A PURSUIT OF HOLISTIC SELF,

USING THE PHENOMENON OF SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS,

THE SYMBIOTIC TRIAD OF HOLISTIC HEALTH,

AND SISTER WHO, A Sacred Clown AND TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY NUN

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A Pursuit of Holistic Self,

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by

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Abstract

The autoethnographic source of this dissertation originates within the work of Sister Who (www.SisterWho.com), an incarnation of the archetypal Sacred Clown. This is then related to the societal phenomenon of "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR). Both of these unconsciously orient around a new method of measurement of holistic health, named as the symbiotic triad of holistic health. Additionally, the related autoethnography may be the first-ever first-person report by a genuine and organically developed Sacred Clown. Actual examples of Sister Who's ministerial work can be seen at www.YouTube.com/DenverNeVaar.

Keywords: spiritual but not religious, SBNR, Sacred Clown, Sister Who, symbiotic relationship, interdisciplinary, holistic health, spirituality, psychology, sociology, individuality

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Chapter One: Introduction

Throughout three decades of being Sister Who, I have often been asked about the creation of this work. The consistent expectation has always been that creation was accomplished cognitively, intentionally, and decisively; it was not. In most respects, invention and evolution proceeded in specifically intuitive ways. Naming a precise research question is therefore problematic at best, because this indicates a more left-brain, cognitive, and intentional approach. That being noted, the question central to this dissertation is the challenge of articulating that which is central to both the phenomenon of "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) and the specific manifestation of the Sacred Clown embodied by Sister Who. Part of the answer was the discovery of the symbiotic triad of holistic health.

Unfortunately, a precise definition of SBNR is apparently not available. The best I was able to locate is an extended observation by Mercadante (2014):

> "Nones"--those who do not claim any particular communal faith identity--are on the rise. Although the term "none" may sound pejorative, it is simply a shorthand used by sociologists to designate those who might check "none" on a survey when asked to what particular faith group they belong. This phenomenon is increasing so rapidly that worldwide "unbelief" now represents the world's third largest "religion." (p. 1)

and

> While this fact may seem to indicate we are becoming more secular in America, something else is happening instead. Outside organized religion, there is an amazing proliferation of spiritual alternatives which both promote and cultivate the significant proportion of "nones" who are looking to develop their own spirituality apart from traditional structures, those popularly known as "spiritual but not religious." (SBNR) (pp.3-4).

I was told many years ago by a ministerial colleague (whose name I no longer remember) that "a church that marries one generation, becomes a widow within the next" (personal communication, 1984). It's entirely possible that he was plagiarizing William Inge: "Whoever marries the spirit of the age, will find himself a widower in the next" (source unknown). A core meaning behind this phrase is that renewal and the continual integration of new methods, forms, and perspectives is an ongoing inclusive challenge that must be embraced, if effectiveness and the ability to survive are to be retained. A cursory observation emphatically recommends that this dynamic can be reasonably anticipated within all living forms—from the dandelion growing through a crack in the sidewalk to the coyote living within urban settings to human communities having been formed throughout time within even the most diverse and adversarial environments. Renewal and adaptation (e.g., forms of growth) remain—apparently universally—essential to any and all continuance of life.

This dissertation concurs with this premise and expresses itself through the intersection of two areas of investigation. The first is the phenomenon known as "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR), that is a particular example of spiritual evolution. The second is Sister Who (www.SisterWho.com), who is an example of the timeless tribal archetype known as the Sacred Clown. A precise yet comprehensive definition of the Sacred Clown would be a long and difficult undertaking and would distract from the focus of this dissertation, but relevant characteristics will be noted. Included is that both the constitutive pieces and the intersection of these two are interdisciplinary in nature—combining elements of spirituality, psychology, and sociology, each of which is uniquely defined within the second chapter. The resulting symbiotic triad of holistic health

(hereafter named as the triad, explained in the second chapter also) is but one tool capable of describing with precision and clarity both the resulting conceptions (of spirituality, psychology, and sociology) and the associated dynamics. That is, the triad is a tool that identifies the ways that the individual dimensions of spirituality, psychology, and sociology manifest within a specific individual in an interdependent and interconnected manner. Apparently, no other tool integrating all of the same dynamics and producing as concise an evaluation is available. The utility of this tool is further that goals and activities relevant to individual growth can be more consciously recognized and embraced.

Any lesser description than the triad offers, leaves knowledge and understanding in a fractured and incomplete state, unable to fully account for effects that are nonetheless apparent, demonstrated, and consistently enduring. Many derivative possibilities are mentioned, but cannot be fully explored within the limited scope of this dissertation. The sincere hope is that this is merely the first of many conversations, launching new avenues of inquiry that expand knowledge and understanding. Greater complexity must be anticipated within discussing such multi-faceted and multi-dimensional phenomena.

Alternatively phrased, the focus of this dissertation is a pursuit of greater integration of individualistic perspectives near the periphery of understanding and experience, that are actually essential to outward expansion and forward movement. Central to such integration, is the relatively new methodology of autoethnography, that is distinct from both autobiography and autoethnology.

To be clear, autobiography is a superficial account of one's relational and experiential history. Autoethnology is the study of self-generated works, especially of voice and perspective. Autoethnography is a deeply analytical first-person evaluation of experience and insight, more concerned with individual integrity than generalization.

A remaining challenge nonetheless encompassed by the methodology of autoethnography is the extent to which particular experiences and/or insights will be regarded as normative, authoritative, or irrelevant due to uniqueness. The number and nature of examples necessary to satisfy any particular reader, whose non-autoenthnographic perspective (i.e., third-person rather than first-person perspective) would interpret those experiences differently, remains in most cases unspecified. A widely publicized voice offering a debated understanding is Chang (2008), but she omits distinctions between autoethnography and autoethnology. Her work lacks both the first-person voice as well as direct experience, that are signature qualities of autoethnography. It appears that she instead strives for generalization and broad classification, both of which diminish and devalue the individual distinctness with which autoethnography speaks. Without that individuality, autoethnography would no longer authentically be autoethnography. My contention is that genuine and competently done autoethnography transcends existing documentation, since the method would be unnecessary if existing documentation contained the insights and understanding exclusive to autoethnographic records.

It is vital to recognize that my experiential data were not drawn from a small sample, but rather from three decades of intense work that includes a website and YouTube channel, that create connection with a global audience (www.SisterWho.com

and www.YouTube.com/DenverNeVaar). I consider it my duty as a researcher to explain how I arrived at particular conclusions—the depth and detail of which transform autobiography into autoethnography. Essential to the integrity of the report is rigorous evaluation of whether or to what degree deconstructed experience is consistent--that is, substantive--and neither superficially categorized nor random.

For those who understand the implications (too extensive to include here), the context of my autoethnography has included extensive involvement as congregational member, ritual participant, spiritual counselor, focus group facilitator, worship orchestrator, and conversational voice with the following:

— various forms of Roman Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, and non-denominational Christian manifestations

— numerous non-Christian religions

— diverse expressions of Neo-Paganism

— New Age thought

— personally imagined amalgamations within diverse individuals encountered, of the fore-mentioned ideological constructions (i.e., individuals who identify as uniquely integrating elements of contrasting belief systems and/or practices)

A challenging commonality of constitutive components that will be enumerated is that attempts to research these areas are discouraged by a general lack of first-person accounts of any significant depth. This deficiency may be analogous to learning of Druids from exclusively Roman reports, or learning from persons whose self-definition is likewise based exclusively upon second-person perspectives rather than upon first-

person experiences. If, for another example, someone with Lakota Sioux heritage had no access to relevant elders and was only able to learn what it means to be Lakota Sioux from books written by authors who were not Lakota Sioux, the result would be a self-identity based upon second-person perspectives. An autoethnographic formation of self-identity, in that case, could additionally draw from self-reflection and direct experience. Whether or not the resulting synthesis would thereafter be considered representative of a generalized Lakota Sioux perspective would unavoidably remain open to discussion and debate.

Superficially, an additional challenge is that of linguistically communicating what is ineffable and beyond human comprehension. One may experience and report perceptions without ever being able to define the complete reality of that which was experienced and perceived, yet the reality itself may remain undeniable. Alternatively phrased, it is wise for researchers to utilize available criteria to measure all that can be measured, while respecting numerous research questions that cannot. Additionally, they must refrain from dismissing as unimportant, those questions that cannot currently be conclusively answered.

A concession that must be included is that knowledge that has been written is only the tiniest portion of the actual fact-oriented information and understanding that exist. All honest intellectual inquiries must be accompanied by generous quantities of open-mindedness and humility. One must always listen and pose clarifying questions—extensively—before one speaks, and consider that even one who could be classified as an apprentice is still predisposed to learning even if no mentor is available. This was, in fact, my experience. The apprentice system has been utilized extensively and broadly

throughout human history, yet includes that all of the greatest masters were (and are) continuously learning. In effect, they were still apprentices in relationship to anything with even greater knowledge and understanding. The uniqueness of my spiritual path, experience, and service diminishes any need for being or having an apprentice-- although I welcome supporting another's development using available means and resources. To have an apprentice would seem to arrogantly propose that one should become a second manifestation of precisely my work. Developing one's own approach to particular work usually occurs after rather than during apprenticeship. The choice I recommend is for each to pursue what is individually and relationally appropriate.

Additionally, a great many insights may be accumulated by an apprentice that are never written but nonetheless essential to all future professional practice. These may include specific understandings of methodology and technique, precise discernment of optimal material to use, and so forth. The insights referenced at the beginning of this paragraph include knowing precisely how much and in which ways force (physical, mental, emotional, or social) is to be applied to achieve a particular goal. In some but not all cases, these understandings are learned from a more experienced practitioner. They can also be discovered within personal participation. The concern here is that an apprentice may not always document such discoveries and insights. Then again, an apprentice may endure extensive struggle to select the language by which to convey the particular insight or experience. Occasionally, such struggle may end with withdrawing from the task in a state of overwhelming frustration--without ever accomplishing a written record. What must be recognized is the simultaneous reality and potential intractability of unwritten knowledge and understanding. To better

understand this concept, one would only need to converse with a farmer who carries literally generations of unwritten understanding about the practices of that trade. Included within that knowledge may be abilities to govern decisions related to cultivation, collaboration, animal husbandry, and equipment maintenance. Within the ministerial activities of Sister Who, relevant awareness has resulted in sustained listening, curiosity, and openness to diverse perspectives and experiences.

Parallel to all of the areas of concern mentioned are the innumerable globally and temporally inclusive reports of paranormal interaction. Additionally, these have occurred both within and beyond theological and ideological frameworks. This dissertation recognizes these, but is unable to conclusively investigate. At one point within their discussion, the authors of *The Holographic Universe* (Talbot, 1991) conclude that, "the ability to respond to meaning is a characteristic not only of consciousness but of all matter" (p. 122). This implies extensive and often unpredictable overlap congruous with the ideology proposed by Gene Roddenberry many times within episodes of *Star Trek* of "infinite diversity in infinite combination (IDIC)." The fact of paranormal reports and experiences, creates opportunity for both SBNR and certain activities related to Sister Who. Both are predominantly open to consideration of virtually any source of information, including ideological conceptions framed within literary and cinematic science fiction.

Synchronistic and serendipitous experiences and events that not only exceed all parameters of control but also defy all calculations of probability, remain nonetheless historically factual and testify to reality that transcends current understanding and measurement. Yet this reality may inspire intellectual or creative response. Such

elements contribute to both SBNR and Sister Who's experiences, while being neither essential nor foundational to either. More directly, I did not persevere in this ministerial work because of inexplicable phenomena, but rather because of verifiably positive intellectual, relational, and emotional effects. Despite "not being in the spotlight," certain inexplicable phenomena have occurred. What is therefore common to SBNR, Sister Who, and Gene Roddenberry's creative works is having a goal no more specific than growth and exploration, yet unexpectedly encountering transcendent insights and experiences.

Specific cultural and societal contexts may determine the precise frequency, nature, reward, and punishment of responses to phenomena. It is unlikely they will ever eliminate them—especially due to the global parameters of their occurrence. Such contexts may alter the autoethnographic voice and language with which such experiences and insights speak, but they cannot control the spectrum of possibilities for hearing and intentionally listening. It is my experiential contention that both genuine examples of the Sacred Clown and of practitioners of SBNR are intentionally listening.

To establish criteria for genuine and respectable autoethnography as a research method, every effort will be made to implement a rigorous objectively based perspective. References to historical, cultural, and ideological contexts may occasionally be included, but not to the extent of abandoning the primary focus. For those who understand the implications (too extensive to include here), significant points of personal orientation are

— I am a gay autistic man living within the time and place that I do

— My grandparents were of four contrasting European ethnicities, some of which were occasionally at war with each other (the ethnicities, not the grandparents)

— I grew to adulthood within a working-class, northern-midwestern, small-town, and predominantly agrarian social context

— I have had a life-long spiritual and intellectual rather than physical orientation

— I consistently experience difference as fascinating rather than threatening

— I'm predisposed to learning and growth rather than stagnation

— I have an autistic sensitivity to precise detail and heightened self-awareness

— I have written a lengthy yet unpublished manuscript that attempts to answer common questions of autobiography relevant to Sister Who

— I have created more than 500 episodes of a public access television show intellectually addressing a wide variety of topics related to life and spirituality

— I have made more than a half dozen appearances within my "portable chapel" at holistic health and metaphysically oriented fairs

— I have recorded four albums of original songs composed by myself

— I have climbed 16 of Colorado's highest mountains in ritual garb

— I have published a philosophically and spiritually oriented monthly newsletter offering substantive food for thought for over 20 years.

How all of this resulted in the phenomenon of Sister Who is a much longer and far more complex story than this dissertation is able to encompass. Included is the

possibility that my internal universe quickly became larger and more complex than anything external. Personal disciplines of self-reflection were magnified by moving beyond mere superficial observation, thus providing autoethnographic possibilities possessing insights that would be otherwise conspicuously absent. As described by Scarles (2010), this constitutes "knowledge that would otherwise remain undisclosed" (p. 917).

A final autoethnographic consideration is a need for ongoing dialogue with elements present within the surrounding context. That is, that the experience does not unfold in a purely narcissistic way, within which constructive dialogue is categorically and preemptively prevented. This is especially evident within the experiences of Sister Who within innumerable conversations and interactions, all of which shaped and molded consequent ministerial interaction. A lack of consistency would likely translate into a lack of integrity that would also sabotage ministerial work and professional continuance in innumerable ways. Numerous examples of such conversations occurred within my portable chapel at holistic health and metaphysically oriented fairs, within which I made myself available to members of the general public. Anything said to a single individual was likely to be repeated, as I was frequently told that certain individuals circled for extended periods of time. After inquiring about me from anyone they could, they finally gathered the courage to directly approach and I silently committed to being as unconditionally loving and supportive as possible.

An additional term that is essential to this discussion, for which the need for invention was obvious, is "relational individuality" (NeVaar, 2010). As much as narcissistic individuality refers in various ways to obsession with self and is regarded as

a form of mental illness, what is conspicuously absent within such configurations is a specifically holistic sense of self that is inherently inseparable from relationships. That being the case, I concluded that a healthy corollary and opposite was desperately needed. Extensive contemplation and deconstruction revealed that no example of individuality is able to sustainably exist without an accompanying constellation of relationships, yet extensive research discovered no reference to individuality that was not narcissistic in nature. Similar reflection thus concluded that--in practice--the signature quality of narcissism is the negation of relationship by a corresponding preoccupation with a non-holistic sense of self. This led to the discovery of symbiosis as a fundamental dynamic of holistic health. Note: I use "symbiotic" and "relational" in reference to individuality interchangeably due to how synonymous they are within this linguistic application.

This was also a focus within my early doctoral writing, resulting in a paper entitled, "Research in Human Development Pertaining to the Development of Symbiotic Individuality" (NeVaar, 2010; see Appendix B). An African term expressing a similar idea, learned only later, is the word "ubuntu." This word was most concisely translated by an unknown television source I viewed years ago, as "I am because we are and we are because I am." Symbiotic interconnection thus remains both fundamental and essential to all consequent integrity and interrelationship.

Chapter Two: Dissertation Constitutive Elements

Each of the following elements will be addressed in much greater detail, but those that can be anticipated are the religious phenomenon of "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR), Sister Who, and the triad briefly mentioned within the previous chapter. A comparison and contrast of each pairing of these three will also be included within this chapter. The combination of all of these, will hopefully provide a sufficiently comprehensive understanding.

Spiritual But Not Religious

Introducing the perception, action, and experience that comprises SBNR is important. The reason this area of perception and experience exists is because religious contexts are either unable or unwilling to provide what SBNR includes. A significant element within the introduction of its identity, therefore, must be defining what it is that SBNR offers that institutionalized religion does not. Further study could also explore *why* religion does not, but that is not the focus of this dissertation.

A question this poses for institutionalized religion is to what extent such entities have become top-heavy and burdensome. A need for SBNR is contained within foundational intuitive impulses to explore that which religious structure and components have forbidden. Religious routines that have become tedious to maintain are likewise infinitely more mutable within personally defined SBNR networks. An individual may choose, for example, to adapt a common ritual in personally relevant ways that may never be replicated within formal liturgical settings, due to objections from dogmatic ecclesiastical administrators.

As much as every belief system struggles to come to terms with set-backs, injuries, injustices, and every other form of evil, the dogmas offered by religious perspectives are for the most part inflexible and often ineffectively responsive. SBNR, conversely, dares to ask any question and formulate virtually any helpful answer. While the central purpose of both religion and spirituality can be logically determined to be growth—regardless of the effectiveness with which particular examples serve that purpose—SBNR has no system that must be maintained to serve the continuance of its own existence.

This, as a first distinction between SBNR and religion, points to the area of differences in structure and consequently indoctrination. Within SBNR, no hierarchy or authority is charged with defining or enforcing ideological and behavioral boundaries. Individual freedom and attentiveness, by default, are the regulatory administrators. This might explain why perhaps the majority of individuals describing themselves as SBNR are not particularly aligned with any communal association, except as a matter of contextual convenience.

Parallel to such personal factors are societal/cultural factors, economic factors, and the possibility of a predisposition to oral or non-literate records. Among these is the oft-cited witticism of Sister Who that "You cannot have someone else's spiritual experience; you can only have your own." If there is no unifying administration, one might wonder whether such existence is required and, if so, what specific purposes are thereby served.

Spiritual guidance offers such a range of variables that religious entities have gone to great lengths to control the forms that are generally available. Within SBNR, no

such restrictions apply. The boundaries are essentially set by one's experience, education, motivation, and serendipitous encounters, rather than by any institution with potentially ignorant and/or projected agendas.

A second distinction setting SBNR apart from religion is the much greater extent to which the full spectrum of traditions, perspectives, and practices are potentially integrated. All elements can be heard, interpreted, and applied in whatever ways are deemed appropriate. Within my graduate-level education that ultimately produced a Master of Theological Studies degree, for example, was a course entitled "Ritual and Worship." My vocabulary of such extended from Neo-Pagan rituals to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve within the Roman Catholic Church. With great disappointment I discovered the class would address nothing more than Anglican ritual and worship. Within SBNR, the diversity of liturgical voices is conversely magnified by whatever spectrum of cultural contexts are relevant and available.

In spite of a conspicuous absence of a common history, perspective, experience, and communal commitment, SBNR calls into question what each of these truly serve and whether they are truly beneficial within a spectrum that survives specifically because of its diversity. Upon closer consideration of most demonstrated practices within religion, the truth of such allegedly common elements appears to be more presumed than real. It is therefore imperative to consider both negative and positive effects of their absence within the lives of participants.

A limitation of one's experience of SBNR may nonetheless be imposed by the absence of economic resources and consequently restricted participatory opportunities. The sociological implications are corresponding shifts in the present and future

character of spiritual and creative manifestations. Considering that great innovators in history have arisen within unlikely contexts (such as Leonardo da Vinci, widely known to have been born out of wedlock), future human development may be impeded by relationally discriminatory societal structures. SBNR is less likely to include these.

An excess of diversity within any communal grouping, conversely, only seems so to the extent that specific categorizations have not yet been integrated. If the aim is neither uniformity nor conformity (as is the case with religion), but rather effectiveness that is only concerned with creative growth and expression (as is more likely within SBNR), then spiritual, mental, and emotional impacts producing positive effects need no other justification. SBNR could ultimately be the ability to renew using an infinite spectrum of methods. As long as those methods escape any pressure to become no more than the next generation of religion, SBNR retains integrity and distinctive identity.

A third distinction setting SBNR apart from religion is a tentative openness to relationships shifting from hierarchical to egalitarian. For example, the competition for dominance between science and religion, especially prevalent during the late medieval era but still lingering within evangelical Christian social circles, would not necessarily exist. These can instead be metaphorically construed as two sides of the same coin, both being challenged to relate positively to each other as well as to that which is yet unknown.

A fourth distinction setting SBNR apart from religion is the conspicuous absence of communal identity and the perception of individuality as potentially relational rather than exclusively narcissistic. Inherent within this is the absence of overt or covert pressure to conform. Religion has often perceived individuality as threatening rather

than as a resource to be integrated, if the particular identity seems incongruous with existing dogma.

A fifth distinction setting SBNR apart from religion is the presumption by the latter that the former is a recent phenomenon without tradition possessing inherent authority--instead of fully investigating the extent to which SBNR has a timeless perspective. The biblical patriarch, Abraham, for example, began a new relationship with the Divine that corresponded to no contemporaneous religious system. His descendants, conversely, contrived religious systems from principles and insights he originally authored. In combining those with religious systems popular within their times, Abraham's example of SBNR ceased to authentically be SBNR. Important to note is that SBNR makes no collective condescending judgment of religion, for those who still find that approach helpful. All things considered, the essence of SBNR may be more timeless and ancient than religion, despite how relatively recent the terminology is.

A spectrum of opportunities and possibilities are available to practitioners of SBNR within members' development or maturity. Religious institutions that seek to retain power and to avoid being questioned, conversely, are often predisposed to infantilize their membership. By insisting upon designated leadership as exclusively authorized to interpret sacred texts, life, and everything else as well, access to spiritual experience is restricted. Within the broader perspective of SBNR, the Divine is a horizon that continuously recedes while offering--without prejudice--new landscapes for every individual willing to engage the journey of exploration.

A sixth distinction setting SBNR apart from religion is the direction of spiritual development. For the former, the genesis is within and moves outward; for the latter,

ideology and practice originate externally and move inward. An alternative phrasing suggested by a friend is that religion seeks power over (e.g., an intermediary between human and Divine is required), but SBNR seeks power within—but I hasten to add, not only within. Spiritual connection has often been accomplished within unlikely spaces in the wilderness. Ultimately, "What is conspicuously absent is that in order to establish 'shared experiences and common values,' one must first listen without judgment and love without restrictions" (Packard & Hope, 2015*, as cited in NeVaar, *SBNR*, 2020).

Nonetheless foundational is what one believes to be possible in relation to religious needs, spiritual needs, and intangible aspects of humanity and human evolution. Social practices, political definitions, legal requirements, societal and/or environmental shifts (i.e., war, revolution, and concerns associated with public health) predefine expectations. Specifically due to limitless human imagination, the quest of SBNR is to integrate what is both beyond and within the self. It is essential to create an understanding able to satisfy ever-changing needs.

Additionally significant are age/lifespan transitions, physical challenges, and fluctuation in abilities. Within each is a fundamental orientation to either aversion or pursuit. Aversion implies remaining small, while pursuit involves endless expansion in both distances crossed and tools employed.

A seventh distinction setting SBNR apart from religion is that, "SBNR requires an initial perception of individuality and individual appropriateness (or lack thereof)" (i.e., inappropriateness) (NeVaar, *SBNR*, 2020). Institutionalized religion not only does not require this, but often perceives this as a threat to its existing and usually rigid systems.

Relevant to SBNR, but not an element of distinction, is what might be termed "spiritual hunger" or "yearning." The satisfying of this is affected by available resources, guidance, and opportunities. The presence, form, and effect of yearning warrants further study, but is likely to remain unpredictable. That such hunger is influential in any one of a variety of ways is nonetheless indisputable.

Having enumerated seven points of distinction, the next relevant relationship to consider are the ways that SBNR embodies the triad. It may even be central to the essence of the phenomenon. Institutionalized religions, conversely, may dogmatically predispose practitioners to various manifestations of imbalance.

Sister Who

Prior to encountering my spiritual godmother, Sister X (aka John Chidester, who died of AIDS-related complications in September of 1993), who also identified as a Cree Indian within North American demographics, I was unfamiliar with the tribal archetype of the Sacred Clown. While our interaction was too minimal for this person to be accurately described as a mentor, the educational contribution to my perception and understanding was quite pivotal and unintentionally included the action of being named. I seriously doubt that my story could have ever occurred without that brief overlap of our lives.

> Throughout our phone calls, I had often lamented growing up within such a repressive environment that I was essentially forbidden to ever discover the truth of myself; that I was, am, and always will be gay. The story was familiar to him by then so he interrupted yet another repetition with the suggestion, "Considering how your life to this point has been one long identity-crisis, you should be called 'Sister Who Does She Think She Is.'" It was a lightning bolt of revelation; an epiphany; a recognition that transcended everything I thought I knew. (NeVaar, 2001)

Throughout the subsequent three decades of professional service as an example of the Sacred Clown, I have offered spiritual counseling within a wide diversity of social situations, facilitated rituals ranging from memorial services to blessings, and invited deeper contemplation of virtually any topic through an ongoing television series of more than 500 episodes. Finding any academic validation of this anomalous societal archetype remained extremely difficult, until consideration was given to commonalities within social and societal relationship. In defining this archetype by activity rather than identity, a broad and extensive professional family became apparent. Thereby encompassed were examples such as court jesters; characters of the Italian Commedia del Arte, Japanese Kabuki, and Chinese Noe; Native American Heyoka and Koshare; Loki and Anansi; and clowns, tricksters, and contraries of every other name as well. Within each example were degrees of deeply questioning and challenging relational dynamics using metaphor, symbolism, double entendre, and social incongruity. Comedy and satire were utilized only occasionally, but, in either case, an underlying goal of growth and renewal was present. The societal roles occupied by or assigned to such persons is yet another level of evaluation that, although worthy of further inquiry, is not the focus of this dissertation.

With regard to the example of Sister Who specifically, the question has been posed of whether the ritual garb automatically draws attention to compensate for innumerable past personal experiences of being ignored. This fails to integrate, however, that drawing attention to one's self falls into the category of ego-oriented motivations. As instructed by Sister X, these are among the quickest ways to sabotage ministerial work. Sister Who's ritual garb is saturated with symbolism so that the

appearance itself becomes part of the message, serving the work in a way that is analogous to that of the person dressed within the attire. Traditional religious attire, conversely, more often orients to hierarchical definition of the particular office.

Each external response received by Sister Who from others, experience has consistently shown, reveals the personal-historical orientation of that individual to unfamiliar or growth-oriented encounters. Those who are most inclined to avoid such encounters strive to pretend that nothing unusual is even present. Those who are only potentially open to such encounters frequently resort to comedic or satirical comment to create emotional distance. Those who are genuinely open to growth, however, offer sincere questions oriented to investigation or research. The particular response received is thus dictated not by any action or appearance ministerially offered by Sister Who, but rather by an observer or recipient's inherent qualities.

An additional prominent aspect of the evolution of Sister Who is that no mentor was ever present. The inner prompting to be a Sacred Clown was consistent, but innumerable early research attempts yielded extremely minimal information. This may be partly due to occurrence of Sacred Clowns within predominantly oral cultures. The result for Sister Who was a more organic development than may have occurred under other circumstances. As with innumerable nuns of various religious orientations, extensive—but in my case unguided—contemplation shaped and molded the development that followed.

A great many authentic artists, when pressed for the absolute reason they do what they do, resort to some version of "Because I have to." Spiritual callings, undeniable artistic compulsions, and visionary inspirations fall into a category of

absolutely real, historically persistent, but never fully explainable dynamics of human evolution. An oft-cited example of this is Michelangelo's statement that he did not carve David; he simply "released him from the stone." In some instances, these occurrences are described as serendipitous, but even that is dependent upon particular subjective interpretation. This is why rigorous evaluation is so necessary in order to achieve credible autoethnography.

For reasons unknown, such understandings have been present within me since even before the first manifestation of Sister Who on June 2, 1991. This has provoked a journey through continuing self-doubt that suggests I have questioned myself far more often than I have been questioned by any other person. The consequent corollary was the establishment of habitual and rigorous cross-examination of every detail and experience pertaining to myself. Among other possible goals, this dissertation thus attempts to create documentation of this otherwise unwritten historical reality.

A fundamental difference between my experiential and professional perspective and the ideological position of Joseph Campbell within *The Power of Myth* (1988) is the principle of symbiosis. He asserts, "The function of society is to cultivate the individual; it is not the function of the individual to support society" (192). Following countless debates regarding community and individuality during my theological school education, my conclusion was that the relationship of community and individuality is ideally symbiotic. That is, community survives by continuously renewing itself within nurturing the development of its individual members, no matter how eccentric they may sometimes be. Individuality survives by maintaining personal integrity within contributions to its surrounding community.

A profound but daunting consequent realization was that from the first day more than a decade ago until the present, I have been unable to locate a single relational problem in human history that is not a breakdown of this symbiotic relationship. Either community fails, declines, or is prevented from cultivating the development of an individual, or an individual fails, declines, or is prevented from contributing to the renewal and growth of community. I remain open to such discovery, but the existence of such appears increasingly unlikely.

In contemplating extensively what it is that all authentic Sacred Clowns know, among the few fundamental points of orientation discovered, is that all of life is symbiotic. Nothing can affect one without simultaneously having some effect upon all. Within some conversations, the term used to describe this is "The Butterfly Effect" (the essential idea being that if a butterfly flaps its wings on one side of the planet, there will be some consequence on the other side of the planet).

Within virtually any discussion of archetypes, an academic source to which many immediately turn, is Carl Jung, but it is vital to recognize that he did not identify as a Sacred Clown or, in his terminology, "trickster" (Jung, 1959). He thus offers only second-person-perspective comments, most of which are inseparable from a hierarchical and often condescending perspective. One cannot describe an animal's perspective as inferior to that of a human, for example, without presuming a lack of intelligence for no more reason than an absence of common language. Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek IV* is among the very few suggestions to the contrary, although the first cinematic work entitled *Dr. DooLittle*, starring Rex Harrison, likewise includes a direct protest from

Polynesia the parrot: "We're not all dumb!" The doctor, incidentally, is continuously

presented as a contrary in relationship to the surrounding world.

Even Jung's work includes the observation that,

Biology should never forget the question of purpose, for only by answering that can we get at the meaning of a phenomenon…the exclusively causal approach proves to be inadequate, since there are a number of pathological phenomena that only give up their meaning when we inquire into their purpose…and where we are concerned with the normal phenomena of life, this question of purpose takes undisputed precedence. (Jung, 1959, p. 260)

When one therefore holds a belief in the interconnection and interdependence of

all things and embraces an egalitarian rather than hierarchical perspective, questions

arise, such as, "What is it that all donkeys know and what can one learn from their

language and perspective?" Any living or non-living thing can have a voice which the

Sacred Clown is called to serve. In accepting the spiritual calling of becoming a Sacred

Clown, the perspective I discovered to be inherent within this spiritual service was

specifically nonhierarchical and open to receiving understanding and knowledge from

absolutely any source. The fact that my use of metaphors and symbols—essentially my

personal language—is easily misunderstood, does nothing to minimize the knowledge

and insight available for discovery encompassed.

It was within this non-judgmental perspective and the common autistic tendency

to interpret language literally, that development as the specific example of Sister Who

unfolded. In the absence of Jung's unstated assumptions related to values and

hierarchical perceptions, what might be considered offensive or foolish by dismissive

perspectives was not necessarily so. Instead, I discovered the potential to generate

insight, knowledge, and understanding. That which most inspired and guided development were the myriad of honest, diverse, and respectful dialogues that occurred—all of which constituted research related to the essence common within life and spirituality.

A particularly pivotal point of development, however, occurred late within 1998 and ultimately led to enrollment in theological school. The context of this time was that a relationship with a life-partner had recently ended and maintaining ministerial activities while creating a sustainable independent life was extremely difficult. Yet--without exception--every time I considered withdrawing from ministerial activity, within forty-eight hours a person completely unaware of my private thoughts would approach and beg me, "Please, don't ever stop."

After several such occurrences, I elected to spend three weeks in prayer, demanding to know what was so important about continuing this ministry. The answer I finally received one evening was an intuitive drawing on graph paper of a genuinely interfaith spiritual retreat and conference center for individuals and relatively small groups. Having this as an ultimate goal unintentionally consistent with both SBNR and what eventually became the triad has been a point of guidance ever since.

On a similar note, acting from my own integrity rather than attempting to embody second-person descriptions of the Sacred Clown, I was invited to create a presentation for the weekly chapel service while in theological school. The dean of the chapel presumed I would stand behind a podium and give a lecture, analogous to countless other presenters within the hundred-plus-year history of the institution. I calmly replied, "That's not really how Sister Who works," to which she responded, "Oh?" her eyebrows

rising, "What did you have in mind?" "Give me a couple months and I'll provide something specific for you to consider."

Two months later I presented the relatively short script of what was essentially a morality play, such as those typical of the Medieval era in Europe. Mine was ideologically based upon the biblical parable of the good Samaritan. She invited a student worship leader to join us for a discussion of staging what I had written. At one point, puzzled by the simplicity of my comments, the student interjected, "You really don't realize the power of what you've written, do you?"

I absolutely didn't, because it was the first of its kind—completely an experiment, trying something new that I'd never previously done. We were therefore inventing the expression of our collaboration as each challenge dynamically unfolded. Specifically because I do not hold any racial biases, however, I did not anticipate that they would.

Their polarized racial categorization was an unexpected obstacle needing resolution. Within the history of theater, whiteface, like a blank piece of paper, is consistently interpreted as neutral rather than representative of Caucasian ethnicity. I had suggested using whiteface for the other performers in order to create neutrality and focus upon interactive relationship. "What about using blackface instead?" I was asked, but I knew that blackface within the history of North American theater was specifically an expression of racial bigotry. Yet the focus of the play was not racial definition, but rather the fundamental character of relationships.

The solution I ultimately devised was for supporting actors and actresses to wear gray cloth that concealed age, race, gender, and every other descriptor, allowing only

their voices and their movements to be apparent. I was absolutely prepared to cancel the presentation rather than allow it to be negatively redirected, but this costume modification allowed the work to go forward. Nonetheless, three days prior to the performance, I received anonymous electronic hate mail, demanding that the presentation be canceled. I felt emotionally shaken by this attack from an unknown source.

The dean of the chapel responded by encouraging attendance by every supportive person, but no one anticipated the power of the theatrical presentation. The dean refrained from being present at any rehearsal and instead chose to view the play for the first time within performance, like every other member of the audience. The front of the chapel had been completely transformed by a backdrop curtain eight feet high and eighteen feet wide, string-art pieces representative of stained-glass windows, and a central candle. When the final note of music faded, the audience was so mesmerized by what they had seen that the entire room remained absolutely silent. The dean quietly rushed to the podium and invited a few more moments of silence to contemplate the presentation.

The next day in class, one of my professors quoted from the play. Numerous individuals raved about the performance for the next two weeks. At the end of the school year, I was given an award for "demonstrating interest and ability in innovative worship." The school was nonetheless unwilling to attempt a second presentation the following year—even though I eventually wrote eight more plays with similar structure. In every case, the spirituality and theology embodied within the presentation were

sufficiently broad to be constructively integrated with virtually any spiritual or religious conception.

Another involvement lasting four years of annual occurrence was the "Steps to Awareness Festival" in Telluride, Colorado. One organizer promoting the festival within a radio interview was asked about Sister Who. He responded with a description of this person being "the quintessential outsider," described by another organizer as one who will "wow you into a new perspective." From the first festival participation to the last, personal and spiritual growth remained the focus, through presentations of sacred dance, creative ritual, and personal discussion. Some festival attendees responded constructively and some did not respond at all.

As repeatedly stated within my second play, however, one must not focus upon whether circumstances are favorable or adversarial, whether others' responses are receptive or dismissive, or whether opportunities for collaboration are abundant or scarce. The focus must instead remain upon answering, "What kind of person will you show yourself to be?" Thus it has been imperative to remember whenever I am ignored, that this is unimportant. Intentionally drawing attention to myself is absolutely not appropriate. What is important is that I remain focused upon performing whatever ministerial service I can.

Within all of this work was also the element of being an agent of social change and renewal. My realization of homosexual orientation early in 1989 and my yet undiagnosed autistic predisposition to "compulsive honesty" (as described by a Canadian public access television producer) made experiences of duplicity within social and political realms adversarial. Nonetheless, my hard-won self-definition was

absolutely central to being Sister Who. This is why I participated within numerous LGBT-oriented civil rights events as time progressed, but remained ever and always an agent of renewal and growth, who was often unintentionally challenging to event organizers.

My summary of societal shifts and responses suggests that the mantra of the LGBT population following the Stonewall Riots (widely considered to be the beginning of the LGBT civil rights movement within the US) was, "We're here; we're queer; get used to it." That of the current shift toward assimilation rather than integration (an important distinction to understand), conversely, is, "We're just like you"—that, of course, is never true. Every individual and group is unique. That's why they are identifiable. In considering the stories of virtually every marginalized population, what became apparent is that the initial battles for civil rights are predominantly fought by blue-collar, poor, or working-class individuals--essentially societal misfits. When progress is finally made, administration shifts to white collar or middle-class individuals. These latter persons are generally unwilling to participate in the unpleasantness typical of initial struggles, yet proceed to marginalize and exclude anomalous individuals as an inappropriate public image for a civil rights movement.

Within Sister Who's fundamental understanding of symbiosis, however, this would obviously be considered objectionable. Inclusivity is a fundamental value that must be maintained in order to prevent any loss of integrity or any development of dishonest duplicity. The human elements typically marginalized are precisely the means by which renewal and growth is potentially empowered. In holding to the principle that what remains most essential within every life experience is growth, life does not remain truly life when growth itself becomes a marginalized process.

As a brief clarifying aside, the distinction between assimilation and integration is that while integration maintains all aspects of unique identity, assimilation sacrifices virtually any and every quality for appearances of superficial inclusion. Using the metaphor presented by Gene Roddenberry within *Star Trek*, integration is illustrated by the United Federation of Planets and assimilation is illustrated by the species known as borg. Conceptions accurately represented by assimilation have no allowance for the questioning, anomalous, and constructively change-oriented perspective of any authentic renewal-and-growth-oriented Sacred Clown.

On a similar note, central to symbiosis is that all relationships are most truthfully egalitarian rather than hierarchical. That is, nothing is less important to enduring symbiosis; the removal of any part threatens the survivability of every other part. This in turn directly implies that societal hierarchical conceptions are ultimately unsustainable. Living out the principle of egalitarian symbiosis, however, may explain many of the adversarial experiences personally encountered during the last three decades.

A primary concern of life and living, therefore, is not whether a particular example is acceptable, but rather of how it can be constructively integrated and whether those involved are willing to do the relevant essential work. Perhaps owing to either typically autistic dedication or Germanic heritage, Sister Who has always been willing to embrace work that others apparently found excessively objectionable. More directly, if it is verifiably a good work and at least minimal but nonetheless adequate resources are available, but no one else is willing to do the job, offer it to Sister Who.

The Symbiotic Triad of Holistic Health

I'm uncertain that I intended to create the triad, but rather discovered an intersection of disciplines (i.e., spirituality, psychology, and sociology) within which the triad appeared to be the most logical and complete explanation. Exploring what is beyond one's self remains inseparable from deeper inquiries into one's self and the relationships between examples of individuality and community. Tolerance of ongoing mystery, investigation, and growth is likely to also be inseparable from such inquiries. Essential to any sort of balance between spirituality, psychology, and sociology is recognizing that they are complementary rather than competitive.

For purposes of this particular context, spirituality is to be interpreted as relationship with that which is currently beyond oneself. This includes the transcendent, the mysterious, the unknown, and that which exists beyond the current limits of human understanding, but with which one must nonetheless interact as positively as possible. Many have chosen to use the word "God" to represent this category of relationship. Some consciously or unconsciously react to abuses fostered by institutionalized religion by embracing diverse forms of Atheism. My chosen word is "Godde" in order to create a distinction between that which is truly divine and religious history, without simply reversing divine gender. My conception is of a spiritual embodiment of highest wisdom and greatest love, beyond which nothing is certain.

Psychology is to be likewise interpreted as relationship with oneself. Preliminary self-imposed limitations (i.e., believing that something is impossible) relegate awareness-oriented discoveries to either the realm of psychological denial or existence as irrational obstacles. More recommendable would be to ask, "What would be required

for that to be so?" The ability to investigate both latent and obvious questions wisely, invites new avenues of growth and expansion.

Striving toward the embodiment of others' expectations instead of toward one's own integrity and authenticity leaves the majority of one's own life unlived. Failing to sufficiently engage in self-reflection and/or contemplation likewise leaves innumerable internal realities undiscovered and one's own mental and emotional health neglected. Nurturing whatever identity is internally discovered, toward wisdom, creativity, and positive development, empowers that individual toward being or becoming an agent of constructive change and growth.

Sociology, the third element of the triad, is to be likewise interpreted as relationships with others. Either validating or vilifying particular categories may interfere with growth by creating bias—especially if discoveries are offered through questioned sources. Placing irrational limitations upon knowledge that could otherwise be integrated is inherently self-sabotaging. Specifically by recognizing as precisely as possible the sociological interdependence, interconnection, symbiotic biodiversity, and interrelationship of life within the biosphere narcissistically called "Earth," one's understanding and expression of being one specific part of the unfolding of life can be more fully realized. I use the word "narcissistically" because the surface is mostly submerged in water, but the smaller part that is exposed earth is where humanity lives.

To understand the triad, it is essential to understand that it is not one but rather three compiled triangles. In each case, the wide base symbolizes a state of being oblivious or unaware (consciously or unconsciously) of that dimension of one's being.
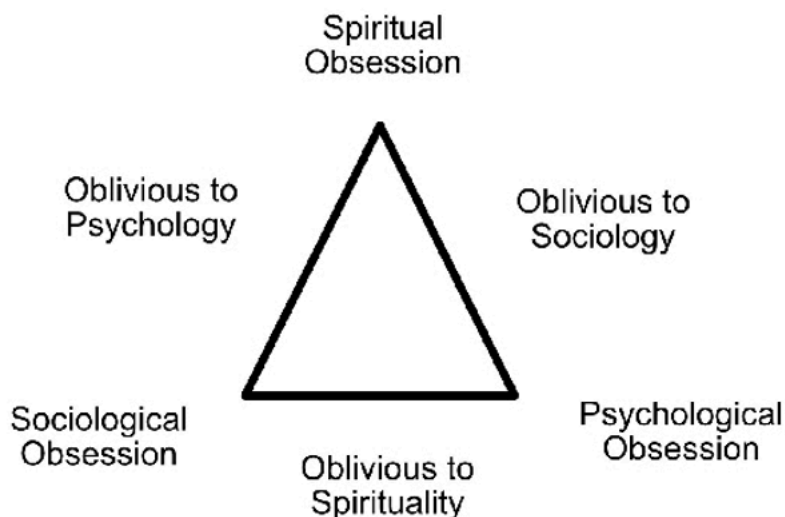
The point, conversely, symbolizes complete obsession—such that nothing else can truly or accurately be seen.

In balancing these two extremes, the ideal is obviously the exact middle. This allows all three triangles to be stacked and pivoted, resulting in the combined configuration. Each point thus symbolizes obsession and each side symbolizes being oblivious to the opposite point's dimension of being. An additional curiosity warranting further exploration is that moving away from the center in any direction, creates a corresponding diminutive effect upon contrasting relationships. The application of the triad is to tentatively map the holistic health of an individual or entity in relationship to the three dimensions of being (i.e., whether the individual tends toward obsession or obliviousness in one or more dimensions). Illustration of the preceding explanation is offered in figures 1 and 2.
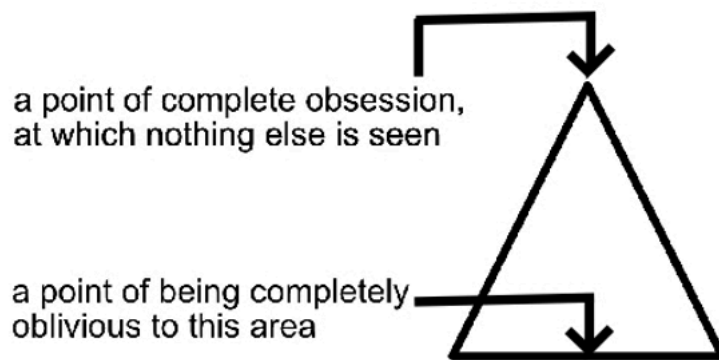
The Symbiotic Triad of Holistic Health

Figure 1

Individual Areas of Concern

Figure 2

All Three Areas Combined

a point of complete obsession,
at which nothing else is seen

a point of being completely
oblivious to this area

The utility of the triad, is the formation of questions and avenues of investigation. Without providing specific answers, pivotal dynamics can nonetheless be identified as such and investigated. An example of this is Scott Peck's observation within *The Different Drum* (1987), that "Pseudo community is conflict-*avoiding*; true community is conflict-*resolving"* (p. 88; (italics added). Shifting the dynamic of relationship utilized within any specific area alters subsequent individual and communal life experience. The Triad is designed for individual rather than categorical application, however, because no individual is the embodiment of a category. Alternatively phrased, no individual accurately and completely embodies all of the qualities associated with a category, nor are all of the qualities associated with a category found within any individual. Key questions of self-reflection can therefore include discernment of where and how significant investments of time and personal energy are occurring.

In considering spirituality more directly and acknowledging that religious perceptions can have a dramatic effect upon concepts chosen, non-physical reality persists in being a significant part of consciousness and perceptual interpretation—and

can include all that is yet unknown but undeniable. Elements of the unknown can be ignored by certain individuals but not others. A conception of some sort is nonetheless recommendable in order to provide a positive intellectual context for personal and societal development.

Historical and personal records of conspicuous absence of any such conception provide sufficient reason to avoid such negligence. I recall a personal acquaintance who chose to create an Internet-oriented neighborhood networking website, but resisted all of my attempts to warn her of dangers associated with religious extremism. Members associating with such ideology were a minority without technological expertise within that particular neighborhood, but ultimately terminated the networking website by expressing sufficient exclusivity and conflict that others wished to avoid. The central point of that example is that the adversarial concern of such persons was not for inclusivity, investigation of potential truth, or strong communal relationships. The concern of the religious extremists was rather for a closed form of indoctrination uninterested in facilitating peaceful coexistence between the diverse ideologies present. Holistic character and commitment within communal management could have prevented their narrow-mindedness from lethally poisoning the entire effort.

In considering psychology more directly, an initial reminder comes from the oft-quoted ancient oracle of Delphi: "Know thyself!" Epistemology focuses upon this more directly, academically, and professionally, but any demonstration of psychology can reveal interconnections and degrees of awareness that constrain internal relationships, interpretation of perception, and subsequent response. Preservation of the freedom to critically evaluate and disagree, without compelling indoctrination, allows development

to be significantly enhanced by contemplation of others' texts, perspectives, ideologies, and presentations.

Critical evaluation and intelligent disagreement require availability of relevant resources. Creating and maintaining the availability of diverse research resources is an inclusive fundamental task that never presumes that printed literature defines the limits of knowledge. Distinctions between literary and experiential knowledge can actually be quite profound. Understandings which are not likewise inclusive are inherently incomplete.

In considering sociology more directly, the effects of societal frameworks and one's responses to them are dynamic elements within consideration of actual life experience within past, present, and/or future contexts. Cultural nuances are but one of many components affecting or sometimes defining the expressions most likely to occur. Individual responses can nonetheless vary considerably, either in congruity or contrast to prevailing sociological norms.

Attempting to engage in spiritual interaction of any description, that is simultaneously devoid of any influence or integration of psychological or sociological elements, is virtually impossible—as is the case with either of the other areas of holistic health as well. Wisely pursuing any involvement in SBNR or in ministerial activity likewise recommends familiarity with the commonalities and distinctions by which the three areas are interconnected. Central to this dissertation is recognizing and listening to diverse elements that may not have previously been recognized as commonalities bridging contrasting contexts and perspectives.

SBNR and the Triad

In considering the ways that the triad logically manifests within SBNR, basic principles are readily available within general understandings of psychology and sociology, while definitions of spirituality with diminished influence from institutionalized religion can be explored with minimal limitation. Where forms of religion extract intellectual parameters from internal literature and practice, however, SBNR invites spirituality to be guided by prevailing psychological and sociological principles in ways that are potentially unlimited. This raises the question of whether SBNR would in fact authentically be SBNR without the egalitarian configuration of the triad.

Additionally, any insistence that a predominantly psychological perspective exclude inexplicable spiritual elements, perhaps even in ways consistent with some perspectives of atheism, invites irrational exclusion of any and all related insights and discoveries. The resulting predisposition to narcissistic arrogance of such an exclusive perspective likewise detracts from sociological relationships. SBNR invites maintaining a constructive and non-hierarchical dialogue between all three, within which atheism is free to propose non-deistic conceptions that serve a holistic outcome (e.g., Earth Literacy). Without any such conceptions, atheism has not completed its task as a spiritual philosophy.

That such egalitarian dialogue is conspicuously absent from institutionalized religion is generally apparent. Examples of ideological exchange that remain hierarchical rather than egalitarian in nature, imply an expectation that SBNR will at some point revert to specified dogmas. This would suggest that the discussion is merely an adolescent exploration rather than an investigation and perspective worthy of

complete respect. If an investigation were merely an adolescent exploration, this would also infer an abandonment of SBNR's appropriate individuation. The triad requires no such shift, being more focused upon creating effective questions than upon formulating dogmatic answers.

An added consideration is how often "spiritual but not religious" is used linguistically to denote being insufficiently religious but nonetheless unwilling to relinquish all belief in a higher power. The distinction to which this points is between those who wish to merely provide a demographic answer and those who are genuinely attempting a relationship with The Beyond that traditional religions are not able to support or embrace. It may be that a particular conception has been inadequately defined, but equally indicated may be a predisposition of intolerance to any dogmatic incongruity. More directly, a significant question is whether one is primarily attempting to be "not religious" or, conversely, to retain a sense of unique if also anomalous spirituality.

This introduces the topic of religious abuse—its definition, manifestation, and the specific response the particular incident inspires. The relevance of religious abuse to SBNR is that it can be a primary reason for departing from religious participation and choosing an alternative possibility. Specifically because trust in administrators or ecclesiastical systems may have been more or less destroyed, opportunity is created for various forms of SBNR. The specific expressions that are individually chosen are likely to reflect relevant and specific manifestations of any religious abuse that occurred.

Although the concept of religious abuse is infrequently openly mentioned, three primary subcategories are recognizable. The first, ideological enslavement, can be

further deconstructed into (a) intolerance of individual inquiry and (b) undeclared negligence, nonexposure, or actual encouragement of ignorance. The second, professional misconduct, includes hypocrisy and/or dishonesty, and the third is intolerance of personal difference (NeVaar, *SBNR*, 2020).

Any combination of these constitutive elements provides motivation to alternatively pursue SBNR. To understand the alternative openness, however, a more detailed investigation of preceding personal ideology could be helpful (i.e., particular religious bias, any incidences of religious abuse, etc.). Defining such investigation at this time would constitute a digression. Closer examination of each subcategory, therefore, is the next goal within the larger sequence of this dissertation.

Within ideological enslavement, mental coercion and peer pressure are typically adversarial to essential inquiry. Within a high school art class, I was told the first challenge with any new material is to learn its properties and potential. If one cannot engage unfamiliar persons individually and inquisitively--rather than with preconceived notions and projections--all that is unique will remain undiscovered. Challenges and resources that are not named, acknowledged, and effectively addressed cannot be efficiently utilized.

Professional misconduct includes reduced consideration of boundaries, imbalances of power, and the enablement of inappropriate behavior. Additionally, agendas and incongruities can create opportunity for sabotaging spiritual and/or holistic health. Within SBNR, conversely, all such possibilities are minimized by reserving ever and always the freedom and, as necessary, the encouragement to withdraw to individual frames of reference.

Within intolerance of personal difference is excessive leniency for diverse examples of bigotry, homophobia, sexism, and similar biases. These may be found within any established group. The concern here is that many have left religious congregations due to forms of negativity finding opportunity within responses to immutable qualities of identity. The predominant remaining strategy in such instances is disassociation. SBNR offers a constructive alternative composed of individually appropriate perspectives, practices, and associations.

Additionally, elements of personal psychology especially pertinent to SBNR, such as self-image, self-esteem, and self-development, may be simultaneously and profoundly affected. The added dynamic revealed by the triad, is that each of these also has sociological implications. That is, shifts within relationships to the self can have profound influence upon relationships with others. Needing specific attention, therefore, are the effects of religious abuse upon relationships with others and the ways those relationships are consequently redefined.

In considering more directly specific elements of sociology that are especially pertinent to SBNR, openness to alternative ideological approaches is mutually exclusive in relation to sociological exclusion. A combination of any form of SBNR and any form of bigotry appears to be impossible. The openness to new possibilities that the former embodies prevents this. For such a combination, SBNR would be required to revert to echoes and shadows of institutionalized religion and forsake its own integrity.

Sister Who and the Triad

Only after discovering and contemplating the triad did it become apparent that a subconscious belief in such has long been central to all ministerial work related to Sister

Who. Essentially, the work remains spiritual. Throughout production of over five hundred episodes of a television program entitled, "Sister Who Presents…," however, separating any of the three areas from the other two has remained at most impossible and at least accompanied by a sense of being incomplete. Integrating all three, conversely, has consistently provided greater insight and understanding.

The initial encounter with Sister X at the international event of the third Gay Games in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, for example, was an intersection of over a hundred diverse cultural/sociological perspectives. Included were over eight thousand individual psychologies with no previous encounters and minimal confrontations with intolerant religious perspectives. The eight days of the combined event can be legitimately characterized as highly spiritual by the embodiment of perceptions and experiences beyond complete definition. Subsequent development of Sister Who continued to address similar challenges by requiring personal responses to commonalities and differences between west coast, western, and midwestern definitions of both community and individuality. More specifically, numerous discussions with Sister X oriented around sociological and cultural differences between Sister X's residence in San Francisco, California, and mine in Denver, Colorado. Choosing to appear in ritual garb on any occasion has likewise consistently embodied elements of all three dimensions of the triad, inviting ideological deconstruction from any of the three perspectives.

Examples have included appearances in annual Martin Luther King Marades (an integration of march and parade), participation in public discussions of relationship with religious institutions, wilderness hikes to mountain summits, and performance of

theatrical presentations analogous to medieval morality plays. Repeatedly pressed for an answer to the question, "What does Sister Who do," the fundamental purpose that precipitated was "support personal and spiritual growth." This led professionally to ordination as an inter-faith minister in 1995. Ultimately, any dialogue within any context became obvious as a ministerial opportunity and the diversity encountered exceeded all expectations.

An evening following a day at a festival promoting alternative spiritual and holistic practices, for example, included riding a commuter train in ritual garb. Only three other persons were present within the particular car, when two security guards entered and began asking surprisingly substantive theological questions. When the guards were summoned to a situation as the train arrived at a station, the woman and her husband, an inter-racial family with their small child, stepped closer to remark, "It is so good to know that someone like you exists."

Such interactions consistently contained psychological, sociological, and spiritual elements. That they were unpredictable but frequent and serendipitous became obvious within the early years of ministry. Having discovered Madeleine L'Engle's book, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art* (1980) during undergraduate education, I understood the importance of "serving the work," rather than attempting to maintain control.

An occasion in which intuition directed participating within the Rocky Mountain Book Festival in ritual garb is another example. I arrived ten minutes prior to the conclusion of a particular presentation that was to be followed by one entitled, "Mystics, Seers, and Oracles—Oh My." I slid quietly onto a seat in the very back row, striving to

prevent any disruption of the current presentation. In mid-sentence, however, one of the two men onstage stopped to ask, "Are you familiar with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in Seattle, Washington?" The entire room turned to look.

I acknowledged occasional collaboration and discerned that the remaining ideologically substantive conversation was between myself, a Wiccan high priest, and a Methodist minister. Upon discovering that two of the four panelists scheduled to facilitate the following presentation had failed to appear, the organizers requested that I immediately serve as a fill-in panelist. I had been within the building only ten minutes and my presence had been completely unexpected, but was apparently considered serendipitous and valuable.

Sister Who and SBNR

I unintentionally embodied the seven distinctions between SBNR and institutionalized religion, even before the former was personally recognized as a phenomenon or the distinctions themselves were enumerated for this dissertation. This was pragmatically essential to effectiveness within ministerial situations of diverse cultural and personal definition. Anything less could have characterized interactions as dogmatic, judgmental, or biased—thereby diminishing effectiveness. Specifically because inclusivity was among the values learned early within LGBT civil rights events, a persistent challenge has been orienting positively to diverse spiritual, religious, and cultural perspectives. It is irrelevant whether those whom I meet choose to be judgmental toward me.

Religion, of course, has no commitment to being inclusive, but rather requires conformity—unlike SBNR. (This is not to say that there are not persons within religious

institutions who are more spiritual than religious). Striving to validate individually

appropriate pursuits of personal and spiritual growth, elements from diverse forms of

spirituality have been incorporated into ritual garb and adornment. As phrased to one

viewer of my television show, "I don't think Godde is as concerned about *how* you

engage in spiritual interaction, as that you *do* [engage]."

Chapter Three: The Methodology of Autoethnography

The question central to this dissertation is the challenge of articulating that which is central to both the phenomenon of "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) and the specific manifestation of the Sacred Clown embodied by Sister Who. The primary means of investigation is autoethnography, which contains insights available within no other source.

A primary task is applying sufficient rigor and thoroughness throughout both awareness and evaluation while maintaining focus, yet also recognizing considerations that warrant further study. I object to dismissive comments about "the myth of objectivity" (which I do not believe to be entirely a myth) that may be intended to acknowledge the complexity of any context, but often seem to excuse researchers from doing due diligence--especially when the object of study is their own life experience. Within any study, a semblance of objectivity is most advanced when an integration of multiple rather than a single narcissistic perspective is presented. The size and scope of the study nonetheless limit the work. Being comprehensive or exhaustive would produce an overwhelming volume of data.

Diverse perspectives and opinions do exist, offering the possibility of breadth within one's understanding. Implementing the most durable and substantive perspectives is unavoidably a subjective endeavor, yet such investigation should never for that reason be trivialized or dismissed.

It is specifically because of what autoethnography is able to reveal, that this methodology has been chosen for this dissertation. A pertinent research question is, "What is a competent autoethnographic account able to reveal, that would otherwise remain unknown?" The ultimate goal of academia, logically, is to learn all that can be learned.

Anderson (2006) names as criteria for autoethnography "(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility, (4) dialogue, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis" (p. 378). Among initial questions, however, is how to make each of these sufficiently distinct from the others. Categorizing them separately may be an artificial construction, due to their interconnectedness and interdependence.

Additionally, Anderson (2006) voices concerns for emotionality and subjectivity, that are more recent trends reacting to the exclusion of such within traditional approaches. A central but not directly identified hypothesis consistently present throughout his essay, however, is the identification of broader generalization as a central aim. Overlooked is that individuation and solitary experience may have abundant insight, wisdom, and knowledge to offer.

An added consideration is the degree of superficiality or depth within ideological evaluation. There are possibilities within autoethnography that offer substantive but thus far unwritten knowledge, beyond what an autobiography would contain.

Autobiography tells events. Autoethnology is the study of how individuals tell their experiences and stories and in what ways such accounts may be integrated.

Autoethnography is when the author—who directly experienced what is described—discloses not only what happened, but why and how, as well as accompanying emotions, thoughts, influences, shifts, and effects that would not otherwise be obvious.

In a manner similar to Anderson, the next article by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) begins by alluding to understanding cultural rather than personal experience. Empowerment arising from autoethnography may not be amenable to generalization, but is not for that reason less empowering to both diverse individuals and certain demographic populations. A given within academic research is that being judgmental, condescending, dismissive, or influenced by any sort of bias restricts research results in self-sabotaging ways.

The search within autoethnography described most concisely, is asking "What specifically happened," in a way that includes the unseen as well as the seen, and also documents the experience thoroughly. It is not only that one must consider the context, but also noting commonalities and distinctions. Inherently, autoethnography that is distinct or contrasting in relation to contextual descriptions is still autoethnography. The reason for this is that the priority is upon individual and direct experience. The specific descriptions included, however, may be the direct result of an important cultural and/or environmental context that is not mentioned within the text (i.e., that the experience occurred during the time of a particular war, pestilence, famine, or governmental administration).

The goal, in any case, is documenting understandings, insights, and information so that knowledge is increased. Excessive and ungrounded individual experiences obfuscate understandings that could otherwise be conveyed.

A consequent consideration is the extent to which individual awareness of cultural influences is present. Alternatively, are cultural elements (for example, relational biases) consciously or unconsciously present? If they are not present, is their identification as cultural elements legitimately to be questioned within the particular example? Perhaps the particular element is a quirk of personality and not a cultural element at all (i.e., is a particular person's expression of racism caused by living within a particular time and region or by a negative direct experience and is that person even aware of the cultural influences potentially shaping particular life experience).

Central to the challenges within autoethnography is an ongoing contrast and/or comparison with ethnography (i.e., consideration of whether, how, or to what extent cultural elements exist and are evolving). This is a bit too complicated, however, to integrate within most autoethnographic accounts and would be better addressed within a separate study. For purposes of this dissertation, a substantial understanding of autoethnography is essential—specifically because of the centrality of my becoming and being a modern example of the archetypal Sacred Clown.

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) do not recognize distinctions between intellectual and experiential ways of knowing that are specifically relevant to the Sacred Clown. Quoted from earlier doctoral writing, therefore, I offer the following anecdote:

> A large crowd had gathered to watch, to whom the tightrope walker called, "Do you believe that I am able to walk across this rope and back again?" The crowd enthusiastically answered with agreement, whereafter the performer did so and was applauded. "Do you believe that I am able to carry someone on my back and do this again?" Once more, the crowd enthusiastically answered with agreement. "Who wants to ride?" the tightrope walker queried. The air was remarkably silent. (NeVaar, *Autoethnography*, 2020)

As a negative example, Forber-Pratt (2015) neglects significant analytic reflexivity and theoretical analysis. Numerous unanswered questions remain: What characteristics are essential in order for this experience to occur within another example? How would the story have been different within a contrasting context? What choices in favor of or against individuality might have altered the experiential evolution that occurred? Had reflexivity and analysis been sufficiently employed, these questions would not be unanswered.

Scarles (2010) nonetheless remains concerned for "knowledge that would otherwise remain undisclosed" (p. 917). The preference, however, is specifically in favor "visual autoethnography" and the insights that medium is able to convey. An added and largely unexplored dynamic, is the extent to which her conception of visual autoethnography embodies dynamics more commonly found within studies of language.

For example, a particular investigation may discern meanings and messages not superficially apparent that comment upon specific life experience in diverse ways. In integrating the tool of autoethnography, the researcher invites consideration of additional relevant communications. Even those central to a particular account may not have been noticed. The added question is whether such meanings and messages were inherent within the previous account or subsequently discovered within later individual experiences. The latter may have even been inspired by, without replicating, the original account.

A significant portion of effective autoethnography, therefore, is dialogue. In the case of Sister Who, instances of such were often mental (with myself and my

conception of the Divine) or verbal rather than written, but the content of these dialogues frequently found its way into essays within my monthly newsletter. This is also where being autistic and remembering many details precisely is an advantage to this study. Regardless, even a recluse within a wilderness location must become aware of dialogues with the self in order to create a genuinely effective autoethnographic account—hopefully in ways that transcend cultural restrictions. Specifically due to the contextual elements of being organic and unguided, new insights have been able to rise to the surface of my mind.

The only human perspective that appears to embrace and resolve the dichotomy of individual and cultural voices seems embodied within the previously mentioned African word, "ubuntu" (that was translated as, "We are because I am and I am because we are"). Ethnography equates to "we are" and autoethnography equates to "I am." True understanding experiences no conflict between the two, but true understanding is never easy.

As an unintended example of this, Zapata-Sepulveda (2017) is concerned, yet without proposing any solution. This might be an example of what many of my professors have described as "the paralysis of analysis." In contrast, I assert that insights are available within corresponding experience, having boldly asserted to my professors within my first masters-degree education, "Any idea without an application, is worthless."

The central challenge of utilizing this methodology is effectively integrating direct experience with an appropriate amount of self-reflexivity and rigorous analysis. A primary element within this effort is never having complete information available. I can

tell what happened, analyze why, and even consider experiences from alternative perspectives, but I will never know all of the contributing factors. Inherent within both doctoral study and autoethnography is posing questions and reporting results, rather than merely claiming to already have answers. Logically, both doctoral study and autoethnography need to begin with questions rather than assumptions or unsupported claims.

Ultimately, this account is both my story and not my story. The archetype of the Sacred Clown and future manifestations of SBNR are both larger than I will ever be. I have experiences throughout the last thirty years, however, that hopefully provide valuable information—using the tool of autoethnography.

Chapter Four: Additional Evaluation and Data Analysis

Some Example Case Studies

In order to have examples with sufficient specificity to reference within the discussion of this chapter, I selected three representative actual experiences that demonstrate characteristics common within innumerable other incidents which have occurred.

Case #1

The date was July 3, 1999, and I was making the first of (thus far) 16 successful ascents of mountains in Colorado reaching above 14,000 feet, dressed in complete ritual garb and face-paint. I presented myself in this way in order to make myself ministerially available as well as to make the journey itself representative of an integration of life and spirituality. In this particular case, the target was the summit of Mount Bierstadt. I was a relatively fast hiker even at that altitude, so I passed a number of other hikers along the way. When I introduced myself to a particular young woman approximately halfway up the mountain, she confided that she was at that very moment deciding whether or not to become a Roman Catholic nun. For approximately 20 minutes thereafter, we discussed the characteristics, societal need, possible forms, and activity of religious vocation within contemporary society. I interpreted that we agreed that the signature quality of a nun is dedication to spiritual service. I gave her my contact information, but have never heard what her decision ultimately was. That our uniquely individual lives serendipitously overlapped on that particular day and mountain, while she was wrestling with that specific decision, was of course highly improbable and

not something either of us could have anticipated or orchestrated--especially because we had never previously spoken or met and my journey up the mountain was completely unannounced. That it was a major turning point within her life seems very likely. Any variation whatsoever in the precise circumstances and it is highly unlikely that our conversation would have ever occurred.

Case #2.

During the summer of 1996, on a Wednesday, I was preparing to facilitate a drum circle (extemporaneous and collaborative drumming by a number of participants) immediately prior to a weekly event of interfaith liturgical dancing. I experienced an inordinate amount of frustration applying face-paint, however, and left my residence 35 minutes late. I even considered not going at all. During the drive to the venue, I ranted out-loud to no one in particular, "What possible reason could there be for such aggravation?" Upon arriving and parking my car, during the thirty seconds required to move to the building, a man across the street saw me, recognized me, and came running. "Could you please come and say a blessing for my lifepartner who recently passed away? We used to watch you on TV together and we're just about to begin his memorial service." Had I been "on time," neither this brief exchange nor the subsequent blessing would have occurred.

Case #3.

July 1, 2009 was among the few mountain ascents during which I was accompanied by an acquaintance who was mostly unfamiliar with the unconventional ministry of Sister Who. The goal in this case was the summit of Mount Sherman. Since we were both acclimated to the altitude, we hiked a bit more quickly and passed a group

of teenage boys led by three men. Upon reaching the summit, we engaged in conversation with a late-middle-aged man and woman about Sister Who, related experiences, and ideological perspectives. At that point, we were interrupted by another man who said something to the effect of, "Alright, you've had your fun. Can you move off of the summit so that we can come up?" My hiking partner's mouth dropped open.

"There's plenty of room," I responded, "Come on up."

"We wanted to engage in our own sort of summit ritual."

"I am happy to be respectfully quiet while you do whatever you like," I continued, but it was clear that he would be content with nothing less than me moving away. I wanted to set a good example and not become an argumentative presence, so I conceded that I would move about fifty feet away, to eat some lunch before heading back down.

The group of boys and men appeared, looked in various directions briefly, and then disappeared so completely they were not even visible in the distance. Having finished eating after only 10 to15 minutes, it was necessary to cross the summit to reach the trail again. The couple with whom we'd previously been speaking were still there and the woman informed us that the group was from a conservative church in Kansas. "And they wanted to protect their youth from exposure to Sister Who," I interjected, finishing her sentence. The woman smiled and nodded in agreement. The potential problem, I explained to my hiking companion, is that gay youth within a conservative religious context, are significantly more likely to commit suicide. Given the size of the group, it was highly probable that at least one of the boys was gay. I silently

said intercessory prayers for that unidentified young man until we again arrived at the parking area.

On August 9, 2011, I made a third and ultimately successful attempt to reach the summit of Mount Antero. Two previous attempts had failed due to adversarial weather. Having carefully watched weather forecasts all summer long, this was the first occurrence that year of three consecutive days with no prediction of rain on the mountain summit. As usual, I drove to the trailhead the preceding evening, applied face-paint and ritual garb by flashlight between 2 and 5 a.m., and began hiking prior to sunrise at 5:30 a.m. I reached the summit without incident several hours later, played my bagpipes for a moment, created some photos using my camera's self-timer, and ate some food. Then I positioned my backpack to begin the reciprocal journey and turned toward the trail.

A group of teenage boys had just reached the summit and stared at me with mouths open. "You wouldn't happen to have been hiking Mount Sherman two years ago?" I inquired. It was the same group. Apparently their leaders hadn't anticipated my presence and sent the boys to the summit alone. I didn't want to provoke any defensiveness, so I made a few comments about inclusive spirituality and the divine being inherently beyond human comprehension, as I gave three of them my calling card containing contact information. They asked no further questions, so I stepped toward the trail, then turned to face them one last time. "You know Godde meant for this to happen, right?" Silent stares were the only response, so I turned and headed back to my car. Statistically, this encounter would be considered impossible, but its occurrence is a historical fact.

External (Others-Oriented) Expectations

The first expectation with which every Sacred Clown and practitioner of SBNR must contend is conformity. To pursue with integrity a uniquely individual form of spirituality, the first acknowledgment must be that the standard answers to spiritual questions are unsatisfactory. Next is the task of answering specifically *how* they are unsatisfactory, what alternatives would be most effective, and why. Inherent within the pursuit of an individually unique integration of spirituality, psychology, and sociology with substantive integrity is responding to the degree of individuality one's social and religious context will tolerate. Within numerous contexts of human history, embracing individuality had serious and sometimes lethal consequences (and still does).

As much as autoethnography is an individual voice bringing a depth of awareness and understanding to a unique journey, there are also varying degrees of duplicity that one's societal context may require. Among these are a generalized practice of maintaining contrasting inner and outer realms of experience (i.e., knowing one's feelings but never being allowed to act or speak of them openly). This could be described as the cognitive and emotional burden of simultaneously living two contrasting lives. Being asked to terminate one or the other for the sake of social convenience could be devastating to the holistic health of the individual. Either one's relationship to one's self or one's relationships to others is likely to be thereby negatively impacted. The ideal, conversely, is to formulate an integration that is egalitarian and symbiotic rather than competitive.

Additionally, if a societal context does not value truth, but rather other concerns, values may be imposed that are adversarial to basic mental and emotional health. A component of one's environment may be a financial burden, for example, but nonetheless provide essential mental and emotional support. Alternatively, one's familial context may erroneously require maintenance of abusive relationships.

Truthful interaction with either SBNR or a Sacred Clown requires degrees of honesty and integrity that disallow such incongruity. All too often, religion values conformity more than inconvenient truth. Additionally and significantly, both SBNR and the Sacred Clown orient to questions, whereas religion orients to answers. The relationship between questions and answers is inherently uni-directional: a question may have multiple answers, but a specific answer has only one corresponding question. An answer may provoke further questions, but cannot contain them without reaching beyond itself in ways that defy predictability and control--both of which would be intolerable to formal religion. Unacceptable consequent change would be likely to follow. The focus of SBNR and the Sacred Clown, conversely, is making change constructive.

Applying the triad to case #1, spirituality is evident within consideration of a religious vocation. Psychology resides within the imperative of a personal choice. Sociology is encompassed by both the unexpected conversation and subsequent interaction within various societal contexts--that would be diversely populated as determined by the personal choice. Moving toward spiritual obsession would diminish both sociological interaction and individual autonomy. Moving toward sociological obsession would limit both the depth of spirituality available for experience as well as the psychological health of the individual. Only in isolation could the individual's

experience spiritually transcend that of the others. Any psychological awareness that conflicted with expectations of sociological contacts could only be repressed. Moving toward psychological obsession would alienate sociological and spiritual relationships by devaluing and objectifying them--potentially also derailing previously chosen vocational goals.

Applying the triad to case #2, spirituality provided reasons for both of the simultaneous events (e.g., the drum circle and the memorial service). Sociology created both communally oriented contexts. Psychology was evident within bringing all of the creativity and wisdom I could offer to serve the events. Moving toward psychological obsession was most evident within the temptation to avoid engagement rather than be late. Moving toward sociological obsession would decrease both spiritual and psychological awareness, turning the experience into a flat, one-dimensional, and annoyingly self-serving public moment. Moving toward spiritual obsession would diminish any commitment to serving others, creating an experience with no legitimate purpose.

Applying the triad to case #3, sociological concerns affected the manner in which the two encounters occurred. Psychological concerns affected the specific kind of presence that each individual brought to the encounters. Spiritual concerns affected the associated meanings and interpretations. Moving toward obsession in any area was predisposed to possibilities of conflict within every area. Addressing the encounters holistically, therefore, was the only recommendable response. The possibilities of conflict presented by the juxtaposition of the specific contrasting perspectives involved, suggested no apparent benefits that would make embracing conflict a recommendable

choice. Significantly more information was required in order to reach any alternative

conclusion. Any attempts to collect such information were likely to be interpreted as

invasive and prompt greater defensiveness. The reasons for such a probable

interpretation are the apparent lack of understanding regarding Sacred Clowns and

presumable religious bias against the diversity I embodied.

Internal (Self-Oriented) Expectations

Perhaps due to being autistic prior to any conscious awareness or understanding

of this disability, an absence of integrity, honesty, and truth has always been abhorrent

to me. In speaking with innumerable other autistics since being diagnosed, and in spite

of the consistent observation by many that autism is a spectrum within which each

individual is unique, most have reported difficulty in relating to any form of duplicity.

Duplicity includes any contrast between words and actions, public and private selves,

principle and practice, and so forth. Autistic perception could be described as both

hyper-focused and in many cases hyper-sensitive, so anything that is not what it

appears would be disturbing. Additionally, the relationships between components would

need to be similarly congruent.

Specifically because institutionalized religions, governments, and other societal

entities are often the cumulative result of many years of evolution and modification by

innumerable and diverse perspectives, intense difficulty is a common experience within

attempting to conform to mandates. When ideologically deconstructed, the incongruities

within such mandates become obvious. Among the gifts of autism is often the ability to

see the incongruities even before any such deconstruction is done. The result is

therefore to perceive such mandates as dishonest--whether intentionally or

unintentionally so. The central goal of both SBNR and the Sacred Clown is to move in the opposite direction, using questions and investigations to sift out what is persistently true within one's self, others, and the surrounding world.

Using the metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle and considering the number of elements to be integrated, neither SBNR nor the archetype of the Sacred Clown is a closed system within which any sort of final answer is expected. Instead, life is an ongoing process of engagement with an unlimited spectrum of diverse experiences and perceptions, requiring significant perseverance--to which there are no edge pieces (e.g., pieces with one flat side, beyond which expansion has been rendered impossible).

Specifically because of the diversity anticipated, the need for continuous innovation is an internal expectation arising from limiting concerns for congruence. The responses best suited to a previous experience cannot be expected to correspond to a new experience that is different. That which is most effective within the current moment will arise from unique qualities and components immediately present. Within viewing every encounter as a complex resource that is inherently neither good nor bad, anything other than a practice of inclusivity would be self-sabotaging. Each encounter is a package of new abilities and constitutive resources to be explored. Attention to details is imperative, but the more unknown the components of an experiential moment, the more judgment must be temporarily suspended. Learning and growth must be unimpeded. Relationally, this renders every moment and every encounter as potential teachers to be thoroughly respected.

Applying this to Case #1, I learned that each of us within unexpected moments may be serendipitously called to be another's teacher and sage--whether or not we feel

qualified to do so. Many have spoken of surviving a moment of crisis by "the kindness of strangers." What remains necessary is to also be receptive to any wisdom strangers may have to offer, rather than regarding familiarity as essential to interaction or relationship. Note: the difference between wisdom and unsolicited advice is especially pertinent to the previous sentence and wise discernment is essential.

Applying this to Case #2, I learned or perhaps was reminded that time as measured by myself is not the measurement that actually matters within a world of millions of unfolding lives. What remains essential is serving each moment one experiences with humility, dedication, and all of the personal resources available. The effects of doing so may in fact send ripples of love and wisdom much further through time than we ourselves would ever be able to travel.

Applying this to Case #3, I learned that I may never know the full effect of my presence and actions, but that both may be very essential to the form and development of others' lives. If my experiences include interactions that are statistically impossible, I can only conclude that there must be a very important reason those interactions occurred. I embody challenges by which spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth are potentially but not specifically empowered, which may be clues to the fundamental purpose of my life and existence within the spectrum of other human lives.

Trial Responses

Within both SBNR and the Sacred Clown, elements may equally be original or drawn from past, present, or future experiences. I have often been asked about the creation of Sister Who as if the appearance and ritual garb were cognitively and intentionally designed; they were not.

The first time during the creation of Sister Who that I recall sensing something much deeper and more mysterious, I was looking into my eyes within a photograph created during my undergraduate education following a Halloween event. Having not had an abundance of materials from which to create an appropriate costume for the occasion, I had purchased a Halloween make-up kit at a nearby department store and-- without any specific plan--used the black pigment to randomly paint the top half of my body with horizontal zebra stripes. Intuitively, one eye was encompassed by a stripe, but the other was not. In gazing at this photo of that night, I distinctly recall a flicker of subconscious recognition that I could not fully explain. I was searching for Sister Who's face, but my only point of guidance was a mysterious quest for whatever somehow "looked right." The configuration that I have used ever since required approximately three years to discover, during which time a variety of possibilities were tested. Until the stylized tears, eyebrow, and vine were added, there always seemed to be something missing. In contemplating the final design, I decided to interpret the tears as "one for all of the evils done to children, one for those done to the natural world, and one for those that adults do to each other." The substitution of sequins for the actual leaves and tears occurred many years later when I suddenly began experiencing neurological challenges and doubted my ability to continue doing my own face-paint. Thanks to this substitution, I have thus far been able to persist.

The complete face design implies the masks of comedy and tragedy used to represent the world of the theater for hundreds if not thousands of years, but also represents the need for integration of joy and sadness throughout one's experience of life. The symbol of the cross has been a religious symbol far longer than the history of

Christianity. My extrapolation was that this represents living at the intersection of vertical and horizontal relationships. That the cross is tipped, is a reminder that there is always more than one way of perceiving, that can be affected by one's own surroundings more than by whatever one is viewing.

The ritual garb also experienced evolution for approximately six years. The first version resulted from fashion magazine photos and projections by others of how challenging they proposed the overall presentation should be. What "looked right" to me was always more aligned with ministry than with societal response. The angel-wing sleeves of a particular early version were deemed impractical. Over-sized cut-outs on the torso that grandstanded having been a bodybuilder were distracting. The conclusion thus had long sleeves with tight cuffs and a modest sizing of open areas in the bodice, for which the interpretation is that, "it is always important to allow some of your true self to show, but not so much as to appear vulgar." Additionally, after the first few versions, all subsequent ritual garb has been made of black cotton with a minimum of decoration. This was inspired by the Amish idea of being plain, so that the focus could remain upon humbly engaging in spiritual service and practice.

In a similar manner, ministerial methodology quickly gravitated to humility and respectful service rather than arrogance or pretentiousness. The measure of the work is ultimately not how popular or wealthy I become, but rather how much personal and spiritual growth occurs within others--specifically due to direct or indirect interaction. That this interaction has included individuals of nearly every conceivable spiritual ideology has empowered ministerial understandings to grow within myself as well--and there is no indication this will ever stop. Those diverse individuals have ultimately been

my most important teachers, even as I assist them in wrestling with innumerable profound questions.

Significant Evaluative Distinctions

Within the myriad of conversations and interactions that populate three decades of ministerial work, I came to understand that each one speaks and perceives from his or her own context. When the words themselves point in other directions, I am reminded of the common paraphrase of Shakespeare's words within the play, *Hamlet*, "Methinks thou dost protest too much." To find the truth of myself as a Sacred Clown and interfaith minister as well as the truth of the other individual's specific need, consequently, required consideration of ethnography and temporal context as well as actual words. An additional consideration might be to which events or opportunities I chose to respond, but this should not overlook innumerable other instances in which doors of opportunity were intentionally closed by others (i.e., several volunteer opportunities to which I was specifically told not to come). Superficially, I sometimes shrug off the rejection with words to the effect that, "I guess I was insufficiently normal," but it is equally possible that I was an opportunity for growth for which the individuals were insufficiently prepared. The irrational extremes to which some will go to pursue notions of "normal," while simultaneously professing that there is no such thing, are really quite bizarre. A more accurate interpretation of my evolution and the associated concerns can be found within the content of the monthly newsletter created since the beginning of 1998, entitled, "Sister Who's Perspective."

Observed Shifts in Methodology

As previously mentioned, I was initially encouraged to be forceful and aggressive but found little integrity within such public presentation. As my understanding of my own development progressed, I also began to understand such presentation as a sort of overcompensation for deeply rooted insecurity--that I did not feel, due to serendipitous encounters such as the three cases mentioned earlier. In fact, the synchronicities quickly became so common that I began to view my service as a 21st century nun and Sacred Clown as a divine calling--and consequently a responsibility and a duty to be performed as exceptionally as abilities and resources allowed. To my observation, the effectiveness of the work increased in direct proportion to (a) a practice of asking questions rather than providing answers and (b) beginning each interaction by listening rather than speaking. Institutionalized religion, conversely, generally begins by speaking and tolerates minimal disagreement.

Initially, my sense of purpose was centered upon helping others with whatever they were doing, but I found that they often did not want my help. Specifically because of that, the ministerial work expanded into areas in which I was the initiator, but not in ways that dictated behavior or ideology to others. What I did not anticipate was how consistent I would remain from the very first day to the present, while the surrounding world changed. For myself, certain principles and virtues were and are fundamental. Within others, echoing the principle of IDIC within Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*, it was a matter of "infinite diversity in infinite combination"--and recombination, over and over again.

Throughout being Sister Who, another fundamental point of orientation, drawn from diverse North American tribal societies, was that I experience myself as a two-

spirited person. I do not perform one or the other or try in any way to be different, but rather experience only the distinction of which persona is internal and which is external within any specific moment. Grammatically, Sister Who is female, but I have never attempted to conceal that I am a gay man. The understanding at which I ultimately arrived, after again contemplating *Horton Hears a Who* by Dr. Seuss, is that Sister Who is a deeper level of personhood that precedes gender and orientation. That is, one must first understand what it is to be the unique consciousness one is--a who--and then consider how the voice and activity of this person is affected by gender, orientation, ethnicity, and all other cultural and social concerns. This is analogous to the quest of a practitioner of SBNR, but finding deeper ideology within one of the most popular children's books of all time is exactly what a Sacred Clown would do.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

The question that remains central to this dissertation is the challenge of articulating that which is central to both the phenomenon of "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) and the specific manifestation of the Sacred Clown embodied by Sister Who.

At the heart of applying the extensive information this paper presents is, first of all, choosing not to be threatened or offended by questions, individuality, honesty, change, or growth. Secondly, one must allow sufficient time to dig deep, rather than being satisfied with superficial considerations. Those who seek quick and easy answers are unlikely to find any answer worth keeping. Conversely, those who understand that every answer is only tentative, pending the integration of new information, offer hope for humanity.

SBNR proposes that religion has not gone far enough. The Sacred Clown asks, "Why would anyone ever want to stop?" The triad echoes the timeless sentiment that everything is interconnected and that the conflict of the six blind men and the elephant (by John Godfrey Saxe) is only a reflection of how short-sighted they are.

For those unfamiliar with this timeless literary composition written during the middle of the 19th century, each blind man touches only one part of the elephant. The tusk, leg, ear, side, tail, and trunk are thus metaphorically likened to a spear, a tree, a sail, a wall, a rope, and a snake. The conclusion, unfortunately, is that each man argued vehemently that the part he touched was indicative of the whole of the elephant.

Ultimately, the actual limitations of perception are most often self-imposed. As helpful as it may be to document all that is and has been, the work will be meaningless unless it proposes where to go next--and is employed in a way that refuses to quit as long as there is one more possibility to try. I've often heard it said that growth is the only true evidence of life. Nothing within all of my research and half a century of life experience suggests otherwise.

It appears that within the current time, innumerable archetypes pertaining to individuality and community are being rediscovered. It is recommended that further research include definition and distinction between the shaman and the Sacred Clown. They are not mutually exclusive but rather often complementary communal roles. The former, however, often includes alternative methods of perception (i.e., meditation, deprivation, chemical or herbal substances, etc.), while the latter is more educationally and relationally oriented. Both seek to respond to ongoing spiritual hunger within humanity that has likewise been insufficiently documented, defined, and consciously discovered. A certain number of books, workshops, and presentations have been done, but in proportion to the vastness of human experience and population, the quest for greater understanding in this area is still in its infancy.

Specific examples of Sacred Clowns have likewise demonstrated additional capacities that, while admirable and sometimes even recommendable, are inconsistently present throughout further examples of both Sacred Clowns and SBNR. One such possibility is advocacy, of which Patch Adams and Wavy Gravy are two prominent examples. The ability to be a voice and an advocate for individuals who are victimized, however, employs a different skill set than that required for inspiring growth.

This could also be described as the difference between having the power of insight and, alternatively, having the power of persuasion, both of which are complex phenomena in and of themselves. SBNR, Sacred Clowns, and shamans are more accurately identified with the former (i.e., insight). This is because the reasons they remain advantageous to humanity are the perceptions and understandings they convey, rather than the force they are able to apply. This does not prevent specific examples from embodying both insight and force, but these are two distinct components.

It may be that the touch and effect of Sacred Clowns is comparable to what has been termed, "the butterfly effect," that also warrants greater documentation, definition, and conscious discovery. The slightest turn of a phrase or the reawakening that arises from perceiving one's image reversed within an effective mirror, may be the fingerprints of Sacred Clowns throughout time--awaiting discovery by those willing to engage in sufficiently precise consideration of human interaction and development. Then again, sometimes even a distorted or ineffective mirror will reveal new directions in which to look.

Perhaps Sacred Clowns will even return to spectrums of societal contexts--not as trouble-makers (an idea that largely arises from second-person descriptions), but rather as those who expertly provoke individually appropriate awareness, contemplation, ingenuity, and development. Much needed further study might also include cataloging the societal roles and names that demonstrate the relational functionality this dissertation has described. To the extent that religion ever chooses to integrate both SBNR and the Sacred Clown, however, religion might no longer be religion--since both of these point to what lies beyond religion's boundaries.

Both ubuntu and relational individuality, conversely, are specifically oriented to understandings that are symbiotically and extensively interconnected yet have no clear boundaries. A primary question within such an alternative approach is not whether apparently opposite components are interrelated, but rather how. As specific dynamics are brought to consciousness, collaborative possibilities increase exponentially.

The availability of infinite diversity (i.e., an unlimited number and variety of specific examples) likewise cautions against any obsession with generalization that is analogous to avoiding precision within perception, overlooking important data, and devaluing originality. Identifying commonalities must likewise follow rather than precede perception, specifically to avoid projection. Even subconsciously employing projection introduces an intellectual equivalent of glaucoma, leaving significant discoveries potentially unnoticed. Generalization is a form of projection.

Within Jung's limited conceptions of basic archetypes, the Sacred Clown is only a trickster, rather than a phenomenon possessing far greater dynamics and potential. The possibility and perhaps even the probability of manifestation across diverse cultures and societies must nonetheless recognize that specific forms will reflect particular contexts. Actual incidence is nonetheless likely to be proportional to societal tolerance for individuality and/or diversity, both of which are discouraged by societal mandates oriented to mass production and generalization.

An additional consideration that will vary according to the specific context is how to progress from an answer-oriented configuration to one that is question-oriented instead. Understanding that the steps to accomplishing such a shift will be individually unique, the first priority is that there be steps that are being implemented in a truly wise

manner. Those societal contexts that are not yet ready for the possibilities and orientation that SBNR and the Sacred Clown include may sadly be a drain upon communal abilities and resources, but they must never become the definition of humanity's ultimate limits.

On a personal level, as much as I'm inclined to insist that engaging in autoethnographical reflection added nothing to what was actually understood, raising awareness from subconscious practice to systematized definition allowed those practices to become available resources to surrounding community. Using the metaphor of artistic creation, it's not that the spirit of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* or Michelangelo's *David* did not previously exist, but rather that by being given form these could at last be shared. In both cases, the ultimate consequences were not merely their own forms, but include all derivative works throughout decades and even centuries of humanity that followed, as well as those yet to come. SBNR and Sister Who likewise hold possibilities of future genesis.

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Appendix A: Additional Resources

The website, www.SisterWho.com, was first created in 1997 to establish an online presence for a unique and rapidly expanding ministerial activity. Numerous incarnations have coincided with changes in available technological resources and perceptions of public response. For example, the website once included a page offering relics for sale, to increase funding for ministerial work. When no response was received after an extended period of time, the page was removed. Much more recently, however, safe-keeping of the original pair of gold boots, so worn that the sole of one literally cracked and broke all the way through its layers, was transferred to Sue Ware, PhD. No measurement was ever made of the precise number of miles traversed in those boots, but the number would probably be over a thousand.

This website also contains the complete newsletter archive of *Sister Who's Perspective*, the publication and distribution of which began in January of 1998.

A selection of ministerial activities are also noted within the About/Chronology pages of the website, to which information is continuously being added, as it becomes available.

The inspirational photos were mostly originally created for annual calendars featuring Sister Who.

Four albums of original songs are also presented.

An additional online resource created in 1998 to increase distribution of episodes of "Sister Who Presents...," originally created for public access television, was an online video channel located at www.YouTube.com/Denver NeVaar. It was specifically because of this channel that a volunteer in Mexico emerged, encouraging Spanish subtitles, which then inspired German subtitles as well. The work of adding such subtitles is quite extensive, but continues as resources and abilities allow.

An off-shoot of this work is that the monthly newsletter, *Sister Who's Perspective*, also began distribution in Spanish and German.

Appendix B: Development of Symbiotic Individuality

Earlier Doctoral Writing

Research in Human Development

Pertaining to the Development of Symbiotic Individuality

July 2021

An Introduction

Community and individuality inescapably exist in symbiotic relationship. Throughout more than a decade of graduate-level research, I have not been able to discover a single problem within all of human history that cannot be explained as a breakdown of specifically this relationship. Community continuously renews itself by nurturing its examples of individuality--no matter how eccentric or anomalous they may sometimes be--and individuality survives by contributing to its surrounding community. In the same way that every human body integrates a myriad of cells and every species of animal life integrates a myriad of individual examples, every society must integrate spectrums of individuality if it is to endure.

As important as it is to consider those spectrums, however, for reasons of accuracy, integrity, and reliability, one must also consider not only the existence, specific identity, and contribution of anomalies within those spectrums, but equally the ways they are essential to all surrounding forms of life. Only against a background of commonality,

does the distinctiveness of an anomaly become visible--much like displaying diamonds on black velvet. Without the diamonds, however, all that one could perceive would be darkness. Diamonds are likewise difficult to clearly perceive without a background of black velvet--thus demonstrating symbiotic relationship.

A professor within my master's-level education observed, however, that I had discovered "a hole within the conversation" by noticing that--without exception--every reference to individuality I was able to find within academic literature recognized exclusively narcissistic individuality, and no term for a positive correlation had ever been written. Central to this discussion, therefore, is recognizing relational individuality and that no example of individuality is able to survive without a corresponding constellation of symbiotic relationships. In common practice, community is conversely consistently observed to be abusively dismissive, by recognizing and rewarding only narcissistic individuality. The tragic reality I discovered was that there is no key literature upon which to build an understanding of relational individuality, and the notion that one's theoretical understandings must be based upon existing literature infantilizes and limits human understanding. My intention, therefore, has always been to go beyond the literary examples I was nonetheless required to include.

A conspicuous oversight I have found within virtually all academic literary sources is a failure to specifically define terms--so I have made a point of including such definitions and being as clear and specific as possible. An additional challenge I must continuously battle is the neurotypical obsession with generalization and categorization, which blurs, obscures, and devalues individuality and specificity in any form. Finally, the common tendency to avoid conflict rather than resolve it hinders language from saying

what needs to be said, so my autistic directness may at times be uncomfortable, but my words are very specifically chosen for accuracy and meaning,

yet without any intention to offend, so that long-standing challenges may finally have an opportunity to be resolved.

A Detailed Evaluation of Required Bibliographical Resources

My search for articles within databases of peer-reviewed scholarly publications began with "symbiotic," "individuality," and both of those words in combination with the word "development." Thereafter, further attempts were made using any related synonym or term. All such attempts produced an extreme minimum of effective results related to the current discussion. Some articles were nonetheless selected on the basis of commonality with a conception of individuality provided by de Beauport and Diaz (1996). Although not identified as relational individuality, her identification of eleven qualities defining individuality in non-narcissistic terms is the best presentation I have thus far been able to find. These are that individuality is able: (a) to be cultivated and developed; (b) to engage in self-directed rationality; (c) to recognize pre-established associations; (d) to envision objects, actions, or experiences which are not otherwise immediately present; (e) to know or learn without dependence upon reasoning or observation; (f) to engage in self-directed emotional response; (g) to move between various mental/emotional states for various reasons; (h) to constructively manage various internal drives and attractions; (i) to consciously and constructively facilitate basic survival; (j) to coherently accumulate and expand upon complex experiences and knowledge; and (k) to manage the more or less constant influx of cerebral stimulus (NeVaar, 2010).

This understanding is fundamental to this essay. Articles selected for consideration were thereafter grouped according to whether the article's focus and/or activity was toward relevant theories or toward actual research data, both of which offered positive contributions, as well as toward active or passive engagement. The significance of this final distinction cannot be overstated, but is most frequently overlooked.

Perspectives Oriented to Ideology Rather Than Actual Demonstration

The first and most essential understanding to this discussion is that there is no consensus within the sources cited. They are disparate perspectives which must be integrated toward a common understanding that they do not inherently have. The key point of my evaluation is that symbiosis and interdependence are not only essential but imperative.

The first of the literary sources I was required to include was Enns (1991), which presents some general comments related to traditional conceptions of the individuality of women held by psychological and sociological professionals and academicians, then focuses more specifically upon five contrasting relationship models, noting strong and weak aspects of each. The principal deficiency, however, is the preoccupation with categorization rather than consideration of specific relationship produced by individually unique variables.

The second of the literary sources I was required to include was Greenwood (2000), which contrasted former and current approaches to social psychology. At the heart of the distinction between the two perspectives is the basic question of the location of any application of social psychology's point of origin. That is, whether a

presentation of an application of social psychology begins with the assumption that individual psychology is primarily defined by commonality with other examples within a specific social categorization or with the assumption that individual psychology is primarily defined by socially oriented behavior, regardless of the presence or absence of commonality. As with most other subjects, the most widely applicable and enduring truth seems to lie somewhere between the two extremes. Neither perspective, however, effectively encompasses relational individuality.

The third of the literary sources I was required to include was Joh (2002), which draws a broad picture of potential conflicts and confusion arising from poorly managed integration of western and eastern values, perspectives, and interpersonal dynamics. Examples of conflict are given, but suggestions for constructive integration are conspicuously absent. Ultimately, the dilemma to which Joh refers is simply the occurrence of confusion, which is a common element within ongoing development, education, and growth. Constructively employed, confusion can give specific guidance toward focusing avenues of inquiry, if internal and societal dialogue remains part of the process, and tradition and individuality are not presumed to be adversarially related. Joh instead allows numerous assumptions suggesting the superiority of traditional patterns of behavior and value to stand, rather than considering possibilities of both deficiency and advantage within both tradition and individualism. A relevant example is Joh's (2002) statement that "Korean parents…generally esteem fatherhood, follow a patrimonial family system and expect unquestioning obedience from their children" (p. 396). Is such obedience genuinely good, considering that children are exposed to new information which could be helpful to significant improvement in many areas? If children

are not allowed to question, the parents' ability to continue learning is significantly impaired and parents are predisposed to becoming less able to relate effectively to a world that is constantly changing.

The fourth literary source I was required to include was Kahn (1982), which focuses upon the principal founder and teacher Hans Hofmann. Without providing any description or definition of the Hofmann School, a somewhat archetypal teaching style is presented, oriented to nurturing a symbiotic relationship between individuality and community--yet without specifically identifying anything analogous to relational individuality, due to a preoccupation with narcissistic individuality.

The fifth literary source I was required to include was Ledermann (1995), which stresses the pivotal role of interpretation within psychological analysis--logically a most obvious path to conscious understanding of any form of individuality. An essential limitation, however, is that this tool is not a panacea, applicable and helpful to all situations regardless of inherent qualities and characteristics. What is ultimately being described within recommendable therapeutic interactions is a symbiotic relationship which produces healing for the client and professional empowerment for the therapist— at the level of the unique individuality of each. Ledermann's references to scholarly material, her attention to structure and to fulfilling initial statements of intention fully, and her limitations of ideological discussion produce a remarkably effective and concise resource for both potential clients and potential analysts, engaged in any way in pursuing the sort of personal growth, inner healing, and professional development which is central to the analytic/therapeutic relationship. What remains central is a shift toward relational individuality and away from narcissistic individuality within all participants.

The sixth literary source I was required to include was Liben (2004), which raises the issues of effectively defining diversity and simultaneously avoiding consequences of categorization--noting the disadvantages of "essentialism," which generally presumes congruence between descriptions of a group and descriptions of individuals within that group (which are in actuality often inconsistent). Additionally, a pervasive characteristic of all research and inquiry is that "every measurement is perspective dependent" (p. 182).

Relating Liben's (2004) article to this overall discussion of symbiotic individuality, a reasonably comprehensive understanding requires self-awareness of measurement (awareness that one has the characteristics that one does) and at least basic understanding of individual and collective forms of development, symbiosis, and individuality. The central research question of how investigations of cultural and gender development are affected by widely accepted ideologies, methodologies, and challenges is clearly very significant (if one wishes to avoid disseminating misinformation).

The seventh literary source I was required to include was McAdams and Pals (2006), which identified four qualities as essential to the conference of legitimacy upon scientific studies of personality--which would presumably include relational individuality. These are consistent uniqueness, persistence, communal predispositions, and individual predisposition. The cumulative result is a remarkably holistic and effectively integrated approach to mental and emotional health and treatment, that, in essence, comprises relational individuality.

Perspectives Oriented to Actual Demonstration Rather Than Ideology

The eighth literary source I was required to include was Bengston and Marshik (2007). Their study documented interactions between two documentary film producers and two contrasting subjects. The first was a psychologist practicing and advocating methods objectively proven to be erroneous and the second was a Neo-Nazi who was similarly objectively shown the consequences of his ideology. The former refused to accept what was presented and modify professional methods accordingly; the latter did not. The unexpected but resulting focus at the conclusion of the study, therefore, was upon (a) the "intersubjective talk" essential for personal transformation and (b) dynamics of symbiotic relationship.

The ninth literary source I was required to include was John and Robins (1994), which sought to address categories of issues and implications. The area of implications can be further subdivided into two categories of concern: individual differences and the role of narcissism. Issues identified include accuracy, correspondence, distortion, self-enhancement bias, and ratings assigned by others. Implications identified by the authors include possible consequential results of variable accuracy, frequency or predictability of correspondence, range of distortion, degree of self-enhancement bias, and consistency or inconsistency of ratings assigned by others. What was conspicuously left for the reader to determine is how the study's findings could be applied to the development of relational individuality.

Obstacles along the way were nonetheless identified as self-perception bias and narcissism, but, curiously, not reflexively applied. Relational individuality depends upon accurate and unbiased information relevant to symbiotic participants being openly and

reliably shared, so that challenges to the maintenance of that relationship can be promptly and effectively addressed.

The tenth literary source I was required to include was Li (2003), which compared Anglo-Canadian and Mainland Chinese university students' responses to questions/scenarios related to either sharing material resources or sharing thoughts and opinions. Three different axes of comparison were used; however, the first related to distinctions between collectivistic and individualistic theories, the second related to distinctions between independent and interdependent self-construal theories, and the third related to distinctions between participants of contrasting gender. This article prompts discussion of self-awareness, self-definition, and interpersonal dynamics across diverse cultural and ethnic categories--all of which are relevant to construction and maintenance of symbiotic/relational individuality.

The eleventh literary source I was required to include was McLoyd (2004), which addresses issues related to categorical representation and ethnic association, orienting primarily to the author's own experiences of being African American. Especially noteworthy is the conclusion that inclusion within a categorization does not equate to common experience, due to a long list of individually oriented variables and the questionable cause-effect relationship between past and present worldviews. Relational individuality, conversely, advocates for individuals who form symbiotic relationships rather than individuals who are defined by the categorical definitions others impose upon them.

Individual characteristics are far too often rendered nonexistent or invisible for the sake of maintaining popular systems of categorization. Consideration of

development of symbiotic individuality is impossible if one cannot move beyond the boundaries of demographic classification and begin to empirically note verifiable qualities, events, and perspectives which can only be found at the level of individuality.

The twelfth literary source I was required to include was Rubenstein (2000), which relates four case studies to Mayan mythological narratives, drawing out insights regarding individuality, relationship, and potentially positively progressive process. The conclusion of these individual and collective evaluations and their integration is then related to the basic idea of wholeness described by Carl Jung, resulting in a well-balanced presentation of simultaneous and equally essential needs for both positive and holistic individuality (i.e., relational individuality) and also for healthy non-objectifying relationship. The implied recommendation is directly and persistently using cultural narratives to interpret and facilitate clients' psychological and emotional health. The relevance of narratives to relational individuality is the replication and extension of wisdom from one generation to the next, specifically by including a multi-generational spectrum of participants. An example of using literary narratives to augment or supplement professional counseling interpretations is Rubenstein's metaphor of a single stalk of corn with multiple constitutive grains, which is equally illustrative of relational individuality and symbiotic relationship.

Possible Applications of Material Thus Far Presented

Both active and passive ways exist in which a development of symbiotic individuality can manifest, ways that involve deliberate choice and action which are likely to result in consciously caused development and other ways that involve the creation of an environment within which development becomes distinctly probable.

Attempting to integrate the two would be analogous to proposing that photographs of an individual are unaffected by standing in light or shadow; a significant number of additional variables would need to be considered, in order to create photographs of equal quality. Differences in effects arising from active and passive methodologies may be subtle, therefore, but are addressed separately specifically because of how profound they sometimes are.

Nonetheless, possibilities for each strategy can be found within each of the two categorizations of contemporary literature (theory-oriented and research-oriented) herein employed. As with active and passive modes, differences between orienting to theory or research can be equally profound.

The Active Pursuit of Symbiotic Individuality

Any active pursuit of symbiotic individuality must of course begin with some basic understanding of the goal, recommending that an active pursuit must begin with recognition, exploration, and examination of the goal of symbiotic individuality. Without a fundamental understanding of symbiosis, individuality, interconnection, and interdependence, significant research data are likely to slip by undetected. Additionally, consequent to such recognition, exploration, or examination, the next steps are the creation and implementation of actual tools that have the potential to create or maintain ongoing development.

Theory-Oriented Pursuits Previously Identified

Of the five different ways that Enns (1991) presents for the identification and development of individuality, the first is the most predisposed to an active strategy. The model presented by Enns, however, presumes that progression will occur in only one

direction and that stages will occur in the order described, rather than any individual experiencing any of the stages of development at any point in time, depending upon circumstances.

Greenwood's (2000) perspective is not tied to expectations of sequential progression within either past or current approaches to social psychology. His idea of current approach is, however, much more active than his idea of past approach, because while the latter focuses upon the norms of one's generally unchosen classification, the former focuses upon social objects or actions. To have or demonstrate a healthy state of personal psychology, therefore, one must act socially in ways that are also generally considered to be healthy. Rephrased for the current paper, to have or demonstrate symbiotic individuality, one must involve one's self in giving to the symbiotic relationship.

For Joh (2002), the active development of symbiotic relationship begins with asserting one's commitment to the relationship between one's self and one's community, more than asserting one's commitment to one's self and assumes that the two possibilities are adversarially related if not also mutually exclusive. The primary foundation of symbiotic individuality, however, presumes that no inherent conflict exists and that ideal fulfillment of the individual and ideal fulfillment of the community are synonymous. Developing symbiotic individuality from Joh's point of departure into the discussion, therefore, would be a matter of harmonizing the needs, wants, and resources of both individuality and community.

Kahn's (1982) pursuit of symbiotic individuality begins with the presumed selection of environment. Since attendance at any particular school is generally a matter

of choice, the active pursuit of symbiotic individuality would entail selecting a teacher, a classroom environment, and an approach to classroom activities. Consequent to such selection is the degree to which a particular individual is superficially or deeply and philosophically engaged with his or her work, the latter generally producing a more genuinely effective and productive educational experience.

McAdams and Pals (2006) seem to have integrated both active and passive approaches to psychological professionals' work with clients, recommending first an active (and potentially erroneous) classification of clients and then a more passive observational and responsive stance, noting a wide variety of environmental and developmental components of psychological health and of the complex and multi-faceted phenomenon of individuality. A significant concern, however, is whether their approach serves the psychological professional more than the client. Ultimately, symbiotic individuality has no specific and unavoidable need for classification. What symbiotic individuality does need, however, is sufficient awareness of commonalities and community, to discern effective construction of mutually beneficial relationships with both community and self. While any notion of a mutually beneficial relationship with the self may seem peculiar, the importance of self-awareness and self-response while sustaining symbiotic communal contribution cannot be overstated.

Research-Oriented Pursuits Previously Identified

John and Robins (1994) initially seem to have engaged in the evaluation of both active and passive elements within participants, actively pursuing through research activities a more comprehensive understanding of individuality as practiced by individuals. Their inability to provide empowering conclusions, however, is predictable

because of the limitation imposed by their personal bias that accurate perception of individuality can only come from external sources. It is not at all difficult to illustrate that although both internal and external perceptions can be affected by numerous influences, reliable and empowering conclusions are every bit as available as misleading ones from both sources. To exclude internal perceptions, therefore, is to exclude potentially helpful data.

Li's (2003) approach to the active pursuit of symbiotic individuality recognized the importance of cross-cultural dialogue and an integration of internal and external information, but not the researcher's own cultural biases. In so doing, as described within the report itself, Li failed to make an effective contribution to an academic community. The consequent relationship related to individuality is that it was thereby rendered competitive rather than collaborative, presuming the superiority of one individual perspective over that of the other—rather than regarding each as correct within its own cultural context and collaborative within a larger multi-cultural global communal context.

McLoyd (2004) makes a positive step in this direction by noting the possibility of contrast between individual experience and experience generally assigned to categorical groupings, but failed to present related findings in a manner sufficiently broad to be applicable to the majority of a global community—thereby weakening the actualization of symbiosis between individuality and community. It is, after all, not enough to possess one's own individuality if others are discouraged or hindered from possessing theirs, if one's true goal is symbiotic or relational individuality within a larger healthy global context. Similarly, it is not enough to proactively possess the knowledge

and practice of one's particular culture if one does not also make that knowledge and practice relational so that it continues both to exist and to develop—pragmatically and academically. To do so would suggest the embrace of a false or hypocritical ideology that could not be wisely practiced.

Rubenstein (2000) manages to side-step such pitfalls as suggested within my evaluation of researchers mentioned above, by focusing on a pursuit of relational individuality clearly, simplistically, and pragmatically. The goal in this case is not the accumulation of data but rather the actual empowerment of individual psychological and emotional health using relevant cultural literary source material. By allowing the individuality of the participant to be the point of departure into the discussion of relevant cultural literature, Rubenstein's reliably anticipated outcomes are reasonably predictable empowerments of those individuals, with regard to personal/psychological issues named for resolution—essentially, the most effective application of the ideological components encompassed by this collective paper entitled, "The Development of Symbiotic Individuality."

The Passive Pursuit of Symbiotic Individuality

A great many essential components of life accept only indirect rather than direct manipulation toward healthier and more developed forms and states of being. One cannot force the grass to grow nor the sun to rise into view on the eastern horizon, but there are environments which nurture and support such activity which can be directly and volitionally constructed. Nevertheless, no guarantees are given that the creation of certain environmental circumstances will reliably result in a desired outcome. Desired outcomes can therefore be made more probable but not necessarily more predictable.

Further Consideration of Theory-Oriented Pursuits

Symbiotic individuality is by nature both and equally active and passive, receiving from one's community or environment and also simultaneously contributing to the same. Unfortunately, researchers are frequently biased one way or the other, but also typically against individuality and in favor of communal categorization.

Considering that four out of five of the models offered by Enns (1991) are concerned with qualities which are developed, received, or inherent because of external influences and factors rather than by any significant amounts of personal volition or choice, one could conclude that Enns is more inclined to a passive, indirect, or nurturing rather than controlling approach to the therapeutic relationship. In the second, third, fourth, and fifth models mentioned, Enns makes the definition and consequent expression of individuality subject to constellations of environmental and relational qualities, but fails to note to any significant degree the resulting dynamic abilities of any individual to make a genuinely progressive and effective contribution, on behalf of one's self or on behalf of one's communal grouping.

Ledermann's (1995) concerns recommend discernment on the part of the psychological professional, first to determine on the basis of information and responses from the client, whether interpretation would be helpful at each specific point within the therapeutic relationship and second to be guided by that same information regarding the form and volume of interpretation to be provided. More directly, this means "checking in" with the client from time to time by asking clarifying questions and listening to information about the client's experience of the ongoing conversation, rather than projecting understanding and accomplishment that are not truly occurring. Specifically

because of linguistic, cultural, and experiential influences, each client relationship could

be understood to have its own unique language, and failing to speak the same

language, as it were, would be the quickest way to render a client relationship

unproductive.

Liben (2004) runs parallel to Ledermann (1995) , supplementing concerns about

interpretation with concerns about diversity, but once again making determinations on

the basis of information and responses from the client. Attempting to erroneously

impose a psychological model for whatever otherwise legitimate-sounding reason, can

only lead to the subjugation of the particular client's individual truth of relationship with

and contribution to, his or her surrounding community. As fascinated as all scholarly and

scientific approaches need to be with measurement, Liben's observation warrants

frequent repetition, that "every measurement is perspective dependent" (p 182). Here

again is the recommendation for self-awareness and observational receptivity within the

psychological professional, rather than any volitional or active molding of the individual

into congruity with the therapist's conception of normal and appropriate behavioral and

psychological characteristics.

Further Consideration of Research-Oriented Pursuits

Bengston and Marshik (2007) stand alone among the sources of recent

discussion of the development of symbiotic individuality by demonstrating research that

nurtures without attempting to direct, design, or control. By noting created

circumstances, observing constitutive events, and acknowledging whatever

development occurred, their research was able to present dynamics and components of

relational individuality in a way that was really quite inspiring to anyone interested in

having a positive sociological and psychological impact upon the world within which we all live. Equally intriguing as this initial presentation would be a further investigation later in time of the qualities which have either persisted or further developed within the participants of the two case studies referenced, documenting whether, how, or how much further development of symbiotic individuality has or has not occurred.

A Concluding Summary

Having concluded evaluation of these spectrums and modes of contemporary discussion relevant to a development of symbiotic individuality, what remains is the task of application. What is needed is a tool which has the capacity to measure whatever amount of symbiotic individuality exists within a particular respondent and, by the specific content of that tool, to suggest ways in which further development could be encouraged, facilitated, or accomplished. In order to be effective, however, such encouragement, facilitation, or accomplishment, as suggested by Rubenstein (2000), would need to be drawn from the cultural, literary, and linguistic context of the particular respondent.

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