need to approach it at their own [speed]—and there are different levels, you know, of pain for the world. (Rocky)

There is a reluctance to feel what needs to be felt—the pain, anguish, terror, and isolation, as well as the responsibility, shame, guilt, and knowledge that we prosper because of the suffering of many. This suffering has gone on in the past, continues in the present, and will go on for the foreseeable future.

I was a really sensitive kid and so for me I suffered through a lot of my feelings and at some point, I don’t know if I walled them off, but I think at

some point you just—you can't just keep poking the wound. You know? I got some scars there but it's not necessary to keep doing it. (Rocky)

It emotionally hurts to go there, so I don't want to go there. Avoidance can also be a privilege, but it does not aid in transformation. "In the journey into the pain, something foundational shifts; a turning occurs. When we touch into our depths, we find that the pit is not bottomless" (Macy & Johnstone, 2014, p. 70). People can find that they are not overpowered by despair but are motivated to act.

Even though there was a near unanimous resistance to doing the shadow work in the retreats, it did not stop me or my co-researchers from engaging in the activities to the degree we could. Even with his caution about doing the work, Rocky said, "I think honoring our pain for the world, doing the shadow work, is important." Matt mirrored that by saying, "that part about going into the dark and generating fear, it's important not to deny it [but] to embrace the reality of it." I found that the more I engaged in the work the easier and quicker I could get to that vulnerable spot and take emotional risks to emote in the presence of other men. "The willingness to risk came as I got to learn about the work ... I actually welcome the work" (Will). To have a greater tolerance for discomfort usually means richer conversations that lead to stronger teams as well as more creative ideas and decisions" (Kendall, 2013, p. 33).

Some of the hardest work I have done has been in allowing myself to truly feel my concern for the living systems of the earth, for mass extinction, for the brutality of war, and for children in cages dying without medical attention. But if we cannot face it, we cannot change it. "By speaking our concerns, and giving voice to our feelings, we make them more visible not just to others but to

ourselves. The more we draw issues into the open, the more inclined we are to tackle them” (Macy & Johnstone, 2014, p. 20). The Work That Reconnects offers a method that is conducive to building trust and relationship in a safe intentional environment that invites men to risk the darkness and stay in the tension long enough to emerge through the shadows into a broader awareness. When we face the despair together and support each other, we come out inspired and empowered to make a difference. The pit may be deep, but it is not bottomless.

Infiltration of the Outside World

A person’s social conditioning and inner wounding is not going to be overcome with a retreat or two; the conditioning is rooted deeply into our psyche. It is also true that it takes time to change social norms that are deeply rooted in structures of gender and power (Katz, 2006, p. 7). When we go into retreat, we “hope all of our [emotional] baggage gets left at the door so we can be present for the moment” (Bragi), but that is sometimes easier said than done. The outer world can infiltrate into the retreat environment and group relationships, weakening the personal bonds and compromising the trust. “Self-interest is a far more powerful motivational tool than is concern for social justice” (Katz, 2006, p. 40) and can come into play at any time.

Our Lost Valley men’s group that formed after the first WTR men’s retreat in 2007 experienced a partial breakdown because of self-interest trying to establish power over the group. On one of our annual men’s group gatherings, there was a breakdown in relationship between me and two men in the group I’ll call Rick and Mike. The three of us had carpooled from California to Oregon for

the gathering and during the long ride, I brought up a topic that the others disagreed with. I feel Rick misinterpreted what I was saying, but he was offended or angered, and he would not hear anything I said to the contrary. No matter how hard I tried to explain, he was not to be satisfied and loudly and critically berated me for several hours while we were driving. I eventually just looked out the side window while he railed. Mike, who is active in the WTR community, witnessed the exchange, supported Rick, and added to Rick's criticism.

This continued for hours until we reached the retreat center. After registering I went into the dining hall where Rick followed and started berating me again. I got tired of it and in strong verbal terms convinced Rick he had gone too far and that he needed to leave me alone. Duffy was in the dining hall and witnessed Rick's behavior and came over to help de-escalate the situation. However, when trying to work through this issue within our group of men, Duffy refused to tell the group what he saw. He said, "I don't want it to look bad for Rick." Both he and Rick are musician-singer-songwriters and have a close bond through that as brothers in creativity. The outcome of this refusal to speak truth to this emotionally difficult topic was the disabling of relationship within the group. It is a form of othering, blaming someone else for something one does not want to address, recognize, or accept within one's self; the projection of an unwanted trait or behavior on another or scapegoating. In terms of patriarchal social masculine norms (Mahalik et al., 2013), admitting a truth that is not comfortable, or exposes emotions, indicates one not in control, dominant, or winning.

I understand through personal experience it is not easy or painless to look at and accept unwanted aspects within one's self. This can be magnified by the need for a man to be in control, to dominate, and to win, all aspects of Western patriarchal capitalist social conditioning. This denial can be backed up with aggression (another masculine social norm of behavior) as a means of establishing control or domination. When issues such as this involve other people, due to the reality that an aggressor is not aggressive with every person they encounter, it can be an impediment to healthy group relations. It reveals a limitation in honesty and authenticity when it comes to maintaining a socially constructed and approved masculine identity over the appearance of being weak or wrong. For men (people) to have and maintain meaningful and healthy relationships, questions that value appearance over honesty need to be addressed.

Disabling Relationships

Concerning the issue described above, during the interview process Duffy said,

I mean, I was disappointed at some of the things that happened among some of the men of the group. I guess that's life. Where there will be some bickering and arguing and falling out and where they could not find their way back in. So, yeah, I think the group failed in some ways. But then again, maybe it wasn't a failure, it was just the way it was meant to be. (Duffy)

After 10 years he still cannot directly address this situation, his participation in it, or tell the truth of what he witnessed. Rick and Mike left the group, but Duffy has continued to be involved to the point of participating in this study. However, there is some part (or parts) of him that hinders him from facing and addressing this issue, be it social conditioning, life experience, fear, or simply not wanting to be

involved. For me, there is a sense of betrayal and a diminishment of my trust in Duffy, while at the same time I care for him deeply.

Another co-researcher from the group who stopped attending our gatherings in 2010 remembered that weekend retreat and was shocked this issue was still unresolved. That was

the weekend when things started going way nonlinear, when you drove up with Mike and Rick. Ten and a half years. How many different pieces of it haven't been resolved? That I'm still learning about new impacts from it. That you're still struggling like hell to be heard—at least be heard.
(Wally)

Wally continued by saying,

It's a shame they can't hear you, really hear you, and you're just being shut out and you're not—I still hate it. I hate it. I still haven't learned how to deal with that coming up in a group. And that it cost me a relationship with Mike, he was the one out of the crowd I was likely to stay close to because we had worked together more than anyone else [organizing the men's retreats]. But I never expected to eject anyone, particularly without making a conscious decision on the part of all of us to do so. That is where—you know—when somebody wants to pack up and jettison one member from the group and have the group decide that it was ok, bye! cut them out. I wasn't ok with that. It's not ok. That—isn't that part of what we're trying not to do? Is it? (Wally)

On behalf of the group, there was an attempt to rectify the situation and we held a council circle to discuss the events together, but without truth-speaking it was a hollow attempt.

Unintended Learning

Until conducting these interviews I did not know there had been this effort from Rick and Mike to evict me from the group. The whole point of our originally getting together was to challenge our male egos and social conditioning with the goal of developing honest, healthy relationships with other men. Here was our chance to do the work. For whatever reasons, Rick would not shift in his position

and Duffy would not speak what he witnessed. The effort failed and soon Rick and Mike withdrew from the men's group. This has been a long-term sorrow for me, and I reached out to both men with personal letters inviting them to participate in this study, so their voices could be heard. I also sent a study recruitment letter to a mutual friend, asking him to give them to Rick and Mike and talk to them about participating. I did not hear back from them and wish I had; it would have been valuable to have their input on this topic.

There are "many sadness's" connected to those experiences of breakdown with the men's group. According to Wally, "I don't think there's a way for this to be resolved satisfactorily for all. I don't know what to do with that." Personally, what I think needs to be done is to continue to gather as a group of men, utilize the framework of the Work That Reconnects, and work on these and other male issues. The more we do the work the more we can change and be affective in our lives, yet it takes courage and dedication to stay with the tension, be vulnerable, and invite transformation.

As a result of conducting this study and revelations from interviews, I was able to establish how I was not always respected and heard by members of our group over the past 10 years. Duffy owned that he has been an active participant in condoning this treatment, which is to his credit; it is not easy to admit when one has transgressed against someone called a friend. "You are right," Duffy said,

We have done this to you many times, I see that now. Why have you kept returning and being a part of our group? I mean, here you are doing this fantastic work, going to all this trouble with us. Why?" (Duffy, from interview notes)

I have asked myself this question often over the years while driving from California to Oregon for a three-day gathering. Truth is, I love these guys and my life would be less without them.

“It’s an overwhelming experience to me and I am glad you’re digging into it to see what was valuable to people, men, who were introduced to the Work That Reconnects however they got there” (Wally). It has been overwhelming for me at times, too. I have kept coming back to this group of men, despite the challenges, and doing this work because I feel there is value in the stories of these men. There is something here that will help other men who are ready to begin the journey of freeing themselves from the demands of patriarchal masculinity and accepted social norms of behavior.

This narrative is an example of how a disagreement between men (people) can cause widespread damage to relationships and group dynamics. Patriarchal masculinity is embedded deeply into the male psyche. Introspection, honesty, and vigilance should be the priorities, in addition to regular meetings to do the work and build new pathways for relationship. We know from neuroplastic research that every sustained activity (e.g., physical, sensory, learning) changes the brain as well as the mind (Doidge, 2007). To build on that thought, repeating situations where men challenge their inner patriarchy and socialized ideals of maleness with sensory engagement help create new neural pathways that change brain physiology; “neurons that fire together, wire together” (Baars & Gage, 2013, p. 85). Changes in our neurology change our lives, and just as society changes us,

we can change ourselves, which will in turn change society, hopefully in a never-ending dance.

Synthesis of Contradictions and Concerns

In this chapter I have presented and discussed five areas of concern or contradictions gleaned from the interview narratives: (a) issues with the retreat model as a vehicle for personal and social change, (b) homophobia, (c) white privilege, (d) reluctance to do shadow work, and (e) infiltration of the outside world into the retreat environment and relationships. Of these five areas of concern, issues with the retreat model are the easiest to address. I see the other four concerns—white privilege, homophobia, egoic intrusion from the outside world, and the reluctance to do the painful shadow work—as inseparable from each other and aspects of patriarchal social conditioning.

Perceived limitations within the WTR retreat model, or any retreat model, can also be seen as perceived limitations within a person and be access points for introspection; the more one puts in the more one gets out of the experiences. As I see it, the purpose of the WTR retreat is to be a vehicle for awakening to the needs, both personal and social, that activate action in our communities. By inviting participants to look at the issues straight on as a group, we find we are not alone: we can share our vision, skills, and inspiration with each other to act with purpose, creativity, and solidarity. Until we unblock our feelings about the threats to planetary ecosystems and the possibility of the extinction of our species, “our power of response will be crippled” (Macy, 2020, p. 74). I believe this crippled

response hinders communication between cultures, ethnic heritages, genders, classes, people, and communities.

Due to the intimate nature of some of the activities in the Work That Reconnects, some activities (e.g., the Cradling described earlier where one physically touches another) were difficult for some of the men. They were able to do the activity, but they were not completely comfortable doing it because of male-to-male contact. Disdain for homosexuality is one of the 11 masculine norms identified by the social masculine norms inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003). At each of the three men's retreats we held there were several gay men at each retreat who engaged deeply with us straight guys, building trusting connections and expanding our awareness of gender and sexual preference issues. A. Johnson (2014) says that the reluctance of men to touch other men is more about the appearance of attraction than it is about sex. The potential appearance of being attracted to another male by holding hands and silently gazing into their eyes for a moment of recognition, as in a Milling, can cause a reluctance to participate in such activities.¹ However uncomfortable the activity, my co-researchers talked about how they helped build trust and connection, and said they got easier with each activity and relationship.

The intrusion of the outside world entered the group in the form of a person (or persons) exercising power-over another person as well as the situation,

¹ The Milling is a group activity where people silently mill about the room and are occasionally guided to stop in front of another, hold their hands, and consider what possibilities they may contain to help achieve a better world in their lives.

winning the argument, displaying aggression, and angling for position within the men's group. I feel it is inevitable that these issues will arise in a group of men working on men's issues. If it is expected, then, it should be planned for as well; appropriate activities are necessary to address these behaviors when they arise. Ego driven and supported by patriarchal social conditioning power-over, "traditional masculinity rests on such an insecure foundation of wonder, smugness, or dread, depending on one's position on the [social] ladder" (Real, 1997, p. 181). For me, shifting from power-over to power-with is a long-term goal that begins with people, specifically men, facing and confronting their social conditioning, claiming their core values, and a secure foundation of awe, creativity, and wisdom.

CHAPTER 6: DISSERTATION SUMMATION

The purpose of conducting this study was to inquire into the benefits to men who had experienced the Work That Reconnects. Due to a perceived shortage of men attending WTR retreats and given the historic damage wrought by Western white supremacist patriarchy (hooks, 2004), a secondary inquiry question arose: “Where are the men?” In this closing chapter I summarize the findings by focusing on their significance to the stated objective of this inquiry that seeks to identify the benefits of the Work that Reconnects for men. I end with a discussion of recommendations that emerged through insights and reflections from the data gathered.

Removing the Masculine Mask

In the patriarchal structure of society, a woman is given some leeway to publicly show emotions, but a man’s pain is something that people want to avoid as if it were taboo; if we have something taboo, we do anything we can so others don’t see it (Golden, 2013). “Men are basically forced to find ways to deal with pain that are not easily seen or observed due to this taboo” (Golden, 2013, Location 216), which usually means they stuff it down and privatize it. “Denial is a tried and true method of coping with disruptive, traumatic, or discomfoting information; it is much less painful than facing the truth” (Katz, 2006, p. 34). “Patriarchy demands of men that they become and remain emotional cripples” (hooks, 2004, p. 27). “They are choking it down, the pain, the despair, the confusion: they are following the patriarchal rules” (hooks, 2004, p. 88).

To cope with the pain of “never measuring up to expectations” and fears “of being vulnerable and real,” men tend to form “masks” or personas to live up to what defines a man (Howes, 2017, p. 7). These masculine masks protect, but they can persist for so long that one can forget what lies underneath: “we’ve lost track of where we end, and the mask begins. This is why it is not only terrifying, it’s painful” (Howes, 2017, p. 11). It is no wonder many men choose to do nothing, go into denial, or unfortunately get angry or even violent as a coping strategy.

In order to learn to work together it is first necessary to engage in a great deal of personal and collective introspection, which can be especially threatening to men, because as perpetrators and bystanders, they are responsible for the bulk of the problem. (Katz, 2006, p. 19)

The way through this morass of repressed and unacknowledged pain, shame, guilt, grief, and patriarchal social conditioning is together, as men, and collectively in our communities.

Having a lifetime of repressed, suppressed, and denied pain, it seems that we men can have a tremendous amount of stagnant emotional energy that feels as if we will be overwhelmed if we allow its presence. I know that was true for me. I can remember myself saying things like, “If I open to the grief, I will go crazy—insane—it’s too much—I’ll die”—all not true, but very real at the time. With loving, kind education, healthy home environments, wellness in our communities, and life-affirming social structures rather than life-threatening ones, we can minimize much of the effects of what creates, builds, and maintains this kind of personal shadow. However, in the meantime we have adults with huge cargoes of

emotional energy that needs to be released and healed, which is a large part of the work that needs to be done.

At the risk of being repetitive, it is important to note the demographics of my co-researchers and other men who attended these men's retreats once again. With few exceptions, the men were middle-aged and older, educated, professional, cisgender white males. There are many social drivers that benefit this demographic; however, it is significant to point out that this group of men is beginning to offer a counter to the social norm as they represent a population of privileged white males who question the status quo while seeking meaning, social connection, heartfelt relationships, and healthy communities. They are seeking a spiritual understanding and are committed to creating a livable human future.

These men have and recognize their privilege; they have access to resources, professional connections, and networks of like-minded people. Most are wanting to make a positive difference in the world before their time is up and being older, many retired, they have time to give. For me, this is the demographic of society that the Work That Reconnects was created to reach. In general, the Eurocentric, white supremacist, imperialistic, capitalistic, patriarchal industrial mind, and specifically the males of that demographic.

Learning to trust, to not hold back emotional connection, and be willing to engage in processes that deepen internal reflection are three big steps toward self-knowing and personal growth. It takes courage to trust, not hold back, and engage. In fact, this may be an indicator as to why more men are not showing up for these retreats. As we have seen, there is a resistance in my co-researchers to

acknowledging and allowing the pain they see in the world, either theirs or others', to enter their awareness even as they see value in doing so. Meeting the raw emotion of allowing the pain and suffering they have held back or denied may also be a powerful motivator to not sign up for a retreat and allow the emotions' entry.

Unrecognized White Privilege

Recognizing, accepting, and reconciling white privilege will take time and the structural racism within our society will not change unless those parties involved bring their best forward in honest, open, and vulnerable dialogue. In the process of addressing cultural, social, and ethnic inequalities with reflexivity, "reflecting on how our own social positions, biases, interests, and personality are implicated in ideas and actions" (Fisher, as cited in Macy, 2020, p. 95) is essential. As men learn to be vulnerable, when appropriate, they will experience better relationships and have more understanding of other men (people) and their ways of being. This can help make positive changes in how white cisgender males approach ethnic and gender identification, differences in sexual preference, calming social stressors for people of color and those expressing alternative lifestyles in the LGBTQ communities. To have more men who are self and culturally aware, who recognize their social conditioning, and are actively seeking ways of being more whole, less stressed, and involved in social change would be a good thing.

It is my belief that until they feel supported by other men, it will remain difficult for white patriarchal men to allow themselves to lower their emotional

defenses, learn to investigate their inner landscape, and embrace personal and social change. Helping men learn to support other men in this endeavor is the work I see needing to be done. It is the white professional male demographic that has the wealth, social status, and privilege to make a huge difference in changing the social paradigm. Women cannot do this alone; they need the help and support of caring and emotionally whole men. This work would not be possible without the leadership of courageous women who dare to speak out loud about their own pain and suffering have set the moral foundation of this work for decades (Macy, 2007) and it is time men step up and shoulder their part in the healing.

Importance of Dialogue

Understanding how and why men change their world views can only help empower those who are seeking a healthier masculinity, better ways of being, and a thriving human presence on Earth. There is a vital and synergistic relationship between cultivating personal wholeness and building life-enhancing cultures (Plotkin, 2013, loc. 510). There are many forms of oppression, such as the fear of pain, fear of despair, fear of not fitting in, fear of guilt, fear of distressing loved ones, and distrust of our own intelligence. Additionally, there is the fear of powerlessness; the fear of knowing (and speaking); the view of self as separate; one's attention being hijacked by mass media, job, and time pressures; and various forms of social violence (Macy & Brown, 2014). For a man adhering to the social masculine norms, admitting to any of the above comes with the risk of appearing out of control, incapable, and weak to peers and society (Baron, 2003;

Levant & Richmond, 2016; Mahalik et al., 2003). This, I believe, lies near the heart of the challenges we face as people, as nations, and as a global community.

Authentic dialogue among the stakeholders is a key issue to success and social transformation (Bohm, 1996), while the costs of denying our fear and repressing the pain are impeded cognitive functioning, impeded access to the unconscious, impeded instinct for self-preservation, impeded Eros, impeded empathy, impeded imagination, and impeded ability to process feedback essential for life (Levant & Richmond, 2016; Mahalik et al., 2003). It seems clear that addressing the impediments listed above is essential for creating health and well-being.

Although authentic dialogue may well be the key to social transformation success, the *how* of holding a dialogue long enough for men to do the needed inner work, to speak honestly without fear of ridicule, blame, shame, or other form of judgment, so that they can practice emotional vulnerability, truth-speaking, and perhaps most importantly, grieve, is still a question. It is my view the Work That Reconnects provides a dialogic, participatory, experiential model of personal and group work that invites sensory–emotional connections with the participants in safety, where one’s conditioning can be investigated; all are necessary for men to risk change.

The Way Forward—An Integral Arising

One theory suggests that humanity, as we know it, has undergone four previous levels or states of consciousness and we are now entering, if we are successful, an emerging fifth level. These levels are archaic, magic, mythic,

rational, and integral (Gebser, 1985). *Integration* is defined by Gebser as “a fully completed and realized wholeness—the bringing about of an *integrum*, i.e., the reestablishment of the inviolate and pristine state or origin by incorporating the wealth of all subsequent achievement” (p. 99). The integral mind can see the value in all previous states of consciousness and bring them together in a way that integrates and transcends into a new way of being in the world. By reconnecting with the “pristine state of the origins” (Gebser, 1985, p. 99) or the original archaic oneness, we can use all previous knowledge in new and original ways.

In relating this to the Work That Reconnects, I look at the Deep Ecology activities as connecting to our archaic mind, our original state of being. We feel a connection to ourselves and each other, all of life, the Earth, the solar system, and the Universe if we can allow ourselves to open to that degree. Simply put, this connection allows us to feel gratitude for just being, for life, for the incredible mystery of it all. Knowing I cannot be separated from the Universe gives me a foundation to stand on. The practices in Deep Time, where we speak with a descendent 200 years in the future, or meditate on the journey of our most distant human ancestors through time, gathering the gifts they acquired along the way, such as fire, cooking, tool making, dance, song, and agriculture, connects us to the expanse of collective human experience. In these activities I feel we are creating a magic place transcending time and space. It allows us to envision how our decisions today impact future generations and their ways of life in some distant future, for good or for ill.

Honoring our pain for the world, speaking of our feelings about the suffering of all life—human, nonhuman, and entire ecosystems like the coral reefs and the oceans—and the loss of a guaranteed future for our descendants cannot be fully addressed without story, mythology, poetry, dance, and song. Some pain cannot be defined, yet it can be danced, or drummed, or wrapped in a story that allows us to hold the whole thing. It trains us to let our hearts speak and to listen to what it says. To see with new eyes, to see what is working, what isn't working, and what needs to be done to fill the gaps, takes a mental-rational way of seeing and understanding the world. We need to have appropriate technologies; we need the planning and implementation skills that are necessary to rebuild society and repair the damage of past injustice. These activities help to activate our own inner wisdom, which creates novelty and invites the emergent to arise, which in turn is an opportunity for providence to get involved.

Approaching personal growth and social change from the perspective of hearing our own voice speak our core truth—and allowing that to motivate us—is transformational. It is the introspection, the self-inquiry, and the embodiment of the experiences as well as the mental absorption of them that makes this work so powerful for me. There is much to be done and more to be discovered in doing it, but the Work That Reconnects gives us a place to start that encompasses the necessary levels of being that can inform our decisions in a way that supports life, and supports our dialogues with a structure that keeps the conversation from breaking down into defensive positions and opinions. It does so by creating intentional space through honest, respectful, and transparent communication

between participants, holding future generations of all species as sacred, and being embedded in a living planet and conscious Universe.

At the core of the perennial philosophy is the view that reality is composed of various levels of existence, levels of being and of knowing, from the smallest particles of matter up through body, mind, and soul to spirit. Each senior level includes and transcends the junior, wholes within wholes, from dirt to Divinity (Wilber, 2000). The issue up until our present moment in time has been that each new senior level believes it has the only correct way of seeing and relating to the world around them, and anybody who doesn't agree with them is simply wrong (Beck & Cowen, 2006; Gebser, 1985; Wilber, 2000, 2017).

Although all the levels and states of being are still with us and active, the dominant world view considers itself the only correct view and disregards the rest. This stance gives rise to much inequality, pain, and suffering in the world.

The integral psychology of Ken Wilber (2000, 2017) offers a four-quadrant system for looking at the complete human experience called AQAL (all quadrants all lines). The four quadrants are as follows: the "I" or interior-individual experience; the "It" or exterior-individual experience; the "We" or interior collective, cultural experiences; and the "Its" or Exterior-collective (i.e., social experiences; see Wilber, 2017, p. 129). In each one of these quadrants a person can experience moments of grace, epiphany, spiritual revelation, and peak experiences of the divine that give one temporary moments or glimpses at higher states of consciousness and being. "In order for higher development to occur,

those temporary states must become permanent traits” (Wilber, 2000, Location 434).

It is recognized that a shift in consciousness is needed for humanity to respond to the current list of crises and avert the collapse of civilization as we know it, or worse. In any integral practice, “the idea is to simultaneously exercise all the major capacities and dimensions of the human bodymind—physical, emotional, mental, social, cultural, spiritual” (Wilber, 2000, loc. 2167) or to “exercise body, mind, soul, and spirit in self, culture, and nature” (loc. 2204).

Epochs of Consciousness

The work of Dr. Clare Graves (1914–1986), as presented in spiral dynamics, offers a theory that “human thinking evolves in recognizable packages as the world around us gets more complicated and we try to keep up” (Beck & Cowen, 2006, p. 29). It appears that these “packets” come in sets of six levels. As new life conditions arise and thinking shifts, the previous way of thinking does not go away but remains with us and becomes activated, creating “a spiral vortex” of human development. “The human spiral, then, consists of a coiled string of value systems, world views, and mindsets, each the product of its time and conditions” (Beck & Cowen, 2006, p. 29).

Spiral dynamics lists six first-tier stages along this human spiral that focuses on survival, kinship, power, absolute belief, self-achievement, and well-being (Beck & Cowen, 2006), a more “me and mine” focus. The next set of six second-tier stages begin across what Clare Graves called a chasm of understanding, beginning with what he called “Flexflow, or flexible adaptation to

change” and secondly with “GlobalView, attention to whole earth dynamics and macro level actions” (Beck & Cowen, 2006, p. 41). Although the stages of second-tier continue, they are speculative, as people operating at those stages have not arisen in a large enough number to be recognized.

Understanding these different stages of development and their related values, world views, and belief systems can help one when designing ways to communicate within and between people at different stages. I believe the Work That Reconnects offers a structure and method that considers all of these eight levels, Archaic through GlobalView, indicating its integral approach, and compatibility with the concepts laid out in spiral dynamics. As with homogeneous groups working on issues specific to that group, the Work That Reconnects can be adapted to address issues in each stage to uncover biases, resentment, beliefs, and judgments about other people. Each level, state, or world view, however one wants to conceive it, has its own religious or spiritual outlook—from pagan ceremonies and mainstream religions to monotheistic fundamentalism. Once there is more clarity for those at a stage/level, it would hopefully be easier to engage in cross-stage/level communication and conflict resolution.

Expanding Consciousness Studies

In terms of consciousness studies and cognitive neuroscience, I consider these stages or world views to be neural pathways, super highways that have been programmed into the brain through various means: family, education, financial stability, class status, ethnic and cultural heritage, peer pressure, societal indoctrination, and so on. What we focus on and put our intention on can become

ingrained in the pathways of the brain, forming grooves or channels, networks of neurons with a common connection. Neurons that fire together wire together (Doidge, 2007). These pathways are our habits, worries, ways of thinking, and ways of relating, all of which were once thought to be hardwired into the brain after a certain age.

We now know this is not the case and that the brain evolved to change and adapt to changing life conditions. The brain's ability to change is called neuroplasticity or brain plasticity (Davidson & Begley, 2013; Doidge, 2007; Ramachandran, 2011). Neuroplastic research has shown us that every sustained activity, including physical activities, sensory activities, learning, thinking, and imagining ... reading, studying music, learning a language, changes the brain and the mind. Cultural ideas and activities are no exception" (Doidge, 2007, p. 288). This clearly states that any activity we do that engages our senses for a sustained period is "mapped" into our brain neurology, somehow rewriting or writing over old neural pathways.

In gathering together with deliberate intention for a specific purpose, and participating in sustained "cultural ideas and activities" that "engage senses and emotions" (Doidge, 2007, p. 288) we automatically change our neurology and our thinking to some degree. Our brains and genetics produce culture, but as life conditions change our brain changes with them; in turn, culture also changes our brain. It is a two-way street (Doidge, 2007). We now know that our focused passionate attention changes our personal neurology and way of being in the world; reciprocally, it also changes culture. The path to radical social change is

clear to see: get together, talk, share visions, introspect together, speak truth with compassion and passion—and do it over and over in sustained action.

We know in what direction we need to go, yet there is gap between what we know and praxis (i.e., making that knowledge applicable in people’s lives). This is the challenge of our time as I see it and the work that is to be done: we need to be shepherds of relationship. After conducting this study, I am more convinced than ever that the Work That Reconnects is an indispensable asset—a vehicle, a method, a structure of applying learning from consciousness studies and cognitive neuroscience. To repeat myself, the Work That Reconnects is not the only way of addressing collective issues and suffering; however, it is a way that has been tried and tested over decades, a proven place to begin for those ready to do so.

It is an odd juxtaposition to be writing these words during a viral pandemic, where we are ordered to shelter at home by our local and state governments. For me this means self-isolation except when I venture out for food; yet I am privileged to be able to work from home. I feel the answers to many of our environmental and social issues problems require us to gather to build trust, create community, and share our stories and our talents in envisioning a better, more whole, saner world. Yet, while we have been sheltering at home, the Trump regime has continued to erode our democracy, hollow out our institutions, and breed hatred and violence while profiting personally, by catering to the richest among us and foreign nationals. All this while sheltering himself and his family from the destruction, pain, and suffering they and the Republican party are

causing. If there is anything left at the end of his presidency, we will have a nation to rebuild; if he succeeds in destroying society as we know it, then we will have to create a new society. Either way, we have our work cut out for us and we need each other more now than ever.

In concluding this chapter, I discuss the benefits of engaging with the Work That Reconnects, what might be keeping men away from engaging in this type of work, and suggestions on a way forward.

Benefits of the Work That Reconnects

When I hear words and phrases widely shared in my co-researchers' narratives that are steeped with meaning, such as *connection*, *safety*, *not alone*, and *feel collective support*, I think that experiencing a sense of community is important to them. To hear my co-researchers speak of gaining in awareness, of connecting to one's own inner wisdom at their core, making room for uncertainty, and having freedom to express, I think of reconnecting with one's inner life of meaning and self-knowing. Phrases like, "my health has improved," "my lifestyle has changed," "my eating habits are way healthier," "I have a new vista, a new perspective," "I feel challenged and inspired to see my role as an Elder," "being able to galvanize my sense of purpose," and "I remembered self-love," indicate a spiritual awakening, a realization or transformation in the way they see and experience life.

To find commonality in experience—the soulfulness, the fellowship—a community in which to grieve and a framework to turn that grief into understanding and focus, into a collective sharing and a deep connection with

other men willing to risk, is also beneficial. Framing the discussion toward introspection can give one the language to describe feelings they did not have the language for, which shifts the thinking. It validates what males need for healing the socially constructed wounds of patriarchy: it is important for men to be able to show feelings. The description of the work as very grounding and validating, and its tendency to open the door to a lot of personal growth, can only be recognized in the positive.

One of my co-researchers sums up the retreat experience in a way that reflects the overall experiences of the men; the statement is worth quoting in its entirety:

I'd never been around a setting where I was thrown in with people I didn't know, people with a variety of different perspectives and context of life. All of us participating in an open-ended exercise where it wasn't exactly clear where it was going, but through doing the exercise there was a lot to learn, not only about the individual contexts and perspectives, but of the people in the dyad, or triad. But it isn't just the interaction, there's something about verbalizing it, something about visualizing while verbalizing it, then the interaction made the potential future so much more real, made the crisis of where we are so much more real, made it palatable and understandable in a way I had not experienced before. I stopped just observing and holding back and really became engaged in those small group exercises. I developed my first trusting and close male friendships. (Leon)

To hear the consistency of these and similar comments from my co-researchers validates the effectiveness of the Work That Reconnects. This inquiry supports the conclusion that the Work That Reconnects is a model and method men can find accessible and potentially life changing. As such, in conclusion, I strongly urge that the Work That Reconnects be recommended to men as a means of gaining self and social awareness, and developing healthier relationships with other men. The benefits of the Work That Reconnects are evident from listening

to the comments and stories contained herein. While this inquiry did focus on a group of men, it is important to stress that the benefits of the Work that Reconnects would be apply to women as well as to men; in fact, to anyone seeking to be more self-aware as well as socially and environmentally connected.

Direct benefits of the work include the following:

- Acquisition of the vocabulary to express feelings and emotions
- Development of close male relationships
- Creation of a community of men to grieve in and with
- Increased self-awareness/sense of self
- Improved communication/listening skills
- Lessened need to be in control through trust in the process

The Work That Reconnects is a model that opens a channel for introspection as a first step toward personal and social transformation. This first step of self-awareness is a revolution that starts inside and snowballs into social transformation. The work uses current important material to organize a discussion that helps to open our feeling channels to discover what is really true and of value in our lives; however, this process does not simply end with a group of emotionally in-tune white men, but produces men who are moving beyond the self and into the world.

There is activism motivated by the Work That Reconnects, evidenced by the majority of participants in this inquiry, who demonstrate that there are positive social impacts emerging through their going forth into the world. For example, Leon was a state employee who became a direct-action climate activist, and Duffy

went from making missile guidance systems to following his dream of being a music composer, singer, and theater actor. Matt, a retired psychologist, is now a small-scale organic farmer and local food supply advocate. Will and Wally have both committed to working with WTR facilitators to bring this work into mainstream society. Bragi, who worked in a psychiatric hospital, is working toward bringing, poetry, art therapy, and sound healing to people in a non-institutional setting. Rocky has expanded from being a youth wilderness guide to become an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister as well. Daniel, who began as a community organizer, has added gender equality, youth leadership, and spiritual leadership to his actions. Bogai, a Zen student and meditation instructor, is working to bring Zen and meditation to marginalized communities, at-risk youth, and incarcerated men. And finally, Mahi has recommitted to living simply and becoming more self-sufficient in his quest to do no harm.

Impactful action does not always need to be monumental, such as chaining oneself to nuclear weapons sites or producing miracle cures. In engaging in the Work That Reconnects one is learning to be a better human being, gaining in self-awareness, and making better decisions, which are essential components for personal growth and social change.

Next Steps

The recommendations based on the findings and benefits of this study include finding ways to increase the exposure of the Work That Reconnects to larger numbers of men. The in-depth knowledge of the type of men this work attracts, which this dissertation uncovers, could be extremely useful in supporting

a focused outreach to certain groups and communities of men that are deemed ready to engage in this work. Further, it is my hope that the publication of this dissertation could be used as a tool to attract more men as they learn about this work through the stories and experiences shared by the co-researchers.

More recommendations include the development of additional practices that focus on male issues of social conditioning and the impacts of this social conditioning—in particular, ways to increase male capabilities of self-introspection. As privileged white males, my co-researchers and I had our basic needs met. We were in relatively good health and nutrition, and had adequate housing, money, time, and social access. We also had concerns and needs for safety, a desire for more sense of belonging and more self-acceptance, and a sense that there was more to life (i.e., a higher purpose and meaning in the whole cosmic dance of existence). Social conditioning stands in the way of self-awareness in that it demands we forget about inherent worth, and instead recommends we supplement the deficiency with external props such as wealth, beauty, and status (Real, 1997). The WTR practices gives one the opportunity to learn introspection and face this internal conditioning in a group of supporting persons with whom we can find community and belonging.

It is also imperative that additional practices be developed that encourages men, especially white men, to reflect on male dominance, white privilege, and the damage these social elements cause. One practical recommendation is to have the men attending a retreat be involved in the day-to-day operations of the retreat so they can experience the effort required in housekeeping needs, such as facilitating

the practices, cooking food and other kitchen chores, cleaning the rooms, and tracking the needs of the other attendees. Efforts such as these could help men realize the amount of work that is involved in domestic chores and create more empathy for all those who take on these chores, whether paid or unpaid.

The concept of race is a social construct (DiAngelo, 2018; Sussman, 2014), but racism is real and the cause of great pain and suffering to many. White supremacy rests on the foundation of structural advantage, which is to be in a privileged position within society and its institutions (DiAngelo, 2018). Kimmel (2017) reports that this is changing rapidly, and that society is individually and culturally quietly accommodating ourselves to greater equality (e.g., doing more housework, helping with child care, having more cross-racial and -gender relationships) than ever before.

This movement needs to be encouraged, supported, and facilitated to “decouple masculinity from that sense of unexamined and unearned sense of entitlement” for white men to “find their way to a new definition of masculinity” (Kimmel, 2017, p. 283). The narratives of my co-researchers indicate that the Work that Reconnects is poised to facilitate this transition for men who are engaging in this shift into a more egalitarian society. WTR practices have us working together, seeing each other as peers, recognizing similar core values, and establishing honest long-lasting friendships. Creating the conditions and environments for this work to transpire is highly recommended.

Perhaps the largest need and difficulty is getting men to register, show up, and engage in the practices offered. The unrecognized, unacknowledged, and

denied personal pain—as well as the historical death, pain, and trauma caused by dominating male behavior—is so large it can feel apocalyptic. Patriarchal social conditioning teaches one that to admit being wrong, having made mistakes, or having been abusive is a sign of weakness and unmanliness. It is imperative that there exist ways and means, for white men in particular, to connect with this deeply buried pain in ways that do not encourage guilt, shame, rejection, or the ire of other men and women in their lives. Men, and perhaps white men more than others, need to be recognized for the courage it takes to engage in models such as the Work That Reconnects.

Society has precluded that men as a gender form an inherent capacity for the type of engagement required for transforming the wounds and harms of patriarchy. Therefore, this healing will not happen in a vacuum and men need the support of their loved ones and communities that emerge through the Work That Reconnects. This is perhaps among the most difficult work ever demanded of men—to accept their role in the struggle for equality, to mourn for the loss of their old self as they create their new self and transform in a culture that does not support and confirm them in changing. As bell hooks acknowledges, “Men who love and men who long to love know this. We need to stand by them, with open hearts and open arms” (hooks, 2004, p. 187).

A final recommendation is to help those men who are willing to do this work by suggesting they do it in a supportive community of men and women with a vision for a healthier and more whole masculinity, society, and culture. In this effort I see the Work That Reconnects playing a critical role. Making WTR

practices more available in mainstream culture, and to men specifically, is an integral part of creating self-awareness, a healthier society, and connection to the greater earth community. Making this happen means finding new and creative ways of gaining social access through grassroots, community-level involvement. The current white supremacist capitalist patriarchal social structure demands that this movement happens at the grassroots level, in city neighborhoods and in rural America, in diverse communities with a variety of people.

In this dissertation I have suggested how, through collective engagement with the Work That Reconnects, men (people) reactivate feeling channels and discover their core values. With this gained self-awareness they can begin to address the numbing caused by conforming to patriarchal social conditioning that perpetuates the inequities, oppressions, and violence of colonialism, imperialism, racism, classism, sexism, and more.

Having conducted this inquiry I have more understanding of men, how they respond to emotional challenge, and what holds them back. I intend to build on the learning and discoveries gained through this inquiry as well as continue my own growth and self-awareness. My focus will be to facilitate practices that invite men to look at their social conditioning that denies their emotional self and asks them to be competitive, aggressive, and to win whatever the cost, and to see the benefits in their lives for doing this monumental work. By utilizing existing practices and creating new ones that adapt to changing times and conditions, I feel I can contribute to the legacy of the Work That Reconnects, to men, and to those who care for them. To invite more men into this work could contribute to more

men taking an active role in creating a better, more just society and global community. For me, this is the work of our times, dearly needed to heal the separation in our earth community and to create a thriving future for all beings.

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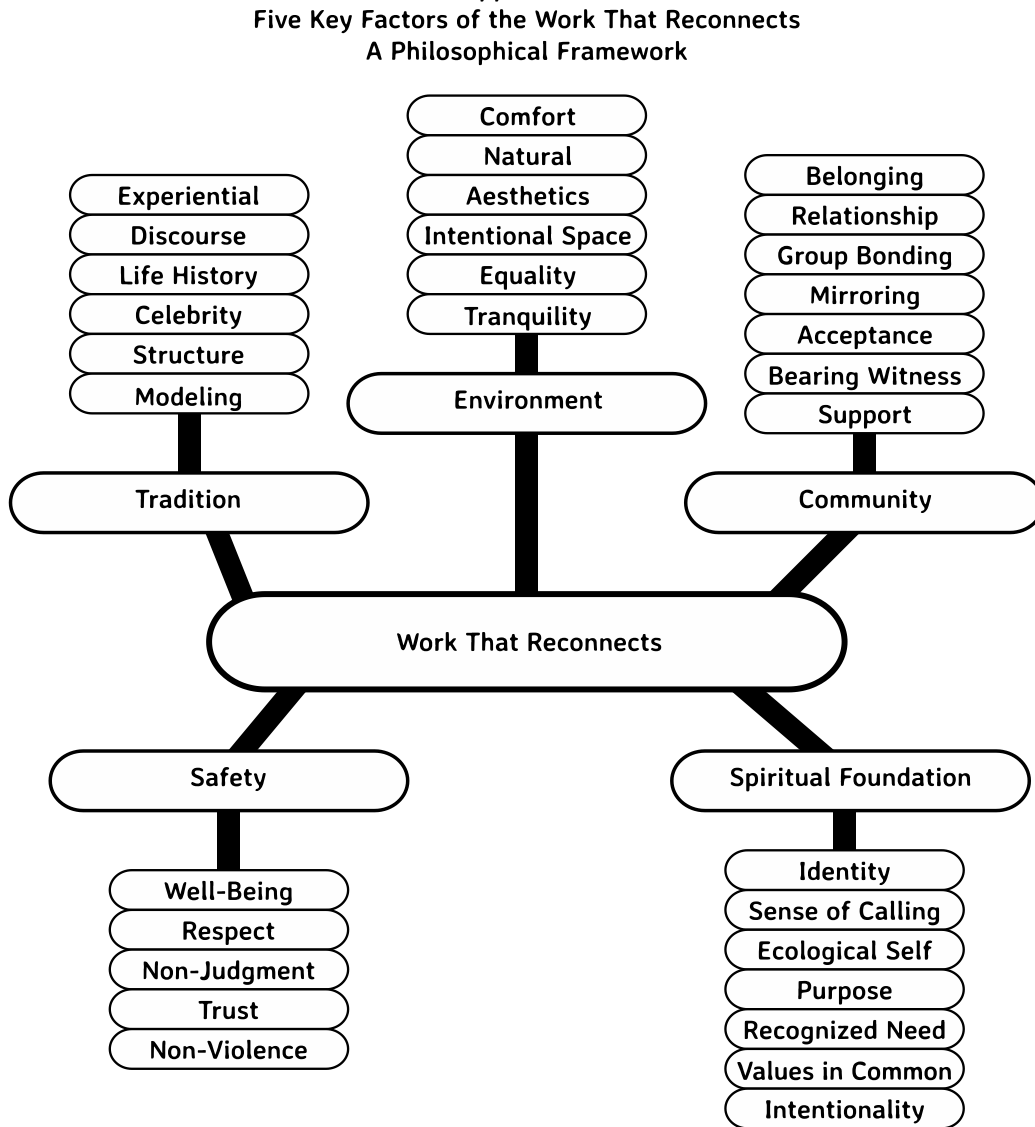
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APPENDIX A: FIVE KEY FACTORS OF THE WORK THAT
 RECONNECTS—A PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK



Note. Graphic [rendered in Adobe Illustrator] by Sid Cooperrider.

APPENDIX B: FIVE FACTORS OF THE WORK THAT RECONNECTS—A
NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

1. Tradition

The Work That Reconnects has a structure, or roadmap, called the spiral, that combines the sharing of information with dialogic practices that allow participants to embody their experience in addition to grasping it mentally. There is also a spiritual underpinning that grounds the retreat community in a sacred trust inviting honesty and a sense of safety. There are four stops along the spiral where the information and practices are experienced: (a) Gratitude, as gratitude is given the joy for life and being, is acknowledged; (b) Honoring Our Pain for the World, for when one acknowledges their pain for the world, they can honor it in others, in themselves, and they can speak it aloud; (c) Seeing With New Eyes, since when one is not consumed by the pain or fear they become empowered, seeing the world in new ways, and; (d) Going Forth, which is about connecting, networking, collaborating, and being seeds of change wherever one goes (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012).

2. Safety

Physical safety includes a commitment to nonviolence, a method of conflict resolution, trust, authenticity, comfortable shelter, and good food. Emotional safety includes personal well-being, respect for self and others, a nonjudgmental environment with plenty of rest, relaxation, and deep listening. Physical and emotional safety are essential if men are to gather and bear their truth, their vulnerability, and their wounding in front of other men. Because of

social conditioning for men to be the Lone Ranger (hooks, 2004; Macy & Brown, 2014)—to go it alone, to be the rock, and to be in competition with other men—safety is critical for men to engage in interpersonal and intrapersonal work. Confidentiality is necessary for trust to develop between the individuals and within the group, essential for honest relationships to evolve (M. Brown, 2009; Macy & Brown, 2014).

Safety, in terms of physical and emotional safety for men, is seldom mentioned in existing literature, but usually used in relation to the victims of male aggression (hooks, 2004; Meth & Pasick, 1990). Social conditioning trains men to be aggressive as a definition of masculinity, but the aggression or brutality of men against other men is not discussed. Safety is reserved for use in relation to a man's impact on family, work, and social friendships (hooks, 2004; Levant & Richmond, 2016; Meth & Pasick, 1990), not for the individual himself. Risking life and limb to prove their masculinity has been the downfall of too many teenage and young adult males. For men to appear weak and emotional (in their own minds) in front of women is difficult enough, but for men to feel safe around other men and to be vulnerable in expressing their emotional truth is near impossible (Golden, 2013).

Both Urie Bronfenbrenner in his *Ecological Theory* (1979) and Eric Erickson's *Childhood and Society* (1950) add their voices to Maslow's (2012) stage of safety, which includes security of body, morality, family, health, and property. Safety is necessity for proper human psychological development and interpersonal relationships. An essential part of safety, physical and emotional, is

nonviolent communication, as taught by Marshall Rosenberg, which “helps people communicate strong feelings without accusation, blame, or put-downs” (M. Brown, 2009, p. 83). The language of peace and relationship is not laden with negative intention and the Work That Reconnects is conducted with an agreed-upon method of conflict resolution, trust, deep listening, respect, and a nonjudgmental environment. A compassionate languaging of our intentions is imperative for people to explore their inner landscape and to freely communicate what they find there.

3. Community

The practices of the Work That Reconnects are usually conducted in group, but it can be done as an individual process as well. As participants speak their truth, listen to and mirror for each other, a community is created. In this community one finds belonging, relationship, support, acceptance, and through witnessing each other, participants bond together. The creation of community and a comfortable environment welcomes participants to relax and “let their hair down.” Removed from other distractions, participants can focus, individually and together, long enough to explore their deeper responses to the realities of their world. The group provides support for challenges too great to face alone (e.g., climate change, nuclear war) and becomes a haven where we discover our emotional responses are widely shared, creating a rare sense of community (Macy & Brown, 2014).

Group work is synergistic, taking on a life of its own; it is particular to that specific grouping of people. A group can get unpredictably creative in a short

period of time, revealing the “profoundly collaborative nature of life” (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 75). Group work provides a setting to develop long-lasting relationships and networks, making our work stronger and more effective. These groups also demonstrate system characteristics. As a group becomes more integrated through the interactions of the participants, it also becomes more differentiated among its members due to participants becoming more aware of their moral and emotional landscapes. Experiencing a new openness and honesty in ourselves when we encounter other people, we carry the feeling of community into our daily lives, into how we meet people, and how we see our place in the world.

I understand community as being similar to Maslow’s (2012) need for love (friendship, family, sexual intimacy) and esteem (self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world). If men are secure in their community, with the sense of being loved their self-confidence, self-worth, and feelings of usefulness will help them further relax and let their truth arise.

4. Environment

To facilitate the group environment special attention should be given to aesthetics of the location, such as a natural setting, comfortable environs, well-lit intentional spaces, and easy access for the elderly and those with special needs. Many facilitators like to create an altar in the room, inviting people bring special objects and photos to place on it. Plants and flowers add beauty, bringing nature into the room. Chairs and cushions are arranged in an oval or circle, depending on

space, or in concentric arcs if it is a large crowd. If the event is a residential retreat then organic, vegetarian (vegan) food should at least be an option, and the sleeping quarters clean and comfortable. Other items such as flip charts, markers, art supplies, important books, and a sound system (boom box, computer, microphone, and amp) help to make the environment relaxed and pleasing. The meeting space should be spacious, closed to outside disturbances, comfortable, nature-accessible, and be as free of toxins as possible for people with environmental sensitivities. This includes such things as chemical cleaners, insecticides, herbicides, fresh paint, new carpeting, and scented products such as scented candles and perfumes. The location should also be wheelchair accessible. A designated smoking area outside and away from the meeting place allows for people who smoke to do so without impinging on the comfort of others.

I see environment as being related to Abraham Maslow's (1908–1970; 2012) physiological needs: breathing, food, sleep, homeostasis, sex, and bodily needs. As these physiological needs are met men are more likely to relax, feel safe, and begin to let their guard down to participate (Macy & Brown, 2014).

5. Spiritual Foundation

In this context, a spiritual foundation includes participants' values held in common, recognized need, purpose, goals, self-identity, unrest, a calling, an ecological self (Macy & Brown, 2014), and the belief one can make a difference or has a part to play in the world. Molly Young Brown (2009) defines spirituality as “pertaining to the realm of human experience involving values, meaning, purpose, and the unification with natural principles, patterns, energies, and the

Divine” (p. 205). Spirituality can be understood as a person’s connection to the unseen aspects of reality that are beyond the physical and which bind us to the animating energies of the cosmos, however one sees them; it is the ground of being (Vaughn, 2002).

The connection to something larger than our human world embeds us in a living universe that is filled with potential and meaning. It is my assumption that with the inclusive views of reality provided by living systems theory, deep ecology, indigenous, and Eastern spiritual traditions, we are rediscovering that our world is a dynamically interrelated whole. A spiritual connection connects us to the wholeness of being and inspires us to care for the world and for future generations, but it also has an impact on the individual. “We are not brains on the end of a stick, but flesh-and-blood beings. Ideas become real for us through our senses and imagination—through stories, images, and rituals that enlist our capacity for devotion, our tears and laughter” (Macy & Brown, 2014, p. 46).

Spirituality is a personal expression; it affects each individual life and imagination, leads to a richer deeper sense of one’s belonging in the world, and therefore increases one’s self-worth and self-esteem. When one acts from a sense of connection, self-worth, gratitude, and love for life, they make decisions based on connection rather than separation (Macy & Brown, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Seed et al. 1988). Maslow (2012) comes close to spirituality when he speaks of morality and the progression toward his stage of self-actualization: morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and the acceptance of facts. When embedded in a living spirituality it is easier to see and

relate to one's self as a part of something grand and magnificent that exists beyond their identity as a body or mind as an emergent property of the creative process of life.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Data for this inquiry was gathered using a qualitative, three-interview series (Seidman, 2013), conducted in three sessions of 60 to 90 minutes each, with each study member. The first interview session is focused on the life history of the individual up to their decision to participate in a Work That Reconnects (WTR) retreat. This provides the context with which to contrast and understand the information gained in the second and third sessions. The second interview focuses on the lived experiences of participating with other men in the WTR retreat: their challenges, successes, insights, and how it was to be them (given their life history) having the experiences. Finally, the third interview focuses on the meaning that has been made from the experiences and how this is being lived in their lives. The invitation was for the participant to tell stories of their experiences rather than to answer a predetermined list of specific questions. It was assumed that each interview would be slightly different due to the life experiences, meaning, and values of each individual participant.

Interview Session 1: Life History

Invitation: To reconstruct the story of your life up to your deciding to participate in the Work That Reconnects.

Thought questions:

1. Geographically, where did you grow up? What was it like?
2. What was your family and family dynamics? (number of siblings, placement within the dynamics, relationship with each, or to be alone if an only child, heritage/genealogy)
3. Who were your family's friends and neighbors? (social groups, church groups, go to social events or stay more at home)

4. Where did you go to school? (academics, sports, music, art, groups, awards, favorite memories)
5. Who were your friends and what did you do when together?
6. What is your work history like? (jobs, volunteer, skills, hobbies, military service)
7. How, and from whom, did you learn about being a man? (identities, roles, rules, consequences)
8. What were the masculine rules and roles that you were taught growing up? How did they fit, or not fit, with your inner sense of self?
9. What were the consequences of not following the masculine roles you were raised with?
10. Tell me how it came about, what situations or circumstances, occurred that inspired you to register for a WTR men's retreat? (challenges, complexities, life-events, realizations, insights)

Interview Session 2: Experiences with the Work That Reconnects

Invitation: To tell the story of what it was like for you to participate in the WTR practices with a group of men; insights, challenges, risks, sensations, etc.

Thought questions:

1. What was your initial reaction when arriving at the retreat space and seeing the other men gathering for the event? (thoughts, considerations, biases, preconceptions)
2. How did you feel about the retreat environment (location, setting, accommodations, food) and was this important for helping you to engage with the teaching and practices? Why?
3. What was it like for you to participate in the WTR group activities with other men?
4. Describe any risks and challenges met during your engagement and how did you deal with them?
5. What was the inner process you went through to allow yourself to risk appearing vulnerable, emotional, or not in control, in the company of the other men? Then what happened?

6. Concerning the spiral of the WTR, how was it for you to express your gratitude and feel the emotional connection you held with the recipients of that gratitude.
7. Tell me how it felt to connect with and express feeling about the pain and suffering you see in the world? Is there more?
8. Did the activities in gratitude and honoring your pain for the world change the way you see your own masculine identity and/or how you see the social definition of masculinity?
9. Did the WTR activities expose any social conditioning within you? If so, what was that like and what did you do with the discovery?
10. Did you feel safe, physically and emotionally, during the activities and if so, what contributed to that feeling?

Interview 3: Reflections on Meaning

Invitation: To describe the meaning and value you have made from your WTR experiences and how this has impacted you, for better or worse, in your daily life.

Thought Questions:

1. In general, what did your WTR experiences mean to you? Why?
2. What has changed in you and how did that come about?
3. Tell me more about how you have made meaning from your experiences and how has this effected your life?
4. Given your life history as you explained it, how do you experience your life now?
5. Given these experiences, how has your definition of masculinity changed, if at all, and why?
6. Has your personal definition of being a man changed through these experiences? How?
7. Have these experiences altered your sense of purpose? If so how?
8. Have you experienced a change in your physical health? If so, what are they?

9. In what ways has your experiences changed your social outlook and connection to others?
10. Have these experiences altered your perception of connection with the nonhuman world and if so how?
11. Is there anything more you would like to add to our discussion about the meaning you have made from your WTR experiences?

These questions were intended as an outline, or plan, for conducting the interviews. As the principal researcher in this study, I retained the option of following up any of these questions with other questions that deepens the communication and increases my understanding of the interviewee's experiences.

APPENDIX D: CO-RESEARCHER INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

This chapter introduces the co-researchers in a series of summaries synthesized from the in-depth interviews that were conducted for this inquiry. Each co-researcher's story will be discussed following the same three movements that guided the in-depth interview process itself: life history, experience with the Work That Reconnects, and the meaning they have made from the experiences as well as how their lives have been impacted. I applied the interview sequence to myself as well, answering the same inquiry questions as my co-researchers. My intention in approaching the data using these three movements was to see if their stories reflected my own and discover how they were similar or how they differed.

These stories are also important for the reader to learn more about the men in this inquiry as well as to get a feel for the scope and depth of the data gathered through the in-depth interview process. They also reveal the type of men who were motivated to participate in WTR practices, in this case middle-aged white men. Understanding the similarities and variations within this social demographic can give insight into the diversity within this group, how to get more men (white men specifically) to participate, and how to plan future men's retreats.

These men are speaking from a transformed space in that they have had time to integrate their experiences, find or make meaning, and live them into their lives. The complete interview series represents a critical reflection of the value of their experiences as well as how it has impacted their lives. I have given each of these men a pseudonym to protect their anonymity and I cite them here

alphabetically by that given name. After meeting the men through their stories, this section concludes with a discussion of common threads that arise from their stories.

Bogai

Bogai is a Zen meditation specialist of 25 years, a translator of Zen teaching, and a social creative who lives in Massachusetts with his wife. His family genealogy is primarily a blend of Jewish traditions with some northern European on his father's side. The eldest of four sons, he was raised in "relative abundance" near Long Island Sound in a "devoutly Catholic" family by artistic parents. Aware of his "privileged situation" and speaking about his youth, he said, "I spent many, many, formative hours of where my mind was be raveled together, was anchored in moments of silence and nature." Having "extra religious studies" when young, he is "a committed Buddhist" and has "been a Zen meditation instructor for 25 years."

He did well in school, was gifted at hockey, and ultimately received a master's degree in environmental studies. After graduation, he worked for a Swedish NGO in Africa helping promote "locally led sustainable agroforestry." His father "was a good father and a very important influence" who "coached his Little League, took them fishing" and yet "was an alcoholic," which was kept away from the children. Generational family trauma included alcoholism and suicide, and his parents divorced in his early teens. As adults, two of his brothers died from heroin addiction, which he described as "a part of [him] that's gone."

He himself suffers from “bipolar depression,” saying that “any day outside of clinical depression is a good day.”

Bogai has been a keyboard musician since childhood and is still playing music with his high school friends in local venues. He has two adult sons and along with teaching Zen, he translates Zen meditation books from Japanese and Swedish into English. He has “been aware of three things” throughout his life: “nature, spirituality, and social justice.” He was introduced to Joanna Macy and the Work That Reconnects while at graduate school and is writing a book in which he calls her “Gaia-Ma.”

In coming to the men’s retreat, he said, “I was in the perfect demographic to get mobilized by the Work That Reconnect. I was ready ... in a way, everything was conspiring to bring me there.” Once there, he recalled, “I don’t think I’ve been in a company of men of such one-heartedness ... one heart-minded orientation.” He claimed the most “salient story event happened in the Truth Mandala” and emotionally described how “that was where I felt most exposed and the most heard ... the most at-one-with.” He said he “remembers feeling safe” and had “a freedom of expression ... there was not a single instance of chestiness. You get a new vista, a new perspective, having gone through the experiences.” On the other hand, he also felt “juvenile” thinking, “Am I doing my part ... am I doing enough?” It’s “a high bar, these guys are important actors in their communities, I felt challenged and inspired.” He speculated, “maybe I was using that experience as an excuse just to emote, to do free, true, expression ... but I felt held and listened to.”

Speaking to the meaning and value of participating in the Work That

Reconnects he said,

“I think without the Work That Reconnects I wouldn’t have the same sense of myself as I do ... so you could say it means everything because that’s my identity.”

“I want to mentor people into empowerment ... this work fills me from inside ... this work is my identity.”

Bogai wants to take the Work That Reconnects into “communities where people lack access to this kind of training ... people who otherwise wouldn’t have access to the opportunity to practice.” Reflecting on maleness, he said, “this culture we are speaking from is toxic,” and that he “identifies with a masculinity that leaves the maximum space for femininity to be” and felt

it’s more important than ever to be able to model and teach a more subtle way of looking at who we are. It’s paradoxical ... the more empowered I feel the less powerful I feel ... the bigger you are the bigger the arena gets.”

Doing the work “galvanized” his “sense of purpose” and “expanded the possibilities of embodying a healthy masculinity” as well as having “improved health.” In closing he said,

On reflection, this is great thinking about it ... I’m grateful for this dialogue, sometimes you have to articulate stuff and hear yourself saying it. I was hoping it was going to be you, you were one of the memorable ones. I would have been disappointed if it wasn’t you.

Bragi

Bragi is an alternative health practitioner in Oregon, working in a mental health hospital using poetry, journaling/creative writing, art, and sound healing modalities with groups in a variety of settings. Bragi has Norwegian, Irish, and Scottish family heritage; he grew up in western Oregon as the second of three

boys, followed by an adopted infant sister when he was seven. His father was an Air Force pharmacist who came to the West Coast while in the Air Force and his mother, an Air Force nurse, moved to the West Coast with her family “toward the end of her grade years.” Although both parents were in the military, “neither was militaristic.”

Bragi was raised active in the Lutheran church. His mom “was very nature oriented and loved the ocean” and his father “was gentle, patient, and openminded ... had a copy of the Koran ... loved gardening ... and was a very fine musician.” He credits his parents for his life-long connection with nature and maintains the family ritual of going to Mount Adams, Washington, to go huckleberry picking each season. He has been a camp director for a Lutheran church youth camp, staff for a wilderness Lutheran retreat center, and has volunteered in Scotland, Ireland, Norway, and on the Isle of Iona at an abbey built in 563 CE. He has a degree in music with a minor in Norwegian, a master’s in transformative language arts, and a certificate in poetry therapy. He is currently enrolled in a sound therapy program and working in the mental health field teaching journaling, poetry, and expressive writing to a variety of client groups.

Bragi was introduced to Joanna Macy’s books and the Work That Reconnects by his academic mentor while reading for his master’s degree. After graduating, he attended a retreat with Joanna and found her work “really resonated” with him, not only because of “the connection with Deep Ecology but because it didn’t poo-poo other ways of being.” He “found ways of integrating aspects of her work” into “the way I do groups at the psych hospital.”

Describing the men's retreat at Lost Valley Retreat Center, he said there's "a certain level of superficiality to start ... getting the sense of who's there and who are the people joining the work." Bragi was the one to answer a woman's question at the Westwind retreat—"Where are the men?"—by saying "here we are." That initiated the desire for a men's only WTR retreat. He mentioned the difference between when it's men only and when it's co-ed, saying, "We took that dynamic out of it, where you start to pair with a woman you have interacted with ... and it can be a distraction from the work." Of the retreat environment, he said, "it's pretty essential to have these retreats away from the built environment" where there's "a certain path you can follow to solitude." He was also concerned with the availability of the work to others due to social drivers such as finances, available transportation, time, and class barriers, saying, "it is a privilege" and "often a white privilege, to attend these retreats."

Of the structure and process of the Work That Reconnects, Bragi said, "it takes a bit of trust, it's a gradual letting down of the guard, you might take more risk because you have this trust and you start sharing on a deeper level." He considers a WTR retreat a "idyllic setting" because of the commonality of the stories and viewpoints of people "looking at life through a different lens ... you get different people from different backgrounds coming together and we find commonality in this work." We find "many people around the world are doing great work where they are" and the retreat "may be one of those peak experiences" where "you can focus on getting closer to what's going on at a deep level."

Some of the values Bragi spoke of are “heightened awareness,” the “sense we are not alone,” finding “the language for describing this work to people we meet,” and the awareness that “we gotta just find ways to make meaning right where we’re planted.” “The Work That Reconnects experience has been bedrock, or foundation, for this belief that there is more to life than what’s doled out to us on the consumerist plate,” he said, and “that in some ways makes it harder because you can’t go back without denial” because once you know, you know, and you can’t un-know. You can only go into denial.

Bragi said,

The Work That Reconnects was a catalyst for me, it came at a good time in my life and my spirituality has probably broadened and deepened. I guess in some ways it gives me the strength, it increases my resolve to find ways to disconnect from the system. It can feel really overwhelming at times thinking, what is it going to take? It helped me make space for uncertainty.

As an art therapy practitioner working with a group of 50 men in a drug treatment center, he saw the men were all struggling to express themselves and so started a poetry group they called “The Bruised Roots.” Of this experience, he said,

There is this portrayal of men in this culture as being tough, having this tough exterior, and it might mask something in the interior that is not that tough and you don’t want to talk about it because you might be seen as less than a man.

He related his own conditioning and the WTR practices by saying he sees an “increase in capacity to speak my truth, but also an increase in my capacity and willingness to be a good listener.” Bragi is still “unfolding” his purpose, but he sees his direction “in the context of how he is impacting current and future generations ... the community ... the human family and other living things.” With his sound therapy certificate and other healing modalities, he is “looking for ways

to integrate aspects of the Work That Reconnects into his work in mental health ... to create environments where people listen to each other respectfully.”

Bragi wants to leave the psych hospital and develop his own healing practice “to be more intentional” with his classes, in order to “to have freedom” and “play on a different playground” than what is allowed in mental health programs. In summary, he said,

There’s something that needs to unfold in my life that I need to put some effort into now ... pulling these threads together into something that could be useful in the world. Joanna’s work helps me stay grounded and focused, to remain hopeful.

He concluded by saying, “Both of us will have a benefit with what we’re doing.”

Daniel

Daniel is a thirty30-year-old educator, K-12 tutor, community organizer, and social activist now residing in Philadelphia. At 24, he was the youngest member at the 2012 WTR men’s retreat. Daniel was raised in a traditional Jewish family by a single mom, and actively participates and leads in his religious community to create intergenerational community councils for at-risk youth. Daniel’s maternal ancestors lived in Poland and the Ukraine, near the Carpathian Mountains, until the violence toward Jews increased when his great grandparents came to the United States, settling in New York. “They assimilated” and “learned English as quickly as possible.”

Daniel and his brother have different fathers, by the mother’s design, and feels “like a fatherless child” who “had a mother but father wasn’t immanent.” For his first five years he lived in Florida; then, his mother moved them to the suburbs of Maryland for better schools and more job opportunities. His mother

was “kind and generous” yet “very protective, like she finally had a family and she was ferociously going to keep us alive and also going to keep us separate from the men who may or may not have wanted to be in our lives.” He feels this “caused a sense of longing for some direction, longing for someone not to just comfort me and console me, but to challenge me and help me direct my energy ... longing for consequences.”

Not willing to explain how the resistance began, he said, “there were some people early on that took the kind of fatherly role, but I was always resistant to them ... I never trusted men as much as women, especially older men.” At 18 Daniel met his father, who did not know of his birth. At first it went well and his father was a “philosophical companion ... an incredible man with incredible wisdom to share,” but after about 10 years his father “asked me not to be in touch with him.” He said,

I learned what it means to be a son and have contempt for older men. He took the brunt of that ... I think he really felt how I was always trying to get him to be a better person, to change him.

Daniel and his father are talking again, he said, and recently “there’s a sign he’s looking for some resolution.”

When asked about if there was violence in his growing up, he said “not really,” yet goes on to say his “brother was violent” and would “try to hurt him,” and there were “moments when his mom would just flip out, yell and smash a bunch of dishes.” But apparently, he does not see this as violence, saying, “we lived in the suburbs, so that’s true, I didn’t experience a lot of violence.” Daniel was socially active in his high school, sang tenor in the men’s choir, and struggled with self-identity: “I was ashamed of not having gone through puberty yet.” Of

his school years, he said, “in my own feelings of otherness I sympathized with the cast-out that I saw in school” and “not finding the guidance of older men, I became an activist and an organizer.”

He “graduated college with a double major in philosophy and the history of math and science, and a double minor in the Classics and ancient languages”; he is currently tutoring students of various ages from the elementary level to high school. It was through his social activism that he came to know the Work That Reconnects, and through that connection came to California to study and work with other youth activists while living at Canticle Farm, in Oakland, a project organized by people close to Joanna Macy and the Work That Reconnects.

He said, “when this opportunity to do the Work That Reconnects came again, this time with men, I jumped on it.” Of his experiences, he said, “there was a part of my Soul that knew, that hungered, to be with men who had looked at themselves and the world.” Being with

initiated men talking about their own initiations in life may me realize that I needed to be on my own initiation, my own journey ... just being around those men made me realize I had to do some work in order to become the man, the human, that I wanted to be.

After the retreat, Daniel organized a bike tour down the West Coast visiting several of the men from the retreat, and some of them accompanied him on parts of his journey. He said about of one of the men, “Just being around his big gentle soul was good for me” and, of another, “just being on his property was another embodiment of what it could mean to be a steward of the holy and the ground.” A third man Daniel visited on this bike trip was a psychotherapist he

developed a strong friendship with at the retreat, who “became my therapist” that “has helped me for the past three years.”

Daniel said he had been “unconsciously at the mercy of his lust and desire” and had sex with a friend’s underage sister. At first, he said, “it was consensual” and “she wanted me,” but later said, “I took all the rape culture pornography that I’ve seen as a young person and inflicted it on another person that didn’t want it.” He said, “it’s been helpful to see the patriarchy in me, in that way, and see how it causes suffering.” He said he is “passionate about doing reconciliation work because of causing harm to this young woman.” As a reconciliatory effort, Daniel wants to create “a group for boys called Soul Scouts, where boys learn consent, learn about their hero’s journey, learn about their purpose, have them learn how to work together.” In acting out the misogynistic and pornographic domination and control of women as a substitute for relationship, he hurt someone who was vulnerable. He has seemed to have learned from this experience, yet he talked more about his struggles related to the incident more than recognizing the damage done to the young lady.

Wanting to redirect this pent up libidinal energy into community service, he “also started this alternative divinity school called AltDiv with some friends and available community ministers” and wants “to have people doing the Work That Reconnects in this kind of community ministry.” Intergenerational communications are important to Daniel, but he “thinks retreats are too limited and slow” to respond to the massive need; “maybe it starts with a retreat for the Work That Reconnects but with the intention that these people will be in dialogue

for a year, for two years, studying and transforming together.” This speaks to the need of what is called “communities of practice” in the Work That Reconnects, what others call “islands of sanity” (Wheatley, 2017, p.4).

True to his history of not trusting older men, throughout his interview series Daniel demonstrated open resistance to me and my questioning by saying, “I’m feeling resistance and so maybe it’s resistance from the experience or resistance to this moment.” By the beginning of the third interview session, there was open and voiced resistance to me as an older man questioning him, which was very frustrating for both of us. He stated, “I’m feeling a bit stuck, like wanting to be generous in this moment and also not knowing exactly how.” For my part, I was frustrated because I came across the United States on a bus to interview him. It is evident we both have work to do—he on his relationship with older men and me with patience.

Duffy

Duffy is a well-traveled, retired, electronic engineer who is working on creating a living composing music, singing, and performing in the theater in Portland, Oregon. Duffy’s maternal family were from “deep in the mountains of Kentucky ... god fearing Baptists,” and his father, also from Kentucky, was Irish, “a hunky” man who “loved fighting.” Duffy did not speak much about grandparents or other family members, but did respond to prompting.

Duffy grew up in the Rust Belt of Ohio, the fifth of six boys where there was “a lot of drinking and fighting” in a family “who had a tendency to exaggerations to make us feel better about who we were.” Duffy has “an identical

twin brother, five to ten minutes older that kind of made the path easier” who he remains very close to. Duffy’s father was in World War II and was dishonorably discharged from the Army for killing two children in Japan with his truck.

At home, he ruined his construction business by trading sex for utilities and building expenses, pulled and fired a handgun while threatening to kill his mom, and later went to prison for being a con man. Duffy has created stories about his father’s innocence “for his father’s sake” because he “wanted to like his father”; later in life he tried to reconnect with his dad but that didn’t go well. His father “was pretty distant and only talked about going to strip joints.” After his parents divorced, his mother remarried but Duffy resented the guy and has “always has issues around men.”

Music was always strong with him and his twin brother, and they grew up playing and composing music together, which they still do on occasion. Duffy went into engineering and got his bachelor’s degree from Illinois Tech and worked in the phone industry. While working for a phone company in Chicago, he got married, but that was unsuccessful and ended up with an abortion and divorce. After the divorce he got transferred to Ireland to work for a year with a subsidiary of the phone company. He quit the phone company and hitchhiked around the globe with a woman from Australia before returning and going back into engineering.

Duffy learned of Joanna Macy while living in Phoenix, Arizona, working on contacts for the Department of Defense. He attended several of her annual Buddhist meditation retreats in Southern California, which was before the Work

That Reconnects was fully fledged. He had been to a mixed-group WTR retreat before he attended the 30-day retreat at Westwind with Wally, Will, and Bragi. He was invited to help with organizing the men's retreats and although he was "intrigued by the realization that there were so few men attending the retreats," he "didn't actively engage in preparing for them." He also liked being "one of the only males and getting a lot of attention" from the women at the retreats.

At the men's retreat he "genuinely enjoyed being with a diverse group of men from so many walks of life" who "were taking bigger risks" than he was. He said that "it takes a while in order to let go enough to be vulnerable," but the group gave him hope and helped him not feel alone. Duffy has contradicting views on fear, saying at first "it wasn't about being afraid" to emote, he "just couldn't find" his feelings; then, later, saying it "was a fear of not being able to display and it was easier to be more passive" while in group. This is similar to his not admitting to being "resistant to engage" his feelings; at first he was "just not accessing anything" and then said, "still, there was resistance, I was holding back."

Instead of connecting being "conditioned to resist the typical competitive male" to "because I didn't like the males" and "I have always had issues with males," he said he "just couldn't find" his feelings. There were other contradictions, as with his father stories, that seem to help Duffy cope with difficult situations or intense feelings. An important epiphany for him was realizing "that the Work That Reconnects can go to that level of that basic nature of what it is to be human" and that he used his "mind a lot for defense," so he

“didn’t have to feel anything.” He left the first men’s retreat feeling like he “had a group of men, deep companions” that he “felt a deep connection” with us men he “didn’t think was possible.” He said, “I was transformed.”

When asked about meaning and how he was living his WTR experiences in his life, he said, “meaning is a relational kind of value, not necessarily an intrinsic thing but accumulated over time.” He also said, “meaning and value accumulates in a way I can become aware of it” and “I don’t want to objectify it ... I don’t want to have words for it right now ... because words tend to crystalize it in maybe some ways that I’ll have to take extra work to shatter so it can move.” I felt gaslighted. This sort of evasion is typical of Duffy when he does not want to engage with a topic.

However, concerning the WTR activities he said, “these practices are useful, I needed a place where I could be myself and be accepted and people be honest with me.” He was “doing military contracts and feeling ashamed of it” and a “direct result of the Work That Reconnects” was to give him “the confidence to have some integrity and stop taking those contracts.” Duffy says having the experiences with the men in retreat gave him more faith in the “men on the street” or your average stranger; that there are “probably things in common to connect with.” He also pointed out he was “disappointed with some of the things that happened among the men of the group.” This is an indirect reference to an issue involving myself, him, and two other men who attempted to expel me from our men’s group. I speak of this elsewhere, so I will not elaborate further here.

Overall, concerning the Work That Reconnects, he said that the experiences “have enriched his life” and the Work That Reconnects is “effective in getting people into the field,” but to also “gather and recharge afterward.” One vision for taking the WTR structure into the world for Duffy is “to take people out into natural areas that have been wounded,” polluted, or otherwise damaged by human actions, such as forest clear-cuts, toxic industrial areas, mountain top removal for coal mining sites, nuclear reactor sites, and so on, “to do Work That Reconnects practices, create music, and make art from the location.” Duffy has been married twice, without children, and is currently attempting to build a career with music in northern Oregon.

Leon

Leon is a retired Oregon State employee who is now a national climate activist speaking for climate justice and involved in direct civil disobedience actions against the oil industry. Leon has been divorced three times, is a father of five, grandfather of two, and living in Oregon with his current partner. Since October 2016 Leon has been under legal prosecution for shutting off a tar sands crude oil pipeline coming into the United States from Canada.

He is the descendant of a farming family in Oregon’s Willamette Valley, who suffered many losses during the Great Depression, which included losing the family farm and the early deaths of siblings through disease and accident. Leon’s father was deeply impacted by these events, as well as the effects of fighting in the South Pacific during World War I, and was both physically and sexually violent with his children. He father was a devout Baptist, taught Sunday school,

was abusive to his wife, and beat his children “with a belt causing bloody welts” on the back of their legs. In her youth, Leon’s mother also suffered from emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and “could not protect the siblings from harm” due to the father.

Leon grew up in self-imposed isolation, distancing himself by reading and study in order to cope. His strategy was “to not need anyone, to be independent, to either meet my own needs or to not have needs.” He confronted his father at 15 years of age, declaring his freedom from his father’s control, and when his parents divorced in his mid-teens, he got a job and moved out on his own. Leon rejected the violence of his father, and in a youthful experience of standing up to a bully he saw the “thin shell of bravado” behind the personality and developed a sense of compassion for men in this condition.

Leon obtained conscientious objector status during the Vietnam War. Being raised in a strict Baptist household and believing in the core teachings of Christianity to not kill, he had “the religious upbringing and vocabulary” to substantiate the claim. He continued working and following his education, yet in his relationships he “didn’t feel loved” and internally “didn’t feel lovable.” In retrospect he sees this as coming from knowing that he “didn’t trust mom or dad to be there.” In relationship, he “didn’t think his partners truly loved him,” and he “projected his family wounding on them” and others. He says, “I struggled with the intensity of my emotions ... they flood me ... they overwhelm me to the point where it’s difficult for me to talk ... to think ... to access my words and thoughts and verbalize them.”

Although he didn't complete a college degree, he became a skilled tradesman and worked in carpentry and construction. In 1980, Leon went to work for the State of Oregon as a project manager and has since retired after 31 years of service. While working for the State of Oregon, Leon befriended Will, who was working in the information technology department and they attended a Buddhist sangha together for many years. Will was familiar with the Work That Reconnects and invited Leon to the first WTR men's retreat. In his adult life Leon studied world religions, philosophies, and systems thinking, and took a liking to Buddhism and Unitarian Universalism. Leon began a "spiritual exploration" and "was not in any kind of crisis," but felt he was "ripe," "looking for a calling," "looking for meaning in his remaining years," and "looking for a way to contribute."

When the men's retreat began Leon was "feeling like a neophyte" and "not understanding the playing field." He said he "was socialized to look at my career, my paid work, as the most important contribution"—his ability to provide for his wife and family. Yet, "as a guide and facilitator, Joanna is so practiced in really helping us get in touch with the miracle of just being alive ... our human species, and the nonhuman world" that trust built quickly. He had never "been in the proximity of so many men that were roughly the generation in a context that was so open" and it "was very grounding and validating and opened the door for lots of growth."

Leon credits the small group activities (dyads, triads, and groups of four) as being important in filling in the framework with context making for a powerful

combination: “Those exercises were so powerful to help me look at the truth of how things are.” For him, “it was interesting to pull the veil off in a group of men,” but when the veil was removed, he saw “the commonality of our grief, and want, and need, and pain from the lack in our relationships with our fathers.” Leon grew up thinking men were less trustworthy than women, saying, “given the choice of confiding in or trusting a man or a woman, it is much safer to trust a woman.”

Doing the activities with the other men helped him to “reevaluate those primitive childhood assumptions” and develop “my very first trusting and close male friendships.” Leon sees “the Work That Reconnects and the work of the Great Turning to be a gift,” but he sees it also “as a family of children, because there are so many ways of teaching and applying the Work That Reconnects.” After working with the men and the WTR activities, he “became willing to look at how fucked up things were in the world and with the spiral I was able to face that and face it in a community that let me grieve with others about where we were.”

After participating in the 2007 and 2008 WTR men’s retreats, Leon began a series of protests as an environmental activist using civil disobedience as a tool to force legislation regarding climate change and the threats to life on Earth. For him, the most important outcomes from WTR retreats were a “community of wonderful men that shared a sense of value and purpose.” Leon along with others formed a chapter of 350.org and another group called Act on Climate in Oregon to educate and advocate about climate change. Along with these actions, Leon “was going to hearings and testifying, going to city council and county

commission meetings, and testifying, lobbying state legislatures, and putting a task-force for a climate action plan in his hometown.”

His first direct civil disobedience was in 2013, when he “and a friend put our arms onto steel pipes welded in an L-shape and locked down on mining equipment at the Port of Umatilla” that was headed for Canadian tar-sand fields. In addition to other actions, Leon and four other activists now known as the Valve Turner Five turned off the tar sands oil pipelines coming into the United States on October 16, 2016. He did this aware that there would be consequences, but also understood that “we’re in the midst of the largest extinction event the Earth has experienced, one that is killing off species faster than any before.” As of this writing, he is still having to appear in court through the appeals process, as the higher courts refuse to allow the necessity defense and keep referring the case back to the lower courts. This is a testament to his conviction about climate justice.

Leon said,

There is less certainty about the possibility of my own work being significant as a contribution, and more understanding of how dependent on community and on the contributions of the people around me. I’m letting myself fall back on that support, understanding my own place in the work and trusting in the possibility that there’s a contribution there and in the outcomes that will flow from that trust. That’s a much different place than my masculine male identity where I saw the goal as being in control, a need to defend my own place in working toward that goal, to justify it and to defend it.

Going forward, Leon continues to work for climate justice and “feels a responsibility for our domestic homeless and for global refugees” ; he sees these as potential areas for social activism.

Mahi

Mahi is a 52-year-old handyman and outdoor enthusiast living in Oregon. Mahi's grandparents were devout Lutherans who immigrated from Germany and settled in Wisconsin sometime after World War I. His father was a farmer and blacksmith and his mother was a housewife, who with an older brother, older sister, and a younger sister continued the Lutheran tradition. They sold their farm and moved to Coos Bay, Oregon, in the 1950s when he was three. He "grew up in Coos Bay and attended a conservative, mostly white, country school."

His main connection has always been with nature, and said, "I have many pleasant memories of childhood, being outside all the time with my dog, just being in nature, it was pretty blissful." Concerning his home life, at first he said there wasn't really any kind of violence that he "was aware of" but later mentioned his parents "feuding" and whose arguments "would actually get pretty intense" and how his mom "could just beat him into the ground" verbally. He also recalls "getting spanked," but didn't see that as violence: "that's just the way it was back then." He also said his parents "didn't have strong racial views," but he remembers his "dad referred to anyone with dark skin as Fiji Islanders"—another contradiction in understanding, as with the violence.

In school, Mahi was not into sports. He said, "I quickly realized I didn't like the competitiveness of sports ... it was a good way to get hurt." What also "dawned" on him "pretty early" was that he "was not as intellectually inclined as a lot of other kids." It "affected" him, because he felt "inferior to a lot of other people that got better grades" than he did. He "never thought about what it meant

to be a man” and “just picked up on the dominant culture,” saying, “I was just a confused teenager trying to figure shit out.” After high school Mahi and a friend “hitched to Calgary and got arrested going across the border into Canada” because they “didn’t want to go through customs,” spending a week in jail. After returning home he “squeaked by without being drafted” into the Vietnam War and “went to Hawaii and lived off the grid.” Mahi “did drugging and boozing” as a way of releasing his inhibitions.” He lived in Hawaii for 15 years and met both his wives there, having a son with each 14 years apart.

Mahi has “never had a mainstream job,” saying, “I just couldn’t deal with it, a 9-to-5 job, house, car payments, debt, all the stuff people are shackled to.” What led him to the Work That Reconnects was when his second wife moved back to Germany and took their son with her, leaving him “heartbroken and devastated.” He had read one of Joanna’s books and “was deeply moved by her writing,” so when he saw the flier for the men’s retreat, he “didn’t hesitate the slightest bit.” He said,

I was just searching for help. I was just broken, and I was dying for some connection, some guidance, some help. And being familiar with Joanna’s work and how much of it related around grief work and sorrows for the world. I just knew it was the right thing for me to do.

His “initial reaction was just some curiosity” and that “whenever a group of men get together there’s always a sense of just sizing people up, like who’s a threat and who’s not.” He said, “I was pretty judgmental,” but “a lot of these biases and first impressions melted away quickly, and I could see people on a deeper level.” He didn’t have negative feelings about physical safety, saying “that’s the interesting and wonderful thing about the process, people come with

good intentions.” Speaking about the spiral of the Work That Reconnects, he “often has a difficult time feeling gratitude but the process is effective, it definitely works. Joanna as a facilitator is good at using these techniques and it was very effective for me; it’s a heart opening experience.” He was able to gain more compassion and forgiveness for himself. It “definitely helped” him “feel more capable.”

When asked about making meaning from the experiences, Mahi says he’s not sure how he chooses and makes meaning out of it. He can’t say it helped him find his purpose, but if anything, it’s made him “more at peace with just the way things are,” giving him “a broader perspective into male identity.” He feels “more resilient” and that “there are tools available” to him, yet “it’s a process, it doesn’t happen all at once.” It “feels therapeutic, it’s relaxing, it’s thought provoking and at the same time sometimes I resist it.”

Regarding the men, Mahi said, “I think I would describe the quality of our relationships as a gentleness, a sweetness, a type of love.” About the interview process, he said, “I admire you for taking this project on, I enjoy the conversation, I respect and honor it and I’m also aware of resistance in me. There’s a part of me that wants to tune out.” He said anything that

makes us the slightest bit uncomfortable we want to push away, get back to our comfort zone, and the Work That Reconnects will definitely push you out of your comfort zone, in a good way. I don’t fully understand it but it’s an ongoing process. It motivates me to keep showing up, to keep pursuing a better understanding of myself and others, to keep participating.

Matt

Matt is a retired clinical psychologist, organic farmer, and local food community organizer in his mid-60s now residing in Oregon. He refers to himself as “a kind of western European mongrel,” having Italian, Moravian, and German heritage. His main influences as a youth came from the Italian side of the family, which immigrated to San Francisco, California “during the period of the Barbary Coast” and developed a successful grocery business in North Beach. His family history includes members who fought in the Revolutionary War and every U.S. war since.

His father fought in the South Pacific during WWII and came back damaged (PTSD), but “didn’t act it out with his family.” “It was never against his family but there were occasions where people would do something that threatened somebody, that crossed a line with him. My brother and I called it his storm the beaches look.” Speaking about his father’s war wounding was emotional for Matt and his love and respect for his father obvious. Matt grew up “working class” or in a “lower middle-class family,” and in following in the footsteps of his Italian grandfather he “was ambitious” and “always had three jobs.”

There was “a musical component” in his life as his Italian family would “always get together and sing and dance,” which led him to pursue an education in music, and to teaching music at San Francisco State University. He later went back to school for his PhD in psychology, “trying to figure himself out” and to “try to help his father” with the lingering effects of war. In the 1970s he “was part of the “back to the land” movement and “was early onto organic farming.” He

“watched the Bay Area become overdeveloped and crowded,” and after having his “house burglarized five times,” bank robber neighbors “having a shootout with the police,” surviving collapsing buildings during the 1989 earthquake, and being “diagnosed with Graves’ disease” he and his wife decided to move to Oregon and “start their family away from all that drama.”

He “was well aware of Joanna Macy” from his years at San Francisco State University, having “read her book and knowing people who had done workshops with her.” He was “interested in meditation” and “the Buddhist way,” which along with her environmental activism “resonated” with him. When he saw Joanna Macy was offering a men’s retreat

at Lost Valley Education Center ... eight miles from my home, I thought, oh my god, I have to do this thing. I was always interested in figuring out how I had been hurt, how men have been hurt ... why men do the crazy things like kill each other.

At the retreat, Matt said, “I was kind of shy ... I stayed to the periphery a lot” and that “some of it was a little touchy-feely.” What he remembers most “is the quality of men” he was meeting. “It was a relief to be among men who were not jockeying for position ... spitting and chest bumping,” demonstrating “unaware sexism” and “dominance,” who brought “their presence and not their personas.”

He remembers Joanna’s “presence being quite remarkable, a wide-open spaciousness that you just kind of fall into” where you get “like a spiritual transmission of what it means to be living from that kind of awakesness.” It was a “lightbulb moment when she went through the holding actions, new institutions, and emerging consciousness,” yet he felt there “is a pull toward the darkness in the Work That Reconnects, toward how bad it is,” toward the pain and suffering,

how damaged we and the world really are. Matt thinks “this makes people anxious, characteristically defensive” without inviting “them into a broader perspective, or the next higher worldview.” Even so, in the Truth Mandala, he was “outraged ... furious ... spitting mad at the lack of connection and compassion for the damage being done by people’s consumptive lifestyles.”

It was the Truth Mandala where Matt came up with the “Iraqi Mother Test” for testing the merit of an action.

There was a well-known picture of an Iraqi mother holding her dead child that circulated through the public widely during that war. If I sat down with that mother and said, I want to meet my friend [Vincent] and help him in his educational journey because it is my hope that he can do good on the world that will keep the type of thing that took your child from happening again. And in order to do that I going to have to put market demands for gasoline that will impact your country to get there to do that. In my mind, if she says, “Yes, please do something to stop this from ever happening,” then it passes the Iraqi Mother Test. Because the other side is that mother spitting at me, “How dare you put that above the life of my child that I’m holding in my hands. How dare you! How could you do that?” (The above was said through tears.)

As with other men, Matt was moved when at the end of the retreat when Joanna, “the only woman in the room,” spoke about her childhood oppression by her father and brothers. “It was really fabulous; you could see how the innocence had been attacked and squashed in her enculturation and how she was flinging it off ... it was very beautiful.” When he got home and told his wife, he “burst into tears and she just held me, it was really great.”

In describing the value and meaning from his experiences, Matt said, “There was definitely a period of integration after the retreat, I grew very sensitive to how polarized our society is around environmentalism. I realized how frightened I was in this world.” One outcome of his experiences was that he

pulled “together a bunch of workshops” and wrote his book, *Communicating Across the Divides*. Joanna talked about “the line of good and evil that runs through the center of every heart,” which he “would have never got” and feels his “focus is on continued awakening to my own uncaring and shadow elements.” Matt said, “it was the evolution of consciousness that brought me to the WTR, and it’s continued after that, it’s been influenced by it.” He has to “keep opening to this broader contextual awareness,” to have self-empathy “in the struggle with this self-hatred ... that I can manifest ugliness.”

Matt is not interested in facilitating the Work That Reconnects but has organized men’s circles at his home that use some of the practices. His relationship with his wife had deepened, he said. “I think she appreciates how things have evolved, I’m able to share more deeply my own struggles, I have more flexibility on my masculinity, in my maleness now.” When asked what’s next, Matt says he is “trying to stay open to not knowing.” He’s “letting go, thinking surrender.” He said, “I don’t want to get woo-woo but it feels like trusting more the intuitive movement through my life, and it’s scary as shit, but I’m going with it.”

Matt also wanted “to give me a shout out” for a WTR introduction session that I had done at one of our men’s gatherings “that was so well done,” in his view. He said, “that was teaching, your ability to present that information was as powerful as Joanna’s ability to articulate it, so go Vince, go for it, that’s your calling, it makes a difference, get it out there somehow.” (I am humbled)

Rocky

Rocky is a Universalist Unitarian minister, vision quest leader, and youth rites of passage guide living in New Mexico. Rocky was “an Army brat ... born at WestPoint Military Academy” when his father, “a career artillery officer, was teaching mathematics there in the mid-1950s.” His parents were “working class people from a little town in Indiana,” and they “moved every 18 months to 2 years.” He has an older brother from his mom’s first marriage, a younger brother, and two younger sisters.

Both his parents were “well educated”; his mother “imparted a deep love of nature” and his father “was a thoughtful guy, educated, pretty calm, secure in himself.” His parents “modeled a loving, positive, long-lasting relationship ... the family was tight-knit,” and when he was 15 his father died of pancreatic cancer. This was “devastating”; he “was not just really pissed off, not just angry, but angry at god.” He ended up dealing drugs and living on the streets, and in a close brush with the law his “little outlaw life fell apart.”

Eventually, he went into computer sales and did very well. Unintentionally, he fathered a son, but he and the mother never married. These events changed his outlook on life: “he got custody of his son, started therapy, and settled down.” He got “involved in a sweat lodge community and started putting his life back together.” Rocky did not go to college, but “was on the Red Road with the sweat lodge, the traditional vision quest, and the Sundance” and is “self-taught.” He and his second wife (a CIIS PhD graduate) went to the School of Lost Borders and worked with youth and rites of passage, as well as with other youth-

oriented organizations using Native American, South American, and Jungian psychology. He now has a divinity degree and ministers at a Unitarian Universalist church in his community.

Rocky was familiar with Joanna and her books and knew Mike, one of the men's retreat organizers, from divinity school; he felt comfortable settling in at the retreat. He had many years of groupwork and going to the men's retreat was a chance for him "to play." It was "a great group of guys, everybody seemed comfortable with each other, pretty open, willing to share and be vulnerable." Rocky considers himself "a fairly reserved person" in that he is not one to just how he's feeling, but he "felt safe enough in that setting ... it wasn't a problem to drop in and be vulnerable." He also sees the "need for trust, which takes time ... it's good to have a history to go deep with a group of guys."

Of his time in retreat, he said he "felt very, very grateful and very connected." He said, "Gratitude takes me out of myself ... softens me, makes me more appreciative." Of the structure of the Work That Reconnects, he said "the spiral can be challenging, but I think that gratitude is really, really key." He was apprehensive about the shadow work aspect of the Work That Reconnects, saying, "I think honoring our pain of the world, doing the shadow work, is important but I think people need to approach it at their own speed."

In men's work, he said "it's useful for men who have made that journey, to mirror that to other men, so we can be in touch with those feelings and articulate them." It's "part of the journey into mature masculinity, you have men who can't listen or do self-introspection, and they're dangerous ... and that's a

deeper cultural shadow ... a deeper issue we have.” Rocky considers the WTR practices and activities as potentially being like bringing ceremony into the work: “Ceremony is a way of encoding these things, embedding them in the psyche, repeated ritual, repeated things ... embodies, because the body and the mind are not separate.”

Rocky thought that the Work That Reconnects is “a real useful framework ... a piece of medicine in my medicine bag. It reinforced a lot of my values and I carry that forward in my ministry.” He hears people “expressing dismay, frustration, and not knowing how to move forward” and thinks that “Active Hope is a useful framework for people,” encouraging study groups as “it aligns well with UU [Universalist Unitarian] values.” His ministry is his main way of bringing this work forward and although he said it is nice to hear people say “that was a great sermon,” he continued, “but actually taking something I brought forward and turning it into action, that’s when I get that good feeling.”

Rocky says the Work That Reconnects is “valuable, useful, positive ... a bug influence ... easy for people to work with ... one of the major threads in my reading and ministry.” He said, “I want to reduce my suffering, reduce other’s suffering, and that’s how do we do it. We don’t want to cause suffering we want to reduce suffering.” I’m going to try to make sure everybody suffers less and that’s the goal.” He thinks the Work That Reconnects “psychologically grounds people, it gives them a way to deal with uncertainty, and it fits beautifully in the Medicine Wheel. But yeah, it’s a process thing because it’s a spiral”; it just “keeps coming back to gratitude. It’s just a process thing, it’s a circular thing, a

relationship thing. It's the web versus the hierarchy kind of a deal, so it's a process thing."

In closing, he said of the interview process,

It's always good to go back and refresh, to have the opportunity to go back and reflect, think about stuff. "Oh yeah, that's why I did that, and this is where I'm going," because we all get caught up and lose sight of that. It's been very useful.

Wally

Wally is a sanitation engineer living in Idaho has a long history with deep ecology through the North West Earth Island Institute and with Joanna and Fran Macy. Wally was a co-organizer of the first and second WTR men's retreats. He was also an original member of our "Lost Valley Men" group that self-organized after the first WTR men's retreat at the Lost Valley Retreat and Education Center in Oregon. He has been married twice, with no children, and says he is still "pessimistic in relationship" although he is in a committed relationship with his partner. He is still involved in men's work and "continues learning" about group work.

Going back generations, Wally's family lived along the Georgia-South Carolina border. His family was divided along what "felt more like a class thing," not "in terms of money and social standing" but "in terms of education; uneducated vs educated." His mother's father was a farmer and corn miller from a conservative and judgmental family who Wally did not identify with. He identifies most with his father's side of the family; they were "educated and were townspeople, not farmers ... a number of them were teachers, one a pharmacist, a great grandfather who was a policeman." He thought of his area of Georgia "as

home” and felt “other” and “not belonging” when his parents relocated to Alabama so his father could teach engineering at a college there.

In his extended family there was alcoholism, suicide, and verbal violence, and “a whole lot of secretiveness” as well as class division. Shame comes up from several sources: “My dad had some shame around who he was, and who his cousins were,” he said. Wally’s father was “a dry drunk” and his “dad’s father and grandfather were drunks,” so there “was plenty of room for shame.” His parents “weren’t very social,” they “didn’t have people over to the house,” and it “felt like they didn’t know anyone.” He says he got “the message people are too much trouble ... or too exhausting.” There was “fierce shame” on his mother’s side for “something in her background” and “she couldn’t talk about anything straight.”

This has caused difficulty in his relationships:

All the indirect communication and consequences of misinterpreting I am allergic to feeling like someone is trying to get me to do something without just asking me plainly to do it. I feel manipulated. I go nonlinear. I really get unreasonable.

He experienced the desegregation of the South and was bussed to a mostly Black school where “he got good marks in everything he took” and did not suffer from the experience. He “did not play sports,” had “almost no social skills, very few friends,” and “was more on the academic, squeaky clean side.” In not identifying with “what appears to be a Southern male,” his life was “more a life of the mind.” He was “not emotionally open” and his “emotions were clamped down hard.” Wally said, “there was nothing there for me ... I didn’t see anything there I wanted.” That

started this discovery process. I already felt like an outsider, to not feel like a man was not surprising. It wasn’t that I didn’t identify feminine,

masculine, or whatever, it was that I identified as Other ... that isolating feeling, that otherness.

When Wally was living in Oregon, he got involved with the Northwest Earth Institute and was introduced to Joanna Macy through a series of Deep Ecology courses and retreats held by them, before the Work That Reconnects was given that name. His first official WTR retreat was in 2004, which is where he and I met, and in 2007 he attended the first men's only retreat. Of the men's retreat he says he saw others "going deep" and remembers himself as "one of the two that didn't." He said, "there is not the type of emotional catharsis" for him "that we frequently see with people with the Work That Reconnects exercises." After all his personal work, he said he "finally just fucking gave up" because he felt he "may never get to fucking bottom of it ... to deal with whatever it is down there that is being guarded." At the same time, he was feeling "a less depressed, more alive, more engaged life."

Wally left engineering for a period of 11 years and went to every WTR gathering he could; he was at the inception of the idea to have a men's only retreat at Westwind when Bragi answered the woman's question about "where are the men." Wally was a part of organizing the first two men-only retreats, finding that he "was comfortable with the inviter role" and "got pleasure in helping people overcome the boundaries that would keep them from participating." Even though the work "was not moving his core issues" and he was "feeling some shame" that "there must be something wrong with [him]," it didn't stop him from sharing. He said, "The thing that is so valuable to me by having those experiences with the

other men is understanding how much we need to figure out how to get our hearts open.”

Concerning the value and meaning of his experiences, he said, “I’m very confused about what our role is as men in the helping with the changes that need to be made,” yet “if we can create the right circumstances, we can get the men there ... and it is incumbent on us as other men to be reaching out to them.” Through these experiences, Wally said, he has “learned to push past anxiety about groups and participate in them because I have tasted the rewards and the rewards come consistently.” He has “more tools, more areas of inquiry” and a “tremendous amount of self-knowledge” that he didn’t have back in 2004 at his first WTR retreat. “I can see you as more of a full human than I could before I had that piece of commonality to connect you to.”

Of social conditioning, he said, “Learning a little bit about patriarchy ... a little bit about testosterone and rape and dominance, oppression, and man-oh-man did I want to go hide somewhere.” The experiences with the men’s work helped him “understand it as part of something more and not just sink under the guilt of it.” Wally admits that his mental, emotional, and spiritual health is better, saying, “as a direct result of this work I am opening.” He said he has “more resilience ... more ability to find seeds of hope,” and “it’s been wonderful to actually say I’m happy.” At the same time, he said,

Frankly, I don’t remember to take advantage of the work. Even though it’s very potent it’s not an active thing in my life. It still has value, I still have an affinity for it, it’s still important, but I am busy just working for the coin of the realm so I can stay afloat.

Because he watched our men's group semi-disintegrate and lost close friends who he co-presented with, he is no longer doing facilitation or going to more retreats. However, he would be interested in helping get men to participate in other men-only WTR retreats if someone would take the lead for organization and facilitation.

In closing he said, "I'm glad you're digging into it to see what was valuable to people, men, who were introduced to the Work That Reconnects, however they got there, and start leaving some guidance, or tracks, paths for other people to follow."

Will

Will is a retired computer programmer and information technology specialist living in Oregon. He is volunteering his computer skills to help sustain and promote the Work That Reconnects, working closely with a small group of facilitators, Joanna's personal assistant, and Joanna. Will introduced Leon to the Work That Reconnects and the men's retreat while they were working together for the State of Oregon. Will has five children, four boys and a girl, and is happily married to his third wife and living in Oregon.

Will is the descendent of German parents who immigrated to the United States in 1951, after the war, when he was three. Having both German and Jewish heritage, Will had relatives who were in the German army and Jews who were killed during the Jewish holocaust. There is "a lot of trauma there, especially on my dad's side." He grew up in Southern California, where his parents assimilated quickly as a working-class couple. He was a good student in school, played high

school sports, and has continued to be a runner into his elder years. He credits his parents for his connection to nature by taking him on vacations to places like the Grand Canyon, Oregon, and Yellowstone for camping.

Being “raised with this German discipline” he “got spanked,” but “never hit in the face, but on my hands, or on my butt.” Will’s father interacted with him a bit when he was younger, but was deeply troubled and eventually sexually abused Will’s daughter, who later became addicted to heroin. Growing up, he was “consciously looking for a male mentor” but “never really had one.” Will was enrolled at University of California, Los Angeles when the Kent State shooting took place. Becoming disillusioned, he dropped out of school and went hitchhiking around the United States and Canada before returning to Southern California. He did not finish at UCLA, but instead got a job as a computer programmer and began a professional life.

Will first began the Work That Reconnects in 2003 and had experienced mixed groups before the first men’s retreat in 2007. Regarding the Work That Reconnects overall, he said, “it has enriched my life in many ways.” With the men-only retreats, Will stated,

With the absence of women there I felt, for me, a bit more at ease, but I also felt more hesitant to share myself emotionally with other men. If my left arm was my emotional part, I grew up cutting that part of myself off, I didn’t realize how much of my own emotions I would have to deal with.

What ultimately made the difference was when he heard “other people share their stories,” which “resonated” with his own story. “It’s like you almost take away from ‘my’ story to this is ‘our’ story.”

Especially in the men's group, Will said, "where there's so many issues around fathers ... that really built a cohesiveness in the community, because now we are sharing something collectively that we may have privatized or thought we're the only one that experiences that." A common thread that Will saw and experienced was the universality of the suppressed grief in himself and the men. "As I took more workshops, I started to realize how carrying this grief, in its many forms, including personal grief or grief for the land, I was really cut off from it."

Will has practiced Buddhist meditation for much of his life, which he found very grounding in his experience with the Work That Reconnects. He had his connection to nature, but "never had any words to articulate it" and the Work That Reconnects gave him the language to do so. This work also "validated this area of what it's like to be male," that "it's ok to show your emotions" and "when you do it collectively you get support."

This work has also stimulated a sense of elderhood in Will, creating the desire for "intergenerational work" and support for the "invitation to expand it to other men." Speaking as an elder, Will asked, "What can I do to contribute somehow, in a positive way, from our experiences to the younger generation?" In answering his own question, Will said he is "still interested in being back in the workshop model where he could co-facilitate and co-organize working with people." He sees his main contribution as expanding the WTR network in using his "technological skills behind the scenes to keep feedback flowing and keep the network going" when Joanna "passes on." He is also "a board member of the

Holistic Centers Network,” which includes Findhorn and Esalen, and other centers of transformation where he helps organize retreats. Will is instrumental in keeping our WTR men’s group in connection and meeting at least once year.

Additional Interview Threads

Nature

Contact with nature when young was common among these participants’ stories, from growing up in nature with a “Willamette Valley farming family” (Leon) or camping vacations in “the Grand Canyon, Oregon, and Yellowstone” (Will), “anchored in moments of silence in nature and deep connection ... canoeing near Long Island Sound” (Bogai) to “maintaining a life-long family ritual of huckleberry picking” on “Mount Adams, Washington” (Bragi). Their connections have remained alive for them through the years and are still important in their lives.

The Work That Reconnects is rooted in Deep Ecology and many people who are sensitive to the threats to stable climate and destruction of entire ecosystems, as well as anti-nuclear activists, are attracted to this work. It is not surprising that nature is a thread among these stories. What was surprising to me was the intensity of the memories, how the experiences had lived in them and continues to be a way that they relate to the world around them. These experiences have not seemed to diminish over the years; they remain strong in their psyche.

My connection with nature came from growing up in mountainous rural Northern California in a subsistence farming and construction family. We were

usually the local connection for eggs, milk, and cream. We raised chickens, pigs, sheep, and cattle, for both sale and food, had a lush garden, and hunted during the winter rainy season when it was too wet to do road construction work. There were at least a dozen ranch horses for collecting the cattle and sheep, and we were all riding at a very early age. Outdoors with the animals was a place of stability for me during turbulent times. As an introverted adult, to best combat stress and overwhelm, I escaped to the forest or the ocean as often as I can for solitude, to regroup myself and to recharge.

This commonality of nature connection suggests how significant it is to have meaningful contact with nature as a way of knowing more about one's self. Another way to say this is that, perhaps, direct contact with nature helps to soften or open our senses so they can encompass more; it is a gateway to broader awareness. This is important when considering taking the Work That Reconnects into urban and inner-city environments where children rarely see the stars and, if ever, come into direct contact with wild nature.

Music

Music plays an important role in many of the lives of the men, as do other arts such as dance, song, and theater. Music is the most prominent, yet participants also discussed the role of art therapies, sound healing/therapy practices, poetry, and journaling in some lives and occupations. Several of the men have had professional careers in music as teachers, composers, and musicians, and it is still active in their lives. Music is a powerful way of using creative action to relieve grief within a safe place, which helps move the musician

toward transformation (Golden, 2013). It appears that this was true for at least two of my co-researchers, Duffy and Matt.

The above discussion is also an indication of who these men are not. They are not out of mainstream corporate America without some experience of searching into deeper questions and suffering from some losses. Their stories are not about having power, control, or power over; they are not seeking the cultural masculine norms but going counter to them. They are experienced enough and seeking meaning and value in their lives.