

Stargazer: The Personal Narrative of a  
Marriage and Family Therapist Called  
To Work with Global Systems

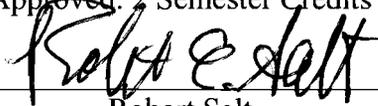
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ABSTRACT

Stargazer is a personal narrative which chronicles the developmental learning journey of a marriage and family therapist called to work with global systems. Personal narrative is a form of the research methodology autoethnography, in which the researcher is the object of study. In Stargazer, the personal and professional self of the researcher is linked to the field of marriage and family therapy, gendered reality, spirituality, and global issues. The author discusses how her relationship with these facets of self facilitated her development into a committed global systems thinker and practitioner. Both poetry and social science prose are utilized as written forms to articulate the author's story and engage readers. The methodology of autoethnography is introduced, and validity and reliability of the project are explored. A literature review is conducted which places the author's narrative within the cultural context of the field of marriage and family therapy. The author's narrative is applied to the field of marriage and family therapy and facilitates an ongoing dialogue with readers and this professional population.

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I am filled with gratitude for the abundance of love in my life. Thank you to my circle of family and friends who continue to honor my truest self and believe in the power of my dreams.

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Thank you to all the teachers who have passed through my life: moments great and small, challenges, ambiguity, loving hearts, reflections of myself. You are the sparks of my growth.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

The purpose of this project is to tell the story of a marriage and family therapist called to work with global systems. As a human being, citizen of the planet, ordained minister, lover of life, passionate social activist, artist, *and* a marriage and family therapist I am called to service. Traditionally, therapists work in private clinical settings with individuals, families, and other groups. This work often supports creating balance and healing in family systems that are not functioning at their highest potential. Sometimes, therapists are called to the front lines of social systems to advocate for the personal rights and quality of life of the clients they serve. As healers, we are called to work on multiple levels of human experience: individual, familial, communal, cultural, economic, social, political, and environmental.

As a marriage and family therapist, I know that my title implies much more than my interest of working with couples and families. To me, it means that my work is grounded in the principle that human experience can best be understood when each of these levels is known in relation to one another. Each level is a snapshot: I am an individual, woman, family member, citizen, and living being on this planet. The richness of who I am is illustrated when these snapshots are combined into a multi-faceted composition. I am complex. The dynamic of who I am in the world can be intricately understood by examining how I relate to these multiple aspects.

When I look at the issues we face, as a world, for example the genocide in the Darfur region of Africa or the decimation of endangered animal populations, I believe our leaders are working from a limited mindset. Our world has become fragmented, isolated and out of that, fearful, competitive, and violent. We have forgotten that, just as the mighty redwoods depend on microorganisms for their survival, we are all connected to one another. And, just as I believe that

the planet will grow into peace by reclaiming our unity, I believe that the world issues we face can be well served by marriage and family therapists. Instead of seeing snapshots of violence, economic constraints, and environmental degradation, our ideological roots of systemic, ecological thinking and social activism give us an innovative and efficacious window as planet health practitioners. I see the genocide in Darfur as a constellation of interconnected themes from multiple systems: social, economic, political, environmental, and so forth. In the rich and complex portrait created, this vantage point offers innovative possibilities for growth, change, and healing.

In the completion of two years of graduate school in marriage and family therapy, a developmental spiritual process, and life experience, I have come to know that my work as a health practitioner will not be isolated to individual personalities and symptoms. I am called to work with the larger systems of human experience, from which these symptoms are derived. I will take my telescope, and the unique viewpoint it gives me, and gaze at the heavens: how we are all connected to each other in infinite ways. As a marriage and family therapist, it seems I am a stargazer. Traditionally, marriage and family therapists have viewed themselves as clinicians. As a profession, I believe it is time to evolve to incorporate more aspects of practice into our work. As social activists, *health practitioners on a world stage*, we can be bearers of consciousness: bringing the potential of our philosophies and ideas to the constellation of interconnected global systems.

The purpose of this project is to relate my learning journey, as I became who I am today: a marriage and family therapist called to work with larger systems. It is my intention to name this identity and process: call it into being and affirm it. It is a proclamation of my professional

intention, a call to other marriage and family therapists, and an expression of new perspectives and ideas.

### *Methodology*

This project begins with an introduction to the research methodology of autoethnography. This section will discuss the applicability of personal narrative and poetry as significant research phenomena. The next section is a literature review of the current dialogue about the appropriateness and applicability of marriage and family therapy practice with global systems. Both the methodology and literature review sections provide a context for exploring the personal narrative that follows. The final sections facilitate a discussion about the ideas introduced and conclusions are drawn.

### *Assumptions of the Study*

"Believe nothing because a wise person said it. Believe nothing because it is generally held. Believe nothing because it is written. Believe nothing because it is said to be divine. Believe nothing because someone else believes it. But believe only what you yourself judge to be true." ~ *Buddha*

Storytellers have been present in many societies throughout time. They are the keepers of community wisdom and the shared meaning that provides a framework for understanding personal and community experience. The storyteller must balance two truths: that of the community and that of the self. It is significant that the teller of the community story has both lived it and transmits it to others. In times of famine, the storyteller's voice is parched and strained. As researchers, we carry both community and personal meaning. We too live the hardships and successes of the community we speak for. Our voices are shaped by the grief, fear, frustration, joy, and connection we embody as we explore and transmit community meaning. As ethical researchers, we cannot forget the timbre and identity of the voice that speaks for others. Our perspective shapes our journey as researchers and storytellers. Our personal voices can also

be gifts to community stories. As community members, the internal meaning we construct in response to social dynamics and events is intimately connected to the co-constructed meaning of the wider community. As we open windows into ourselves, so too do we open windows of beneficial insight into community.

The purpose of this study is not to present a generalizable truth, but to create a dialogue with you, the reader, as you connect with my personal journey. It is not my intention to label the truth of anyone else, and instead offer my perspective. You may not have an affinity for my ideas or share my beliefs. We have not walked the same journey, and therefore each stand in a unique location made up of our personal experiences. The purpose of this project is not to express the “correct” way of being in the world. Instead, I embrace this opportunity to articulate my journey and name the truth that I resonate with for two reasons. First, this action helps me call my personal and professional intentions more fully into the world, articulate them, and move into action. Second, it is my hope that the expression of my truth will be a touchstone for new ideas and growth of those who read it. Whether we align or reject what we interact with in the world, it gives us an opportunity to explore our Selves and experiences more fully. Because I align with unity and connection, I believe that diversity in interwoven community enriches us all.

It is not an easy thing to step forward and tell one’s story with authenticity. Sharing the vulnerable, fearful, and evolving parts of my Self asks that I step into an intense crucible of learning and stand openly in my own truth in the midst of a wider community. It is a daunting challenge to ask, “Is my personal story and perspective actually valuable to the community?” I live in a society that values one absolute truth and believes that those in power are the experts on this truth. *Who am I to proclaim the power of my personal truth?* In alignment with my values of interconnection and non-hierarchy, I see that you and I are citizens of a circle who each have

wisdom to contribute to the wider community. I am conscious that, as I step into the authority of my own truth, I pave the way for others to do the same. It is an honor to journey with you. In the words of Marianne Williamson (1992, p. 190-191),

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us most. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and famous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that people won’t feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in all of us. And when we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

## Chapter II: Methodology

The purpose of this project is to relate my learning journey, as I became who I am today: a marriage and family therapist called to work with global systems. You may be asking yourself, “Is someone’s personal story research? Is her individual story relevant to the field of marriage and family therapy?” This chapter will answer these questions by introducing the research methodology of autoethnography and discuss subject selection and description, data collection procedures, data analysis, validity, reliability, generalizability, and limitations.

### *An Introduction to Autoethnography*

Autoethnography is an emerging qualitative research methodology that connects the personal to the cultural through autobiography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography is often written in a first-person voice and utilizes a broad spectrum of written forms that evoke personal experience and engage the reader, including poetry, journals, photography, fiction, social science perspectives, and personal essays. In summary, the personal experience of the researcher is the phenomenon studied. The dominant research culture values objectivity and the security of separation of subject and researcher through double blinds. The intimacy, vulnerability, and subjectivity of autoethnography honors the feminist and post-modernist perspectives that the observer always influences the observed and that research is always infused with human values (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography proposes that we observe the observer and encourages researchers to reflect on their personal experiences. In this way, the author becomes “I” and actively engages readers as “you.” As you read my written work, we begin a dance of ideas, reactions, and dialogue. As a marriage and family therapist, I recognize and honor this relationship. The goals of autoethnography are (Ellis & Bochner, 2000):

- As the researcher, I will be able to understand myself more deeply, and engage readers in your own quests for personal and global understanding.
- To write in a manner that evokes emotion, reaction, and new learning for self and readers as a means to make a difference personally, in the field, and globally.
- To express the ongoing process of the research phenomenon, as opposed to a snapshot of results. These narratives are often ongoing, unfinished, and open to subjective interpretation.
- Instead of description, the goal of this methodology is to communicate meaning and inspire ongoing dialogue.

Autoethnography is an umbrella term that embraces a wide spectrum of ethnographic forms, including reflexive ethnographies, ethnographic memoirs, and personal narratives. Stargazer is a personal narrative. As a means to inspire readers to reflect on their own lives, personal narratives focus on both the researcher's academic and personal lives within a cultural context (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Within a Western cultural context of current world issues, power, and gender, I will focus on the relationship between my personal development and identity as a marriage and family therapist. I will connect my personal story to the field of marriage and family therapy through an ongoing dialogue with you (readers and marriage and family practitioners) throughout the narrative and in a separate discussion section. Based upon the lived experience articulated herein, I will extend my personal truth as a potential application to the field and the planet.

### *Subject Selection and Description*

My developmental story is the subject of this research project. I am a twenty-four year old woman of English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, German, Dutch, and

Oglala Lakota heritage. I was born and raised in Minnesota, and live in the Twin Cities community. I was raised by my particularly amazing mother and step-father, both of whom love and encourage me to live fully into my dreams. I am lucky to have a wonderful step-sister and supportive extended family. My father died when I was twelve due to complications related to alcoholism. He has been a wonderful teacher about the complexities of love, loss, trust, and the ability to stand up for myself. As my mother attended college and took care of me as a single parent, I spent the first half of my life feeling poor in an affluent community. During adolescence my class experience shifted as I became an insider in privileged suburbia. My political views are feminist, progressive, and emphasize social justice, human, and environmental rights. I have attained a Master's education level and am beginning the marriage and family therapy licensure process to become a therapeutic practitioner.

In preparation for this project, I attended a natural healing educational program in Belize, Central America. In accordance with Institutional Review Board policy, I received informed consent both from the educational organization and speakers to utilize program material for this project. Information was ascertained through the program curriculum and through the ongoing dialogue between speakers and students. While the speakers, or natural healers, are active and open contributors to community and global health I am honoring the value system of the Institutional Review Board by keeping their identities anonymous.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

This story was written over a two year period in the form of poetry, personal reflection, and academic thesis-focused work. At each step of the process, I emphasized personal authenticity, vulnerability, and a holistic worldview that included multiple aspects of my personal, professional, and spiritual selves. Life events found to be significant and included in

this narrative are based upon personal reflection after the experiences were integrated into meaningful contributions to my identity. While the written text provides a reflective process-oriented narrative, my poetry provides evocative snapshots of my relationship with current events. All information included is accurate based upon my personal recollection and perspective. Validity and reliability will be discussed in greater breadth in a following section.

### *Data Analysis*

The purpose of this methodology is not to analyze data to arrive at a significant finding of absolute truth. According to Ellis & Bochner (2000), the active process of autoethnography is not to generate analysis, but to facilitate the making of personal meaning both for myself, *the author*, and you, *the readers*. Is the material I present significant to individual readers and the collective field? This question cannot be answered through “p values” or other statistical measures. Instead, this process of meaning is deeply subjective: *is what I express in this project personally significant for you? Did I engage you, as a reader and potential member of the field of marriage and family therapy, on emotional and cognitive levels to think deeply, question, and reflect?* The active process of autoethnography is to support you in your own developmental process of creating meaning on both personal and professional levels. The following sections will provide information about the metric for reflecting on the success of this process.

### *Validity*

Validity asks the question, “Did this research project study what it meant to examine?” In Stargazer, as the researcher, I am studying my developmental journey as a marriage and family therapist called to work with larger systems. As outlined by the above goals, the purpose of autoethnography is not to study or manipulate data, but through sharing of self, facilitate an environment that engages readers in a relationship of dialogue with the author. Accordingly, the

validity question for this project can be understood as, “Did this personal narrative facilitate the environment it meant to create?” The questions below have been written in direct relationship with the goals of autoethnography. As autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology, validity cannot be ascertained through objective analysis. Instead, these questions must be answered on a subjective level. I will answer the questions below that ask about my component of our relationship (written in *italics*). As an active participant in this project, my subjective truth helps to verify validity. As a reader, it is up to you to check in with your own internal truth and decide if I achieved validity in this project.

- After completing the project, do I understand myself more deeply on personal and professional levels? Did I connect with new personal insights?

*This project allowed me to engage deeply with myself. I was able to gain a global perspective on how the last three years of my life contributed to the person I am today.*

*This gave me the opportunity to reflect on multiple aspects of myself and experience, and synthesize them into a cohesive personal and professional self-concept. Through this, I received deep insights into my self-purpose and next steps as a global systems practitioner.*

Did I engage and inspire you as an active participant on your journey for personal and global understanding?

- Did I evoke emotion in myself as I wrote this narrative?

*Yes, writing my personal narrative connected me with wonder, excitement, fear, sadness, and other emotions along the way. There were many times that I needed to stop writing for days or weeks until I had integrated my personal reactions to the process and could, once again, connect with my creative energy.*

As you read my story, does it evoke emotion, reaction and new learning in you?

- Was my primary emphasis on the process of my ongoing developmental journey, as opposed to a “results” orientation?

*You, as the reader, can decide this as well. When I read this project, it is my sense that the majority of its pages and attention focus on my personal process, and not on recommendations or a completed self.*

Did I present a personal narrative that provides a sense of continuity and a coherent sense of self?

- Did I create an environment of connected communication between author and readers, and inspire ongoing dialogue? As you read this narrative, do you feel like a co-participant?

*As I wrote this project, I focused my energy on reaching out to readers at many points with questions, first-person voice, and consideration of reader reactions.*

### *Reliability and Generalizability*

A study is reliable if its results are consistent through replication. According to Ellis & Bochner (2000, p. 751), “there’s no such thing as orthodox reliability in autoethnographic research.” The purpose of autoethnography is not to attain a consistent set of data or test results. Autoethnography is a living, breathing interaction between the author and readers. On the one hand, if readers are consistently engaged and personally reflective as they read my story this replicates methodology goals. On the other hand, reliability cannot be judged solely based upon community connection and approval. Was Van Gogh’s artwork not soulful until he achieved public acclaim after his death? How many of us reach out in personal authenticity and

vulnerability to make meaning of our experiences, and do not find validation from the larger culture?

Every time I read through the words I have written in *Stargazer*, they ring true of the deep upheaval and soul searching I have traveled through to reach where I stand today. From my personal, subjective standpoint this project is a reliable expression of my journey. In addition to this, reliability checks can be performed if other people are connected with one's story. These participants can give their comments and interpretation of events. I plan to distribute copies of this project to the speakers from the natural healing program, individuals in the Marriage and Family Therapy program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, and members of my spiritual community. I look forward to continuing this dialogue with them.

“A story's generalizability is constantly being tested by readers as they determine if it speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751). My life as the author of a personal narrative is both unique and generalizable to broad themes of the society within which I am embedded (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). My personal life experience should not be applied to others as a generalizable truth about what it means to be a marriage and family therapist or human being. At the same time, as a health practitioner and community member, my perspective is an opportunity to generate meaning about the collective groups of which I am a part. My question for you, the reader, is “does my story speak to you about your experience and/or the culture of which you are a part?”

### *Limitations of This Study*

Autoethnography cannot present an absolute, empirically validated truth. Its results cannot be fully generalized to the wider culture with which it is connected. This personal narrative embodies both my unique experiences and themes I share with the society in which I

am embedded. For the traditional research paradigm, these facts are considerable weaknesses of the emerging methodology of autoethnography. I highlight the fact that autoethnography is an emerging methodology, because its very expansion into mainstream research illustrates its contrasts with the status quo value system. Instead, autoethnography reaches beyond the goal of generalizability to that which is unique, personal, and connective. As its focus is the living relationship between the author and readers, I believe autoethnography is an excellent methodology for marriage and family therapists.

Another limitation of this study is that the narrative I present cannot be separated from my personal worldview, perceptions, and biases. As a researcher studying herself, this limitation cannot be avoided. It is clear to me that I cannot be fully objective about my lived experience. Nor can any other community members validate the process of my internal world. At the same time, it is important to recognize that all research is colored by the value system and biases of its authors. Recognizing this fact gives me the opportunity to revel in the possibilities of subjective study. I can go deeply into the many layers of myself: my fears, hopes, excitement, and personal insights. I value this opportunity to research my personal truth and engage the marriage and family therapy community in an ongoing dialogue about the purpose of our profession. The following section reviews professional literature which concerns the connection between global systems and the practice of marriage and family therapy.

### Chapter III: Literature Review

The goal of this section is to provide a cultural context within which my personal and professional journey can be placed. As a marriage and family therapist called to work with global systems, I place myself within the professional community of my peers. As I share how I arrived at my professional identity, I feel it is important to orient my story within the cultural context of the professional dialogue of marriage and family therapists as they answer the question, “Is working with global systems and issues a legitimate professional goal for marriage and family therapists?”

I would love to sit in a room with diverse members of the field as they discuss this topic together. During my literature review for this project, I discovered a dialogue on this very topic between four marriage and family therapists: Scott Johnson, Carlos Sluzki, Monica McGoldrick, and Kenneth Hardy. In a 2001 edition of the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, Scott Johnson wrote an article that asks the following questions: Can family therapy save the planet? Should family therapy save the planet? Where does this notion of professional purpose come from? The other three authors offered their reactions and perspectives on Johnson’s (2001) article.

In this literature review I will recreate this dialogue as if the authors had gathered together for a conversation. While I recognize that a vocal conversation differs from an ongoing dialogue in essay form, my intention is to animate this professional dialogue to engage you, the readers, bringing you into the moment and community, as the marriage and family therapy field discusses its purpose. I also recognize that the recreation of this conversation is affected by my perspective on the meaning I made as I read each article. This dialogue should be understood as my interaction with the material I read, as I worked to communicate key themes, each author’s

perspective, and explore these perspectives in relation to one another. Using direct quotes (written in plain text), I attempt to keep the opinions expressed true to form. This is balanced with the creative license of autoethnography to unify the fragmentation of the discussion into a cohesive whole by constructing sentences that, while not actually stated in the literature, express themes presented (written in *italics*). Let us now enter a library where, in between shelves of books, we find the four authors seated in comfortable chairs beginning a conversation about global systems and the purpose of the marriage and family therapy field.

*Kenneth Hardy:*

We, as a professional community, seem to be struggling with our own version of a crisis of meaning. Questions I both hear and often ask are: What do we do next? What do we stand for? Will the once radical profession continue to go mainstream? Can we, as a group of professionals, dedicated to *what Scott terms* “helping specific couples and families enjoy better relationships” (Johnson, 2001, p. 4), be satisfied with limiting the scope of this worthy goal to only that which occurs within the four intimate walls of therapy? Do we concern ourselves with healing the world? (Hardy, 2001, p. 19)

*Scott Johnson:*

One can hear the view that we are obligated to solve problems on a *global* scale expressed by marriage and family therapists in many situations. But rarely, if ever, in our course work or credentialing processes are we knowingly offered the tools with which to attack human discord on a national or global scale. One way, at least, of classifying such beliefs – the expectation that it is the mission of the profession of marriage and family therapy to end, in some way or another, social injustice and save humanity – is that they are messianic. Family therapy becomes not simply a process for helping specific couples and families to enjoy better relationships but humanity’s messiah – the salvation of a sick society. (Johnson, 2001, p. 3-4)

*Carlos Sluzki:*

All those in favor of saving the planet, please raise your hands! *This professional dialogue about purpose on a global scale* is a mere representation in our backyard of a pervasive trend of this past decade—or is it human second nature?—toward lack of solidarity with and responsibility to our fellow human beings that is reflected in sanguine civil wars and massacres, forced exile, and internal displacement by the millions, as well as the destruction of our habitat with out any foresight. And, if I mention those larger issues, am I, pray, outside of the realm of our professional interests? This “let’s concentrate on business” approach in a period of major transformation in the world and in our profession are the traits that I find troublesome with your perspective, Scott. (Sluzki, 2001, p. 13-14)

*Monica McGoldrick:*

*Scott, you call for us to narrow our attention to the interior of the family. This would make it impossible to discuss such issues by indicating that such larger influences are not the business of family therapists, whose job is “to help dysfunctional couples and families. “ What if the problems that beset “dysfunctional” couples and families in our society are structured by the racial and other oppressive factors that may be contributing to our patients’ anxieties and dysfunction? (McGoldrick, 2001, p. 17)*

*Scott Johnson:*

*Before we consider the proposition that family therapy’s mission is to save the world, let us ask a much more basic question. Where, in the first place, does such an idea come from? How, seeing that societal salvation is obviously not a component of the formal training of family therapists, did it become accepted by at least some of us as a legitimate professional goal? The idea of family therapy as the salvation of the planet is embedded in the writing of many systemic theorists themselves, including some of the most influential.*

*Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the developer of General System Theory focused on a number of crises that he and others of the era (the middle 1960s) saw as literally threatening human survival, including famine, overpopulation, and violence. Von Bertalanffy believed that a world governed by the concept of “wholeness” elucidated in General System Theory can move toward peace and cooperation. Thus one of the intellectual cornerstones of family systems thinking has presented itself from its inception as, in a very real sense, the salvation of humankind.*

*Gregory Bateson shared von Bertalanffy’s horror of the twentieth century’s technologically skyrocketing capacity for bloodshed, and focused in greater detail on the impact of human activity on the environment. In Bateson’s view, the only way to survive required an end to what he identified as “Western” ways of thinking, in particular to what he saw as the idea of a “self” separated from others and even to the way in which we conceptualize human thought as an individual activity, rather than as a constant interplay between the nominal “thinker” and the people and things in her or his environment.*

*According to Bradford Keeney (1983, p. 108), “When what you do is seen as mental or living process, your action is revealed as a part of a more encompassing ecological dance. Family therapy then becomes a crucible for the drama of life and mind.” I am troubled by these arguments and ideas because the thinkers present them as THE viable solution for saving the world. Ironically, this creates a framework for the theory which is nonholistic and nonsystemic, as messianic statements invariably are. (Johnson, 2001, p. 4-7)*

*Kenneth Hardy:*

*I share your concerns regarding the hazards and, perhaps, shortsightedness of messianic thinking, of which there seems to be no shortage in our field. I do believe that the extant efforts in the field to promote absolute truths, universal truths, subjective truths, and other forms of truth that are anointed “pure” and “righteous” do lead the field down a rather slippery slope. (Hardy, 2001, p. 21)*

*Carlos Sluzki:*

*At the same time, it is important to remember that to think with the key conceptual tools of family therapy—that is, to think systemically, and epigenetically—is precisely to understand the multilayered, interdependent, overly inclusive nature of our lives in context and those of our patients. The cybernetic-systemic paradigmatic revolution of the 1940s and 1950s built conceptual lenses that, when worn, highlighted totally new processes. The consistent application of a systemic lens required that this unit be seen, in turn, as part of larger systems: economic conditions, the sturdiness and, conversely, the ultimate fragility of the ecosystem of which we are a part. (Sluzki, 2001, p. 19)*

*Kenneth Hardy:*

*Let's turn our attention to marriage and family therapists as global systems practitioners. Admittedly, I am, to some degree, "one of those" who is guilty of raising the social justice bar for family therapists. I believe that as family therapists, we do have a mandate to do our small part to transform the human condition, especially as it maligns the lives of those we serve. As a family therapist, I believe that I should cease to serve as therapist when I become unwilling or unable to assume the position of activist. (Hardy, 2001, p. 19)*

*Scott Johnson:*

*I wonder if our field is experiencing a confusion of purpose. If we can heal dysfunctional families, why not, we may understandably (albeit illogically) ask ourselves, try to repair a dysfunctional world? (Johnson, 2001, p. 4)*

*Monica McGoldrick:*

*Scott, I fear the position you advocate here—that marriage and family therapists should retreat to a narrow focus on the interior of the family—would have the effect of inhibiting our thinking about how race and other cultural influences profoundly affect couples and families in our communities, as well as the services and resources available to them. I believe that these larger structural dimensions are, in fact, essential issues for us to consider in family assessment and intervention. (McGoldrick, 2001, p. 17-18)*

*Kenneth Hardy:*

*It is segregated thinking that makes it difficult for us to appreciate the transferability of our skills as relationship experts to other contexts. As a family therapist, I do not view my work in a way that is substantially different from many human rights organizations. Although the stage from which I work as a therapist may be much smaller than that of Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, there is considerable compatibility in philosophy, scope, mission, and overall purpose with regard to our respective goals. My assumption is that they (human rights activists) and we (family therapists) are committed to helping others enhance the quality of their lives. I believe this is true whether we are talking about the relationship between warring nations, estranged neighboring communities, or committed loved ones. I want the students whom we train to be prepared and committed to work effectively with both. (Hardy, 2001, p. 20-21)*

*Carlos Sluzki:*

We are by vocation contextual thinkers, and a responsible inclusiveness of contexts should be treasured as part of our vision and of our language. Wanting to save the planet allows us to save ourselves as human beings and, as responsible professionals, to help our patients. (Sluzki, 2001, p. 15)

*Kenneth Hardy:*

*Exactly!* If we are committed to assisting our clients improve the quality of their relationships then we must also be committed to doing all that we can to address those conditions that might compromise their quality of life. I believe that, as a therapist and human being, empathy that is devoid of activism is nothing more than helpless pity by another name. (Hardy, 2001, p. 21)

*Scott Johnson:*

Who are we really trying to save, the planet—or ourselves? It is not hard to see such attitudes as heavy with the projection of our own needs on to those for whom we say we are working. (Johnson, 2001, p. 24)

*Kenneth Hardy:*

I believe *this discussion* is exactly what we need in the field at this time. My hope is that, in addition to inspiring discussion and debate, it also will be received as an invitation—one that will encourage us to revisit core values, to examine what we believe, to reassess what we stand for, and to reflect on whether we have anything to pursue beyond legitimization, regulation, certification, and accreditation. I hope that it will inspire others as well, especially the hopeful and idealistic therapists who still dare to believe that our mission can be so much more expansive and our venue so much larger than the four walls from within which we chose to work. (Hardy, 2001, p. 22)

*Key Themes Discovered and How They Inform My Narrative*

*The field is in the process of questioning its purpose.*

As I listen to these marriage and family therapy professionals discuss purpose, I recognize that my internal process of defining my professional practice is a microcosm of our field. Having developed from radical roots, there is a strong undercurrent in marriage and family therapy to question and grow into a fuller vision of service and activism. I recognize that my personal questioning is in alignment with the current trends of this field. Who are we? How can we be of highest service? Where is there room to expand our thinking beyond its current

limitations? My narrative will discuss my personal developmental process as a global systems thinker and practitioner, and highlight my professional values and priorities.

*There is a spectrum of opinions representing diversity of thought in the field.*

Some therapists believe the primary focus of the field should be working with individual couples and families. Others cite the importance of focusing on how larger systems impact client issues. Still other therapists communicate the importance of expanding practice beyond traditional talk therapy to include working with global relationships. I align with Kenneth Hardy's ideas that marriage and family therapists have training and an ideological foundation which are excellent for understanding global issues and community relationships. I also agree that the future of our professional focus can include practice which expands *beyond* traditional talk therapy to include activism, global mediation, and education for systemic consciousness.

It is important to me that I honor the spectrum of professional thought on this issue. I believe it is important for therapists to utilize systems thinking in which ever context and with whatever emphasis they choose. All marriage and family therapists do not have to agree with my priorities or choose my professional focus. Our field is enriched by this diverse mosaic of professional practice and areas of focus.

*A professional focus on larger systems and the applicability of systems thinking to global issues is built into the foundation of family systems theory.*

I was excited to confirm the connection between family systems theory and a global focus that I have instinctively valued. This has been important validation that my professional priorities are not only compatible with my chosen field, but are built into our theoretical foundation. This conversation has also been important for my learning, because it has pointed out the danger of theoretical imperialism. I recognize that my ideas, strategies, and values are not the

only way to support positive change on the planet. It is not my job to “save the world.” The ideas presented in this project are my contribution to the field and the planet. They are my vision, just as my journey is uniquely mine and not THE correct way of being for everyone else.

I was also struck by the theoretical theme that each individual is in constant relationship with her or his environment, ecosystem, and planet. This is a significant idea for me, because part of my story has been the development of an intimate relationship with nature. It is profound and exciting for me to see this theoretical connection to my lived, human experience and professional vision.

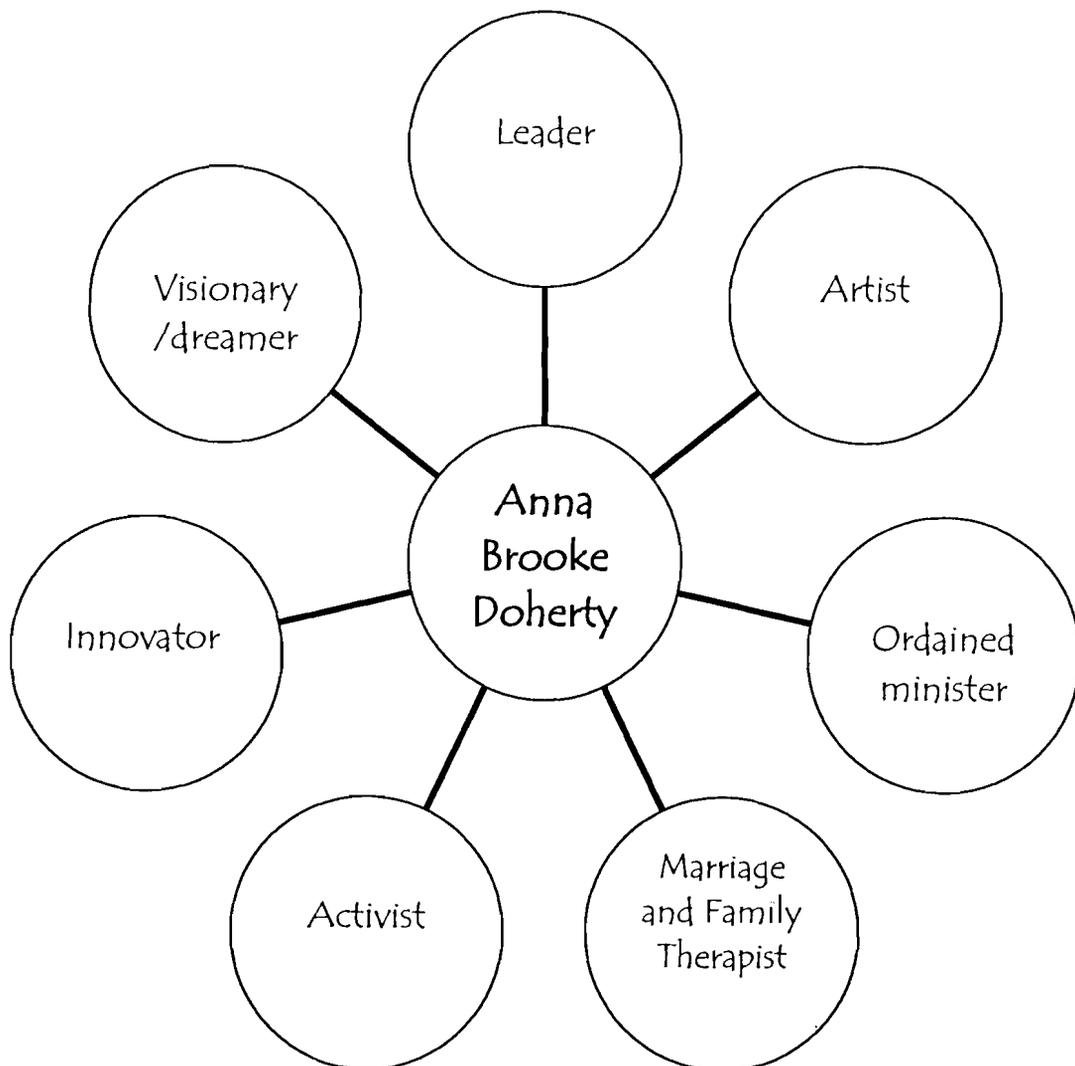
*One purpose of this dialogue is to inspire idealistic therapists working to expand their professional purpose beyond traditional talk therapy.*

Hooray! I am incredibly thankful that some of the leaders of my field who have paved the way for my future work are cheering me on. After listening to their words, I am left asking: how big can I dream? How dynamic can marriage and family therapy be during this time of global transition and upheaval? What is my unique professional purpose within a field filled with a multitude of individual purposes and a collective intention?

The next section of this project begins my personal developmental story. Its emphasis is to share my journey: how I have made meaning of my experiences and grown both professionally and personally. I hope to engage you, the readers, at both an emotional and cognitive level. How are you growing and changing? What is your professional role and value system? *How big can you dream?*

## Chapter IV: Stargazer

When I look out into the world I perceive an interconnected constellation, or web, of life. Just as our agricultural system, and the blooming of the world hinge on the flight path of the bee, so too are all forms of life in intimate and necessary relationship with one another. As I look within, I recognize that I am a microcosm of this constellation. My identity is made up of many interconnected aspects of self.



As each of these aspects dance with one another, my identity and the gifts I bring to the world are manifested. As a participant in the web of life I become more fully myself as I connect with others. My story surrounds the people, experiences, and places that I have connected with, and in so doing, have been transformed.

*Unfolding into Fullness*

I ache with grief over the loss of my known self.

Each unfurling petal is a death and a life.

Drops of dew are the sweat upon my brow.

Do not dismiss my unfolding as an inevitable act of nature.

It is by my sheer will and courage that I stand before you, naked in my growing fullness.

Do not judge me as a colorful blossom.

It is the truth vibrating in my cells that gives me shape and form.

Do not pull me from my roots to decorate your life, I am a sovereign queen.

In the minute depths of my being there is a star in the darkness.

It calls for me to grow, and I answer.

It calls for me to become, and I come forth.

It sings of my potential, and I dance my manifestation.

Unfolding into fullness, I claim the birthright of my divinity;

growing stronger, brighter, and lovelier.

Do you perceive me? Do you see me fully?

We are reflections of one another.

*Anna Brooke Doherty (2007)*

Please gather with me under the stars and I will tell you my story of becoming. It is my hope that this story will drum up new ideas and possibilities within you, and in so doing, I will be connected to who you are becoming on your learning journey and that of the planet.

### *Called to Synergy*

Where I stand today is built upon a foundation of many experiences, people, and milestones. The journey I will share with you begins at the end of my undergraduate education, and was brought into being by the herstory of twenty-four years. Since childhood, I planned to be a therapist and brought that into being in a Family Social Science undergraduate program at the University of Minnesota. I thrived in this practice- and people-oriented program that supported my individual voice and unconventional interests. I graduated with a Family Social Science honors degree and an area of emphasis in complementary and alternative medicine. I emerged from this program with an ecological and systemic worldview. I valued understanding the person within the family, culture, community and so forth. *And how these different systems interacted.*

Having learned these lessons, and planning to continue my education in marriage and family therapy that fall, I didn't foresee tumbling into a new wave of learning that would affect me both personally and professionally. The Friday before my graduation I was diagnosed with cancer. A seemingly harmless sore on my right great toe had refused to heal over the past year. It didn't seem possible that it was cancer, and yet it was. When people hear that I had cancer in my toe, my sense is that it comes across as a close call, but minor. For me, it was as if a tidal wave had rolled through my life. I couldn't possibly remain the same. I had the choice to stagnate or grow, and I grew. The seemingly harmless spot was in fact an extremely rare sweat gland tumor found in the digits. Reported cases number in the hundreds worldwide, and less than ten (as of 2005) in the United States, and I certainly did not look like the average patient of this cancer: a

white man in his fifties. Though slow growing, this type of tumor has the propensity to metastasize to the lungs and be fatal. Why me, why now, and how did this happen?

As a new college graduate just beginning to spread her wings into adulthood, I was flung out of the nest in what I can only describe as an intense initiatory process spanning the last two years. That summer I grappled with the foundational tenets of what it means to be alive in the world: facing the possibility of death and germinating the seeds of survival within myself. Nobody could save me from this experience. As I faced telling my loved ones, braving medical tests, considering my medical options, and electing to have my toe amputated, I realized that as a human being I have to choose life every step of the way.

In the midst of this aloneness, I began to perceive that I was cradled in the arms of the Universe. I was co-creating my reality with the Divine. I spent much of my youth rebelling against established notions of religion and God. God was somebody I was told about, and the reality always sounded foreign to me and made up. As a little girl, I imagined God as a man with handle bar mustache closely resembling my father, who worked at a gas station on a cloud. This literal god, and the patriarchal worldview that followed him, left me at best disengaged, and at worst, hostile to an oppressive reality. In Bowenian terms, I had a cut off and conflictual relationship with the Divine. I thought that I had differentiated myself from an oppressive presence, but instead lived in unconscious reaction to this unresolved relationship.

Cancer certainly did not help me “find God,” but through this personal crisis I realized that forces greater than I were at work in my life. For my senior honors project I was called to write about my professional beliefs about health and healing. Unconscious of the cancer growing inside me, I spent the year refining my perspective on health, healing, and chronic disease. Two

weeks before my diagnosis, I handed in the paper that had given me a space to prepare for the health crisis I was about to go through. I found that I resonated with the following ideas:

- The human experience is a developmental learning journey, in which we grow into fuller, evolved selves.
- Conflict and crisis, in our personal health and that of the world, is an opportunity to learn and grow.
- Chronic disease can be an ongoing physiological health imbalance or a behavioral pattern in which we return to the healing opportunity again and again, until we are able to move through it. For example, an individual may find oneself in abusive relationships over the lifetime, because s/he is not yet able to face the healing opportunity to embody self-esteem and autonomy.

My self-designed senior honors project, “Exploring the Meaning of Health” (Doherty, 2005), gave me the opportunity to ground myself in preparation for cancer, create a framework that gave me emotional stamina, and helped me make important health decisions. I believe this project was in Divine timing in my life to support my personal learning. The timing of diagnosis itself was a synchronicity. Had I been diagnosed any earlier, I would not have been able to graduate, and any later, I would not have been able to begin graduate school in the fall. I learned that there is a Divine presence in my life that is supporting my highest good. I began to expand my relationship with the Divine; shedding old rebellion and redefining our connection. My true differentiation had begun!

My systemic worldview had expanded to encompass the connections between conflict, crisis, health, and personal development. I had a personal learning that the health crisis I faced was a learning opportunity to heal the personal imbalances in my life on physical, behavioral,

and spiritual fronts. This gave me renewed energy and motivation to face the challenges in front of me with courage, creativity, and excitement about my expanding self! As a therapist, I bring this worldview into my work with clients; helping them to find the functional in the pattern and the meaning in the chaos.

I also discovered the importance of the Divine in my life when my best laid plans began to fall through. I had a carefully organized “I survived cancer” trip planned that summer. Instead, I found myself immobile from an infection and invited to learn the importance of surrender to the Divine. One of my personal imbalance themes was a need to control. Forced to cancel my trip and out of work, I felt a message from the Divine: “You are not alone and cannot control every detail of your life. Surrender to the connections that sustain you: significant relationships and experiences. We are all one and you are connected to the Divine as though with an umbilical cord. Let go and flow with the wisdom of life.” Through this, I learned to see my reality in relation to all other aspects of life and the Divine. I am sustained by an interconnected web of life and live in the flow of its wisdom and love.

I also learned to carry my expanding sense of interconnection into my understanding of global dynamics. It is disheartening to live in a world of meaningless violence, conflict, and degradation. Instead, I began to discover the possibility that the global crises we face are opportunities to expand into a fuller, evolved world. Through this experience, I learned that we are not fragmented parts. Each aspect of life and all life forms are interconnected, forming a whole greater than the sum of its parts. I believe that in this synergy is the potential for healing and growth. Was I alone in seeing the potential and meaning of life as an interconnected constellation and the connection between shadow/conflict and growth in our lives? The patriarchal, competitive society I live in gave me no representations of this. Was I crazy? Or was

I finding my own wisdom in an imbalanced world? The following section will explore my evolving relationship with the Divine.

*Reclaiming the Feminine Divine*

*Creation*

I will forge my own goddess in the fire of my need  
 Unmet by the father-god daddy-world  
 (call her Kali)  
 Hammer her curving, open form on the anvil of my power  
 (call her Hecate)  
 Carry her close in the medicine bag of my heart  
 (call her Inanna)  
 Worship her with love of self  
 (call her Diana)  
 Love of life  
 (call her Demeter)  
 Love of Earth  
 (call her Gaia)  
 She asks no burnt offerings, no fatted calves,  
 No "Thou shalt nots"  
 Indeed, she sings to me "Thou shall!"  
 Oh, truly is she flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood,  
 Bone, sinew  
 Never further from me than my heart, my skin  
 My belly and breasts,  
 I call upon my goddess, "Rise up within me!"  
 And, oh, she rises.

*Karen Runkles Throener © (1996)*

In the fall, I began my first semester of the Marriage and Family Therapy graduate program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. This program affirmed my background in systems theory, social activism orientation, and prepared me for clinical therapy work with individuals, couples, and families. At the same time, I began what I view as the second half of my graduate studies. Inspired to open more fully to a relationship with the Divine I signed up for a year-long developmental spiritual process which focuses on personal empowerment and explores the feminine face of the Divine.

I gathered with a circle of women for many powerful weekend workshops and community events. This process does not involve particular beliefs, dogma, and structure. Instead, it is a fluid and evolving developmental process that supports and enlivens the unique journey of each woman into her full spiritual empowerment and self-knowing. As it explores the priestess archetype, it is called the Priestess Process. The “P” word! What does the word “priestess” trigger within you as you read it?

For many in Western society it is a denigrated and dangerous word. It has been associated with other terms: witch, whore, unholy, illegitimate, exotic, and dangerous to the social order. It has taken time for me to step away from this dominant patriarchal social perspective and define the archetype of the priestess for myself. To me, a priestess is a woman who is a spiritual facilitator, takes a personally-empowered spiritual stance, and honors both feminine and masculine aspects of the Divine.

Over the hundreds of years of the women’s holocaust, or the witch trials as they are popularly known, thousands if not millions of women were tortured and killed (Armstrong, Pettigrew, Studio D, National Film Board of Canada, & Read, 1990). These women were not witches, but landowners, women with money, healers, those active in the community, or those who were simply too bright, beautiful, and gifted to be tolerated by medieval society. In other words, women with any sense of personal power were found to be dangerous and systematically stamped out of Western society (Armstrong et al., 1990). By blaming the victims as witches, we belittle this holocaust and deny its connection to the long-term oppression of women. Women have long been “known” to be sinful, and we are told to look to our fathers, husbands, and men of the church for authority. A woman with a healthy sense of internal authority and

empowerment could be dangerous to the status quo! It is no wonder we have been denied positions of authority within many Western churches.

I was disconnected from the Feminine Divine, but she is my source. Up until 2500 BCE, many of the agrarian communities of Western Europe were socially organized around Goddess spirituality, and were led by women (Crawford, 2004). A number of recent feminist authors, including Crawford (2004), have stated that these societies were peaceful, egalitarian, and surprisingly complex. Though many Neolithic cities held large populations, archaeologists could find no trace of warfare for thousands of years (Crawford, 2004).

Closely mirroring the plight of women, the feminine face and principles of the Divine have been denigrated and forgotten. The Goddess and priestesses were given the negative mask of the witch and were associated with the devil (Armstrong et al., 1990). As Western society shifted from matriarchy to patriarchy, I do not believe it is a coincidence that the snake, an ancient symbol of wisdom and the feminine, was utilized in Genesis as the devil tempting a woman with knowledge, thus bringing about the exile of mankind from the heavenly garden (Kidd, 1996). With the origin of the Judeo-Christian world, the identity of woman as sinful and unholy was cemented. In recent times many men and women have begun to explore this lost feminine face of the Divine (Kidd, 1996). This journey is unique to each person. My reclamation of the feminine Divine has been instrumental in the journey that calls me to work with larger systems.

After the women's holocaust, many women learned the forced lesson to be small, quiet, and sacrifice themselves. This is how my female lineage survived a gender-oppressive reality. It is no small task to reclaim the Feminine Divine and claim my personal spiritual power and worth. Many women are still metaphorically burned at the stake for being powerful in this

culture. Living into the archetype of the priestess has been a powerful developmental journey for me. As I explore aspects of the Feminine Divine, I explore myself and the planet.

As I wrote these words, I felt my storyteller's voice take on a new tone. As both a storyteller and participant of culture, I hold this herstory of women and my own reactions to it. The emotion of my voice tells an additional story. I refuse to be unconscious of the oppression, violence, and mystification of experience that women and all other marginalized groups face. As I identify my own determination, anger, and refusal to shrink into less than I am, I resonate with the interconnected experiences of oppression that others have faced: the loss of indigenous culture, the bigotry directed at different cultural groups and the LGBT community, the rape of environmental systems, and the economic piracy of large corporations. What began to rise up within me, as I explored the loss of the Feminine Divine, was a voice that said with certainty, "This oppression will not stand anymore. This is my work on the planet." I claim the following intention statement for my life:

*Life Intention Statement*

*I am Priestess Anna Cariad*

Mystical dreamer  
 Visionary  
 Creatrix  
 Sentinel and protector  
 Wise elder of the circle  
 Loving energy incarnate  
 Mother to all

Through these many facets of self, I shine as a beacon to the world.

I am a global leader, teacher, and healer.

I have come forth in this lifetime as a truth speaker.

My voice and actions shake the brittle cage of oppression and violence  
 Until it dissolves into the flowing birth waters of harmony, understanding, and connection.

I am divine midwife in the birth of a new planetary consciousness.

I am catalyst of energy potential.

Through the divine energy of my truth,  
I activate the power of my life intention.  
I call forth the dynamism of my life expression  
And commit myself to walking this journey.

I stand in the power, truth, and beauty of myself.

*I am Priestess Anna Cariad*

*Anna Brooke Doherty (2005)*

*As Within, So without... As Above, So Below*

As I began to develop a relationship with the feminine divine, I realized how absent she and her principles were from my life and the society I live in. Having been a fish in water for the first 22 years of my life, I had no idea another reality existed or what was lacking in my worldview. My view of the Divine is a sacred presence made up of the interconnected energy of the universe. It is certainly not limited to the confines of a gender or a specific way of being and knowing. So why do I find the Feminine Divine relevant and important?

How we make meaning of the Divine has a direct impact here on Earth (Kidd, 1996). In recent millennia, God has predominately been understood as male (especially in Western society). As above, so below: when we held up God as male we saw masculinity as sacred. God's masculinity became an unquestioned *raison d'être* for patriarchy. Positions of authority were given to men, and because other ways of knowing God were not valued, women and women's wisdom were devalued.

I believe that how we know and experience God is connected to our worldview, made up of the substance of ourselves. Women and men each have our own wisdom, perspectives, and qualities. For example, women give birth, menstruate, and attend to important transitions (for example, midwifery, the family life cycle, and care of the dead) throughout life. Accordingly our

worldview tends to honor the cycles of life and view life from a cyclical perspective. Some cultures honor the dance of masculine and feminine, for example Hinduism's Shakti and Shiva. For me, I believe we are all made up of the sacred substance of the Universe. As within so without, we project the sacred ways of knowing in ourselves outward, onto the Divine. Living in a patriarchal reality, I learned the following lessons:

- I am not sacred, but sinful and my value is less than that of a man. This lesson is connected to the Christian cultural norm that women are the originators of sin and sprang from Adam to be a helpmate, but not created in our own right.
- As a woman, my way of knowing is not valuable, but dangerous, dirty, and wrong.
- I see no symbols of the sacred that represent me. The only symbols of femininity I see uphold patriarchal values, creating limiting or harmful choices for defining myself. For example, mother Mary is held up as a symbol for women to aspire to. Her popular symbolism is paradoxical and an impossible ideal for women: fulfill your social role of motherhood but do not be a sexual being in your own right. This is the harmful split of virgin/whore consciousness.

It is important to note that the lessons I have learned are rooted in my social citizenship in a predominately Christian Western society. While I believe many of the themes I discuss have global trends, including the pervasiveness of patriarchy across the planet, the examples I often use are derived from my personal developmental process which is steeped in my culture of origin. Because I began to explore the Divine Feminine, I began to see the incredible imbalance of validity between masculine and feminine principles, and the impact this has within our psyches and on a global level. In the next section I will discuss masculine and feminine principles and their impact.

*Faces of God, Faces of Humanity*

As we have made meaning of the Divine as male or female, and sanctified the aspects of ourselves that parallel that image, we have accordingly recognized the sacred wisdom within ourselves. Because God has been predominately understood as male, masculine ways of knowing and being have been upheld in isolation, while feminine wisdom has been vilified, mystified, and repressed (Kidd, 1996). Accordingly, the following principles of the Feminine Divine may be unknown or foreign. I encourage readers to utilize these texts for more in-depth information and discussion [Dance of the Dissident Daughter (Kidd, 1996); The Passion of the Western Mind (Tarnas, 1991); Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom (Northrup, 2006); Daughters of the Inquisition (Crawford, 2004)]. I will spend more time fleshing out feminine principles to aid readers in "re-membering" this aspect of their psyches and our culture.

Principles of the Masculine Divine are steeped within their cultural context of patriarchy and are reflected here as they have been constructed in Western Christian Society. Again, I believe many of these themes are paralleled in other faith traditions that live within a patriarchal global context. Neither feminine nor masculine principles have been understood and lived in balance to one another. I have made meaning of these principles through the study of multiple texts (Kidd, 1996; Tarnas, 1991), discussion in a community of women, and through the reality of my own lived experience. I encourage readers to notice if these principles ring true with your lived experience in your culture of origin.

As I spent time creating a list of these principles, many of which have been discussed in the texts mentioned previously, my marriage and family therapist worldview began to understand them in relation to one another and as a cohesive whole. The meaning I have made of these

masculine and feminine principles organizes them by understanding the Divine as within or without.

**Principles of the Divine Masculine**

The Divine is outside of me.			
↙	↓	↓	
<p>Accordingly, authority is external to me.                      --I need an external authority to help me experience the absolute reality of God.</p>	<p>The external reality of God is absolute.                      -- I am a viewer of the one God reality.                      -- There is only one God, and one correct way of knowing and experiencing God.                      -- There is one absolute Truth and it is based upon quantifiable facts and data.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↙   ↓</p>	<p>I honor transcendence of earthly reality as a path to God.                      --Material reality/Earth is devoid of the Divine.                      -- The Earth is made of dead matter to be utilized by humanity.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓   ↘</p>	
<p>As there is only one truth, those who have it are right while those who value another truth are wrong.                      -- Authority and power is given to those who hold the Truth.                      -- Society is organized as a hierarchy whose reality is: those who value the "correct" Truth have power, and those in power are the bearers of the Truth.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p>Those who dissent are a threat to the Truth, social order, and are therefore ungodly.                      -- As we strive to experience the one Truth, dissent must be eliminated.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↙   ↓</p>	<p>Death leads to transcendence.                      -- Life and reality are linear whose endpoints are transcendence.</p>	<p>The body binds me to earthly reality and limits my experience of God.                      --The body is sinful. I sacrifice my material needs to more fully transcend.                      -- I honor strategies such as prayer and meditation to transcend reality.                      -- Sexuality is sinful.</p>
<p>Heaven is a kingdom I wish to transcend to.                      -- If I want to transcend to heaven I must uphold the absolute Truth of those in authority here on Earth.                      -- I transcend to the top of the hierarchy as I seek</p>	<p>Those who are different, not in power, or have other ways of knowing are not bearers of the Truth.                      -- Conflict occurs between those who</p>		<p>I value head over heart knowing, mind over body, heaven over earth, man over woman, adult over child, strong over weak, quantity over quality.</p>

<p>status and power as a strategy to be a bearer of the Truth.</p>	<p>have the Truth and those who are wrong, and therefore ungodly.  -- I see those who are different as my enemy who lack the truth of God and therefore lack value.  -- I am righteous and correct as I engage in conflict.</p>	<p>→</p> <p>Peace can only be found when you agree with the one Truth.  -- If you validate your own truth there cannot be peace.</p>	
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This is one interpretation (through historical progression of the Christian worldview) of masculine principles (Tarnas, 1991). I see reflections of this patriarchal reality in our emphasis of quantitative over qualitative research. Is it a coincidence that popular momentum for the Divine Feminine is growing as autoethnography arrives and expands as a legitimate mode of research? I see reflections of this patriarchal reality in the diplomatic and foreign relations strategies of the current administration. "If you are not with us, you are against us." "If you dissent, you are supporting the terrorists." "There is an axis of evil." I see reflections of this patriarchal reality in the upsurge of violence and conflict in the world. I look forward to the emergence of a new understanding of the Divine Masculine that is not weighed down by competition for power/truth. I believe this emergence will come when we begin to again embrace the feminine, solidifying collaboration in addition to competition, and can hold the two aspects of the Divine in balance.

### Principles of the Divine Feminine

I recognize the Divine within myself.			
↙	↓	↓	↘
<p>Accordingly, I can experience the Divine directly. Because my way of knowing God is unique to me, I honor the infinite diversity of Divine Truth.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p>Accordingly, I have internal authority and value my unique way of knowing and being in the world as valid. -- I value qualitative reality.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p>My body is a sacred temple through which to experience the Divine -- My body connects to the Divine through sexuality, dance, and other bodyways.</p>	<p>Because I recognize the Divine in this moment in myself, I see heaven on Earth. -- Planet Earth is a sacred temple for my spiritual experience. -- Every moment is an opportunity to connect to the Divine. (Mater is the Latin root both of <i>material</i> and <i>mother</i>. Material experience is honored.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
<p>As I honor the diversity of Divine truth, I recognize that each perspective and person is equally valuable. -- I recognize the Divine within you. -- We are all equal. -- I honor the structure of society of a collaborative circle.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p>I value the intelligence of my heart and emotions as ways of knowing. -- I honor my inner wisdom and intuition. -- I can validate information based upon my internal truth barometer.</p>	<p>Accordingly, I know that death is apart of life. Death creates new life. -- I see the wisdom in death/conflict/pain as a teacher and natural part of life. -- I embrace conflict as an opportunity to learn and grow.</p>	<p>My body is microcosm of Mother Earth and she is a macrocosm of me. I honor the cycles of nature which are directly connected to the cycles within myself. (For example, I notice the direct connection between the tides, my menstrual cycle, and the moon.) -- I see life and death as cyclical.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">←</p>
<p>We are all connected.</p>			

As I learned more about the principles of the Feminine Divine, I found much of my own worldview and way of being to be honored and understood. I had found sacred affirmation of my personal truth that we are all connected to one another and the understanding that the cycle of life, death, and rebirth is an ever-present teacher during times of conflict.

My point is not that feminine principles are better, or should replace their masculine counterparts. I believe we have moved from a matrilineal civilization to a patriarchal

civilization/worldview that is disturbingly out of balance. This imbalance is negative because women and women's wisdom have been devalued and repressed. Humanity, both men and women, have been denied this essential wisdom as a way of understanding the feminine energy within ourselves and on the planet. It is my belief that we each carry masculine and feminine energy within ourselves. When the feminine is suppressed both men and women lose the chance to fully understand ourselves and use the full spectrum of gifts we embody. As we are each a microcosm for the planet, so too has the suppression of the feminine disinherited the planet from its full spectrum of wisdom and its ability to find a peaceful balance.

On a global level, women, our bodies, and sexuality have been devalued and turned into the paradox of commodities and sin. Our girl children face the possibility of genital mutilation, domestic abuse, and forced sexual contact. I believe this rises out of both the devaluing of the feminine and as a means to suppress it. Our global body, the sacred Earth, has been devalued, and therefore polluted, mined, and used up. This is a startling parallel to the treatment of women. People have been taught to sacrifice themselves for a transcendent reality. The reality here on Earth is the oppression of the labor force to maintain the authority and power of a few. Our governmental systems are fragmented hierarchies fighting for power to soothe their fears of diverse ways of being and knowing.

I have come to understand that it is time for humanity to move from the hierarchical worldview of one-up and one-down to a place of the balance of opposites. Light and dark, young and old, masculine and feminine: as a marriage and family therapist, I understand these principles to be in a relational dance with one another that enriches us fully in their interconnectedness. I understand the light in my life by its borderlands of shadow, and so too do

I understand the wisdom of honoring both the miracle of transcendent consciousness and the sacred reality of each moment.

As a marriage and family therapist, my spirituality is a bridge to working with global themes and issues. I have come to know that as marriage and family therapists, we have the opportunity to extend our clinical practice beyond the traditional notions of marriage to *sacred marriage*: the harmonic balance between masculine and feminine. The marriage and family therapy field has the opportunity to facilitate healing and shifts in consciousness in systems on multiple levels:

- *The individual system*: facilitate new awareness and honoring of the balance between masculine and feminine aspects within the self. In this way each person can know her/himself more fully, profoundly, and accept parts of the personality that have been rejected by social conditioning. Each person can have access to the full spectrum of masculine and feminine wisdom.
- *The couple/family system*: facilitate the creation of balanced structure and validation of the feminine and masculine within the couple/family system. We can support families as they shift from validating the masculine above the feminine to an egalitarian balance of principles that honors multiple ways of knowing and being in the family and maximizes family resources.
- *The global/social system*: marriage and family therapists can work as social activists, authors, and group facilitators to call for the sacred marriage of masculine and feminine principles on the planet. We understand the relational dance between masculine and feminine. She is an equal and capable partner for the masculine and their egalitarian partnership creates a more balanced structure for the global family, in which we can

thrive. Marriage and family therapists can send out the call for the re-emergence of the feminine that will bring new wisdom and strategies to the issues we face.

As a marriage and family therapist, I can see that the consciousness of sacred marriage in each of these systems as interconnected. When I embody the balance of sacred marriage within myself, I can transmit it into my family system. Family systems are the building blocks of the global family. As a profession, we have the opportunity to create efficacy on each of these levels.

Our planet can learn to sit in a collaborative circle where we are all valuable. We can embrace the sacredness of the moment and the planet so that we may create a sustainable future. We can know that we are not alone, do not have to be fearful of difference, and lay down the self-protection of our violence. *We can know that we are all connected.* In this safe space, a more healthy masculine can begin to emerge which is not limited by fear and power. We can begin to fully know the wisdom of masculine and feminine, and hold them in balance within ourselves, in our families, and on the planet. As we learn to honor the full spectrum of divinity, we can begin to honor the full spectrum of humanity and all of life.

In May 2006, I created a sacred marriage ceremony for the masculine and feminine within myself. It was an amazing day. The soft wind of spring blew across my cheeks and with violets in my hair I honored the sacred dance of the Divine Masculine and Feminine within myself.

### *Commitment to Self*

I stand here as a whole, complete, perfect, and balanced being.

I am worthy of my birthright.

I commit to living authentically,

Loving every aspect of myself,

Serving my truth,  
Taking risks into the extraordinary,  
I marry myself first and forever.  
I rise in radiant song, reveling in the ecstasy of my union with my masculine partner,  
Loving, nurturing, and providing,  
With my feminine self,  
Self-sovereign, intuitive.  
I am expanding, blessed by the living breath nurturing my sacred spark.

*Anna Brooke Doherty (2006)*

*Exploring: Within and Without*

As I explored and integrated principles of the Feminine Divine, I began to hear a call inside myself to go and connect with a culture that lives close to the Earth. As I began to know the sacredness of the Earth, material experience, and my body I yearned to engage with these principles. I had learned to be open to messages from the Universe, set my intentions, and co-create with the Divine. I use synchronicities as guideposts pointing me in the right direction.

In November, having given my dream little action, I came across an internship listing for Belize, Central America. It was a two week Natural Healing program in which traditional Mayan healers invite small numbers of students into their homes and guide them through the rainforest. Students learn about traditional healing methods, Mayan culture, and rainforest ecology. I was overjoyed! I had found an opportunity that supported my dream and was realistic within my school schedule. At this point in my personal development, I was continuing to differentiate as a self, be autonomous in the world and take on new challenges. Visiting Belize by myself was a

wonderful opportunity to go on an adventure and explore myself within, and Mayan healing without.

I had a knowing that the Natural Healing program could be connected to my Master's thesis (plan B) project. The application of Mayan healing principles and their close relationship to feminine wisdom, to the field of marriage and family therapy seemed like an excellent project. By synchronicity, my hunch that this was the right project for me was confirmed when my trip to Belize was generously funded for research by the University. I was headed to Belize! I felt fully supported and in the flow of the Universe.

*Poem for Belize*

I traveled here in hottest May

Sweat dripping, hair curling

Wilting in tropical intensity

To San Ignacio,

Healing herbs on the roadside

Dusty streets, sudden stinks

Skinny dogs surviving freedom

Nooks and crannies, leering men

Hisses, warm greetings

Little shops, bumps in the road

I traveled alone and lived with four women

I learned to live my own life

Deep in the forest, in thatched huts

I met indigenous healers

Keepers of living wisdom, kind hearts

Balancing the sacred and humanity of everyday

I know the wombs of wild yams

Mayan Ixcanan

Cleansing herbal baths

I was a goddess sticky with leaves

Moon Priestess of Primicia

Faith and intention, healing connection

I am empowered to grow my health

One piece of dynamic ecology

*Anna Brooke Doherty (2006)*

I learned a great many things in Belize: how to recognize plants, the Mayan healing system, the role of Mayan medical practitioners, and how to treat many body/mind/spirit illnesses or imbalances. I will now share with you a significant experience that synthesizes the Mayan healing philosophy, my personal exploration with the Feminine Divine, and my worldview for the field of marriage and family therapy.

*It was a bright, hot day in May; the kind of day in which my body goes limp from the heat only to be revived by the glorious evening breeze. I was riding in the back of a rusty red pick up truck with four other young women in the program. I was dusty and exhilarated as we bumped along the rutted roads which bordered farms and houses. I was on my way to visit a renowned Mayan healer and shaman. I was let off near a much loved house surrounded by a perpetual parade of dogs and chickens. Near the house was a wonderful thatched healing hut surrounded*

*my lush foliage. Inside, I met an extraordinary woman who has worked as a traditional Mayan healer and shaman for most of her life. She was a woman with kind eyes, and an inner strength which expressed her deep connection to life and death, sickness and health.*

*We gathered together in this healing space which felt grounded in the earth and steeped in ancient wisdom. As the heat of the day increased, we sipped icy juice squeezed from a local fruit that had a fresh translucent green taste. It was cool and refreshing, but the intensity of the May heat was suffocating. We spent the morning learning about traditional Mayan healing.*

#### *The Mayan Healing System*

Mayan medicine treats both physical and spiritual ailments, and is aligned with shamanism (Arvigo, 2001). The Maya believe that all forms of life are sacred and possess their own energetic life force, or *ch'ulel*. This concept is similar to *chi* in Eastern medicinal-spiritual traditions. *Ch'ulel* can be *hot*, open and flowing, or *cold*, closed and congested. Because aspects of nature, including animals, plants, stones, minerals, and water, have their own life force energy, they can aid in healing the life force energy of human beings. The Maya have a strong ecological value about healing. They believe that “medicine is all around us” (Arvigo, 2001, p. 6). As a part of the living earth, plants play a special role in healing. Medicinal herbs are used to treat both physical and spiritual ailments. Many of the plants being studied for cures to chronic diseases like AIDS and cancer can be found in the rainforests of Central America.

Prayer is used to heal because it has the capacity to send *ch'ulel* to patients whose own *ch'ulel* needs to be balanced or restored (Arvigo, 2001). Practitioners work to balance the flow of energy as it moves in and out of the human body. Another principle of Mayan medicine is that there is no separation between mind, body, and spirit. The spiritual and the physical are

connected by the universal presence of ch'ulel. Spirits are manifestations of ch'ulel, responding to prayer and aiding in the healing of others.

For effective healing to take place the healer, patient, plants, and spirits must set the intention to work as a therapeutic team (Natural Healing program, personal communication, May 9-22, 2006). All participants must be honored for their role in the healing process. Both the healer and patient must have faith in the therapeutic process and practice conscious intention (Natural Healing program, personal communication, May 9-22, 2006). This is a fundamental aspect of the Mayan healing philosophy. Faith opens one up to receive healing, and is considered the curative agent that is supported by medicinal plants and other treatments.

#### *Diagnosis*

Pulse-taking is often the first form of diagnosis utilized by Mayan healers or *h'men*. The blood is said to contain ch'ulel and the pulse can reveal complex information about the nature of a patient's disease or energetic imbalance (Natural Healing program, personal communication, May 9-22, 2006). Diagnosis is based upon the rapidity, rhythm, location, bounce, and strength of the pulse (Arvigo, 2001). Often practitioners may be aided by dream visions and spirit guides that illuminate a specific diagnosis or treatment strategies. In a similar vein, some *h'men* possess a *sastun*, or divination stone that allows them to communicate with Maya spirits for the purpose of diagnosis (Arvigo, 2001).

#### *Treatment*

Prayer is the central healing tool of Mayan healers. Prayer carries energy between physical and spiritual worlds (Arvigo, 2001). Verbal prayers are repeated three times while pressure is applied to each radial pulse, and repeated three times at the forehead. Prayers are repeated nine times because numbers are considered sacred by the Maya, with certain numbers

carrying a higher concentration of energy. Another spiritual treatment used by h'men is shamanic journeying. In this practice, healers energetically leave their bodies to retrieve lost parts of the patient's soul.

Medicinal plants are a primary healing tool for h'men. Plants are gathered with prayer and respect for the soul of the plant as well as its ecological sustainability (Natural Healing program, personal communication, May 9-22, 2006). Plants such as basil, marigold, and rue are often used for spiritual imbalances (Arvigo, 2001). Plants can be administered as teas, herbal baths, syrups, powders, poultices, and salves. Herbal baths synthesize the energy of water and plants as a means to cleanse and renew. Amulets are often given to patients as a protective measure. Massage is used to heal a variety of complaints experienced by all ages. Abdominal massage is a trademark of Mayan medicine (Natural Healing program, personal communication, May 9-22, 2006). Along with acupuncture, practitioners may use *ventosa*, which is a practice similar to that of cupping in Eastern traditions. Both acupuncture and *ventosa* help to balance the flow of ch'ulel within and without the body. As a h'men, he or she works to heal the mind, body, and spirit as a counselor. H'men provide both listening and advice, using humor as a powerful healing tool (Arvigo, 2001).

Ritual and ceremony are essential to the Mayan healing tradition. They combine the aforementioned healing tools and techniques with faith and conscious intention. Ceremony enlivens healing work by imbuing it with sacred significance and meaning. Seasonal observances, prayer, and herbal baths are examples of healing rituals. As stated previously, faith and intention are the most important ingredients of healing ritual and ceremony.

*After lunch I wandered down to the river for a swim. The river was a friendly place; its waters cool and deep. The silty brown water held me up and I was able to float for the first time*

*in my life. I stared up at the bright blue sky and felt not just the river's current, but the current of energy from the natural world flowing into me, supporting me, holding me up. As I walked the steep hill back to the hut, the sun evaporated the water off my body. During the afternoon I had the opportunity to experience what I had learned about. I was about to take an herbal bath! Brushing against the lush multitude of flowers and leaves, I wandered through the many plants on the land. I listened to my intuition and picked the leaves of plants I felt guided to: the sweet, sharp smell of lime leaves and fragrant red hibiscus blossoms.*

*I respected the spirit of each plant and thanked it for its contribution to this ceremony. Returning to the hut, I held my personal intention for healing in my mind and heart as I ripped up the leaves and flowers into a bucket. This released their juices and essences. I filled the large bucket with water and carried it out into the sun. For a period of time the sun warmed the water and ingredients into a fragrant tea. It was then time for my herbal bath. In the privacy and shade of the hut I stripped off my clothes and knelt before the bucket. I breathed in the tropical perfume of sun, water, and plants all giving of themselves in harmony for my well-being. I held my healing intention and opened my heart to receive from nature. I held the bucket and slowly poured amber water and emerald leaves over my head. I felt rivulets of water and the tickle of leaves on my skin. I felt healing energy around me in the sacred space I had co-created with the ceremony. I was left with a crown of wet leaves and flowers adorning my head. I wore this crown for the rest of the afternoon. I experienced a notable and surprising change after the ceremony: I felt open, light, and happy. I was joyful and free like a young child. As I rode away in the back of the pickup truck leaves flew from my hair shimmering in the golden light. I smiled to myself.*

The herbal bath ceremony was a profound moment for me, because it allowed me to experience healing and enrichment in a new way. Using ceremony that is created with intention

in the moment is in strong alignment with the feminine. I activated therapeutic dynamics by embodying the healing experience within myself. I used my own spiritual authority to create sacred space for myself and connect with that which is larger than me. As the water washed over me, I used my body experience to activate sacred energy and connect with the web of life that surrounded me.

Living ceremony is often used in the Priestess Process through dance, spoken word, and art making. As a woman, when I come more fully into my body, I come more fully into my sacred Self. Steeped in patriarchy, many dominant religions, including Christianity and some forms of Buddhism teach that we must transcend the physical worldly experience to connect with the sacred. Connecting to spirit by being in the body, in the moment, and on the earth has been repressed by Western culture. Today, we can find this feminine path in the traditions of many indigenous cultures. The herbal bath gave me the opportunity to breathe life into every moment through intentional ceremony. I learned to access the sacred in myself, and the divine interconnected web of life that surrounds me. Mayan healing senses the connections between mind, body, heart, spirit, and the ecological context of our health. As my energy mingled with the plants and leaves, I began to feel the earth as a living being, holding me up, co-creating with me, blessing me with abundance, and intimately connected to my lived experience.

*Temple of the Living Earth* (Christine, 1995)

I left Belize transformed on multiple levels. I had accessed a culture that lives in a connected, respectful relationship with nature. From a marriage and family therapy perspective, much of global society has divorced or cut itself off from nature. It is my belief that when one cuts off from another at the heart level it can be a strategy to cope with the oppression or violence the other is experiencing. For example, during slavery in the United States, many who

were in favor of slavery dehumanized African people and rationalized this reality as necessary (Takaki, 1993). Because at a core level, I believe we feel the interconnection with all life, to survive an oppressive reality, or our own role as oppressor, we may dissociate from other forms of life at a heart level. We leave the collaborative circle and affirm a hierarchical reality of less than and more than. I don't find it to be a coincidence that our culture, which holds up human life above other forms of life, has atrocious standards of care for animals used as food and environmental policies which are digging a collective grave. What I discovered in Belize is that when I began to dialogue with the natural world I learned that it has a soul. I am in the midst of an interconnected web of living beings *of which I am a part*. Fritjof Capra (1996) calls this a deep ecological worldview. According to Capra (1996, p. 6-7),

“Deep ecological awareness recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena and the fact that, as individuals and societies, we are all embedded in (and ultimately dependent on) the cyclical processes of nature... Deep ecology does not separate humans-or anything else-from the natural environment. It sees the world not as a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life.”

When I began to heal my cut off relationship with the natural world, my heart began to melt. I could no longer turn a blind eye to loss of habitat, pollution, animal torture, and social attitudes of neglect and disrespect. Much of Western society sees the Earth as dead matter whose only purpose is to fulfill human needs. The ice in my heart helped me survive the reality of pain in the short term, but as my heart melted and I built a cohesive relationship with nature, I allowed myself to feel the pain of the violence, the pillaging of natural resources, the rape of our planet's integrity. I also began to perceive the beauty and precious reality of our ecosystems. [Capra (1996) is an excellent source for scientific information on the living Earth and the interconnection of life.] There are beautiful dances going on all around us. There is life and

death, sacrifice, and joy in the tiniest microcosms to the glorious whole. The Earth has its own integrity, and its own purpose which we can only begin to understand. When I healed my relationship with my mother, the Earth, I could no longer be unconscious to her victimization. In addition to my love for her, as I climb upon her body, I realize that a connected relationship of respect is our best strategy for survival in the long term.

As a marriage and family therapist, I have come to know that my systemic ideology and practice must expand to include the natural ecosystem, in which I and my clients are embedded. I perceive my clients' biopsychosocial-spiritual health experiences to be in intimate relationship to the natural world. As a practitioner, I take responsibility to help my clients heal and enhance this significant relationship. Second, as a systemic thinker and citizen-practitioner of the natural world, I believe my marriage and family worldview can be a positive contributor to the dialogue on sustainability, preservation, and peace.

### *Coming Full Circle*

This spring I had the opportunity to gather with a council of women to envision peace, balance, and new consciousness on the planet. We were women of all different ages, cultures, and professions who came together in unity to stand up for our planet, human rights, and positive change. This was a meaningful event for me for a number of reasons. At the time of the council, I was deep in the midst of writing this project and reflecting upon my journey of the past two years. When I arrived in the misty green of the Smokey Mountains, I met a number of people who had held sacred space, prayers, and love for my healing during cancer. These people knew my mother and had connected their hearts to my family and me during a very difficult time in our lives. When I looked into their eyes, I plunged into the depths of a soul connection with people I had never met but at the same time with whom I was very close. As I was coming full

circle, exploring my past to define my present and envision my future, I connected with a community of my lineage who had supported me at a soul level throughout the entire journey. They work in support of the reemergence of Feminine Divine consciousness, sacred marriage, and a return to global wholeness. It was through them that both my mother and I in turn had connected with the Priestess Process that catalyzed my spiritual journey. For me, traveling to a place I had never visited and meeting people I did not know has been one of the most profound homecomings of my life. In a year when I had been working to heal my heart and help it open fully to life, I felt I had arrived: fully known, loved, accepted, and celebrated. This circle of the Smokey Mountains was a reflection of the acceptance and love I had claimed for myself.

This event was also meaningful for me because it gave me the opportunity to be in conscious community with people working for global peace and evolution. I engaged with women working on the front lines of peace activism and others creating global change beginning in their communities. As I gathered with these women we called out our intentions, visions, and dreams. We honored ourselves, multiple ways of being and knowing, and our wisdom for the planet. We created a community reality that was full of magic, miracles, and loving connection. It was incredibly powerful for me to witness and connect with people remembering their heart connection to one another and holding a big vision for the planet. In a profound way, we made the extraordinary become ordinary as many synchronicities and amazing events occurred: *I learned that anything is possible, and now choose to live in a reality of miracles.*

At this council of wise women I came into full awareness of my work on the planet. As a marriage and family therapist, my work is to support the consciousness that we are all interconnected as a global family. The truth that resonates in my heart is that we are all essential elements of the interconnected web of life, and it is through our relationship with one another

that the beauty, magic, miracles, and magnificence of life are manifested. I believe that web consciousness creates opportunities for sustainability and peaceful coexistence. We are all connected, valuable, and sacred. Web consciousness allows humanity to expand its vision to comprehend the interconnected contextual reality within which serious global issues are embedded, and begin to take meaningful steps for positive change.

Through my learning journey of the past two years, I have come to know that through the inspiration of my relationship with the Divine, the energy of the interconnected web of life runs through me. Within and without, as a family member, practitioner, citizen, and activist I am committed to creating safe space and holding the vision for every member of the global family to re-member their sacred selves and connection to one another.

*I am the Divine prism for Heart Synthesis.*

*The Web of Life*

Shimmering green, infused with light  
I see the universe in a drop of dew  
I feel the life sap flowing through my veins  
Reaching out from my heart  
Flowing into you

The wind ripples over fields of grass  
White cranes are flying over blue oceans  
Sunlight sparkles over the water and I am blinded  
Falling back into darkness  
I feel the Earth drumming in my blood  
Old melodies growing from ancient seeds  
You catch me in your loving arms  
And I am held

A wasp emerges from a fig fruit  
Spiraling up, it dances with its mother tree  
And disappears on fertile winds

I am entranced by the power of small lives  
Death nourishing life, life flowing into death  
We each uphold the beauty of the pattern

I open my heart to you  
Expanding, my self becomes all  
I feel the consequence of your heartbeat  
The rains begin in my soul

*Anna Brooke Doherty (2007)*

## Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this project has been to tell the story of a marriage and family therapist called to work with global systems. I have journeyed through cancer, reclaimed the Feminine Divine, learned to fully honor my ways of being and knowing, connected deeply with the ecosystem within which I am embedded, and arrived to stand in my power as a therapeutic practitioner whose soul purpose is to create balance, sustainability, and peace with global systems. I have come to know that my personal work in the world is to bring through the consciousness of the interconnected web of life.

When I look at the issues we face, as a world, for example the genocide in the Darfur region of Africa or the decimation of endangered animal populations, I believe our leaders are working from a limited mindset. Our world has become fragmented, isolated and out of that, fearful, competitive, and violent. We have forgotten that, just as the mighty redwoods depend on microorganisms for their survival, we are all connected to each other. And, just as I believe that the planet will grow into peace by reclaiming our unity, I believe that the world issues we face can be well served by integrating the consciousness that all life forms and issues are interconnected and in relationship with one another. Instead of seeing snapshots of violence, economic constraints, and environmental degradation, my ideological roots of systemic, ecological thinking and social activism have given me an innovative and efficacious window as a planet health practitioner. I see the genocide in Darfur as a constellation of interconnected themes from multiple systems: social, economic, political, environmental, and so forth. In the rich and complex portrait created, this vantage point offers innovative possibilities for growth, change, and healing.

I will take my telescope, and the unique viewpoint it gives me, and gaze at the heavens: how we are all connected to each other in infinite ways. As a marriage and family therapist, it seems I am a stargazer. I plan to bring this consciousness more fully onto the planet by continuing the tradition of the founders of marriage and family therapy: working with both individual and global systems, and exploring the connection between the two. I plan to work with the global microcosm within each human being: helping people reconnect fully to their bodies, honoring their unique ways of being and knowing, establishing a living relationship with the natural world, and coming into awareness of their relationship with all forms of life. As more people learn that all life is valuable (including themselves, the powerful, and the vulnerable) and essential to the sacred pattern of life, change will be manifested both within and outward on the planet. I also plan to work as a social activist, visionary, and writer: bringing this consciousness to world leaders, disenfranchised populations, and those who have gone unconscious to survive global violence.

As a field, I believe it is possible for marriage and family therapists to evolve our professional purpose to incorporate more aspects of practice into our work. As social activists, *health practitioners on a world stage*, we can be bearers of consciousness: bringing the potential of our philosophies and ideas to the constellation, or web, of interconnected global systems. Our field is in the midst of a questioning of purpose and transition. I honor the pioneering, avant garde spirit of marriage and family therapy. I believe we stand on the threshold of expanding our practice to include relational therapy with foreign countries and organizations in conflict, testify as strategists before branches of government, and make the leap between environmental health and human biopsychosocial-spiritual well-being. As health practitioners, is our highest and most efficacious level of service to be found when we assist the global family?

As a global family therapist, I see that we are attacking and polluting our only home. We have built strong boundaries of fear and defensiveness that isolate us from one another and incite violence. We have forgotten that our every action affects one another, and that we are stronger in cooperative community. *How would you work with a family like this? How big can we dream?*

### *Conclusions*

This project has been an opportunity to reflect on my personal journey and highlight new insights about my personal and professional selves. I have been able to discover, and articulate more fully, my goals for therapeutic practice and personal value system. Through telling my story and declaring my professional intentions, I step into this moment as a member of the marriage and family therapy community who honors our professional purpose of working with the global family. I welcome readers to connect with me and continue this dialogue after you have closed the final pages. What can we create in community together? What do you envision our profession becoming? I would also love to engage with your stories of personal and professional development.

I am filled with deep gratitude for the opportunity to share my dreams and the fullness of who I am. Thank you for walking this journey with me. It has been unexpected, exciting, and profoundly moving. As we express our authentic selves, the beauty of the sacred pattern is enriched, and we manifest the potential of loving community. Thank you for unfolding into fullness with me.

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