THE SACRED DIVIDED:
UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY AMBIVALENCE TOWARD RITUAL

by

CRAIG GARFINKEL

A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
PSYCHOLOGY

INSTITUTE OF IMAGINAL STUDIES
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To a good-enough collaboration between the Mother and the Father
ABSTRACT

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This study examines adults’ experience of ritual ambivalence. The study’s Research Problem was: What are the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual? The hypothesis stated that contemporary ambivalence toward ritual is a symptom of the dissociation between the Mother principle and the Father principle, and arises out of cultural and archetypal taboos associated with ritual.

The Literature Review addresses Ritual, Psychological Perspectives on the Sacred, Ambivalence, and Creative Play. This review reveals a connection between ritual and ambivalence, and a paucity of literature regarding ambivalence which arises at the threshold of ritualizing.

This study utilized the methodology of Imaginal Inquiry. Data was collected with 10 adults, focusing on experiences of desiring and resisting ritual, which involved participants sharing previous ritual experiences and engaging together in ritual.

Six learnings emerged: First, ambivalence toward ritual involves early negative experiences and childhood wounding in conventional religion. Second, under the influence of sibling culture, contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves an absence of recognition of verticality, uncertainty about how ordinary space becomes converted
into sacred space, confusion between rituals of routine and transformative rituals, and trivializing of differences between superficial and sacred rituals. Third, approaching ritual evokes ambivalence around the Mother principle, associated with the desire for safety and connection, in tension with the fear of merging and enmeshment. Fourth, approaching ritual evokes ambivalence around the Father principle, associated with the desire for supportive structure, in tension with fear of rigid and oppressive authority. Fifth, ambivalence that arises at the threshold of ritualizing is characterized by assessment of the relationship between the Mother and Father principles, in which the desire for acceptance and protection in the play space is in tension with the fear of a lack of safety. Sixth, the exploration of ambivalence, culminating in the determination of a safe-enough play space, catalyzes ritual trust, temporarily suspending fear and allowing fulfillment of the desire to participate in ritual, characterized by collaboration between the Mother and the Father Principles.

Contextualized within the Jacob and Esau myth, the learnings are applicable to developing strategies for catalyzing effective participation in ritual.
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## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................ iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................................. vi

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1

   Research Topic
   Relationship to the Topic
   Theory-in-Practice
   Research Problem and Hypothesis
   Methodology and Research Design
   Learnings
   Significance and Implications of the Study

2. LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................. 20

   Introduction and Overview
   Ritual: Forms of Sacred Play
   Psychological Perspectives on the Sacred
   The Psychology of Ambivalence: Experiencing Desire and Resistance
   Creative Play: Engaging the Polarities
   Chapter Conclusion

vii
3. METHODOLOGY .......................................................... 108
   Introduction and Overview
   Participants
   Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry

4. LEARNINGS .............................................................. 133
   Introduction and Overview
   Learning One: Religious versus Spiritual, Imaginal Structures around Religion
   Learning Two: Secular Ritual versus Sacred Ritual, Imaginal Structures around Verticality
   Learning Three: Loving Mother versus Mad Devouring Mother, Imaginal Structures of the Mother Principle
   Learning Four: Preserver Father versus Rigid Oppressive Father, Imaginal Structures of the Father Principle
   Learning Five: At the Threshold, Assessing the Relationship between Mother and Father Principles
   Learning Six: Inside the Closet, Transforming Ambivalence into Collaborative Ritual
   Chapter Conclusion

5. REFLECTIONS .......................................................... 193
   Introduction
   Significance of Learnings
   Mythic and Archetypal Reflections
   Implications of the Study
   Areas for Further Research
Appendix

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>ETHICS APPLICATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>INFORMED CONSENT FORM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE OF GROUP MEETINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF GROUP MEETINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>RECRUITMENT LETTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>TELEPHONE SCREENING INTERVIEW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>LETTER OF REJECTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>SCRIPT FOR SIGNING INFORMED CONSENT FORMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>THANK-YOU LETTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>INSTRUMENTS USED IN CONDUCTING THE STUDY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>GROUP MEETING SCRIPTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>LIST OF JOURNAL QUESTIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>JOURNAL TRANSCRIPTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>POLARITY GROUPS TRANSCRIPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION OF GROUP RITUAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>PRELIMINARY LEARNINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>THE JACOB AND ESAU MYTH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES | 313 |

REFERENCES | 337 |
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Topic

This dissertation presents participatory research on the topic of ritual. For the purpose of this inquiry, ritual can be defined as a symbolic action that gives expression to soul, the mysterious, animating principle in human life.1 Ritual can be understood as a means of connecting to the sacred, that which is considered to be holy and worthy of religious veneration.2 Since ancient times, ritual has been an intrinsic part of the human condition. People in all cultures have devised symbolic ritual actions to mark changes in the seasons and in the life cycle, to commune with the gods, to gather collectively, give honor, celebrate, and heal.3

Aftab Omer writes, “Ritual is a personal and cultural necessity. As the lungs breathe, so does the soul ritualize.” 4 To ritualize means to deliberately make an action into, or create a ritual. Ronald Grimes offers the following descriptive definition: “Ritualizing transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places.” 5

It is thought that ritual holds an essential function for psychological health and development, for it is through participating in ritual that we may bring the rich symbolism of our inner lives into conscious awareness.6 James Hillman writes, “Ritual offers a primary mode of psychologizing… As we go into a ritual, the soul of our actions ‘comes out’; or to ritualize a literal action, we ‘put soul into it’.” 7 In diverse settings
such as educational and religious organizations, the theater, complementary medicine, psychotherapy, and New Age communities, there is a growing interest in using group ritual for a variety of purposes, including personal growth, spiritual exploration, recovery from addiction or medical illness, community-building, and political expression.\(^8\)

Yet, this recent resurgence of ritual within various communities stands in marked contrast to the widespread loss of meaningful ritual in the larger culture. In contemporary secular culture, the importance of ritual as a means of connecting to the sacred has been obscured by the domination of science and rational thought. There is a pervasive devaluation of ritual, wherein in common usage, ritual may be thought of as an empty, boring routine, or denigrated to the level of irrational superstition.\(^9\)

Erik Erikson uses the term *ritualism* to refer to any pathological routine behavior that is indicative of a developmental failure, as distinguished from ritual, which he sees as a normal, healthy part of human growth and development.\(^10\) In looking at collective group rituals, Omer makes a distinction between *repressive ritualisms*, which have a deadening or numbing effect on the group culture, and *creative rituals*, which have an awakening or liberating effect, catalyzing personal and cultural transformation.\(^11\) Some writers view the loss of such meaningful, transformative ritual as a global problem of epidemic proportions, a condition that leads to the breakdown of individual psychological and spiritual development, coalescing in a collective loss of social responsibility.\(^12\)

Many authors speculate that reconnection to the sacred through ritual is essential for the revitalization of modern culture. The academic literature on ritual is largely unanimous in its call for a re-imagining of contemporary ritual.\(^13\) The recent emergence of interest in ritual is reflected in bookstores full of self-help books that provide
suggestions for ritualizing. Yet, both the academic literature and the popular writers largely ignore the widespread aversion and resistance to ritual that is endemic to contemporary secular culture. This is a critical blind spot that needs to be addressed.

This research examines the contemporary phenomenon of ambivalence toward ritual. Stated simply, *ambivalence* refers to the combination of desire and resistance toward a single object. In psychoanalytic theory, ambivalence is seen as originating in experiences of loving and hating parental figures in early childhood. This ambivalence is carried into adulthood as a foundational psychological structure, often with one pole repressed in the unconscious. In archetypal and transpersonal theory, ambivalence is associated with the experience of being in the presence of archetypal energies that are bipolar in nature, evoking a mixed emotional response. Emergent systems theory frames ambivalence in terms of the combination of creative and destructive forces that promote growth in any organic system.

The learnings in this study are aimed at illuminating the psychological structures that underlie the experience of ambivalence toward ritual. The data that supports these learnings was gathered and analyzed from the experiences of a demographically diverse group of 10 adults who came together with a shared interest in exploring their relation to ritual. In order to understand in particular the phenomenon of ritual ambivalence, the study focused on the participants’ experiences of desiring and resisting ritual.

**Relationship to the Topic**

The seeds for my interest in this topic were sown in my childhood experiences while growing up in a Reform Jewish family on Long Island. I have warm memories of
participating in rituals to celebrate the Jewish holidays with my family—eating traditional foods, lighting the Chanukah lights, singing songs during the Passover Seder. However, my memories of the formal rituals associated with the temple that my family attended for holiday and occasional Sabbath services are not nearly as positive. Although there were elements of these services that appealed to me on a sensory level—the haunting, bittersweet melodies of the cantor, the colorful play of light through the stained glass windows—my overall experience was one of boredom and disconnection. The Hebrew prayers were unintelligible to me, and even when translated into English, I could not find any personal meaning in them. Nor could I understand why I was being required to suffer through these unpleasant temple services against my will.

Nonetheless, it was through Judaism that I first encountered the power and beauty of creative ritual. Throughout my teenage years, I participated in religious retreats conducted by people who were active in the Jewish Renewal movement. Their aim was to find ways to make the prayers and traditions of Judaism come alive for young people in a modern culture. We took part in trust exercises and shared stories about being a teen. We made ritual spice boxes out of oranges and cloves and lit special, braided candles. We circled up, linked arms, and sang James Taylor and Israeli folk songs. In participating in ritual activities that were accessible to me, my image of God was transformed from an unbelievable faraway figure into a palpable presence, invoked by a feeling of communal receptivity in the circle after hours of singing, playing, and praying together. These experiences left me with a wonderful taste for those moments when the veil that keeps me separated from the sacred is momentarily lifted.
The call to ritual sounded in my ears in the weeks before my twenty-first birthday. Inspired by a book I had read about West African ritual, I decided to travel to Ghana with the intention of being initiated into a village drum orchestra there.\textsuperscript{15} On the way to Africa, I stopped off in Paris to visit a childhood friend, Paul Garber. Paul had recently taken a college course on constructing rituals, and he suggested that we find a way to creatively celebrate the upcoming Jewish New Year. Envisioning the new year as an opportunity to both remember the past as well as allow new possibilities for personal growth, we set about to create a structure that combined traditional Jewish elements with contemporary improvisational forms.

When the evening arrived, a group of friends from various cultures and religious backgrounds gathered for a potluck dinner. Afterwards, we set off into the cool rain for the enactment of a symbolic journey across the Pont des Arts, from the old year into the new. On the bridge, we distributed handfuls of dirt, and asked everyone to meditate on their previous year and what was holding each of us back from moving forward in our lives. Then, one by one, each of us was lifted up on our backs by the group, and held near the edge of the bridge. In this somewhat dangerous position, each of us threw our handful of dirt, laden with personal meaning, into the Seine to be carried away.\textsuperscript{16}

After crossing the bridge, we distributed apples dipped in honey, a traditional holiday food. On the riverbank, we planted the apple seeds while expressing aloud our hopes for what could flourish in the New Year, followed by a cathartic group celebration filled with improvisational music and movement. Everyone that night departed in silence, moved by the power of our own united creative efforts. For me there was, as
well, a sense of having stumbled onto my life work: to help others, through the expressive arts, to create and enact meaningful rituals for themselves.

The ensuing journey to Africa was transformational for me and continued to solidify my belief in the power of ritual. Although it was psychologically challenging for me to enter deeply into the local rituals of another culture, I was continually astounded by the beautifully intense expressions of collective spirit that I witnessed during weddings and funerals. Even more meaningful to me than participating in a drum orchestra, I was able to experience being a member of a loving extended family. Time and time again, I was shown incredible warmth and hospitality by people I had only just recently met. I lived with several families, sharing our lives intimately, as if I was a long-lost son who had finally returned home. Through this experience, I began to develop a personal cosmology of being a participant in a World Family.

Back in America, I underwent culture shock as I witnessed the disconnection and sense of alienation in the culture in marked contrast to the communal relatedness I had experienced in Africa. I reflected on how one group of people could develop so differently than another. To me, the answer seemed to lie in the realm of ritual, through which a culture’s values could be symbolically transmitted to its members. In Africa, I had experienced how participating in a polyrhythmic drum orchestra could cultivate one’s sense of being a unique and essential participant in a tightly interwoven community. In America, I began to see how activities such as television viewing and shopping mall excursions could serve as powerful dysfunctional rituals that transmit values of passivity, material consumption, and social disconnection, thus perpetuating a frustration of the soul.
I realized the necessity for a re-imagining of ritual forms that could draw on creative, soulful expression. Rather than becoming a teacher of traditional ritual forms such as African drumming, I felt my calling as a creative artist who could assist others in discovering their own authentic expressions. With this vision, I became an expressive arts therapist, in order to help co-create and facilitate rituals that participants could experience as accessible and meaningful. I have worked in this field professionally for 15 years.

My relationship to ritual has been profoundly affected by my enrollment at the Institute of Imaginal Studies, especially by the teachings of the school’s founder, Aftab Omer. Ritual plays a central role in the transformative learning curriculum at the Institute; together, ritual and transformative learning comprise the engine of personal and cultural transformation. For me, ritualizing took on a sacred quality that I had not known before. Time and time again in ritual, I encountered the presence of archetypal energies in the learning community, while simultaneously feeling my own smallness. On occasion, I was graced with the ability to surrender to this power, allowing myself to become a medium for the expression of this sacred presence.

However, it was much more common for me in this process to experience doubt, confusion, disconnection, and anxiety. I frequently felt myself struggling with something beyond the control of my ego. Although I desired to enter fully into ritual, I was often not able to. This inner conflict manifested externally as resistance to ritual.

Over time, I have come to understand the importance of recognizing and engaging with my own resistance. According to Omer, resistance can signal one’s arrival at an initiatory threshold, the entrance into an experience that holds the potential to expand
one’s identity. By coming to understand my own resistance, I have grown more effective in loosening its hold over me and more aware of what it is within me that prevents me from participating deeply in ritual.

The most painful learning from working with my resistance to ritual has been seeing my own narcissistic structures. As in the myth, Narcissus is transformed upon self-reflection. Looking back on my early attraction to ritual as a young adult, I can now see that I was driven more by my extroversion and my talent in the performing arts, than by a longing for sacred communion. I have come to realize that my journey to Africa, which I had construed as an initiation in my early adulthood, was limited in terms of its efficacy for catalyzing psycho-spiritual maturity in me. Not being truly initiated left my personal relationship to the sacred underdeveloped. In the secular culture that surrounded me, the domination of my secular identity went unnoticed. Only through moments of surrendering to the reflexive quality of ritualizing at the Institute did I begin to see this.

My own resistance to ritual is a shadow part of myself that I have only become aware of in the past few years. Previously, I had projected this disowned shadow part outward, maintaining a psychic split between myself and others in regard to the desire to ritualize. I mistakenly believed that I was someone who was purely interested in ritual while most others around me were not. Through my own experiences, I have come to appreciate the complexity of my relationship to ritual. As well, I have come to the understanding that others, like me, hold both desire and resistance toward ritual.

This combination of desire and resistance toward ritual describes a psychological state that I myself have come to call ritual ambivalence. My hunch, corroborated by my research, is that ritual ambivalence is relatively common among adults like me who
express a conscious interest in ritual. In spite of its pervasiveness, this psychological phenomenon is difficult to identify, as it generally remains at least partially hidden from conscious awareness. It is often only when the opportunity to ritualize presents itself that one may become aware of complex, mixed feelings about participating in ritual.

Knowing the value of ritual, I continue to be amazed by my own ritual ambivalence and how difficult it is for me to ritualize. Each time, I struggle anew as voices that doubt and trivialize the importance of ritualizing attempt to undermine my participation. For example, not too long ago, my wife and I decided to mark the end of our workweek by ritualizing on Friday nights, as my own Jewish ancestors have done for thousands of years. The benefits to doing this are many, and yet each week, as Friday night approached, I invariably had the thought that I would prefer to see a movie or dine with friends, anything other than ritualize. The pull to secular culture is strong. “I’m managing my life just fine,” I would tell myself, “I don’t need to renew my relation to the sacred.” After some time, we gave up on the idea of ritualizing our Friday nights.

**Theory-in-Practice**

This study is based on data which illuminates the experience of ritual ambivalence. The literature review describes what is already known about this topic, through a survey of written works in the areas of: Ritual, Psychological Perspectives on the Sacred, Ambivalence, and Creative Play (Chapter 2). The review of the literature in these areas uncovers various theoretical underpinnings for the study. These are integrated through a single, cohering theory-in-practice in which this inquiry is situated, Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory. This theory-in-practice contains an
interlocking web of concepts and principles which were used to interpret the collected data.

Ritual holds a central place in Imaginal Transformation Theory. As stated earlier, Omer distinguishes between *repressive ritualisms*, which have a deadening or numbing effect on the group culture, and *creative rituals*, which have an awakening or liberating effect, catalyzing personal and cultural transformation.¹⁹

Foundational to Imaginal Transformation Theory are the *Four Modes of Experiencing*, which outline a typology that pertains to personal and cultural transformation. Omer discerns between experiences that can be defined by a fundamental relationship to the archetypal Mother, Father, or Peer, or all three. Respectively, these modes of experiencing are referred to as: *symbiotic, bureaucratic, decentralized*, and *collaborative modes*.²⁰ Each of these modes can manifest in either their positive or negative aspect. When they manifest together in their positive aspect, they give rise to the *collaborative mode of experience*.

According to Omer, the dominance of any one of the first three of these modes of experiencing can limit depthful participation in ritual in a particular way.²¹ The denial of differences in the negative aspect of the symbiotic mode of experiencing is problematic for the emergence of ritual, as ritual requires the engagement of distinct individualities. The rigid, dogmatic verticality in the negative aspect of the bureaucratic mode of experiencing suppresses the individual, making impossible the surrender that is necessary for deep participation in ritual. The disjunction with verticality and tradition in the negative aspect of the decentralized mode of experiencing limits the potency of the ritual that emerges when this mode is dominant.²²
In Imaginal Transformation Theory, creative ritualizing can only occur when the collaborative mode of experiencing is dominant, characterized by the alignment of the positive aspects of the Mother, Father, and Peer archetypes. Omer articulates Mother, Father, and Peer principles which shape ritual participation. The *Mother principle* refers to the relationship to the archetypal Mother which catalyzes the desire for participation in ritual. The *Father principle* refers to the relationship to the archetypal Father which catalyzes the discipline that is required for effective ritual participation. The *Peer principle* refers to the relationship to the archetypal Peer which catalyzes the cooperation required for participation in group ritual.

According to Omer, the Mother and Father principles contain positive and negative aspects, personified by the Loving Mother and the Preserver Father in the positive, and the Mad Devouring Mother and the Rigid Oppressive Father in the negative. The bipolar nature of the Mother and Father principles evokes ambivalence at the threshold of ritualizing.

A key concept in Imaginal Transformation Theory is *imaginal structures*, which Omer defines as:

… assemblies of sensory, affective, and cognitive aspects of experience constellated into images; they both mediate and constitute experience. The specifics of an imaginal structure are determined by an interaction of personal, cultural, and archetypal influences. These influences may be teased apart by attention to the stories that form personal character and the myths that shape cultural life. During the individuation process, imaginal structures are transmuted into emergent and enhanced capacities as well as a transformed identity. Any enduring and substantive change in individual or group behavior requires a transmuting of imaginal structures. This transmutation depends upon an affirmative turn toward the passionate nature of the soul.

Another key concept in Imaginal Transformation Theory is *gatekeeping*, defined by Omer as referring to:
… the individual and collective dynamics that resist and restrict experience. The term *gatekeepers* refers to the personification of these dynamics. Cultural gatekeepers restrict experience; cultural leaders catalyze the deepening and diversification of experience.\textsuperscript{27}

A final key concept in Imaginal Transformation Theory that was significant in interpreting the collected data is *ritual trust*. According to Omer, “*ritual trust* refers to trust engendered through participation in ritual that enables a temporary submerging of differences, ambivalences, and conflict, liberating a revitalized Eros within the relationship or group.”\textsuperscript{28}

In addition to Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory, this study is supported by relevant concepts from other theorists. One of the basic underlying theoretical components of this research is archetypal theory. Carl Jung introduces the psychological term *archetype* to denote a primordial image, a universal psychic patterning of the collective unconscious that structures human experience.\textsuperscript{29} According to Jung, the psychological growth process of *individuation* is characterized by the development of a conscious relationship to archetypal forces, though such activities as dreamwork, art-making, and ritual.\textsuperscript{30} In his study of the archetypal Great Mother, Erich Neumann articulates various oppositional characteristics that constitute the bipolar archetype.\textsuperscript{31} Gareth Hill offers a model that builds on Jung’s and Neumann’s theories by outlining an inter-relational system that connects static and dynamic aspects of both the masculine and feminine archetypes.\textsuperscript{32}

Several concepts illustrate the play dynamics in ritual that provide containment for coming into a conscious relationship to archetypal forces. Donald Winnicott offers the concept of a *potential space* that is catalyzed in play activities, an intermediary zone between inner and outer realities that serves as a creative matrix in which psychological
growth can occur. This is parallel to Victor Turner’s concept of the liminal space in ritual, in which fixed roles and structures are broken down, and new ones can emerge.

Turner writes that transformation in ritual occurs through communitas, the state of communal bonding through the transcending of individual differences among ritual participants who are in connection to the sacred.

Rudolph Otto writes of the ambivalent feelings that surface in the encounter with archetypal forces. In his description of the mysterium tremendum, the emotional experience of being in the presence of the sacred, Otto claims that humans both long for communion with the sacred and are terrified of it. Mircea Eliade speculates that traditional cultures developed ritual as a vehicle by which the members of a culture could successfully approach the sacred. From this perspective, ritual provides a structure through which individuals can enter into an embodied relationship to the sacred despite the contradictory feelings that this relationship may bring.

A grouping of psychoanalytic theories suggests a relationship between ambivalence and transference, projections based on feelings toward parental figures formed in childhood. Sigmund Freud conceptualizes ambivalence as stemming from repressed taboo feelings toward the father associated with the Oedipal Complex. He posits that ambivalence is evoked in a situation such as psychoanalysis in which a transferential field develops. Melanie Klein’s articulations of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions locate the source of ambivalence in the infant’s early relationship to the mother. Ana-Maria Rizzuto suggests that individuals may imagine the God-image in the likeness of any idealized parental or caregiving figure. Her research offers a
conceptual link between Otto’s *mysterium tremendum* and the parental ambivalence described in the psychoanalytic literature.

Several theories are employed to understand contemporary attitudes toward ritualizing. In writing about the *sibling society*, Robert Bly describes a contemporary loss of *verticality*, which can be understood as the recognition of the sacred. Bly writes that in contemporary society, both the imagination of the sacred and the longing to be in relationship to the sacred have been lost, along with the ritual practices that could restore this relationship.\textsuperscript{42} James Fowler’s model of faith development outlines various capacities and limitations in the ways that individuals in particular faith stages imagine the sacred.\textsuperscript{43}

**Research Problem and Hypothesis**

In order to better understand ritual ambivalence, it was first necessary to understand more about the desire to participate in ritual. As well, this inquiry sought to know of the particular nature of the resistance that occurs in relation to ritualizing. These questions were connected to the concept of ambivalence by looking at the relationship between desire and resistance as experienced in ritualizing. Together, these research questions provided a foundation for the Research Problem: What are the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual?

Participation in ritual offers the possibility to effectively turn an individual toward the passionate nature of the soul. However, the unconscious ambivalence that surfaces in the approach to ritualizing can undermine one’s participation. Ambivalence that remains unconscious can have a freezing effect that inhibits decisive action as well as active
participation. On the other hand, the conscious exploration of this ambivalence can serve
to transmute the imaginal structures that underlie the ambivalence. This may result in the
emergence of capacities such as clarity and decisiveness that allow one to move toward
deeper participation in ritual as well as more integrated participation in the individuation
process. Thus, it becomes vital to understand more fully the imaginal structures
associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual.

The guiding hypothesis in the research is that the contemporary ambivalence
toward ritual is a symptom of the dissociation between the Mother principle and the
Father principle and arises out of a cultural and archetypal taboo associated with ritual.
As described earlier, Omer’s articulation of the Mother principle states that a clear
relationship to the archetypal Mother catalyzes the desire for participation in ritual; the
Father principle indicates that a clear relationship to the archetypal Father catalyzes the
discipline that is required for effective ritual participation.44 The first component of this
hypothesis posits that ritual ambivalence represents the lack of an inner collaboration
between the desire and the discipline that are needed to enter deeply into ritual.

The second component of this hypothesis is that the contemporary ambivalence
toward ritual arises out of a cultural and archetypal taboo associated with ritual. The
relationship between ambivalence and taboo was first proposed by Freud, who attributed
emotional ambivalence to the repression of taboo desires associated with the Oedipal
Complex.45 As these taboo desires were thought to be directed toward parental figures,
this hypothesis extends the first component of the hypothesis by connecting the
relationship between the Mother and Father principles to dynamics associated with taboo.
Methodology and Research Design

For this study, I utilized Imaginal Inquiry, a distinct research methodology developed by Omer, which is congruent with the orientation of Imaginal Psychology. Along with two co-researchers, I collected data in two group meetings that were attended by 10 research participants. The data collection meetings both took place in November 2004 at a professional building in downtown San Francisco. The participants were an ethnically diverse group of five women and five men, ranging in age from 27 to 57. All of the participants who were selected for this study had expressed their willingness to explore their personal relation to ritual, as well as their conscious desire to bring ritual more fully into their lives.

Imaginal Inquiry involves evoking, expressing, interpreting, and integrating experience. In the case of my study, I gathered data on participants’ experiences of their own desire and resistance toward ritual. In the screening process, the participants had generally expressed a very positive relationship toward ritual. Although I did not directly screen participants for signs of ambivalence toward ritual, my hunch was that each of them carried an unconscious resistance to ritual alongside their conscious desire. In order to evoke the experience of ritual ambivalence, I gave each group member the opportunity to speak aloud about how they had been affected by previous experiences with ritual, both positively and negatively. I further evoked the experience of ritual ambivalence by inviting the group to ritualize together during the group meeting.

I provided opportunities for the expression of ritual ambivalence by encouraging participants to bring forward the various reactions they had to the invitation through
group discussions, written responses to questions, group enactments, and a written

*reflexive dialogue*, which Omer defines as “a conversation engaging two or more distinct

centers of subjectivity within a field of suspended identification.” I arranged all of

these activities in an order that provided support for participants to explore and express

their own internal ambivalence in relation to ritual. I recorded the data collection

meetings on videotape and audiotape, which I later transcribed. The participants’

journals, including their reflexive dialogues and their written responses to questions, were

collected at the end of the first data collection meeting.

In the analysis of the data, the co-researchers and I identified key moments in the

transcriptions through intuitive and condensation approaches. Intuitive approaches

involved selecting moments that leapt out at us for some initially inchoate reason.

Condensation approaches involved uncovering passages that presented similar and/or

recurring themes and ideas. Interpretations emerged from our own affective responses to

these key moments. My learnings are contextualized within Imaginal Transformation

Theory as well as the mythic structure of the Jacob and Esau story.

**Learnings**

The Research Problem in this inquiry is: What are the imaginal structures

associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual? The analysis of the data

suggests a transferential field that is catalyzed through group ritual, involving the

archetypal Mother and Father. The overall learning can be stated as follows: The

contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves the desire to participate in ritual that is
characterized by collaboration between the positive aspects of the Mother and the Father, in tension with the fear of evoking negative aspects of the dissociated Mother and Father.

Specifically, the analysis of the data resulted in six major learnings, each of which is distilled into a propositional statement that identifies a particular aspect of ritual ambivalence: Learning One states that contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves early negative experiences and childhood wounding in conventional religion, especially through ritualisms. Learning Two states that under the influence of sibling culture, contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves an absence of recognition of verticality, uncertainty about how ordinary space becomes converted into sacred space, confusion between rituals of routine and transformative rituals, and trivializing of differences between superficial and sacred rituals.

Learning Three states that the approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Mother principle, associated with the desire for safety and connection, in tension with the fear of merging and enmeshment. Learning Four states that the approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Father principle, associated with the desire for supportive structure, in tension with fear of rigid and oppressive authority.

Learning Five states that ambivalence that arises at the threshold of ritualizing is characterized by an assessment of the relationship between the Mother and Father principles, in which the desire for acceptance and protection in the play space is in tension with the fear of a lack of safety. Learning Six states that the exploration of ambivalence, culminating in the determination of a safe-enough play space, catalyzes ritual trust, temporarily suspending fear and allowing fulfillment of the desire to
participate in ritual that is characterized by collaboration between the Mother and the Father.

**Significance and Implications of the Study**

In reflecting on these interconnected imaginal structures, I see ritual as offering the potential for experiencing one’s participation in an archetypal Family. Ritualizing can be seen as an activity that places adults in relation to the sacred in much the same way that children are in relation to adult parental figures. The potential for psychological growth through participating in ritual paradoxically requires a regression in the service of forming a relationship to archetypal presences that are larger than oneself.

I believe that these learnings on the experience of ritual ambivalence could be usefully applied toward catalyzing deeper participation in ritualizing. It is evident that many individuals are starving for the meaningful connection to the sacred that participation in ritual can offer. It seems important, therefore, to understand the dynamics that underlie the blocking of one’s desire to connect with the sacred when the possibility for such a connection is present.

It is my hope that a fuller understanding of what limits participation in ritualizing could contribute to the development of strategies for catalyzing participation in and deepening the efficacy of ritual practices. For example, the outcome of this research could assist those in the helping professions to facilitate more accessible and meaningful rituals with their clients. Understanding the experience of ritual ambivalence could provide a small but necessary piece in catalyzing broader and deeper participation in ritualizing throughout the culture.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this inquiry is to identify the imaginal structures that characterize the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual. In order to illustrate what is already known about ritual ambivalence, a review of the literature from four different areas of focus is included: Ritual, Psychological Perspectives on the Sacred, Ambivalence, and Creative Play. The first cluster of literature, entitled: Ritual: Forms of Sacred Play, spans diverse disciplines and provides a foundational conversation about the function and characteristics of ritual, as well as offering theoretical perspectives on ritual ambivalence. The second cluster, entitled: Psychological Perspectives on the Sacred, offers a theoretical understanding of the relationship between the individual and the sacred. This focus helps make meaning of transpersonal dynamics evoked through ritualizing. The third cluster of literature, entitled: The Psychology of Ambivalence: Experiencing Desire and Resistance, reveals how ambivalence is defined and constructed across a range of psychological perspectives. The final cluster, entitled: Creative Play: Engaging the Polarities, looks more closely at some of the processes involved in contemporary ritual that may contribute to ritual ambivalence. Throughout all of the clusters, literature drawn from Imaginal Psychology is included.

The literature on ritual sets the foundation for understanding the nature of ambivalence that occurs in the approach to ritualizing. First, the various ways that ritual
has traditionally been defined through typology, characteristic, and function are reviewed. The discussion then turns to the widespread loss of traditional ritual in modern society, as well as the emergence of the phenomenon of contemporary ritualizing. An examination of contemporary cultural attitudes toward ritual reveals further polarities in regard to how ritual is viewed. Finally, there is a discussion of psychoanalytic theories that draw a direct connection between ritual and ambivalence.

The cluster of literature on psychological perspectives on the sacred offers a theoretical understanding of the connection between the human psyche and the sacred. This connection offers a context in which to make meaning of the dynamics that frame the experiences that are evoked and expressed through ritualizing. The literature abounds with mention of polarities, contradictions, and paradoxes, all of which point toward the phenomenon of sacred ambivalence. A primary function of ritual is to bring psyche into an embodied relationship with the sacred. Thus, the consideration of psyche’s natural ambivalence toward the sacred is an important key to understanding the ambivalence that can be evoked in the approach to ritualizing. In this cluster, the loss of the sacred in modern culture is also examined.

The literature on the psychology of ambivalence explores how ambivalence is defined and constructed across a range of psychological perspectives. Although there are few works that focus entirely on ambivalence, each theorist contributes a piece to the overall understanding of the phenomenon. A broad view of ambivalence from a variety of perspectives is important for making psychological meaning of the processes that occur in the approach to ritualizing. Additionally, this cluster of literature provides a theoretical framework for interpreting the phenomenology of ritual ambivalence.
The cluster of literature on creative play begins with a review of theorists who view ritual as a form of play. Following is a discussion of the concept of a symbolic play space catalyzed in ritual that is central to human growth and development, and a review of writings on the transformative nature of the expressive arts. The literature reveals the particular challenges adults in modern culture may face in participating in creative ritual play, as well as the danger that is inherent in the play space. These dynamics in play are linked to the resistance and desire that can be experienced toward ritual.

Taken together, these four clusters of literature provide a review of the major theories and research studies that contribute to our current understanding of the phenomenon of ritual ambivalence. In the conclusions to each of the clusters and in the chapter conclusion, it is shown how the existing literature falls short of being able to elucidate the imaginal structures that characterize the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual. As well, the need for a phenomenological inquiry into this question that utilizes a participatory research paradigm is demonstrated.

Ritual: Forms of Sacred Play

Introduction

The literature on ritual traverses a variety of academic fields, including theology, mythology, history of religion, drama, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. In addition, the interdisciplinary field of ritual studies brings together diverse perspectives from each of these academic fields in order to cultivate a more integrated understanding of ritual. The vast majority of the literature on ritual analyzes traditional, religious ritual in order to support or challenge various theoretical perspectives. In the last few decades,
general academic inquiry has shifted its focus to understanding ritualizing in contemporary secular culture.

The four subclusters in this review of the literature on ritual are entitled: Typology, Characteristics, and Function of Ritual; Ritual in Contemporary Culture; Contemporary Attitudes toward Ritual; and Ritual and Ambivalence. In order to situate contemporary ritual within a framework of ritual forms, the review begins by describing a classification system that has been proposed to outline the range of traditional rituals. Then, writings on the elements that comprise ritual actions and the functions of ritual are discussed. Following this is a look at the widespread loss of traditional ritual in modern society, as well as the emergence of the phenomenon of contemporary ritualizing. An examination of contemporary cultural attitudes toward ritual reveals further polarities in regard to how ritual is viewed. Finally, there is a summarization of psychoanalytic literature that describes a direct relationship between ritual and ambivalence.

The review of the literature on ritual focuses on how the various theoretical formulations of ritual relate to the particular area of inquiry in this study, ritual ambivalence. Although there are few writings that speak directly about contemporary ambivalence toward ritual, the existing literature provides a conceptual foundation for understanding this phenomenon. In the literature, it is generally agreed that ritual offers a context for bringing polarities together into a dynamic relationship with one another. A discussion of these ritual dynamics is essential for understanding what may underlie contemporary ambivalence.
Typology, Characteristics, and Function of Ritual

Although there is consensus that ritual has been an intrinsic part of human culture since ancient times, there is little agreement among scholars as to how to define ritual and what exactly constitutes a ritual action. While some writers limit their conceptualizations of ritual to formalized religious actions, others include such activities as greetings, hand washing, television viewing, and sporting events within the realm of ritual.\(^1\) Accordingly, the ritual classification systems that have been proposed by various theorists are diverse and often idiosyncratic.\(^2\)

A simple typology proposed by Catherine Bell provides an initial perspective on the range of how rituals have traditionally functioned in human culture. In this typology, Bell discerns six basic genres of ritual actions: rites of passage, calendrical rites, rites of exchange and communion, rites of affliction, rites of feasting, fasting and festivals, and political rituals.\(^3\) She extracts these basic genres from examples of rituals that tend to be communal, traditional, and rooted in beliefs in divine beings, noting that the rituals associated with clearly defined religious traditions comprise the dominant examples and primary data for ritual studies.\(^4\) A brief description of each of these categories illustrates the range of ritual activities and the breadth of functions that rituals have traditionally served.

Rites of passage are the ceremonies that are associated with important life cycle events, such as birth, adolescent initiation, marriage, and death. Arnold van Gennep, who coined the phrase *rites of passage*, theorizes a three-stage symbolic death-rebirth process through which the individual’s social and personal identity is transformed—from the old identity, through an in-between liminal stage in which there is no identity, to a new
identity. Van Gennep proposes that this model of initiation applies to events not necessarily connected to the life cycle, for example the rites of passage around joining a professional or social organization. Many writers, most notably Jung and Joseph Campbell, extend this model of initiation into the realm of psychological transformation, seeing it as a template for the individuation process.

In the same way that rites of passage mark the life cycle, calendrical rites have the function of marking and giving a sense of order and meaning to the passage of time. Bell notes that calendrical rites generally fall into two groups: seasonal rites, which are rooted in agricultural cycles, and commemorative rites, that recall historical events.

Rites of exchange and communion are usually religious rituals that center on a human-divine interaction, often involving an element of sacrifice. Rites of exchange emphasize a symbolic act of giving offerings to a divine being, while communion implies an experience of unity with the divine world. Rites of affliction similarly entail a human-divine interaction, but with the purpose of influencing spirits that are believed to be causing human misfortune. These rituals involve healing or restoring a sense of equilibrium. Bell notes that how rites of affliction vary tremendously according to the worldview of the particular culture in which they are taking place.

Bell writes that feasting, fasting, and festival rituals emphasize the public display of cultural and religious sentiments, and that participants in these rituals are typically interested in demonstrating their connection to the values of their community. Festivals such as Carnival involve a social inversion, in which the normal rules that govern a culture are temporarily suspended. The final category, political rites, consists of rituals
whose primary function is to display and promote the power of specific institutions within a society. 10

The genres of rituals in Bell’s classification share certain basic characteristics. For example, there is widespread agreement among theorists that ritual consists of symbolic actions. Turner writes that symbols comprise the building blocks of ritual. 11 Noting that most human behavior is symbolic, Robert Johnson says that what distinguishes ritual from other behaviors is that the symbolism is expressed within a conscious action. 12 Onno van der Hart adds that ritual is characterized by the involvement of the participants; a lack of involvement results in what he calls **empty rituals**. 13

Barbara Myerhoff sees rituals as intentional collective actions that employ symbols “in a repetitive, formal, precise, highly stylized fashion.” 14 From a similar perspective, Roy Rappaport delineates six basic aspects of ritual: (1) Repetition: in action, content, and/or form, (2) Acting: doing rather than just saying or thinking, (3) Special behavior or stylization: behaviors and symbols set apart from their ordinary uses, (4) Order: beginning and end and containment for spontaneity, (5) Evocative presentational style: staging and focus that catalyze an attentive state of mind, and (6) Collective dimension: where there is social meaning. 15

Bell finds that three features—formality, fixity (of time, place or gesture), and repetition—are consistently described in the literature as being central to ritual. She argues that these three features can be understood as strategies that are frequently employed in ritualizing, rather than qualities that are intrinsic to ritual. 16
Several theorists propose distinctions between rituals according to various characteristics of the actions, the motivation behind them, and their effect on society. Émile Durkheim, viewing ritual as a means through which participants can connect to the larger society, makes a distinction between two different types of ritual behavior. He contrasts positive rituals that facilitate a connection to the sacred ideals of the collective culture, with negative rituals that restrict communion and hinder this connection.\(^\text{17}\)

Durkheim’s theories are rooted in a world view in which the sacred is set apart from the mundane aspects of life. This view is furthered by Eliade in his book, *The Sacred and the Profane*. Eliade describes how the profane world can encroach upon, and desecrate the sacred. He theorizes that ritual efficacy requires a clear demarcation of sacred space and sacred time in order to offset the sacred from the profane world.\(^\text{18}\) In contrast to this view, Myerhoff sees the “set apart” quality of the sacred as a matter of degree, rather than as a matter of type. Thus for her, rituals are never either purely sacred or purely secular, but rather, reflect a position on a continuum between sacred and secular.\(^\text{19}\)

Erikson characterizes ritual actions in terms of how they support or inhibit human development. He notes a contradiction in the way the term *ritual* is generally understood by different fields of studies:

When in psychopathology we speak of an individual’s ‘handwashing ritual’, we mean that he scrubs his hands, in tortured solitude, until they become raw, and yet he never feels clean. But this blatantly contradicts the anthropological meaning of the word, which assigns to ‘ritual’ a deepened communality, a proven ceremonial form, and a timeless quality from which all participants emerge with a sense of awe and purification.\(^\text{20}\)

Erikson seeks to clarify this distinction by using the term *ritualism* to indicate a pathological routine behavior that is indicative of a developmental failure.\(^\text{21}\) Omer
extends this distinction to collective actions, delineating between *repressive ritualisms* that abuse the transformative power of ritual to intensify social domination and *creative rituals* that inspire cultural sovereignty. He gives Hitler’s Nuremberg Rallies as an example of repressive ritualism and Gandhi’s Salt March as an example of creative ritual:

Through the Nuremberg Rallies, Hitler... abused the transformative powers of art and ritual to intensify Germany’s *cultural trance*—a collective state of complacent passivity and loss of individuality. Conversely, Gandhi inspired an experience of cultural sovereignty—an awakening from cultural trance and domination. Gandhi’s creative transgression of prevailing laws through the ritual of the Salt March provides a dramatic example of cultural transformation.

Despite the variety in the types and characteristics of rituals, some theorists have described underlying commonalities in the way that rituals function. For example, Campbell writes that the primary purpose of ritual is to give form to human life in a depthful way. He discerns four elemental functions of ritual: a mystical function wherein one can experience awe and reverence; a cosmological function that provides a coherent worldview; a sociological function that connects individuals to a larger community; and a psychological function that serves as a guide for an individual’s inner development.

Johnson writes that it is the conscious performance of symbolic behaviors that enables ritual to function as a vehicle for psychological development. He says that although it is possible to understand the meaning of symbols cognitively, it is much more powerful to feel the symbols in one’s body through the enactment of ritual. Rappaport writes that the simultaneous use of various modalities in ritual, such as music, costumes, and movement, as well as the incorporation of multivocal symbolism, has the effect of uniting the somatic, psychic, and emotional aspects of one’s experience. Van der Hart
One topic of debate in the ritual studies literature is whether ritual serves a conservative or a transformative function. For many years, ritual had been understood primarily as a means of preserving the status quo. Early social anthropologists such as Durkheim and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown highlight how ritual reflects and sustains a sense of order in a community. For these authors, ritual functions as a means of promoting group stability and validating the ongoing social structure.

The contemporary literature on ritual emphasizes the potential for ritual to creatively shape culture. This perspective was first articulated by Turner in his classic work, *The Ritual Process*. Turner views culture as a fluid process rather than simply being comprised of fixed, static structures. He proposes a mutual relationship between the everyday, normal structures in a society, and dynamic forces that work in opposition to the normal structures, which Turner calls *anti-structure*. In his view, ritual functions to provide a container for anti-structure, thus allowing the dynamic, creative impulses in the culture to be expressed. Tom Driver also sees ritual as a source for cultural change. He writes: "It is not as true to say that we human beings invented rituals as that rituals have invented us."

In a study based on interviews with family members who were participating in their family’s first Bar Mitzvah celebration, Judith Davis finds that rituals can be experienced as simultaneously being both conservative and transformative. The ritual is conservative in that it represents a continuation of a long-standing tradition. At the same time, the ceremony signifies a transitional process in the development of both the
individual and the family. Davis theorizes that it is the capacity for ritual to hold this paradoxical tension that allows for its power to facilitate developmental change.\textsuperscript{34}

In her review of the writings on ritual theory, Bell notes that there is great support for the idea that ritual functions as a container that can hold the tension of opposing forces. She writes that despite a variety of perspectives and methodologies, the theme of bipolarity in descriptions of rituals is surprisingly consistent throughout the literature:

Ritual is a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing social or cultural forces comes together. Examples include the ritual integration of belief and behavior, tradition and change, order and chaos, the individual and the group, subjectivity and objectivity, nature and culture, the real and the imaginative ideal.\textsuperscript{35}

Bell observes that ritual is consistently depicted as a means of integrating or transforming these sociocultural polarities. Similarly, in viewing the way that ritual functions psychologically, Janine Roberts writes that ritual is able to incorporate both sides of a contradiction, so that they can be managed simultaneously. She gives the example of a wedding ceremony, which can contain the feelings of both joy and loss that may be experienced by the parents who are “giving away” their child.\textsuperscript{36}

**Ritual in Contemporary Culture**

The review of the literature thus far has focused on describing the primary types, characteristics, and functions of traditional ritual forms. This overview of traditional ritual provides a foundation for a discussion of the literature that looks specifically at ritual in contemporary culture. As a point of departure for this discussion, it is necessary to look at the impact of contemporary culture on traditional ritual. A theorist who contributes a unique perspective to our understanding of ritual in this regard is Malidoma
Somé. Having been both initiated into the ancestral tribal traditions in his West African village and educated in the West, his lived experiences form a bridge between traditional ritual and the place of ritual in modern culture.

In agreement with the traditional anthropological view, Somé understands ritual as a way to maintain effective communications between the spirit and human worlds, so as to preserve a natural cosmic order in the society.\(^{37}\) He conceives of ritual as a structure for invoking and communicating with spirits, who participate in the ritual as invisible, yet powerful presences.\(^{38}\) Somé describes three levels of ritual—communal, familial, and individual—that form an interconnected web of relationships with an invisible, yet real, spirit world.\(^{39}\)

Somé describes an oppositional relationship between modern industrial culture and ritual. He views modern culture as being oriented around the worship of machines, rather than the worship of ancestors. Somé calls ritual the “anti-machine” because of the effect that ritual can have in breaking the trance-like worship of machines that he associates with modern culture. Through participating in ritual, Somé writes, one can begin to experience one’s relationship to the ancestors. The restoration of this ancestral relationship can, in turn, effectively loosen the grip of the “machine” over the individual in modern culture. Somé notes that in modern culture, however, it can be difficult for individuals to foster a belief in ancestral spirits or in the efficacy of ritual as a means of communicating with them. He writes, “The corporate world dims the light of the traditional world by exerting a powerful magnetic shadowlike pull on the psyche of the individual.”\(^{40}\)
For many authors, the widespread abandonment of sacred ritual in contemporary culture is tied to the loss of meaningful rites of initiation. Eliade conceives of initiation as a symbolic death-rebirth experience, a transformative process through which initiates receive sacred knowledge and return to their communities more fully human, spiritually reborn. He suggests that initiation is the foundation of all ritual, because in being initiated, one is reborn as an adult who knows how to commune with the divine world, and who can participate in the initiation of others. Somé writes of the importance of initiation for psychological development:

... a person cannot mature without initiation. Anatomic maturation is insufficient for manhood or womanhood. The experience of breaking down fundamental perceptions of the world brought about by initiation ritual permits another self to grow and to be born.

Somé believes that just as ritual is essential to the spiritual life of an individual or a culture, the abandonment of ritual is devastating. Several authors connect the loss of initiation to an impoverished ritual life, resulting in a variety of psychological and social illnesses. For example, Campbell says that a society without initiation rituals breeds “destructive and violent acts by young people who don’t know how to behave in a civilized society.” He uses the example of street gangs as an illustration of a misguided attempt by the youth to initiate themselves. Ultimately, Campbell says, this is dangerous because gangs have their own rules which ignore the laws of the larger society. Grimes notes that not ritualizing leads to a psychic drain on the collective as well as the individual. In witnessing the contemporary absence of initiation in his own traditional culture, Somé agrees that the loss of ritual opens a psychic spiritual hole that is devastating both to individuals and communities.
Concurrent with the widespread loss of traditional ritual practices in modern culture is the emergence of a new genre of ritual actions that is distinctively postmodern. Whereas for many years, ritual had been construed as a conservative action that maintains the status quo, this postmodern perspective emphasizes the creative and transformative potential of ritual. According to Bell, we are seeing a new paradigm of ritualizing, where participants are active in constructing and modifying the symbolism that forms the basis of collective life. In turn, the enactment of rituals has a transformative effect on both the individual and the collective.\(^{48}\)

In order to describe the actions in this emerging genre, Grimes uses the term \textit{ritualizing}, which denotes making an action into, or creating a ritual. He offers the following definition: “Ritualizing transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places.” \(^{49}\)

Grimes elucidates several characteristics of contemporary ritualizing by describing each of the distinct elements that are embedded within this definition: “Ritualizing transpires” emphasizes the dynamic form-making possibilities in ritualizing, distinct from the pre-formed quality of rites. “Animated persons” suggests that the participants are inspired by soul or divine beings. “Enactment” is neither an ordinary action nor an imitation of an action; rather, Grimes writes that ritualizing enactment integrates “the indicative and subjunctive, the literal and symbolic, the real and the dramatic.” \(^{50}\) “Formative gestures” suggests a bodily way of knowing that emerges in response to the moment. By “face of receptivity,” Grimes means that the communication from the gestures must be received by either a human or divine listener. “Crucial times” refers to the auspicious moment, the sense of sacred time that occurs when enactment and
receptivity are aligned. “Founded places” refers to intentionally marking and setting apart a space for ritualizing.\textsuperscript{51}

In Grimes’ view, contemporary ritualizing offers participants a means of communing with the sacred. Grimes takes a broad view of sacred communion, describing it in terms of the receptivity to one’s actions that is essential to ritualizing.\textsuperscript{52} He observes that the face of this receptivity is given many names and is located in various places, such as the unconscious, the community, or attending spirits. According to Grimes, the more deeply an enactment is received, the more it takes on the quality of ritual. He writes that \textit{sacred} is the name we give to the deepest forms of receptivity in our experience.\textsuperscript{53} For Grimes, sacred ritual in contemporary culture can occur in countless contexts, where one’s enactment is received by God, or a therapist, or a supportive community.

In a description of contemporary ritualizing, Myerhoff suggests how ritual attempts to hold the tension of connecting to the sacred within the context of a secular culture that lacks the shared beliefs, deities, and histories of the members of a traditional culture.\textsuperscript{54} For Myerhoff, contemporary ritual achieves this by employing sacred/secular and open/closed sequencing, held together by a guiding metaphor. In sacred/secular sequencing, particular and unique secular themes and symbols are juxtaposed with symbolic associations that are considered unquestionable and permanent, imbuing the secular with a sacred quality. In open/closed sequencing, rituals offer a balance between structure and spontaneity. According to Myerhoff, the open portions of contemporary ritual allow for improvisation, conveying a sense of personal authenticity and emotionality. The closed portions of ritual are more scripted, and convey a sense of
authority and tradition. By utilizing this sequencing, Myerhoff writes that diverse meanings and experiences can be woven together into a coherent and powerful ritual drama.\(^{55}\)

Bell writes that in contemporary society, ritual is now often approached as a means to create and renew community, transform human identity, and re-make our most existential sense of being in the cosmos.\(^{56}\) Several qualitative dissertation studies on adults’ experiences in contemporary ritual processes support this view. In a narrative inquiry, Hollye Hurst sought to understand the experience of group ritual work within a contemporary context for individuals without formal ties to a particular spiritual tradition.\(^{57}\) She interviewed 12 adults, who each described a prior personal group ritual experience of their choosing. Out of a narrative analysis, she extracted eight themes that illustrate the values and meanings of the group ritual experiences. Hurst reports that what participants find most meaningful in contemporary ritual is that it “provides both the structure and the spontaneous process for self-discovery and expression; revitalizes somatic, emotional, and creative aspects of being; creates a forum for socio-psychological experimentation of non-hierarchal forms of community that are based on shared spiritual intention; and offers avenues for the exploration of consciousness and nonordinary reality.”\(^{58}\)

Two other dissertation studies that focus on adults’ experiences of ritual with gender-specific groups corroborate Hurst’s findings. Richard Moyer conducted a qualitative analysis of the narratives of eight men who each participated in the Men’s movement for more than 10 years. He reports that ritual promotes psychological and spiritual growth through a process that generates feelings of connectedness, shared
empathy and enlarged conceptualizations of the self.\textsuperscript{59} Using a phenomenological approach, Catherine Davidson explored the experiences of six middle-age women as they co-created and enacted rituals to commemorate life milestones. She reports that ritual is experienced as a potent process of soulwork involving the exploration of archetypal motifs within the security of sacred space, effecting psychic healing, integration, and personal validation.\textsuperscript{60}

Taken together, these research studies show that contemporary ritual is often experienced by participants as a creative play space that holds the potential for connecting to the sacred. The reviews of the literature on Psychological Perspectives on the Sacred and the literature on Creative Play further examine the dynamics associated with the experience of sacred play.

**Contemporary Attitudes toward Ritual**

Psychological ambivalence may be reflected in prevailing cultural attitudes toward ritual. Several authors discuss varying attitudes toward ritual that are common in contemporary culture. Grimes notes that in popular usage, ritual is generally seen pejoratively as a boring, empty routine. He writes that the scholarly view of ritual tends to identify it narrowly, with characteristics such as: repeated, religious, formalized, traditional, and intentional.\textsuperscript{61} Johnson notes that the words *ritual* and *ceremony* are often used to signify “empty and meaningless formalities.” He observes that many individuals have internalized the idea that rituals are simply superstitious outdated religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{62}

Tom Driver speaks of the widespread “ritual boredom” in contemporary culture, in which individuals have lost interest in the rituals that could give their lives meaning.
Driver theorizes that this process may be twofold. On the one hand, he notes, many traditional rituals have not changed along with the culture, and have thus become arcane and outdated; on the other hand, there is a pervasive “ritual misapprehension”, in which individuals lose the ability to perceive the importance of ritual. Grimes speculates that one source for the boredom may be the lack of a plot in most ritualized events. He writes that while rituals have high evocative power, they have low entertainment value in a modern culture that favors narrative climax and linear symbolism.

In addition to these pejorative views of traditional ritual, the literature also reveals ambivalent attitudes toward the invention of new ritual forms. Bell notes that rituals have an innate quality of being old and unchanging, which creates a tendency for individuals to perceive rituals as fixed, time-honored customs, even when they are modified or newly constructed. She says this goes hand-in-hand with the equally common assumption that newly invented rituals cannot be effective. Myerhoff agrees that we do not want to see rituals as newly-invented. She writes, “We do not want to see our rituals as products of our imagination, but rather as reflections of the underlying unchanging nature of the world.”

Grimes points out that rituals can also be perceived as being oppressive and abusive. He calls attention to recent outcry over reports of satanic ritual abuse that alleged widespread physical and emotional violence toward children in the name of religious ritual practices. Grimes notes that even though experts have generally agreed that many of these reports are unfounded, the imagination of such abuses illuminates a fearful attitude toward ritual.
Grimes describes the vulnerability of participating in ritual, and notes the potential for ritual to harm, as well as to heal. Several authors describe a shadow side to ritual. Robert Greene points out how cult leaders can use ritual exploitatively in order to increase their power over their followers. Arthur Deikman writes how cults can utilize the altered states of consciousness produced by ritual to develop compliancy and dependency among their membership. Omer offers the example of Hitler’s Nuremberg Rallies as a blatant illustration of how the unprincipled abuse of the transformative powers of ritual can serve to further a sense of oppression in the collective.

Even when ritual is principled, a participant may perceive it as oppressive in reaction to the challenges and discomforts associated with the transformative process. Eliade writes of the necessity for sufficient difficulty in an initiatory process. He offers many examples where the initiate must undergo a difficult ordeal, with themes such as discomfort, darkness, physical hardship, and separation from the mother and from familiar surroundings. Thomas Moore notes that sadistic elements in initiatory ritual can function to catalyze the transformation of the existing identity.

While authors such as Grimes and Driver speak about rituals as being viewed in the collective as boring, empty, contrived, or oppressive, they also note the marked resurgence of ritual within various contexts and subcultures of contemporary society. For example, Grimes reports a growing interest in ritualizing in certain educational and religious settings, the theater, the holistic health industry, therapy groups, and New Age communities. Bell notes that the ways in which rituals are viewed as having efficacy is broadening, and that rituals are now commonly used as a means of therapy, personal growth, connecting to the community, or making political statements. She points
toward the growing amount of self-help books that suggest ways to invent and enact personal, family and community rituals, as an indication of this growing interest in ritual.  

Bell also describes the recent romanticization of ritual that is reflected in scholarly work, finding that the vast majority of studies on rituals tend to promote rituals solely as beneficial and healthy social experiences. This observation applies to the dissertation studies on adults’ experiences in contemporary ritual processes described earlier. Independent of one another, Hurst, Moyer, and Davidson all reach similar conclusions that extol the positive attributes of ritual while downplaying or ignoring any negative or harmful effects associated with ritual.

This romanticized view of ritual is commonly found in the literature on the clinical use of ritual in psychotherapy. A thorough search of clinical case studies documenting ritual as a therapeutic intervention shows that ritual is uniformly characterized as a powerful, effective means of promoting positive psychological and social changes. For example, an article by Chris Sand-Pringle, John West, and Donald Bubenzer describes how a seed planting ritual helped a family recovering from a member’s alcohol abuse to establish appropriate boundaries, roles, and leadership. An article by Marci Barton and Richard Bischoff demonstrates how a ritual involving the labeling of rocks can aid clients in breaking down overwhelming problems into smaller component pieces that are easier to conceptualize and work through. A qualitative dissertation research study conducted by Jennifer Corlett describes how a ritual co-created by a therapist and a married couple on their fiftieth birthdays helped the couple to effectively deepen their spiritual and personal development. While these claims about
ritual may be accurate, the absence of any negative descriptors associated with ritual in these clinical case studies is noteworthy.

A consideration of this resurgence and romanticization of ritual in both the popular and academic literature alongside the many common pejorative attitudes discussed previously suggests the presence of contradictory social attitudes toward ritual in contemporary culture. Yet I found no studies that directly looked at the phenomenon of ambivalence toward ritual.

**Ritual and Ambivalence**

Divergent social attitudes toward ritual may be a symptom of an underlying psychological ambivalence toward ritual. Freud is the first theorist to describe a clear connection between ritual and ambivalence. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud constructs a psychoanalytic approach to ritual theory by drawing a connection between the behaviors of obsessive neurotics and participants in religious ritual. In both cases, he sees the ritual behavior as a symptom of repressed impulses and ambivalence toward the father. In the case of the neurotic, obsessive rituals stem from unresolved Oedipal conflicts, in which the unconscious desires to kill the father and marry the mother are unfulfilled. In the case of religious practice, according to Freud, ritual stems from unresolved guilt feelings and ambivalences remaining from the primordial killing of a father-leader by the horde.

In both instances, Freud views ritual as an ineffective attempt to mediate an inner conflict that arises around a taboo. Since what is desired is prohibited, one represses one’s desire and attempts to gain temporary relief from this conflict through ritual means.
Thus, Freud views ritual as a compulsive act that both arises out of and perpetuates one’s ambivalence.

In contrast, other writers view ritual as an effective means of holding and working through one’s ambivalence. For example, Erikson notes the polarities that define each successive developmental stage and sees rituals as adaptive behaviors that serve to successfully navigate the tension between these polarities.\(^8^6\) Turner sees ritual as providing a play space where oppositional dynamics in a society can be symbolically dramatized in order to effect movement toward integration and transformation.\(^8^7\) Similarly, Grimes writes that ritualizing occurs when the polarities in a psychosocial rift are too important to choose between, and instead, must be brought into a dialogical relationship.\(^8^8\) According to Grimes, ritual functions by highlighting both poles of the polarity at once. Thus, he writes, ambivalence is at the heart of ritualizing.\(^8^9\)

One way to reconcile the disparity between the views of these theorists and Freud is to understand the particular context in which Freud was writing. According to Volney Gay, Freud’s critical view of religious ritual can be understood in light of the fact that Freud’s theories are aimed at the promotion of psychoanalysis.\(^9^0\) In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud proposes that the ambivalence that remains hidden in religious ritual is the same ambivalence that is revealed clearly through psychoanalytic treatment.\(^9^1\) Freud views psychoanalysis as an effective means of treating the neurotic effects of the ambivalence, through the skilled way in which the analyst can work with the ambivalence as it is revealed in the transference.

In the century since Freud developed his theories, there has been an expansion in psychoanalytic theory and practice as well as in the scope of activities that theorists
define as ritual. Many contemporary writers view psychotherapy itself as a form of ritual, especially as an initiatory rite-of-passage. For example, in an analysis of various phenomena within contemporary psychotherapeutic practice, Robert Moore finds that most modalities of psychotherapy can be understood as ritual processes. Similarly, R. Rogers Kobak and David Waters apply Van Gennep’s rite-of-passage stage model to the therapy process.

Several authors discuss the idea of using ritual as a particular intervention within the context of psychotherapy. Valerie Cole and Richard Whiting are two clinicians who offer specific models for the use of rituals in psychotherapy. While Gay outlines basic similarities between ritual and psychotherapy, he suggests the need for a clinician’s sensitivity in bringing ritual into the therapeutic encounter, as the transpersonal field that is constellated in religious ritual could break the frame within which psychotherapy is conducted. Lynn Cooper presents a dissertation study that finds positive results from the application of ritual process and techniques in psychotherapy. Based on a qualitative analysis of structured interviews with 10 therapists who utilize ritual interventions in their clinical work, Cooper reports that the effects of participating in ritual are more likely to be both therapeutic and enduring when the rituals occur within the context and support of the therapeutic relationship.

A participatory study by Melissa Staehle looks at the use of ritual in clinical psychotherapy supervision. Although she finds that supervisors and supervisees can sometimes experience resistance to ritual, Staehle reports that the sensitive introduction of ritual into clinical supervision is often experienced as having positive and beneficial results.
Several psychoanalytic theorists offer positive interpretations of Freud’s writings on ritual, arguing that ritual can have a therapeutic value by providing healthy ego adaptations. Bruno Bettelheim writes that male initiation rituals function by resolving, rather than perpetuating, the ambivalence that arises from the Oedipal complex. Gay argues that religious ritual can benefit the maturation process by aiding the ego’s suppression of dangerous id impulses. Joseph Kelley offers a revised, contemporary psychoanalytic understanding of religious ritual based on self psychology. Drawing from interviews with participants in the Catholic Mass, he finds that ritual can either be experienced as supporting, strengthening, healing, and transforming the self, or conversely, as frustrating and failing to meet the narcissistic needs of the self.

In a survey of modern psychoanalytic writings on ritual, Joseph Rubenstein finds that the developmental benefits of ritual are often played down, while the repetitive and compulsive aspects of ritual are emphasized, fostering a pejorative view of ritual. Rubenstein suggests that theories on the psychology of play can offer a fuller, more balanced understanding of the connection between ritual and ambivalence. This connection is explored further in the review of the literature on creative play.

Somé offers another perspective on the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual, drawn from his belief that the ancestral worship of ritual is antithetical to the mechanization of modern life. Interpreting the fast pace of life in modern culture as a distraction, an attempt at avoiding experience, he writes about ritualizing. “When you slow down, you begin to discover that there is a silent awareness of what it is that you do not want to look at: the anger of nature within each of us, the anger of the gods, the anger of the ancestors or the spirit world.” From this perspective, although ritual may be
efficacious in reestablishing communication with the spirit world, it could feel threatening in its potential to expose anger and other repressed material. This idea is explored further in the review of the literature on psychological perspectives on the sacred.

**Conclusion**

The cluster of literature on ritual describes the ways that ritual has traditionally functioned in human culture. Ritual is generally seen as an embodied symbolic action that brings one into relationship with the sacred. Several theorists view ritual as a container for holding polarities, allowing for psychological growth and development. The loss of traditional ritual in contemporary culture is seen alongside the recent emergence of postmodern forms of ritualizing that draw upon traditional forms in novel and creative ways. A discussion of markedly divergent attitudes toward ritual points toward the phenomenon of contemporary ambivalence toward ritual.

Psychoanalytic theory speaks directly to the relationship between ritual and ambivalence. While Freud sees ritual as an attempt to overcome an internal ambivalence that arises around a taboo associated with the sacred, Erikson views ritual as a healthy means of working through challenges associated with developmental stages. Ritual is thus seen both as arising out of ambivalence, as well as providing an adaptative response to ambivalence.

Despite the clear articulation of a theoretical relationship between ritual and ambivalence among psychoanalytic writers, a search of the literature on ritual yields no formalized studies on the phenomenon of ritual ambivalence. In part, this may be due to
the way in which Freud’s writings are largely overlooked within the ritual studies literature, where his theories on ritual can be seen as speculative, pejorative, and/or antiquated compared to those of more contemporary writers.\textsuperscript{103}

However, a more significant gap in the literature on ritual is the general lack of formalized research studies that are specifically designed to examine the experience of individuals participating in contemporary ritual. Rather, much the literature on ritual continues to focus on traditional religious and cultural rituals. These writings tend to be theoretical and anecdotal, based on fieldwork observations of traditional rituals.

It is only recently that scholars have begun to look at contemporary ritual practices. As is the case with studies of traditional ritual, most of the academic writings on this topic focus on theory and critical analysis, rather than the experience of ritual participation. A comprehensive search of the research and journal articles on ritual uncovered only a handful of formalized research studies on the phenomenology of participating in contemporary ritual, such as those conducted by Hurst, Moyer, and Davidson. However, none of the few studies in this area describe the ambivalence that may be experienced in relation to ritual. Therefore, while the literature on ritual, especially the psychoanalytic literature, provides a theoretical foundation for ritual ambivalence, this phenomenon remains unstudied in formalized research.

Ritualizing can be understood as functioning by allowing for psychological transformation through an embodied relationship with the sacred. The literature on ritual suggests that the experience of being in relation to the sacred that occurs in ritualizing may evoke ambivalence. As well, the opportunity to engage in authentic communion through ritualizing can present a particular challenge to individuals in a secular cultural
context. Therefore, it is necessary to look more closely at the literature on psychological perspectives on the sacred.

**Psychological Perspectives on the Sacred**

**Introduction**

The literature covering psychological perspectives on the sacred offers a theoretical understanding of the relationship between the human psyche and the sacred. This is essential in making meaning of the dynamics that frame the experiences that are evoked and expressed through ritualizing. The etymology of the word “sacred” reveals a connection to ritual. The word “sacred” is derived from a Latin word for “holy,” *sacer*, which in turn was derived from an ancient Hittite word, *saklais*, meaning “ritual.”

Throughout this literature are themes about polarities, contradictions, and paradoxes associated with the sacred, which point toward the phenomenon of sacred ambivalence. One of the primary functions of ritual is to provide a structured form which allows psyche to come into a direct relationship with the sacred. Thus, a consideration of psyche’s natural ambivalence toward the sacred is an important key to understanding the ambivalence toward ritualizing.

The four subclusters in this review of the literature on psychological perspectives on the sacred are entitled: Phenomenology of the Sacred, Psychoanalytic Perspectives, Archetypal Perspectives, and The Sacred in Contemporary Culture.
Phenomenology of the Sacred

In *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto gives language to the emotional phenomenology of deeply felt religious experience. He uses the term *numinous* to describe the “wholly other” quality of the sacred and the absolute sense of dependence that is felt in relation to it. Otto describes the experience of being in the presence of the numinous: “It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures.”

Otto coins the expression *mysterium tremendum* to describe the terror and awe evoked by the sacred. He notes the tension this phenomenon evokes between the unfamiliar, unknowable mystery and the familiar, bodily tremor reaction. Otto writes of the experience as the combination of seemingly disparate elements: dread and ecstasy, power and impotence, overflowing fullness and nothingness. Andrew Weigert suggests that it is the combination of these disparate elements that may be evoked in an experience of the numinous that has given rise to the development of the rituals of conventional religions. According to Weigert, the ritual forms of a faith community can provide a structure through which a believer can safely approach the sacred despite the fear and terror that one may have in doing so. Otto’s description of the *mysterium tremendum* thus provides a phenomenological explanation for understanding the emotional ambivalence that may be experienced as one approaches the sacred through ritualizing.

Eliade builds on Otto’s work by describing the cosmology of early human cultures and their relation to the sacred through the embodied symbolic enactment of myth. He describes traditional cultures as being in touch with their need for the sacred and their methods of catalyzing sacred space and sacred time through ritual practices.
Noting the ambivalence that is inherent in the relationship with the sacred, Weigert writes that religious ritual functions as a container that provides a structured framework in which the sacred can be approached.\textsuperscript{109}

Durkheim offers a sociological perspective of the \textit{mysterium tremendum}.\textsuperscript{110} In his view, group ritual provides the context for an individual to project godlike characteristics onto the community, and to simultaneously experience both transcendence and the immanent qualities of the collective. In ritual, Durkheim says, one senses one’s smallness in the face of the transpersonal power of the group; at the same time, one feels something internally that is connected to that power and thus larger than oneself. This phenomenon of simultaneously feeling both small and large in a group suggests a sociological dynamic that may contribute to ritual ambivalence. Durkheim offers a metaphorical image for this ambivalence describing it as if each participant in ritual is made up of “two beings facing in different and almost contrary directions, one of whom exercises a real pre-eminence over the other.”\textsuperscript{111} In this view, the individual/group polarity contributes to the ambivalence toward the sacred that may be experienced in group ritual.

\textbf{Psychoanalytic Perspectives}

Psychoanalytic theory draws a parallel between the psychological relationship to the sacred and the relationship to parental figures. This line of reasoning begins with Freud, who views the sacred as the idealized projection of a loved and feared father figure that develops out of the Oedipal complex.\textsuperscript{112} Object Relations and other
developmental theorists beginning with Klein focus on the bipolar imagery that forms the child’s early relationship to the mother.

Rizzuto agrees with Freud that the sacred may reflect the child’s projection of the personal father, but her research demonstrates the importance of the mother and other caregivers in the process of forming a God-image and a relationship with the sacred.\footnote{113} Rizzuto finds in her research that the images that individuals draw to represent personal God-images correspond to the likenesses of early childhood caregivers, both male and female. Likewise, Erikson believes that the relationship to parental figures in childhood, especially early experiences around bonding with the mother or primary caregiver, can shape the adult’s capacity for being in relationship to the sacred.\footnote{114} The dynamics of ambivalence in relation to early childhood experiences are discussed further in the review of the literature on ambivalence.

Approaching this phenomenon from another perspective, Heinz Kohut describes an \textit{idealizing transference} that forms in childhood. According to Kohut, the child forms an idealized parent image as an attempt to maintain an idyllic world despite lapses in parental care.\footnote{115} James Jones notes the same dynamic of an idealizing transference that underlies what an adult considers to be sacred. He writes, “We call something sacred when it meets our needs for idealization, when we can invest our narcissistic energy in it.”\footnote{116} Kohut’s concept of an idealizing transference further supports the parallel between the child’s psychological relationship to parental figures and the adult’s relation to the sacred.

Michael Washburn integrates Otto’s concept of the \textit{mysterium tremendum} with psychoanalytic theory, discerning two distinct phases of the ambivalence that can be
experienced in the process of spiritual awakening. He writes that an encounter with the numinous, which can initially be perceived by the ego as a breakthrough, is as well a breakdown. In transpersonal terms, such an encounter breaks the barrier between the ego and the unconscious nonegoic core, whose power momentarily eclipses the power of the ego. Washburn writes:

… [The ego] begins to sense that its new openness is not only a spiritual receptivity but also a psychic vulnerability or “wound”; and it begins to sense that that to which it is open is not only a source of replenishing energy and wondrous phenomena but also an “abyss” that emits dangerous forces and beckons the ego to a dark destiny. Accordingly, the ego ceases being one-sidedly enthusiastic about the breakthrough it has experienced and begins to suffer seriously mixed feelings about its new condition and prospects.

Washburn theorizes that the ambivalence experienced by the ego in its awakening to the nonegoic core leads to a process of regression and subsequent regeneration. In the first phase, which Washburn refers to as regression in the service of transcendence, the ambivalence is negatively weighted, as the ego is in touch with previously repressed dark aspects of early childhood parental figures. In this phase, the ego is prone to feeling defenselessly exposed, and may form negative projections of others. The ego also may experience feelings of dread, strangeness, and the fear of engulfment by the numinous forces.

Marie-Louise von Franz refers to the process of being assimilated by a numinous archetypal image as possession by unconscious shadow material. In her analysis of fairy tales, she sees the phenomenon of possession represented symbolically through human characters who transform into something other than human. Von Franz understands possession as a mechanism through which repressed, unconscious parts of the self can be brought into consciousness. Although contact with this repressed material
can be terrifying or painful, it can set in motion a process that can ultimately lead to psychological growth and renewal.

Similarly, Washburn writes that if the ego successfully endures the negative effects of this regression, there is a reversal of the ambivalence toward the positive in a phase that he calls *regeneration in spirit*. In this phase, the ego comes into a more secure relationship to the nonegoic core, through the re-emergence of the positive aspects of early childhood parental figures. This allows for shifts from feeling vulnerable and exposed to the desire to disclose to others, and from seeing others as “bad objects” to the emergence of a newfound faith in others.

**Archetypal Perspectives**

Jung sees the relation between humans and the sacred as manifesting psychologically in the relation between the ego and archetypal energies represented by the Self, psyche’s leadership archetype. Jung views individuation as a process which is characterized by a developing awareness of one’s relation to the sacred. Edward Edinger describes the formation of a conscious ego-Self axis that develops through the individuation process. Jung offers a mythic account of the development of the ego-Self axis through the biblical story of Job. By entering into an embodied, dynamic relationship with Yahweh, Job, who represents ego, is seen as transforming the God-image through human consciousness.

Jung views the development of one’s relation to the God-image as the central task of individuation. Through various ritual forms such as dream analysis, art making, and
active imagination, the individuating person develops a conscious awareness of one’s relationship to the archetypal energies of the collective unconsciousness.  

James Gollnick describes an ambivalent attitude in Jung’s conception of the God-image. He says that for the most part, Jung takes the voice of the dispassionate scientist, and speaks of the God-image in terms of totality and wholeness, representing the union of opposites. Gollnick notes that in *Answer to Job*, however, Jung writes with great emotion, and presents the negative aspects of this archetype, a God who is largely unconscious, reactive, and filled with inner contradictions.

Françoise O’Kane offers an explanation of Jung’s ambivalent stance in theorizing that the Self, like all archetypes, has two poles that coexist. She refers to the shadow side of the God-image as the Dark Self, and argues that contact with the Dark Self is a necessary part of the individuation process. One’s connection with the Dark Self dredges up raw material from the unconscious, which can then be integrated into awareness, resulting in greater psychic wholeness. O’Kane’s view of a bipolar God-image is consistent with Otto’s depiction of the sacred and further supports the idea of psyche’s natural ambivalence toward the sacred.

Jung characterizes the Self as both the totality of the psyche and the container that holds the opposites. In his view, the Self can be depicted symbolically by the image of a mandala, standing for wholeness and unity, superimposed on a cross or a square, which represents the intersection of opposites within the circle. Jung writes that “as alchemy shows, the Self is androgynous and consists of a masculine and a feminine principle.” Jung describes the transformative process of individuation through the metaphor of alchemy, involving the opposition and synthesis of masculine and feminine forces.
The separation between opposing masculine and feminine forces catalyzes a tensioned attraction that leads to their union in the alchemical stage called the *Coniunctio*.\(^{135}\)

In his study of the Great Mother, Neumann articulates a bipolar archetypal structure, describing various oppositional characteristics that constitute the bipolar archetype.\(^{136}\) According to Neumann, the primordial archetype is an undifferentiated conglomerate of contradictory symbols. For example, the primordial Great Mother archetype is both extremely good and extremely terrible all at once. Neumann writes, “This union of opposites in the primordial archetype, its ambivalence, is characteristic of the original situation of the unconscious, which consciousness has not yet dissected into its antitheses.”\(^ {137}\) Since these two attributes are mutually exclusive to the conscious psyche, they split apart and order themselves as two separate, mutually related symbols according to the principle of opposites.

Neumann identifies two primary sets of opposing symbolic polarities associated with the Great Mother: elementary/transformative and positive/negative. He describes these as two basic characters of the feminine principle: the elementary character, which has a static, conservative function in the psyche, and the transformative character, which has a dynamic function. Both of these characters in turn contain positive and negative aspects.\(^ {138}\) Thus, Neumann conceptualizes four basic components of the bipolar Great Mother archetype: (1) a positive elementary character, which he refers to as the Good Mother, (2) a negative elementary character, which he calls the Terrible, Devouring Mother, (3) a positive transformative character, associated with a Muse who brings inspiration, and (4) a negative transformative character, which is associated with madness.\(^ {139}\)
Hill offers a model of the Self that combines Jung’s description of a masculine and feminine component with Neumann’s articulation of the bipolar structure of the archetypes. In this model, the Self is composed of four distinct archetypal patterns: the static feminine, the static masculine, the dynamic feminine, and the dynamic masculine. The static feminine, characterized by unity and undifferentiated wholeness, is represented by Hill as the Great Mother. The static masculine is characterized by order and meaning, and can be symbolized by the Great Father. The energy of the dynamic feminine, which Hill represents by Dionysos, involves altered states and play. The dynamic masculine is characterized by initiative and goal directedness, and can be represented by the Dragon-Slaying Hero.

Hill discerns two axes along which these forces engage with one another—an order/chaos polarity between the static masculine and the dynamic feminine, and a unity/differentiation polarity between the static feminine and the dynamic masculine. In this model, the active engagement of masculine and feminine archetypal energies promotes growth and change, whereas pathology and stagnation is characterized by the dissociation between the masculine and the feminine.

In Hill’s model, each of the archetypes contains a positive and a negative aspect. He writes that the presence of an archetypal energy can evoke strong affective responses that are rooted in the full range of repressed memories, thoughts, and feelings associated with both the positive and negative aspects of the archetype. Thus, the desire for the unity, wholeness and acceptance that characterizes the positive static feminine can be accompanied by a fear of the smothering entanglement associated with the negative static feminine, which Hill represents as the Devouring Mother. Similarly, the desire for the
play and emotional expression of the positive dynamic feminine can bring up a fear of being overcome by the negative dynamic feminine, represented as the Mad Mother.

According to Hill, the positive ordering traits of the static masculine stand alongside the oppressive sense of order of the negative static masculine that can be represented as the Senex. The sense of initiative and goal-directedness associated with the positive dynamic masculine gives way to the inflation and willfulness of the negative dynamic masculine, represented as the Despot.¹⁴⁵

Omer identifies four modes of experiencing that discern various ways that psyche can be in relationship to the sacred: symbiotic, bureaucratic, decentralized, and collaborative.¹⁴⁶ Each of these modes affects the emergence of a container in which ritualizing can occur. The symbiotic mode is personified by the archetypal Mother. In its positive form, this mode brings experiences of the Loving Mother, characterized by acceptance, compassion, and receptivity. The negative pole of symbiotic experience can include disapproval and discounting behavior, as well as the denial of difference between self and other. Omer states that the symbiotic mode is problematic for the emergence of ritual, as ritual requires the engagement of distinct individualities.¹⁴⁷

The archetypal Father personifies the bureaucratic mode. The positive attributes of the Preserver Father include structure, discipline, and encouragement. The negative pole of bureaucratic experience brings suppression, repression, and criticism, as well as the oppression of difference between self and other. Omer states that the rigid, dogmatic verticality in this mode suppresses the individual, making impossible the surrender that is necessary for deep participation in ritual.¹⁴⁸
The decentralized mode is characterized by a peer relationship. In the positive form, this mode includes cooperative behavior, such as meaningful speech, working together, and inclusivity. The negative pole includes colluding and exoticizing, as well as the trivialization of differences between self and other. According to Omer, because the decentralized mode involves a disjunction with verticality and tradition, there is a lack of potency with the ritual that emerges when this mode is dominant.\textsuperscript{149}

The alignment of the positive poles of these first three modes of experiencing results in the collaborative mode. This mode is personified by the presence of the Friend, the figure of the God-image found in the poetry of Jelaluddin Rumi.\textsuperscript{150} Omer writes: ‘The Friend refers to those deep potentials of the soul which guide us to act with passionate objectivity and encourage us to align with the creative will of the cosmos.’\textsuperscript{151} The collaborative mode of experience brings together the archetypal energies of the Loving Mother, the Preserver Father, and the Cooperative Peer, and is characterized by recognizing and relating to differences between self and other. According to Omer, creative ritualizing can only occur when the collaborative mode is dominant, as the presence of the Friend allows a container to form that enables participants to move outside of the limitations of personal identity and to embrace the multiplicity of voices that dwell in the psyche.\textsuperscript{152}

Omer articulates a Mother principle and a Father principle that describe the elements that contribute to collaborative experience. The Mother principle relates to desire, while the Father principle relates to discipline. According to Omer, the coming together of desire and discipline, the collaboration between the Mother and the Father, is required for catalyzing effective participation in ritualizing.\textsuperscript{153}
There are several theories in the literature that provide support for Omer’s Mother and Father principles. Freud’s theory of the Oedipal complex portrays a drama in which the disciplined prohibitions of the father are brought into psychic engagement with the incestuous desires of the mother-child dyad. This dynamic is formative in Freud’s topographical theory, wherein the healthy adult ego is able to mediate the inherent tensions between the desires of the id and the prohibitions of the superego. This description of healthy ego functioning involves a balance of desire and discipline that is analogous to the concept of the Mother and Father principles.

As noted earlier, Jung describes the individuation process as involving the opposition and synthesis of masculine and feminine forces. Jung postulates that for each gender, there is an unconscious contrasexual psychic element. In the male psyche, this is called the anima, and is often personified as an inspiring muse or a loving maternal figure. For women, this contrasexual element is called the animus, and can be personified by a protective and secure paternal figure. Jung writes that in the individuation process, these contrasexual elements, originally unconscious, become integrated into conscious awareness.

Individuation in Hill’s view, regardless of a person’s gender, entails initiatory experiences that are characterized by contact with the numinosity of the archetypal Mother and Father. Hill differentiates between fiery initiations involving submission to the authority of the static masculine (personified as the Great Father), and watery initiations involving surrender to the wholeness and unity of the static feminine (personified as the Great Mother). According to Hill, each of these initiatory experiences evokes a particular kind of resistance which must be overcome if the
initiation is to be successful. In fiery initiations, one’s willful and grandiose dynamic masculine energy resists being subordinated to the objective authority and discipline of the Father. In watery initiations, resistance involves clinging to the security of what is known to avoid being thrown into a “night sea voyage” of disorienting, chaotic experiences.  

**The Sacred in Contemporary Culture**

The literature thus far describes the ambivalence that is inherent to the experience of being in relationship with a bipolar God-image. Beyond these dynamics, modern culture can be characterized by a widespread loss of relationship to the sacred, the discounting or denial of the sacred that is announced by Nietzsche’s famous proclamation, “God is dead!” This loss of relationship to the sacred in modern culture may be derived, in part, from the ambivalent nature of the sacred; but it is a distinct phenomenon that merits its own exploration, as it is central to understanding the resistance to ritualizing that is pervasive in contemporary society.

Eliade sees the disappearance of meaningful initiation as a defining characteristic of modern culture. For Eliade, initiation serves the purpose of birthing adult members of a community into a spiritual life. He feels that having lost the effective means of being in relation to the sacred, modern culture is essentially desacralized, in contrast to the religions of early human cultures.

Bly describes the loss of the imagination of the sacred in the sibling society that has coalesced in the wake of the loss of meaningful initiation. Like Eliade, he connects the lack of meaningful initiation to the loss of vertical thought, essentially, an
inability to recognize and be in relationship to the sacred. In terms of Omer’s modes of experiencing, sibling culture can be characterized by the domination of the decentralized mode. Omer notes that in sibling culture where verticality is unrecognized, differences such as those between the sacred and the profane can be trivialized to the point where the boundary between them is no longer distinct.162

Eliade notes the uneasiness that modern people can have around an experience of the sacred, and speculates that this is due to the dominance of rational thought, which obscures one’s affective and imaginative engagement in the world to the point where an individual can no longer see when the sacred presents itself.163 He writes that “desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies and that, in consequence, he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in the archaic societies.” 164

David Abram echoes this claim and describes some of the perceptual shifts by which the sensual attunement to nature that characterized traditional societies has been lost. He discusses the rise of secular humanism as forwarding a view of humans as being in a dominant position over nature.165 David Ray Griffin writes how science has been elevated to the status of religion, resulting in a disenchantment of nature.166 Frederick Ferré notes that objectifying, mechanistic, and reductionistic scientific ideals have coalesced into a religious world model that brings a sense of disconnection from the world. Ferré connects these ideals to the development of a narcissistic position:

By worshiping the Object at the cost of the Subject, this religious world model alienates us from our own inwardness, from our own intuitions of meaning and our own structures of purpose. Not only are we cut off from nature, but the world of other persons becomes the domain of I-it perception, and the stage is set for both the great and the little atrocities of modern life.167
Martin Buber distinguishes between sacred and desecrated experience in terms of the basic attitudes in how one relates to the world.\textsuperscript{168} An \textit{I-Thou relationship} implies that one considers the other as an alive, sovereign subject, catalyzing a relationship of mutual respect that has the effect of restoring the sacred quality of the world. Buber contrasts this with an \textit{I-It relationship}, in which one considers the other as an object, evoking detachment and separation, and contributing to the desecration of the world.

Peter Reason draws a connection between a modern positivist paradigm based on an individual self who experiences the world as separate from oneself and the widespread disenchantment and desecration in modern, secular culture. He describes the emergence of a postmodern participatory consciousness that can “re-sacralize our experience of ourselves and our world.”\textsuperscript{169} Reason outlines a sacred science anchored within this postmodern participatory worldview that is based on love, beauty, wisdom, and engagement.\textsuperscript{170}

Reason contextualizes this paradigmatic shift within a model that describes the evolution of human consciousness in terms of three broad phases of participation: \textit{original participation}, \textit{unconscious participation}, and \textit{future participation}.\textsuperscript{171} The first phase, \textit{original participation}, is characterized by an undifferentiated consciousness in which subject and object are merged. Reason writes that in original participation, humans are embedded in their environment without self-reflection.\textsuperscript{172} This undifferentiated consciousness is personified in the image of the primordial Great Mother. As discussed earlier, Neumann describes this figure as a conglomerate of contradictory polarities, being both good and terrible at the same time.\textsuperscript{173}
The second phase, *unconscious participation*, is characterized by a progressive differentiation from the environment that parallels the development of a separate sense of self and community. This phase is marked by the emergence of a masculine principle that forms a dynamic polarity with the feminine principle, analogous to the interaction of *yin* and *yang* in Taoist philosophy.\(^{174}\) Although this differentiation of consciousness is not inherently problematic, it can degenerate into the domination of one form of consciousness over another.\(^ {175}\) Reason writes that “in an extreme of this phase (which characterizes much of Western consciousness at the present time) participation is denied and people live in an alienated consciousness.”\(^ {176}\)

These first two phases of participation both have positive and negative aspects, or what Reason refers to as valid and degenerate forms: Original participation allows for communion but denies differentiation; conversely, unconscious participation brings a differentiated consciousness but denies communion. Reason describes an emerging third phase, *future participation*, which allows for both differentiation and communion. He writes that “a future reflexive participation must be essentially dialectical, always in movement, formed moment to moment in creative resolutions of the paradox between deep participation and separated consciousness.”\(^ {177}\) Reason describes certain qualities of future participation, such as: self-awareness, the interdependence of relationships, the active use of imagination, and consciousness that moves beyond conceptual language and paradigmatic knowing.\(^ {178}\)

Edinger presents a model that describes various psychological responses to the loss of the sacred in contemporary society. He theorizes that when the religion of a community breaks down, as has happened in modern culture, the external container for
the projection of the Self is lost. Edinger outlines four possibilities for how an individual can respond to this loss. The first is that in the loss of connection to the Self, the ego is deflated and the individual experiences the symptoms associated with the loss of meaning in life. Edinger refers to this state as the alienated ego. Another possibility is that without an external God-image to be in relation to, the ego comes to regard itself as the God-image, which Edinger calls the inflated ego. He writes, “Examples of this are seen in the hubris that overvalues man’s rational and manipulative powers and denies the sacred mystery inherent in life and in nature.”

Edinger’s third possibility for what can occur when a communal religious projection is lost is that individuals form rejections onto secular deities such as capitalism, in which a sacred value is placed on the accumulation of material wealth. Edinger describes this phenomenon as idolization, and notes that when one reprojects the God-image onto a secular or political movement, the unconscious religious motivation can lead to destructive results. Omer notes the connection between idolization and fundamentalism, both religious and secular. He sees idolatry as a misuse of sacred image that closes off the imagination, rather than opening one up to the mystery associated with the sacred. Erikson traces a source of such idolization in the adult back to maladaptions in infancy in the ritualized bonding behaviors between the infant and mother.

Edinger contrasts inflation, alienation, and idolization with a fourth possibility, individuation. He views the loss of the religious ideal as holding the potential for catalyzing an opportunity for the individual to develop consciousness through self-reflection. From this perspective, it is self-reflection on the other three states that
catalyzes individuation. According to Edinger, the breakdown of collective religion brings a concentration of archetypal energy back to the individual psyche. This sets up a condition that allows awareness to be focused on the subjective experiences of the individual.

Several theories on faith development provide further clarification about the various ways in which individuals in contemporary culture form a relationship to the sacred. Fowler proposes that the psychological relation to the sacred develops throughout the life cycle, and is based on the development of faith. \(^{185}\) Fowler builds upon the work of Paul Tillich, who sees faith as a personal dynamic construction that is based on the ultimate center of value and power that one can imagine. \(^{186}\) According to Tillich, the images of one’s faith may or may not be connected to a conventional religion and are often not conscious. Yet, it is these images that provide a sense of direction and meaning in one’s life.

Based on interviews he conducted, Fowler presents a six-stage model of faith developmental that articulates a maturation process in one’s relationship to the sacred. \(^{187}\) The following is a list of the six stages, along with the life stage when they usually first develop: (1) Intuitive-Projective Faith: early childhood, (2) Mythic-Literal Faith: school years, (3) Synthetic-Conventional Faith: adolescence, (4) Individuative-Reflective Faith: young adulthood, (5) Conjunctive Faith: midlife and beyond, and (6) Universalizing Faith. \(^{188}\)

The first three stages are formative in developing a mature sense of faith. Stage one, Intuitive-Projective Faith, is a fantasy-filled, imitative phase in which the child is powerfully influenced by primary adult caregivers. Stage two, Mythic-Literal Faith, is
marked by the rise of concrete operational thought, which leads to the appropriation of literal, uni-dimensional beliefs, rules and attitudes. Stage three, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, is characterized by the attunement to the expectations and judgments of significant others, as one’s own autonomous and independent perspective is not yet well-formed.  

A majority of the adults that Fowler interviewed were identified as being in stages four and five of his model of faith development. Stage four, Individuative-Reflective Faith, is characterized by the centrality of one’s own egoic perspective. Individuals in this stage may adopt a demythologizing strategy in which there is movement away from conventional religion. In contrast, stage five, Conjunctive Faith, involves opening up to the acceptance of a multi-perspective view that moves one beyond one’s personal egoic awareness. Individuals in this stage often experience a reawakening in their personal connection to the underlying patterns in spiritual traditions.

Fowler remarks that development to stage six, Universalizing Faith, is exceedingly rare, and refers to Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King, Jr. in his last years as representative examples. According to Fowler, individuals in this stage subordinate needs for self-preservation and well-being to “the criteria of inclusiveness of community, of radical commitment to justice and love and of selfless passion for a transformed world, a world made over not in their images, but in accordance with an intentionality both divine and transcendent.”

Fowler writes that development from one stage to the next occurs through crises of faith, essentially by one’s working through places of doubt; the old God-image begins to no longer hold one’s ultimate center of value and power, and a new image arises in its place. Rizzuto finds that this development of psyche’s relationship to the sacred can
be facilitated by ritual. She writes, “By making God or the gods active participants in the process, ritual provides a new opportunity for the reshaping of the god representation and the individual’s relation to it.”

Based on Fowler’s work, M. Scott Peck offers a four-stage model of spiritual development: antisocial, formal (or fundamental), skeptical, and mystical. The first stage is marked by chaos, as one is unable to withstand the tension of the opposites. Each successive stage is characterized by the increased capacity to hold one’s ambivalence in conscious awareness. The fundamentalist manages the tension by identifying solely with one side of the polarity, the skeptic has some awareness of the ambivalence and may struggle with it, and the mystic is able to embrace both sides of the polarity.

According to Peck’s model, skepticism is a secular stance that is flanked by two religious stances—fundamentalism, which is less psychologically developed, and mysticism, which is more developed than the skeptical position. Peck writes that for an individual in the skeptical stage, the fundamentalist religious stance may seem regressive and superstitious, while mystical religion may not be comprehensible, or may appear as being too open, and perhaps threatening to one’s sense of identity. To the extent that ritual is associated with religion, this model suggests that the skeptic may perceive ritual as too formal or too unstructured, evoking resistance either way.

Conclusion

The literature on psychological perspectives on the sacred reveals the inherent paradoxes and contradictions in the experience of the sacred that give rise to the natural human phenomenon of ambivalence toward the sacred. Archetypal theory outlines a
bipolar structure of the archetypes. This raises the consideration that perhaps any experience of the sacred or divine is mediated through this bipolar structure, evoking ambivalence.

The literature points toward the development of ritual in early human cultures as an adaptive response whose function was to navigate sacred ambivalence. The religious outlook of traditional cultures is contrasted with the widespread desacralization among adults in modern culture. The secularization of modern culture is associated with a variety of attitudes toward religion and religious ritual.

There are several explanations for the etiology of this phenomenon. One is the elevation of science as a religion, and the valuing of reason over highly subjective states. Another is the cultural and personal loss of initiation and the complex of subjectivities that is evoked by this loss. These factors coalesce in a widespread condition whereby one’s capacity to be in an embodied relationship with the sacred can be limited. The loss of the recognition and relation to the sacred may contribute to feelings of ambivalence toward ritual, in which a primary function is to reconnect humans with the sacred.

Several theorists contextualize secularization and the loss of the sacred as a stage that is necessary in the broader development of one’s psychological relationship with the sacred.

Although the literature on psychological perspectives on the sacred provides an additional layer of a theoretical foundation for understanding the ambivalence that may be experienced in relation to the sacred, an extensive search of the existing literature yields no formal research studies on the actual experience of this ambivalence. Such a study might require a methodological approach that is situated within a participatory paradigm. For instance, a researcher conducting participatory research could evoke an
experience of the *mysterium tremendum* and gather data about this experience. However, there are currently no participatory studies in this area. Thus, while this literature provides theoretical support for an inquiry into ritual ambivalence, there remains a gap in the literature around how this phenomenon has been researched.

In reviewing what is currently known about the imaginal structures that are associated with contemporary ambivalence toward ritual, it will be necessary to understand in more detail the psychological dynamics of ambivalence. Ambivalence emerges as a central concept in the literature on psychological perspectives on the sacred. Psychoanalytic theorists draw a connection between an adult’s relation to the sacred and the transference that develops out of the relationship to parental figures in childhood. Archetypal theorists describe a bipolar relationship to the archetypal Mother and Father that constitutes psyche’s relationship to the sacred. Both theoretical approaches suggest that ambivalence toward parental figures is a central component of the relationship to the sacred. It is therefore important to look more closely at the literature on the psychological dynamics of ambivalence.

### The Psychology of Ambivalence: Experiencing Desire and Resistance

**Introduction**

The review of the literature thus far suggests that the experience of coming into relationship with the sacred through ritual may evoke ambivalence. Therefore, it is important to explore further how the psychology of ambivalence is understood theoretically and described in the literature. The four subclusters in this review of the
literature on the psychology of ambivalence are entitled: Psychoanalytic and Developmental Perspectives, Archetypal and Transpersonal Perspectives, Ambivalence in Contemporary Culture, and Phenomenology of Ambivalence.

The review of the literature on ambivalence begins by describing how ambivalence is defined and constructed across a broad range of psychological perspectives, including: psychoanalytic, developmental, archetypal, and transpersonal. Although there are few monographs that focus entirely on ambivalence, each theorist contributes a piece to the overall understanding of the phenomenon. A broad view of ambivalence from a variety of perspectives is important for making psychological meaning of the mixture of desire and resistance that can occur in the approach to ritualizing.

A discussion about the ambivalence in contemporary culture brings in writings that demonstrate the pervasiveness of ambivalence, especially in the parent-child relationship. The review of the literature on ambivalence concludes with a section on the phenomenology of ambivalence, which reveals the challenges both in experiencing and studying ambivalence. Writings on the phenomenology of ambivalence can be applied toward understanding and interpreting the ways in which ritual ambivalence may be experienced and expressed.

**Psychoanalytic and Developmental Perspectives**

The definition of *ambivalence* in Webster’s dictionary is, “simultaneous and contradictory attitudes or feelings (as attraction and repulsion) toward an object, person, or action.” In psychoanalytic theory, ambivalence is generally understood as the
dynamic tension that occurs when two opposing desires are held simultaneously in the psyche. Freud borrowed the term from Eugen Bleuler, who distinguished three types of ambivalence among a group of schizophrenics: voluntary, intellectual, and emotional. According to Bleuler, voluntary ambivalence is the conscious conflict over whether or not to do something; intellectual ambivalence is when a person simultaneously interprets a phenomenon in both a positive and a negative light; and emotional ambivalence involves loving and hating the same object. It is this final type that Freud uses as a foundation in constructing psychoanalytic theory. In Totem and Taboo, he defines ambivalence as “the simultaneous existence of love and hate toward the same object.” Freud focuses particularly on emotional ambivalence toward the father, involving intense feelings that are normally not experienced consciously.

Freud views ambivalence as arising from the intrapsychic tension between the drives of the id and the prohibitions of the superego. In Freud’s earlier writings, he considers sexuality to be the central instinctual drive, and describes the relationship between love and hate within the sexual drive. Freud writes about how pleasure can be bound up with pain and how the ego hates any object that it associates with painful feelings. Thus, when a love-object is removed or is the cause of pain, the ego comes to feel hatred toward that object. If these hateful feelings are a source of anxiety, they may be repressed from conscious awareness.

Freud uses the term transference to refer to a client’s projections onto the analyst of feelings and reactions toward a parental figure from childhood. In observing the combination of affectionate and hostile attitudes in his clients’ transferences onto him in psychoanalysis, Freud came to characterize transference as emotionally ambivalent. He
theorizes this ambivalence of feelings as arising from the Oedipal complex, in which the male child hates and fears the father, who is seen as a rival for the mother’s love and affection. Freud feels that although the healthy male child grows to love the father, these feelings of hatred and fear continue to live in the unconscious as repressed material. Psychoanalysis offers a means through which one can uncover this repressed material in a situation that promotes the formation of a transference. The forms and techniques associated with psychoanalysis are aimed at facilitating the regression of the client, allowing for access to the ambivalent feelings formed toward parental figures in childhood.

Freud sees the occurrence of regressive behavior not only among his patients in analysis, but as well in the dynamics of groups. He speculates that the needs for equality among group members and governance by a leader create a horde dynamic in which group members behave in childlike ways. Groups are seen as constituting a transferential field that parallels the psychoanalytic relationship. From this perspective, ambivalence toward ritual could be associated with the transferential feelings that may be evoked in a group context. In this view, participants in group ritual may project unresolved, ambivalent feelings toward parental figures onto the group, the group leader, or any objects that are used in the ritual.

From Freud’s perspective, the transformative nature of ritual could be seen as contributing to the evocation of ambivalent feelings. Freud writes that the ego hates any object that may be seen as a threat to its self-preservation. As discussed earlier, ritual can be viewed as a death-rebirth process that holds the potential for the transformation of identity. Individuals who consciously desire to participate in ritual may hold unconscious
hatred and fear toward a process that threatens to bring about the death of the ego-
identity. Freud sees therapeutic resistance as signaling the ambivalence that occurs as
patients are close to uncovering unconscious material that is painful or anxiety
provoking. In this view, one’s resistance to ritualizing may suggest that one is close to
uncovering such painful or anxiety provoking unconscious material.

The idea that therapeutic resistance stems from a perceived threat to one’s identity
is corroborated by a qualitative dissertation study by Arcangelo Caputo that focuses on
clients’ perceptions of their own resistance in therapy. He reports that clients can feel
ambivalence toward processes in therapy that threaten their existing constructions of self.
Caputo finds that resistance functions as a form of psychological self-protection that
attempts to provide safety and security when threats to self-identity and self-autonomy
are perceived.

In Freud’s later writings, he broadens his drive theory to include aggression, in
addition to sexuality, as a primary human instinct. He writes of an oppositional and
irreconcilable dynamic between the life-affirming energy of Eros and a death instinct,
referred to as Thanatos. Freud sees Thanatos as an instinct toward aggression and cruelty
when directed outward, and self-destruction when directed inward. A number of
writers view the development of ritual as an attempt to create an experience of eternal life
that grew out of the awareness of death in early human culture. Ernest Becker points
to the widespread fear and denial of death in modern culture, and notes the aversion to
activities that can evoke awareness of the death instinct and of the reality of one’s
mortality. From this perspective, the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual can be
understood as an individual’s defense against bringing the intensity of the death instinct and the awareness of mortality into consciousness.

Klein builds upon Freud’s dual-instinct theory and locates a primary source of ambivalence in the child’s early experiences in relation to the mother. This begins with the paranoid-schizoid position, in which the infant separates the mother into two separate objects in the psyche, represented by the images of the Good Breast and the Bad Breast. The image of the Good Breast forms as a result of the mother’s attunement to meeting the child’s needs as they arise: the infant is hungry, the mother offers the breast, and the infant sucks at it contentedly. The image of the Bad Breast develops from occasions when the infant’s needs are unmet: the infant is hungry and screams, but the mother does not come. The infant is immersed in the intensity of their immediate, primary experience, and cannot understand that the mother may show up in a few minutes. Klein imagines that in moments such as this, the infant feels aggression toward the hated object and develops a fear about being annihilated; these raw, unmediated impulses thus form into a projection of being attacked by the Bad Breast.

At this point in development, the infant lacks the cognitive capacity to understand that the same mother has opposite qualities, sometimes attuned to the infant’s needs and sometimes not attuned. Without this understanding, the infant psychically experiences these aspects of the mother as two completely separate partial objects, totally independent of one another. Kenneth Shapiro notes that for Klein, the seeds of ambivalence originate through the internalization of these two split-off partial objects that represent aspects of the mother.
Sandra Edelman describes a sensory basis for the “I-not I” distinction in the infant as the primal foundation for psychological splitting. She postulates that prior to the formation of an ego, the infant possesses a rudimentary sense of self based entirely on sensory experience, as well as a basic human capacity to perceive opposites. Edelman imagines that for the infant, any interruption of the flow of this sensory experience is perceived as a traumatic encounter with a wholly other Not-I. The infant fears being annihilated by the Other, arousing the same terror and dread that Otto speaks of in his description of the *mysterium tremendum*.

Klein writes that cognitive development brings the awareness that the Good Breast and the Bad Breast are aspects of the same mother, and with this awareness comes a shift into the depressive position. Whereas in the paranoid-schizoid position, the two opposite experiences of the mother remain separate, the depressive position is characterized more by ambivalence, due to the awareness that the two partial objects are aspects of the same mother. Emotionally, the tension between the opposing object relations is difficult for the child to hold together. Klein states that the child may experience depressive anxiety—guilt and terror around the awareness of the destructive tendencies that flow from and toward one’s own mother. When the pain from this anxiety is too great, the child may revert back to the paranoid-schizoid position or develop a manic defense, by denying one’s dependence on the mother and seeking substitutes to fulfill one’s dependency needs.

There may be a connection between ambivalence toward ritual and the need to defend oneself against the experiencing of depressive anxiety. Klein believes that because love and hate are always present in human experience, depressive anxiety and its
accompanying defenses remain throughout the life cycle. In the presence of bipolar archetypal energies in ritualizing, both sides of one’s previously split-off partial objects can be evoked. Thus from Klein’s perspective, ritual may feel threatening in its potential to expose the hatred, anger, and extreme subjective states that underlie depressive anxiety. According to this view, resistance to ritualizing can be seen as a defense against the experiencing of depressive anxiety.

Developmental theorists also look at ambivalence in the mother-child dyad. In Margaret Mahler’s work, ambivalence is seen as the tension in the child’s desire for attachment and simultaneous need to differentiate from the mother. This tension is highlighted in the *rapprochement* phase, in which the child acts out this ambivalence by alternately leaving and returning to the mother’s side.\(^{222}\) John Bowlby observes the ambivalent feelings that children and parents naturally have toward one another. He also notes the ambivalent attachment that can form if the mother’s behavior is unpredictable.\(^{223}\) Hans Loewald states that the naturally occurring, yet oppositional drives for merger and autonomy continue into adulthood.\(^{224}\)

The literature on group psychodynamics points to a connection between the infant’s early experience in relation to the mother and the particular ambivalence that individuals often experience in relation to groups.\(^{225}\) Freud describes a collective identification and regression that occurs in the psychology of groups.\(^{226}\) Kenwyn Smith and David Berg note that individuals who join groups typically experience the wish to be included in the group while simultaneously wanting to maintain one’s separateness from the group.\(^{227}\) This ambivalence triggers fears of both being consumed by the group and being excluded and isolated from it. Smith and Berg see this fusion-abandonment tension
as leading to anxiety and accompanying defense mechanisms, such as splitting and
projection (signaling a reversion to the paranoid-schizoid position) or the range of manic
defenses that divert one’s attention away from the experience of being so deeply affected
by the group. Thus, group dynamics may contribute to the regressive states and
accompanying ambivalence that can be evoked by the opportunity to ritualize.

Archetypal and Transpersonal Perspectives

In contrast to Freudian drive theory and its focus on instincts, Jung views the
psyche as being animated by the interplay of archetypal energies, the elemental patterns
and images that underlie and structure human experience. Ambivalence is intrinsic to
Jung’s description of the archetypes. Each archetype has opposing energies, which can
be viewed in terms of polarities, such as masculine and feminine, light and dark, or
positive and negative. Archetypes also have numerous symbolic representations of
their various aspects, which can be personified as mythological figures. For example, a
group that is ritualizing may evoke the archetype of the Mother in the psyche of each
participant. The particular imagery for each individual emerges from the unique way that
one’s personality and life story intersect with the archetypal patterning held in the
collective unconscious.

According to Jung, when we identify consciously with one pole of the archetype,
the opposite is held in the unconscious as a counterweight. The psyche’s alchemical
work in the individuation process is to hold the tension of these polarities in relation to
each other, allowing the emergence of a third, transcendent function that embraces both
sides of the polarity in consciousness.
With the contemporary development of consciousness, according to Neumann, we have lost the participation mystique that was indicative of early human cultures. He writes, “Whereas, originally, the opposites could function side by side without undue strain and without excluding one another, now, with the development and elaboration of the opposition between conscious and unconscious, they fly apart.” Neumann refers to this process mythically as “the separation of the World Parents.” In his view, it is this division into opposites that leads to a need for rejoining what has been separated, which can occur through religious ritual.

Ken Wilbur writes that the historical development of consciousness involved a differentiation of the mind and the body, which has resulted in the alienation of the self from nature. At the heart of this split are egoic structures that coalesce into a fixed identity, leading to feelings of separateness from the world and from the spontaneous aspects of one’s own body.

Wilbur writes about states of consciousness that transcend these egoic structures, dissolving the boundaries between self and the world. According to Wilbur, the highest form of consciousness brings an awareness of nonduality, in which “reality is neither one nor many, neither permanent nor dynamic, neither separate nor unified, neither pluralistic nor holistic.” He notes that nonduality is at the core of the transcendental essence of many religious traditions, and can be experienced through spiritual practices such as meditation. Language can only point toward an understanding of nonduality through paradoxical or contradictory statements.

Michael Washburn speaks of the ambivalence that can be experienced in the process of spiritual awakening. In agreement with Otto, Washburn writes that an
encounter with the sacred is characterized by a breakdown of the ego, generating ambivalence toward this encounter. In his view, ambivalence functions in the process of spiritual awakening as a dynamic force that can propel individuals toward developing new levels of awareness. If successful in navigating the poles of one’s ambivalence, one emerges with a broader awareness, having pieced together both sides of the split into a more congruent whole.

Similarly, according to emergent systems theory, the dynamic engagement of polarities in a system carries the potential to generate complexity. In this view, disequilibrium is required for the emergence of new configurations. For example, Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern understand contemporary global cultural development as an ambivalent process in which homogenization, degradation, and the loss of diversity is occurring simultaneously with new encounters, syntheses, and diversity. In describing the emergence of an ecological-planetary consciousness that takes humans’ relationship to the planet earth into consideration, Morin and Kern note two paradoxical double imperatives: first, to preserve is to change, and second, to progress is to resist. The authors view these contradictions as catalysts that offer opportunities to generate awareness of a planetary community.

A primal source of human ambivalence may stem from the dual creative and destructive aspect of the cosmos itself. Using the example of the creation of galaxies from supernovas, Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry note how creativity and destruction are inextricably bound together, as it is the violent destruction of old forms that fuels the creation of the new. The authors write that indigenous people had an intuitive sense of
this relationship and their traditions acknowledge the pain that is intrinsic to the creative process.

Swimme and Berry suggest that both the singular pursuit of pain and the singular avoidance of pain are pathological, born of alienation from nature; rather, suffering is an intrinsic part of nature that asks to be listened to and deeply experienced. The authors describe how the rituals of indigenous people served as containers for listening to and experiencing the spontaneity of the universe. They write of the creative resolutions that can emerge from holding the tension of experiencing suffering:

Great art, monumental speculative philosophy, profound institutional and social reform, epochal works of music, and world-transforming technical inventions have been created by individuals stunned by suffering and violence. To eliminate the tension would be to eliminate the beauty.

Formalized research has recently begun to support this view of ambivalence, linking ambivalence to creativity and the process of meaning-making. A study by Christina Fong based on interviews with engineering students working on projects demonstrates that the experience of emotional ambivalence leads to increased creativity when compared with uni-dimensional states such as happiness or sadness. A qualitative study by David Kissane and Brenda Grabsch conducted with cancer patients finds that processes in a supportive-expressive group therapy can transform existential ambivalence into creative living, evidenced by humor, celebration, assertiveness, altruism, new creative pursuits, and eventually, courageous acceptance of dying.

Emily Abbey and Valsiner Jaan report a correlation between ambivalence and the emergence of meanings. The researchers recorded individuals’ responses to a series of five photographs that began with an ambiguous extreme close-up and zoomed out to a clear portrait of a woman. According to the researchers, a lack of ambivalence in one’s
perception leads to a status quo or decline in meaning production, while greater levels of ambivalence catalyze the production of signs from which emergent meanings can be constructed.

Ambivalence in Contemporary Culture

The literature on Ambivalence in Contemporary Culture demonstrates the pervasiveness of ambivalence, especially in the parent-child relationship. Weigert views widespread ambivalence as a central identifying feature of contemporary culture; he attributes this both to the growing complexity and density of experiences in a society that is increasingly pluralistic and multivalent, and to the weakening of effective means for resolving ambivalence.246 Weigert notes that in traditional cultures, ambivalence could be resolved or transcended through collective rituals or overcome by institutional and interactional norms.247 In contrast, he proposes that not only is modern culture increasingly generating ambivalence, but as well, it has lost its means of resolving this ambivalence.248 According to Weigert, collective rituals whose function is to assist in navigating ambivalence are themselves the object of widespread ambivalence. In this view, the decline of effective collective ritualizing both contributes to, and is directly caused by the ambivalence that pervades modern life.249

Since ritualizing generates a field involving parental archetypes, it is important to look at studies and writings on the ambivalence associated with parenting in contemporary culture. In a study based on interviews with mothers of small children, Leon Hoffman finds that mothers commonly experience ambivalence around their own or their child’s aggression.250 Rozsika Parker notes that although a mother’s feeling both
love and hatred toward her child is a normal human condition, the tendency in contemporary culture to portray mothers as either all-good or all-bad prohibits the full discussion and exploration of the ambivalence. This leads to unrealistic expectations of motherhood, as well as guilt and anxiety associated with the mother’s feelings of hatred toward her child. Parker suggests that because ambivalence is not accepted as a normal condition, the hateful feelings are often repressed. She reports that mothers who are able to express their ambivalence in a supportive group environment are often able to discover a sense of new-found freedom and resourcefulness in their parenting.

Several authors offer explanations for the widespread ambivalence toward the role of the father in contemporary culture. Stephen Frosh points out that the dominant imagery of the father in psychoanalytic writing is one of prohibition, of saying ‘no’ to the fantasized union of the mother-child dyad. Rather than being merely restrictive, this frustration is seen as being important for the child to learn the value of limits and to develop a realistic sense of self. Zoja writes that with the loss of initiation in modern culture, the traditional role of the father as initiator has changed into one of material benefactor. He draws a connection between the resulting spiritual impoverishment and the pervasive image in contemporary culture of the Absent Father. Both authors note the ambivalence that fathers have about their roles as well as the ambivalent attitude that contemporary culture holds toward fatherhood.

The ambivalence found in relationships between adult children and their aging parents is the subject of several research studies. In an analysis of adult children’s attitudes toward their aging parents and in-laws, Andrea Wilson, Kim Shuey and Glen Elder report that ambivalence is a common theme. The researchers propose that
ambivalence is a useful concept to bring into therapeutic work with adult children, in that it emphasizes the complexity of family relations and holds the potential for individuals to evaluate relationships as both positive and negative. In a study based on data from focus group interviews with aging parents, Glenna Spitze and Mary Gallant find that parents commonly experience ambivalence toward their adult children, especially around the issue of receiving assistance from their children. According to the researchers, aging parents employ a variety of strategies to deal with the ambivalence that arises from their opposing desires for autonomy and connection with their children.

**Phenomenology of Ambivalence**

The literature points toward complexities in the way that ambivalence can be experienced or observed. One factor in constructing a phenomenology of ambivalence is the variation in how the term is understood. Several writers observe that the psychological definitions of ambivalence often differ greatly from the way the term is commonly used to describe having mixed feelings, or experiencing ambiguity in one's feelings toward someone or something. Parker suggests that the unacceptability of hateful feelings may have contributed to the widespread misuse of the term. Shapiro agrees that the current usage of the term plays down the emotional underpinnings that are essential to the psychological definition. He also notes that the etymology of the word emphasizes the compatibility between the forces. *Ambi* means “both” and *valence*, a physics term that refers to the combining power of an electron, comes from the Latin, *valēre*, meaning “to be strong.” According to Shapiro, this etymology suggests the two sides of ambivalence, although strong in opposite ways, are reciprocally influential.
Several authors write about the difficulties involved in both experiencing and conducting research into the phenomenology of ambivalence.\textsuperscript{262} Shapiro notes that in Freud’s use of the term, the feelings associated with this ambivalence are normally not experienced consciously. A person with ambivalent feelings may not be aware of either of the feeling states separately, or of the contradictory relationship between the opposite feelings. A research study conducted by Irwin Katz finds that socialization encourages the expression of friendly, positive feelings and attitudes, and the suppression of hostile or negative feelings and attitudes.\textsuperscript{263} Katz finds that the negative pole of ambivalence tends to be more unconscious and covert, and recommends research methods that uncover these attitudes through indirect means, such as through observing nonverbal behavior.\textsuperscript{264}

According to Shapiro, the phenomenon of ambivalence is difficult both to experience within oneself and to observe in others, as it involves a complex relationship between unconscious structures.\textsuperscript{265} To understand it, the observer needs to draw inferences and make interpretations of certain behaviors. Shapiro gives the example of a client’s over concern for the well-being of a loved one that gets interpreted by an analyst as a reaction formation manifesting out of the repression of hateful feelings toward the other. In all likelihood, the client will not be aware of feeling hatred toward the other; nor will they necessarily experience their level of concern for the other as being shaped by unconscious forces. In this case, ambivalence does not manifest overtly as the expression of opposing feelings. Rather, it is a psychological structure that can only be seen through the analyst’s inferences and interpretations of the client’s behavior.\textsuperscript{266}

The literature suggests that the simultaneity of opposing feelings involved in ambivalence is problematic for inquiring into its phenomenology. Shapiro considers that
strong feelings of love and hatred toward another at the same moment to be an inconceivable proposition.\textsuperscript{267} Fong calls attention to recent developments in emotions research suggesting that at times, individuals can experience opposing emotions simultaneously; however, she notes the tendency toward experiencing one’s emotions uni-dimensionally.\textsuperscript{268} Katz posits that one’s conflicted feelings toward another could be perceived within oneself as insincere or inconsistent, generating a defensive reaction to this potential threat to one’s self-esteem.\textsuperscript{269} He reflects that in the psychoanalytic literature, a frequent type of defense is the suppression of one pole of the ambivalence and the amplification of the other side, making one’s overall felt experience more congruent and uni-dimensional.\textsuperscript{270}

Because of the challenges involved both in experiencing and documenting the complex phenomenon of ambivalence, Shapiro recommends a research approach that centers on paying careful attention to one’s moment-to-moment experiences, by tracking one’s own somatic responses.\textsuperscript{271} In an effort to unpack the phenomenology of ambivalence, Shapiro uses his own lived experience of sitting down to write a lecture in order to tease apart the many levels of desire and resistance in this activity that manifest for him as bodily sensations. This type of inquiry requires careful self-reflection on one’s experience. Slowing down the process seems to be an effective means of increasing self-reflection. In his research on clients’ perceptions of therapeutic resistance, Caputo finds that it is helpful to slow down the therapy process to allow for clients’ reflections on their experience. This reflection brings consciousness about ambivalence that had previously remained outside of clients’ awareness.\textsuperscript{272}
Conclusion

The literature on ambivalence follows the trajectory of the literature on psychological perspectives on the sacred, further defining a connection between ambivalence and transference. Psychoanalytic and object relations theorists propose how early childhood experiences, especially those in relation to one’s primary caregivers, can form the basis for the psychological structures that characterize ambivalence in adult life. The relationship to archetypal energies that occurs in ritualizing can be understood as paralleling the development of object relations in early childhood.

Theorists of various backgrounds view ambivalence as a dynamic source that holds the potential to generate growth and change. From this perspective, ritual can be understood as a form that allows one to reflexively experience and express the ambivalence. However, studies on the phenomenology of ambivalence suggest that ambivalence is a complex psychological structure that is neither easily experienced nor easily observed, due to the tendency for individuals to repress one pole of the ambivalence.

Shapiro demonstrates the need for an effective inquiry into the phenomenology of ambivalence to be grounded in the moment-to-moment felt experiences of participants. Although a review of the literature on ambivalence yields several formalized research studies that elucidate various aspects of ambivalence, there are none that focus on the moment-to-moment felt experiences of participants. Additionally, while the literature on ambivalence further supports a theoretical connection between ambivalence and the sacred, the experience of ambivalence toward the sacred is currently unexplored by
research that is conducted within a participatory paradigm. The particular nature of the ambivalence that surfaces in participation in sacred ritual remains a genuine unknown. This gap in the existing literature justifies the need for a participatory study that seeks to understand the imaginal structures that are associated with contemporary ambivalence toward ritual.

The literature on ambivalence describes the tendency of adults in contemporary culture to repress one pole of the ambivalence. The potential to uncover these repressed feelings through ritual may generate discomfort and anxiety, resulting in resistance to participating in ritual. It is important to look more closely at the specific dynamics that can be constituted at the threshold to ritual, by reviewing the literature on creative play and its relation to ritual ambivalence.

Creative Play: Engaging the Polarities

Introduction

Ritual has often been described as sacred play, and as discussed earlier in this chapter, contemporary ritualizing often emphasizes creative and spontaneous elements. In order to better understand the imaginal structures that may be associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual, it is necessary to take a closer look at the dynamics involved in creative play and how they contribute to the experience of ritual.

The four subclusters in this review of the literature on creative play are entitled: Ritual as Play, Psychology of the Play Experience, Expressive Arts and The Creative Process, and Adult Resistance to Play. The review of the literature on play begins with an overview of anthropological writings that demonstrate the connection between ritual
and play. Following this is a discussion of the concept of a symbolic play space that supports transformative processes in ritual. The play space that is constituted in group ritual is dramatic, symbolic, and relational.

Writings from the field of expressive arts therapy are reviewed in order to look more closely at the transformative nature of the arts, especially drama, in ritual. Finally, the particular challenges that adults face in participating in play are discussed. As the theories in this cluster are reviewed, they are related to an understanding of what constitutes the desire for ritual and the resistance toward ritual. In this way, the review of the literature on creative play can contribute to an understanding of what is known about ritual ambivalence.

**Ritual as Play**

In order to establish a conceptual framework in which to discuss the literature on creative play and its relationship to ritual, this section begins with the work of Johan Huizinga. In *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Huizinga offers a view of play as a distinct activity that is both universal and essential to human culture. In his view, it is the act of play that nurtures human expression toward social and cultural development. Citing the ubiquity of play in the animal world and among children, Huizinga speculates that play must have preceded culture, and that all of the institutions of culture “are rooted in the primeval soil of play.” In describing the nature and significance of play in human culture, he repeatedly brings up the concept of ritual as sacred play. In reviewing the parallels that Huizinga draws between play and ritual,
the tensions and polarities in the play space that may point toward a source of ambivalence are highlighted.

Huizinga describes play as being consciously offset from ordinary life, with its own particular rules and temporal and spatial boundaries.²⁷⁶ Within the rules and boundaries of the playground, he sees play as functioning to create a temporary sense of order amidst the chaos of the outside world. Huizinga writes that in the sacred play of ritual, it is especially important to mark a boundary around the play space, in order to consecrate it as hallowed ground that is qualitatively different than the world outside.²⁷⁷

Several writers agree with Huizinga about the necessity for creating a sense of a boundary in order for an individual to determine that it is safe to cross over the threshold into play. For example, Eliade speaks of the need to consecrate a space in preparation for ritual, to maintain a sense of order that can hold chaos without becoming overrun by it.²⁷⁸ Stephen Nachmanovitch notes that creative practice requires ritual preparation, some structured form that allows the creative process to emerge. He writes: “These rituals and preparations function to discharge and clear obscurations and nervous doubts, to invoke our muses however we may conceive them, to open our capacities of mediumship and concentration, and to stabilize our person for the challenges ahead.”²⁷⁹

In Huizinga’s view, ritual is a particular type of dramatic play that although offset from ordinary life, reproduces the natural order of the cosmos. The dramatic element in ritual functions more than merely as a means for symbolic representation; he posits that through active participation in the play, worshippers in a ritual enter into a mystic identification with the sacred in which distinctions between reality and illusion break down.²⁸⁰
Huizinga suggests that the experience of mystic identification that occurs in deep participation in ritual can best be understood in terms of the fluid boundaries between belief and make-believe that are found in play activities. He notes that in both children’s play and adults’ rituals, the engaged player can be swept up in a play activity with utter earnestness, screaming as if being chased by a lion, and at the same time, maintain a sense of awareness that the person wearing a lion’s mask is not really a lion.

Huizinga calls attention to a tension in ritual around volition. He makes the claim that all play is voluntary, and that the freedom that is experienced in the activity is a central characteristic of play. The exception that Huizinga gives to this rule concerns ritual. He writes, “Only when play is a recognized cultural function—a rite, a ceremony—is it bound up with notions of obligation and duty.” Although it is clear that Huizinga is not referring to more spontaneous and creative forms of ritualizing, the tension that he points toward around whether one’s participation is voluntary or obligatory may shape some of the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual.

Roger Caillois builds upon Huizinga’s concepts by classifying play activities into four categories based on the way that they give order to the chaos in the outside world: agón (competition), alea (chance), mimicry (simulation), and ilinx (vertigo). He describes ritual as play that involves a combination of simulation and vertigo, in which participants mimic the identity of divine beings and experience altered states through a variety of means. Caillois calls attention to the polarity of rule-based play versus spontaneous play. This polarity is pertinent to contemporary ritual, which can involve the promotion of spontaneous play within a formal structure.
Erikson, also drawing on the similarities between ritual and play, offers a developmental theory that connects childhood play with adult capacities to participate in ritual. According to Erikson, rituals function as creative formalizations that help individuals overcome the ambivalence that is inherent to human growth and development. He views the life cycle as a series of psychosocial crises, each with its own ambivalent state. Borrowing a term that Julian Huxley uses to describe the genetically imprinted ceremonial actions of various animals, Erikson describes ritualizations in human development as biologically based childhood behaviors that enable the individual to encounter this ambivalence in an adaptive, flexible manner, thus providing safe passage through a series of successive crises. For example, there is the potential for misattunement between a mother and her infant. The bonding behaviors that they participate in together favor the possibility that the mother will be able to “read” the infant and attune to the infant’s needs.

Erikson writes that each stage-specific ritualization is linked to the development of a particular capacity for participating in the adult play of ritual. In the same example, the bonding behavior between mother and infant contains a mutuality of recognition that cultivates the grown child’s potential to bring a numinous element to ritual later in life. According to Erikson, ritualizations in later stages of childhood cultivate the capacity to bring judicious, dramatic, formal and ideological elements to adult ritual play.

Erikson contrasts this healthy development of ritual behaviors with various stage-specific ritualisms, in which the playful aspect of ritualizing is lost and behavior becomes habitual and obsessive. These ritualisms develop out of disruptions in the child’s ritualized play. Erikson writes that if the bonding behaviors between mother and infant
are disrupted, the grown child’s capacity to bring a numinous quality to ritual will be limited. Rather, a ritualism that Erikson calls *idolism* will develop, in which the individual becomes lost in idealized adulation, either of an object or of oneself. This process parallels Freud’s conceptualization of how trauma in the oral stage can develop into an oral fixation later in life, such as an addiction or narcissistic condition.

**Psychology of the Play Experience**

Winnicott articulates several concepts that illuminate the psychology of the play experience. From his work with children, Winnicott views play as being central to forming healthy object relations in the psychological maturation process. He conceptualizes the physical objects that children form strong attachments to as *transitional objects*, which form an essential bridge to the child’s growing awareness of, and relationship to, the outer world. Winnicott emphasizes the paradoxical nature of the child’s relation to transitional objects: The child may perceive the object as being both “me” and “not-me,” and as something which the child has both created and found. In playing with the object, the child has the opportunity to explore polarities such as attachment and separation.

From this idea of transitional objects, Winnicott develops the concept of a *transitional space* that is catalyzed in play activities, referring to an intermediary zone between inner and outer realities that serves as a creative matrix in which psychological growth can occur. In the sense that transitional space connects inner and outer worlds, it can be thought of as a relational aspect of the imagination, a combination of introversion and extroversion. Winnicott points out that in its variability, transitional
space is qualitatively different than either inner psychic reality or outer reality, both of
which are relatively fixed.296

Winnicott sees transitional space as the basis of the cultural life of adults, as well
as children. He writes, “This intermediate area of experience… throughout life is
retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to
imaginative living, and to creative scientific work.” 297 Winnicott draws a connection
between early childhood experiences and the adult’s capacity to experience life within the
realm of transitional space. Similar to Erikson, he claims that the development of the
adult play capacity originates in the trust developed in infancy in the reliability of the
mother or primary caregiver. To the extent that the early formation of trust is impeded,
there may be limitations in the adult capacity to experience life in the creative realm of
transitional space.298

Transitional space parallels Turner’s concept of liminal space. Turner builds on
the work of van Gennep, who presents a three-phase schema of rites of passage. In this
model, the middle “liminal” phase represents the part of a death-rebirth process where the
participant has lost an old identity, but has not yet been reborn into a new identity.299
Turner describes liminal space as a container that coalesces in ritualizing in which fixed
roles and structures are broken down, and new ones can emerge.300 This is a “betwixt
and between” place that he compares to a womb out of which new combinations and
possibilities can emerge. In this view, liminal space can be understood as the container
that allows for the transformation of personal identity and social structures.301 It is, in
essence, the playground for ritual experience.
Turner describes a relational phenomenon that occurs in liminal space whereby the social distinctions regarding role, power, wealth and social position are temporarily suspended. He refers to this mode of social relationships as *communitas*, a state of communal bonding achieved through the transcending of individual differences among ritual participants who are in connection to the sacred.\textsuperscript{302}

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi refers to enjoyable learning activities as *optimal experiences*, marked by a state of *flow*—an individual’s total involvement and presence in the activity. Drawing on the theories of Huizinga and Caillois, he suggests that play allows for optimal experience by providing a limited focus within which the chaos of the larger world can be ordered. This opens up opportunities for learning, mastery, and a sense of deepening one’s participation in life.\textsuperscript{303} Csikszentmihalyi writes that religious rituals are usually conducive to producing a flow experience and notes that Turner views the pervasiveness of ritual in traditional cultures as an indication that the opportunity to experience flow was socially sanctioned.\textsuperscript{304}

According to Csikszentmihalyi, optimal experience is favored when the skills of the player are reasonably matched to the challenges of the activity.\textsuperscript{305} If the challenges are too great for the player’s skills, the activity will generate anxiety. On the other hand, if the challenges are too low, this will generate boredom. Csikszentmihalyi describes a *flow channel* that navigates a path between anxiety and boredom, in which a series of increasing challenges are met with the player’s acquiring new skills to meet those challenges. His research shows that being in this flow channel:

… provided a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality. It pushed the person to higher levels of performance, and led to previously undreamed of states of consciousness. In short, it transformed the self
by making it more complex. In this growth of the self lies the key to flow activities.\textsuperscript{306}

Csikszentmihalyi finds that certain factors favor and limit one’s experience of flow. He describes optimal experience as being an end in itself, intrinsically rewarding, and done because it is enjoyable. Thus, individuals who are too focused on results over process have difficulty entering into a flow experience.\textsuperscript{307} Csikszentmihalyi also recognizes the importance of having a clear means of feedback in a flow activity.

Several writers discuss creative and improvisational play as a means of human development. Nachmanovitch writes that creative play can function as a catalyst for growth and development by creating experiences that combine enjoyment with learning.\textsuperscript{308} In a dissertation study based on interviews with improvising musicians, Lewis Jordan similarly finds that in improvisational play, there is a self-reflexive feedback loop in which one learns from witnessing one’s own creative expression.\textsuperscript{309} Phillip Mirvis notes the importance of improvisation in human evolution, as the ability to “make something up” is central to the development of adaptive capacities. Mirvis asserts that improvisation provides the opportunity to practice navigating through paradoxes such as collective individuality and planned serendipity.\textsuperscript{310} Mary Crossan views improvisation as a means of catalyzing renewal in an organization. In describing the effects of an improvisation workshop for managers, she links improvisational play to the development of abilities such as interpreting the environment, cultivating leadership, fostering teamwork, and assessing organizational culture.\textsuperscript{311}
**Expressive Arts and the Creative Process**

It is generally understood that the expressive arts—drama, music, movement, art, and poetry—have their source in ritual. Many expressive arts therapists theorize that the use of the arts for healing originated in the ancient practices of shamanistic ritual, and construe their clinical work as a contemporary form of shamanism that draws heavily on the use of creative ritual. In inquiring into the nature of ritual ambivalence, it is important to understand what is said in the literature about the role of the expressive arts in ritual. As well, this body of literature can illuminate contemporary views and beliefs about the arts that may shape participation in a creative process.

Paolo Knill writes, “The practice of the arts, as disciplined rituals of play… is and always was a safe container, a secure vessel to meet existential themes, pathos, and mystery.” Arthur Robbins concurs that engaging in the expressive arts in the context of therapy offer patients an empathetic holding environment in which the patient’s object relations are expressed through their imagery. According to Robbins, therapy provides an opportunity for an individual to witness one’s own expressions and move toward integration.

Knill notes that engagement in an arts process forms a play space for the imagination to speak to us within, expressing itself through images. For Knill, the images that emerge constitute an *imaginal reality* that is distinct from both *literal reality* (the daily world occurrences) and *effective reality* (one’s subjective view of literal reality). Knill observes that imaginal reality is commonly thought of as “unreal,” suggesting the pervasive devaluing of the imagination in modern life. It should be noted that Knill’s use of the term “imaginal reality” defers from Omer’s
conceptualization, which is that every experience is imaginal. Omer writes that “creating a privileged or marginalized category of experience by using the adjective of imaginal misses the imaginal nature of all experience.”

This contemporary division between literal and imaginal reality is one of the many splits that engagement in expressive arts processes can help to bridge. Natalie Rogers writes, “It seems to be part of the human condition to be pulled in two directions at once… Using the expressive arts creates the opportunity for us to discover, integrate, and transcend those inner polarities.” She notes the shame and fear that many individuals have about uncovering and expressing unconscious material. Rogers writes that when one’s shadow material is given a voice symbolically through the arts, it relieves the necessity to act out the impulse in a violent and destructive way, instead transforming into an agent for change that gives a new perspective and propels one toward healing.

Shaun McNiff notes that the fear of madness has the effect of keeping many individuals at a distance from the imagination, resulting in resistance to entering into an arts process. Others have suggested to him that expressive arts processes promote craziness and becoming stuck in a quagmire of feelings, to which he replies:

“The feelings and imaginal realities are here, whether or not we are aware of them… As long as you are in contact with the immediate environment, imaginal and physical, there will be no chaos. Craziness comes when you try to be somewhere other than where you are, where you turn against the soul’s intentions.”

Ritual often involves the expression of imagination through embodied physical actions. Daria Halprin says that to be embodied means “to feel one’s self through bodily felt responses in the moment.” She notes the split between body and mind that is
common to individuals in modern culture and writes that giving physical expression to affects, feelings, and impulses through movement has the effect of connecting the body, mind, and spirit. Joan Chodorow finds that the vivid sensory-motor awareness involved in embodied experience can evoke the complexes of early childhood. She writes that the symbolic workings of the imagination not only lead one to the emotional core of a complex; it can also lead one through it.

Of all of the expressive arts modalities, it is perhaps drama that is most closely associated with ritual. Jerzy Grotowski looks at ritual as sacred dramatic play. He views ritualizing as a means of developing the holy actor, one who performs actions from the core, authentic self. These actions arise through the via negativa, which is based not on the acquisition of skills, but rather, the eradication of blocks that prevent authentic expression. Growtowski views ritual theater as a vehicle by which one’s core sacred identity can break through the veneer of one’s secular identity:

We fight then to discover the truth about ourselves: to tear away the masks behind which we hide daily. We see theatre as a place of provocation… Theatre only has meaning if it allows us to transcend our stereotyped vision, our conventional feelings and customs, so that we may experience what is real.

Growtowski sees the habitual focus on interpersonal communication as a hindrance that can prevent participants in ritual from achieving authentic communion. He claims that individuals in modern culture are generally not practiced in the transpersonal communication that ritualizing calls for. Grotowski speaks of the necessity for practices that support the development of each participant’s solitude within the presence of the group. He sees ritual not only as an act of communion, but also as a practice, a means of developing one’s capacity to effectively participate in communion.
David Read Johnson similarly views the play space as holding the potential for an embodied encounter with the Other. He discusses the heightened awareness of the Other in relational play, and the fear and anxiety that can be experienced around intimacy and being seen. Johnson’s research reveals the ambivalence that is generally felt toward having an embodied encounter—a mix of desire and fear of intimacy. He discerns four levels of play that progress toward deepening levels of embodiment and tolerance for intimacy: (1) Surface play, involving social stereotypes and general topics, (2) Persona play, involving personal roles and life stories, (3) Intimate play, involving thoughts and feelings about the interpersonal relationship; and (4) Deep play, involving a level of shared presence and receptivity that is analogous to the communion that is experienced by Grotowski’s holy actor. This level of play is similar to Turner’s description of communitas and could be characterized as well by Buber’s I-Thou relationship.

Adam and Allee Blatner describe the potential of improvisational play to provide the actor with opportunities to try out new roles and identities. They also note an inherent paradox of dramatic play, of being real and not real at the same time. The Blatners suggest that play can be pleasurable in allowing the actor control over manipulating this inconsistency. By entering fully into an “as if” subjunctive play space, the actor can transcend the paradox. On the other hand, the tension in play of being both real and not real may generate further ambivalence about play.

Huizinga posits that conceptual frames such as identity, image, and symbol and distinctions between being and playing make it difficult for individuals in contemporary society to understand the experience of mystic identification in ritual that was readily accessible to individuals in traditional cultures. These conceptual frames and
distinctions may contribute to resistance and limitations around entering deeply into
dramatic play.

**Adult Resistance to Play**

The literature on Adult Resistance to Play describes the particular challenges that
adults face in participating in play. For example, adults can hold negative beliefs and
attitudes about play that result in resistance to play. Johnson notes the social constraints
regarding adults’ expressions both of seriousness and playfulness. He writes, “To be
serious is often seen as a sign of anxiety, difficulty, or rigidity; while being too playful
leads to not being believed, trusted, or authorized.” Sandra Shelley finds that a sense
of over-responsibility and judgments about play as being frivolous or dangerous can
serve as barriers to play. Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi reports that any preoccupation
with the self inhibits the experience of flow. He suggests that the attention to how one is
perceived by others is a psychic drain that prevents entry into the play experience.

Several authors connect experiences in childhood to adult attitudes toward play.
If the adult’s play capacity has not been sufficiently developed in childhood, the
opportunity to play may be resisted or avoided. As discussed earlier, Erikson connects
disruptions in a developmental play sequence in childhood as leading to maladaptive
behaviors that limit the adult’s capacity to play. According to Erikson, the primary core
pathologies that form out of childhood play disruption are: withdrawal, compulsion,
inhibition, and inertia. Disruption during the infant’s early ritualized play with the
mother is linked to pervasive withdrawal in later life. Impulsivity and compulsion are
seen as emerging out of conflicts during the formation of a sense of self-will in the anal
stage. Inhibition is the result of the limitations on the child’s initiative that are rooted in a conflicted oedipal stage. Inertia, or a sense of paralysis, is the result of a disruption in the process of developing competent mastery during school age. These core-pathologies serve as defenses that can limit the adult’s participation in relational play, or if they are severe enough, prevent one from playing with others altogether.  

Omer considers play disruption to be a traumatic experience, one that leads to the formation of gatekeeping that restricts one’s experience of play later in life. Omer defines gatekeeping as follows:

Gatekeeping refers to the individual and collective dynamics that resist and restrict experience. The term gatekeepers refers to the personification of these dynamics. Cultural Gatekeepers restrict experience; cultural leaders catalyze the deepening and diversification of experience.

Shelley finds that adult play experiences can evoke highly subjective states, triggered by memories of childhood play that was traumatic or painful in various ways. Alongside of this, she notes the powerful longing to connect to others that can be evoked through play. Shelley’s research indicates a complex around the adult play experience—a basic human desire to play that coexists with fear and anxiety, catalyzing resistance to, or avoidance of play. She finds that a functioning play space has the capacity to hold the ambiguity and vicissitudes of one’s experience, to allow the polarities associated with this complex to emerge into consciousness, allowing for exploration and psychological growth.

Michael Apter writes that the phenomenological experience of play often involves a sense of being close to danger. He sees this proximity to danger is an effective way to generate excitement, and thus interest in the play experience. Apter imagines a protective frame that bounds the play space, creating an enchanted zone in which the
player feels that although there is the possibility of danger, no harm can come. The protective frame allows a player to enjoy the arousal caused by the danger, rather than the anxiety or fear which might be experienced without the frame.\textsuperscript{343} It also holds the player close enough to the danger, so that the player does not become bored or detached.

Similarly, Winnicott speaks of a zone of safety that is required for the child to be able to enter into a transitional space. This involves the internalization of the security and reliability provided by the parental relationship.\textsuperscript{344} Winnicott writes of the need for an individual to assess the safety of the container before entering into ritual or any play space.

This assessment can serve the purpose of allowing one to determine whether there is sufficient trust to support one’s participation. Omer states that entering deeply into the play space of ritual requires \textit{ritual trust}, which he defines as “trust engendered through participation in ritual that enables a temporary submerging of differences, ambivalences, and conflict, liberating a revitalized Eros within the relationship or group.”\textsuperscript{345} According to Omer, with ritual trust one can temporarily suspend one’s ambivalence and move toward deeper participation in ritual despite the threat this entails to one’s personal identity.\textsuperscript{346}

Creativity may be necessary in ritualizing on account of the dynamic of approaching a taboo. As discussed in the beginning of the chapter, Freud views traditional ritual as an ineffective attempt to mediate an inner conflict that arises around a taboo. Gay argues that Freud presents a pathological view of ritual in the context of promoting psychoanalysis as an effective means of working through the ambivalence that arises in approaching a taboo.\textsuperscript{347} The taboos that can be approached in psychoanalysis
are those associated with the Oedipal complex, the repressed murderous or incestuous impulses that are transferred onto the therapist. Freud therefore set out to develop a creative form that would favor the fostering of the transference. By seating himself close to, but just out of the view of the patient and encouraging the patient to relax and free associate, Freud discovered a creative means through which these dangerous taboo impulses could be symbolically expressed in a safe way.

Omer notes that as one approaches a taboo, one’s gatekeepers can become extremely active, in order to restrict one’s experience. The challenges inherent in approaching the sacred through ritualizing may necessitate a relation to the Trickster.

Rafael López-Pedraza speaks of the role of Hermes, a Trickster figure, in effecting any psychic movement. As Hermes is the messenger of the Gods, he can transit between various positions in the imagination, using fantasy to avoid getting caught in a fixed position. Omer refers to the need for the creative transgression of taboo in order to affect psychic movement and catalyze psychological leadership on an individual or collective level. In the same light, Growtowski writes, “Creativity does not mean using our daily masks but rather to make exceptional situations where our masks do not function.” In both Omer’s and Growtowski’s view, ritual play involves a creative transgression of cultural norms. The transgressive nature of ritual could evoke an ambivalent stance when the opportunity to engage in deep, authentic play arises.

Conclusion

The cluster of literature on creative play provides further elucidation of the phenomenological experience of participating in ritual. The literature points to a
connection between the play of adults as ritual, and child’s play. Concepts such as
Winnicott’s *transitional space* and Turner’s *liminal space* illustrate the potential for ritual
to serve as a creative play space that can contain the ambivalence associated with being
in relation to archetypal energies. The ambiguities of roles, symbols, and structures that
are characteristic of improvisational play allow for learning and development throughout
the life cycle.

At the same time, creative play can be challenging for many adults. Several
writers find that contemporary attitudes and beliefs about play and the creative process
may limit participation in play. This cluster reveals the particular challenges adults in
modern culture may face in participating in creative play, including issues around:
intimacy, embodiment, authenticity, creativity, and imagination. Thus, the literature
suggests an additional source of ritual ambivalence that may be rooted in a complex
around creative play.

The literature on creative play adds an important component to the theoretical
foundation that underlies an understanding of ritual ambivalence. However, a search of
this literature yields little formalized research on the experience of adults’ participation in
creative play. The writings of expressive arts therapists are useful in portraying the
challenges that adults face in participating in clinical expressive arts processes that are
analogous to creative ritual. Still, these writings are not based upon formalized research.
They tend to be anecdotal observations and do not address the inner experience of
ambivalence. The only participatory research on play is by Shelley, who conducted her
research at the Institute. Her learnings of a basic human desire to play that coexists with
resistance to play, provides an important foundation for a participatory study on ritual ambivalence.

**Chapter Conclusion**

This review of the literature provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the phenomenon of ritual ambivalence. The cluster of literature on ritual describes the ways that ritual has traditionally functioned in human culture. Ritual is seen as an embodied symbolic action that brings one into relationship with the sacred. Several theorists view ritual as a container for holding polarities, allowing for psychological growth and development.

The loss of traditional ritual in contemporary culture is seen alongside the recent emergence of postmodern forms of ritualizing that draw upon traditional forms in novel and creative ways. A discussion of markedly divergent attitudes toward ritual points toward the phenomenon of contemporary ambivalence toward ritual. Psychoanalytic theory speaks directly to the relationship between ritual and ambivalence. While Freud sees ritual as an attempt to overcome an internal ambivalence that arises around a taboo associated with the sacred, Erikson views ritual as a healthy means of working through challenges associated with developmental stages.

The literature on psychological perspectives on the sacred reveals the inherent paradoxes and contradictions in the experience of the sacred that give rise to the natural human phenomenon of ambivalence toward the sacred. The development of ritual in early human cultures is contrasted with the widespread desacralization among adults in modern culture. This loss of the recognition and relation to the sacred may contribute to
feelings of ambivalence toward ritual, in which a primary function is to reconnect
humans with the sacred.

Psychoanalytic theorists draw a connection between an adult’s relation to the
sacred and the transference that develops out of the relationship to parental figures in
childhood. Archetypal theorists describe a bipolar relationship to the archetypal Mother
and Father that constitutes psyche’s relationship to the sacred. These approaches suggest
that ambivalence associated with parental figures is a central component of the
relationship to the sacred that is constituted in ritual.

The literature on ambivalence further reveals the dynamics of early childhood
relationships that are seen as the source of ambivalence in adult life. The relationship to
archetypal energies that occurs in ritualizing can be understood in parallel to the
development of object relations in early childhood. Theorists of various backgrounds
view ambivalence as a dynamic source that holds the potential to generate growth and
change. From this perspective, ritual functions as a form that allows one to reflexively
experience and express the ambivalence. However, the potential to uncover these
repressed feelings through ritual may generate discomfort and anxiety, manifesting as
resistance to ritual.

The cluster of literature on creative play illuminates in greater detail the
phenomenological experience of participating in ritual. Theorists draw a connection
between ritual and play, and illustrate the potential for ritual to serve as a creative play
space that can contain the ambivalence associated with being in relation to archetypal
energies. At the same time, this cluster reveals the particular challenges adults in modern
culture may face in participating in creative play, including issues around: intimacy,
embodiment, authenticity, creativity, and imagination. Thus, the literature suggests an additional source of ritual ambivalence that may be rooted in a complex around creative play. In the end, this cluster returns to the beginning of the literature review, by recognizing the taboo associated with relating to the sacred through ritual. Several writers propose that approaching a taboo through creative play can result in psychological growth and development.

Although the literature supports a theoretical understanding of various components that may contribute to ritual ambivalence, this is a complex phenomenon that has not been researched in the participatory paradigm using live experience. To date, the question of what the imaginal structures are that characterize the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual remains a genuine unknown. This lack of formal research on ritual ambivalence represents a significant gap in the literature. A study that focuses on the phenomenology of ritual ambivalence provides a useful complement to the foundation of theoretical knowledge that has been reviewed in this chapter.

Given the pervasiveness of the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual, the general lack of scholarship on this topic is noteworthy. For example, Freud’s and Erikson’s theories on the psychological relationship between ritual and ambivalence are largely overlooked in the Ritual Studies literature. In general, ambivalence is rarely mentioned in writings on ritual. Although scholars commonly agree on the essential importance of ritual, the questions of why many individuals in modern culture are averse to ritualizing or how to effectively deepen participation in ritual remain largely unanswered. These questions are beyond the scope of this study, but a formal inquiry into the ways in which ritual ambivalence can be imagined is a step in the right direction.
There may be several reasons why, in spite of the widespread ritual ambivalence in contemporary culture, this phenomenon remains largely unstudied. One reason is the lack of formal research on the phenomenology of contemporary ritualizing. As discussed in the review of the literature on ritual, the vast majority of the writings on ritual focus on traditional religious and cultural rituals. These writings tend to be theoretical and anecdotal, based on fieldwork observations of traditional rituals.

It is only recently that scholars have begun to look at contemporary ritual practices. As is the case with studies of traditional ritual, academic writings on this topic continue to focus on theory and critical analysis. Within this emerging area of inquiry, there are only a handful of formalized research studies that attempt to elucidate the phenomenology of the experiences of individuals who participate in contemporary ritual, such as the studies conducted by Hurst, Moyer, and Davidson described earlier. The few studies in this area such as these were not designed to gather data specifically on ambivalence or resistance to ritual. In none of them does ambivalence emerge as a major theme.

For example, in seeking to understand the experience of group ritual work within a contemporary context for individuals without formal ties to a particular spiritual tradition, Hurst interviewed 12 adults, who each described a prior personal group ritual experience of their choosing. Out of a narrative analysis, she extracted eight themes that illustrate the values and meanings of the group ritual experiences. Although her learnings are rich, they are based solely on others’ prior positive experiences with ritual, and ambivalence is hardly mentioned.
I suspect that one of the primary reasons why ambivalence did not surface in this study or other studies on contemporary ritual is the difficulty involved in both consciously experiencing and observing the phenomenon of ambivalence. As discussed in the review of the cluster of literature on ambivalence, this is a complex phenomenon that often remains hidden in the unconscious. Essentially, this is data that is not accessible to normative identity.

Thus, the research methodology by which the data is collected and analyzed is of crucial importance. The studies by Hurst, Moyer, and Davidson are typical of the research on contemporary ritual in that they utilize a constructivist research paradigm, in which knowledge is constructed from a group of individuals’ narratives about their prior experiences. The Research Problem that informs the collection of data in my study is: What are the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual? The data I am seeking on ritual ambivalence requires evoking and expressing the experience of ritual ambivalence in real time. The elusive, hidden nature of ambivalence calls for a study in the participatory paradigm that evokes the experience of ritual ambivalence and invites the expression of this experience in the moment. Through such an inquiry, valid and reliable data on the imaginal structures that characterize the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual can be gathered.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

The Research Problem in this inquiry is: What are the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual? The guiding hypothesis in the research is as follows: The contemporary ambivalence toward ritual is a symptom of the dissociation between the Mother principle and the Father principle and arises out of a cultural and archetypal taboo associated with ritual.

For this study, I utilized Imaginal Inquiry, a distinct research methodology developed by Omer, which is congruent with the orientation of Imaginal Psychology and situated in the participatory paradigm. Along with two co-researchers, I collected data in two group meetings, attended by 10 research participants. The two data collection meetings both took place in November 2004 at the Flood Building, a professional building in downtown San Francisco. The participants were an ethnically diverse group of five women and five men, ranging in age from 27 to 57. All of the participants who were selected for this study expressed their willingness to explore their personal relation to ritual, as well as their conscious desire to bring ritual more fully into their lives. All of the activities in the group meetings are listed as Conceptual and Chronological Outlines (Appendices 3 and 4).

Imaginal Inquiry involves four phases: evoking, expressing, interpreting, and integrating experience. In the case of my study, I gathered data on participants’
experiences of their own desire and resistance toward ritual. Although the participants had generally expressed a very positive relationship toward ritual during the screening process, my hunch as a researcher was that each of them carried an unconscious resistance to ritual alongside their conscious desire. In order to evoke the experience of ritual ambivalence, I gave each group member the opportunity to speak aloud about how they had been affected by previous experiences with ritual, both positively and negatively. I further evoked the experience of ritual ambivalence by inviting the group to ritualize together during the group meeting.

I provided opportunities for the expression of ritual ambivalence by encouraging participants to bring forward the various reactions they had to the invitation through group discussions, written responses to questions, written reflexive dialogues, and group enactments. I arranged these activities in an order of increasing emotional intensity that provided support for participants to explore and express their own internal ambivalence in relation to ritual. I recorded the data collection meetings on videotape and audiotape, which I later transcribed. The participants’ journals, including their reflexive dialogues and their written responses to questions, were collected at the end of the first data collection meeting.

In my analysis of the data, I identified key moments in the transcriptions through intuitive and condensation approaches. Interpretations emerged from my own affective responses to these key moments. My learnings are contextualized within various theories from Imaginal Psychology as well as the mythic structure of the Jacob and Esau story.

In order to have a diversity of perspectives from which to analyze the data, I conducted the research with the support of two co-researchers, Ruth Kalter and Tim
Willison, who went through coursework with me at the Institute. At the time of the study, the three of us had worked closely together for six years. Ruth and Tim were familiar with the methodology of Imaginal Inquiry and possessed the necessary levels of ability for collaboration and self-reflection to make them suitable for this task.

There were several limitations of this study that I was able to identify beforehand. The first was the small sample size. Alongside this was my requirement that participants have a high level of psychological awareness and experience, which could have limited the demographic diversity of my sample. Although these aspects of the research design could have limited the breadth of my learnings, I felt that working with a small group of adults who possess the capacity for self-reflection would generate a depth of the learnings that would far outweigh these limitations.

Another limitation was that I collected all of the data in a group setting. While I felt this would support the intent of my research, I was aware of the ways that a group could influence participants’ responses. I accounted for this by including both individual and group activities, and by providing opportunities for participants to journal before sharing their responses aloud with the group. As well, near the end of the meetings, I invited participants to share their reflections on how they were affected by the group.

There was also the possibility that being recorded and observed by me and the co-researchers would limit the participants’ full expression of their experience. I minimized this risk by being candid about recording the data collection process from the beginning, in my initial interview with potential participants. I repeated this information several times, up through the introduction in the first meeting. I ritualized the moment in the first meeting when I first began recording by inviting the participants to make sounds
that expressed their reactions to being recorded. I also strived to create an accepting, non-judgmental environment throughout the meetings, in order to support the participants’ uncensored expression of their experience.

One delimitation in this study was the way I structured the research design so that my data collection was targeted specifically toward ritual ambivalence. I intentionally slowed the process and limited the procedures in the research in order to gather data that was particular to the experience of ritual ambivalence. The invitation to ritualize was followed by pre-determined, structured exercises that encouraged the expression of participants’ reactions to the invitation. Following these structured activities, I provided an opportunity for the group to move forward toward choreographing and enacting a ritual in a non-directive environment.

Another delimitation was my choice of drama as the primary arts modality for Expressing Experience. As the study proposed to gather data about the experience of ritual ambivalence, utilizing embodied play to express that experience felt congruent with the intent of the research. Drawing on the close connection between drama and ritual, I felt that the use of dramatic enactments would support the evocation and expression of ritual ambivalence.

**Participants**

This study was conducted with 10 adult participants. I recruited the participants by sending out an e-mail recruitment letter to friends and colleagues (Appendix 5). This e-mail letter described the nature and purpose of the study, the characteristics of potential participants, and details concerning the time commitments of participating in the study. I
did not recruit my friends and colleagues directly for participation in the study. In the case that the recipient was someone who knew me, I requested that they pass along the letter to their friends and colleagues, so that I could recruit participants with whom I had no significant prior contact. In this way, I was able to recruit a wider range of participants from both inside and outside the expressive arts therapy community. I included my e-mail address and a confidential telephone number so that potential participants could get in touch with me.

As the research study proposed to explore a phenomenon that I believed was pervasive in modern culture, I sought demographic diversity among the participants. This diversity included demographic variables such as gender, age, and ethnicity. The 10 participants included five women and five men, ranging in age from 27 to 57. The ethnicities in the group included: Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, and Asian. Three of the participants were born outside of the United States. More detailed demographical information about the participants can be found in Appendix 16.

There were several characteristics I was looking for in the participants. The primary inclusion variable was a stated interest in ritualizing. This included interest both in learning more about, and participating in ritualizing. In addition to a stated interest in ritualizing, I selected participants who felt that their current ritual practice was limited, and who expressed the desire to participate more in ritual activities. I sought these characteristics because the aim of the research was to study the ambivalence that lives unconsciously alongside the conscious desire to ritualize. Thus, each participant’s conscious desire to ritualize was a prerequisite criterion for this research.
Additionally, since the study required participants to be able to reflect on their experience, I selected individuals who had a sufficient level of psychological awareness. Participants needed to have prior experience with psychotherapy and group process, so that they were familiar with processes of self-reflection and experiential group work.

The primary exclusion variable was that participants could not currently have a formal, fixed religious belief or practice that would prevent them from being open to participating in other forms of ritual practice. I felt that it was likely that such a person would not possess the necessary capacity to tolerate the ambiguity that was required to participate in an exploration of ritual ambivalence. Such an individual could have attempted to proselytize other participants, or have become reactive to the point of skewing the data in a way that would pose a threat to the study’s validity.

The primary inclusion variables were that participants have an interest in participating in ritualizing, prior experience with psychotherapy and/or group process, and sufficient psychological awareness, which was defined in terms of the ability to self-reflect, engage in psychological exploration, and witness their own inner diversity and complexity. These requirements were clearly stated in the recruitment letter (Appendix 5). In this way, the recruitment letter served as an initial step in the screening process. I screened the applicants further through a screening interview that I ran through with each potential participant over the telephone (Appendix 7). Through this screening interview, I collected demographic information and ascertained that participants had all of the required characteristics.

In my initial contact with potential participants on the telephone, I described the nature of the study (Appendix 6). This description provided information about the
general area of inquiry, without revealing the specific intent of the research. For example, I let participants know that I was investigating the experience of participation in group ritual, but I was careful not to communicate my intent to focus on the ambivalence that arises in the approach to ritualizing. In this description, I also outlined the various activities involved in the research, such as journaling, group discussions, and experiential work.

The two group meetings (which I refer to in this chapter as Meeting One and Meeting Two) both took place in November 2004 at the Flood Building, a professional building in downtown San Francisco. Just prior to the start of the first data collection meeting, I distributed informed consent forms to each of the participants (Appendix 2). The informed consent form outlined the general purpose of the study, the time and location of the group meetings, the activities involved in the meetings, and the potential risks and benefits to participating in the study. As well, the informed consent form included my agreement to keep participants’ identities confidential. I gave each of the participants the opportunity to read over the informed consent forms and ask me any clarifying questions about the study before signing them. I did not begin the data collection meeting until all of the participants had signed the consent forms and returned them to me.
Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry

Evoking Experience

The intention of this research study was to evoke experiences that would provide collectable data in response to the Research Problem: What are the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual?

As I discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, various theoretical views suggest that ambivalence is intrinsic to the process of ritualizing. However, because ambivalence can be anxiety provoking and is generally experienced as uncomfortable, it may not be given conscious, focused attention in ritualizing. Additionally, ambivalence is a complex, multi-level phenomenon involving opposing emotional responses that occur simultaneously, either consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, the key to evoking the experience of ambivalence was to allow space for reflection on the various subjectivities that arose in response to the invitation to ritualize. Participants were encouraged to search deeply within themselves in order to uncover a range of responses that lived alongside their primary, conscious response. In this way, unconscious material could be brought out into the open.

As ambivalence involves a juxtaposition of opposing feelings, the initial task in this research was to catalyze a field where a range of reactions and feelings about ritual could emerge. Therefore, I began by cultivating whatever existing feelings of desire toward ritualizing were living in the group. This started in the screening interview, when I asked participants to provide an example of a ritual they participated in that was meaningful for them. I anticipated that the group-meeting format would also generate
feelings about ritual. I assumed that the group, by coming together as individuals who express an interest in and an intention to explore ritual, would begin with an implicit expectation and desire for ritualizing.

The first group activity was the sharing of personal stories. The primary purpose of sharing stories was not to express experience, but rather, to catalyze a field in which there was an affective charge in relation to ritual. This activity also served as a structured way for participants to introduce themselves and get to know other group members. In the first round, I invited participants to share a story about a meaningful experience with ritual, a moment when they were affected by ritual in some way. In the interest of establishing rapport between the participants and myself, I decided to begin the sharing. I was careful to choose a story that did not carry too strong an affective charge, as this could have potentially skewed the data. I spoke briefly, and then we went around the circle, one person speaking at a time. The co-researchers also shared stories and assisted as timekeepers, limiting each person to about three minutes.

As I anticipated that this first round of stories would focus on ways that participants were affected positively by ritual, I called for a second round of stories in which participants were asked to share moments when they were affected negatively by ritual. This round was conducted popcorn-style, with any of the participants who chose to speak taking a turn. Taken together, the two rounds of stories were intended to catalyze the group’s awareness of the polarities in how they had been affected by ritual in the past. These stories, with their range of positive and negative experiences, provided a foundation for an exploration of the group’s ambivalence toward ritual.
Over the lunch break, I brought in food so that the group could stay in the meeting room. During the meal, I had planned to initiate a group conversation about personal and family-of-origin mealtime rituals. In doing so, I hoped to continue to mine the stories that might further evoke ritual ambivalence, and also to preserve the group container that had formed during the sharing of stories in the morning. However, during the lunch break, the participants expressed their preference to eat in small clusters, and no group conversation was initiated. This arrangement provided the participants with the opportunity to get to know one another on a more personal level, which continued the momentum of the rapport-building activities from the morning. Gauging from the way that the group participation deepened immediately following the lunch break, this seemed to have the effect of strengthening the group container, which in turn supported the data collection process.

As a way of bringing the participants back to the exploration of their relationship to ritual after the lunch break, I invited the group to sit in silence for a few minutes and reflect on how they were affected by the stories of the morning. Following the silence, I said to the group that ritual could be described as a way of making contact with the sacred. I chose to describe ritual in this way because it was both congruent with how I conceived of ritualizing in this study, and sufficiently evocative to further elicit ambivalent feelings toward ritual.

I then invited the group to ritualize together, explicitly stating that there was no “right” response to this invitation. I told the participants that any response they had would be welcomed. The group’s response to this invitation, which unfolded through a series of structured activities, formed the primary component of my collectable data.
Later on in the afternoon, after exploring the group’s reactions to the invitation to ritualize, it was apparent that the group was ambivalent about ritualizing. At this point, I offered the group the opportunity to move into ritualizing their ambivalence. Along with this invitation, I asked the participants to share any images they had about how the group might ritualize. In asking for these images, my intention was to further evoke the experience of ambivalence toward ritual by slowing down the process and keeping the participants close to their experience right at the threshold of ritualizing.

Although the primary intention one week later in Meeting Two was to interpret and integrate the experiences from Meeting One, doing so required the evocation of the memory of what had occurred in Meeting One. Therefore, I began Meeting Two by asking the group to silently reflect on what was memorable for them from Meeting One. In our opening, each participant shared their memorable moment with the group. After this, the Preliminary Learnings sheet that I handed out to the participants served to further evoke the memory of the ambivalence toward ritual that was present in Meeting One.

**Expressing Experience**

The expressed experiences of the participants were recorded in a variety of ways. Both of the group meetings were recorded on audiotape, and the group enactments from Meeting One were recorded on videotape as well. My co-researchers and I made field notes during the meetings. Participants journaled their responses to questions that I asked throughout Meeting One. I collected data primarily through the forms of group discussions, group enactments, and written responses to questions.
In the beginning of Meeting One, before any of the activities of the research had begun, I asked the participants to journal their responses to three questions. Each group member wrote down how they were feeling at the moment, what their hopes and fears were about our day together, and finally, what their personal definition of ritual was. Besides providing me with some baseline information about the way that each participant viewed ritual, these questions were designed to give the participants some practice in journaling their reflections on their experience.

Following each of the rounds of stories in Meeting One, I asked participants to write their responses to the following questions: How are you affected by hearing these stories? What reactions come up for you now as you consider your relationship to ritual? During the writing time, I encouraged participants to explore the various subjectivities that may have been evoked by asking if they could notice any additional reactions that were different than what they had already written.

After inviting the group to ritualize together in the afternoon of Meeting One, I asked the participants to briefly write down their individual responses to the invitation. After a few minutes, I again encouraged participants to notice and jot down any additional responses that were different than what they had already written.

Following this, I facilitated several structured activities that were designed to gather detailed data about the various subjectivities that were evoked by the invitation to ritualize. Throughout these activities, I encouraged the participants to bring forward whatever reactions the invitation brought up for them, including any feelings of resistance they were having. For the first activity, I invited participants to share their responses through a focal space exercise. In this exercise, participants had the
opportunity to come into the center one at a time, and carry forward their responses and reactions to the invitation to ritualize through embodied enactments that could incorporate sound, movement, gesture, and spoken word. Rather than commenting on an enactment after it was finished, any participant who felt affected could bring forward their reaction into the center. As with all of the exercises during the research, I rang the chimes to signal the beginning and the end of the activity. The participants were given the option to “chime out” of the exercise at any time, either to get clarification or to address a concern.

The next activity was a sociometric spectrum. I asked the participants to imagine that there was a line across the center of the room that represented the full spectrum of possible responses to the invitation to ritualize. At one end of the spectrum was absolute desire to ritualize and at the other end was absolute aversion to participating in ritual. After giving the participants a moment for silent reflection, I invited them to stand at the place on the line that most accurately represented how they were personally feeling about participating in ritual at the moment. In seeing that most of the group members went to a position on the spectrum in between the two extremes, all of us were able to get a physical representation of the ambivalence toward ritual that was alive in the group.

In order to give each of the participants the opportunity to express the dynamics of their own particular ambivalence toward ritual, I facilitated a guided visualization and journaling activity in which group members worked individually with their own material. I led the participants through a brief relaxation exercise in which they closed their eyes and focused on their breathing. I then invited them to imagine a figure that represented their pure resistance to ritual. I asked the participants to take note of their figure’s
gender, facial expression, details about their appearance, and their emotional state. I invited them to greet their figure and find out what their name was. Finally, I asked them to inquire of their figure what the costs and benefits of participating or not participating in ritual might be at this time.

Following this brief visualization, each of the participants completed journal entries describing their figure of pure resistance to ritual, including all of the details about their figure and the answers to the questions that I had instructed them to ask. When this round was completed, we repeated the process, this time imagining figures of pure desire for ritual.

After this round, I invited the participants to close their eyes, relax, and imagine themselves in a beautiful, quiet place in nature. I led them through a visualization of their chosen place using each of the senses. I then invited them to imagine one of the figures that they had just met, then the other, coming toward them from far away. When the two figures were close, I asked the participants to greet them and let them know that they had just been invited to participate in ritual. At this point, I stopped the visualization and asked the group members to write out a reflexive dialogue between themselves and the two figures, simply picking up the conversation from where the visualization left off. In this way, I was able to gather data about each participant’s imagination of their personal ambivalence toward ritual.

In order to allow for a dramatic expression of the subjectivities that emerged in the reflexive dialogues, I invited the group to divide into polarity groups. In this activity, one side of the room was designated for participants who wished to speak in favor of ritualizing. The other side of the room was designated for participants who
wished to speak against ritualizing. The two groups were asked to engage each other in a dialogue. There was a third witnessing area for individuals who did not wish to speak. I encouraged the participants to change positions during the exercise as they felt the need to, so that they could have the opportunity to witness and to speak from both sides of the polarity. Following the polarity groups, I asked the participants to write a journal entry about how they were affected somatically by this exercise. I invited them to pay particular attention to the images that surfaced as they reflected on their experience. I also asked the participants if they were to take a place on the spectrum now, would it be the same as before, or closer to desire or resistance.

The final group activity in Meeting One that was intended primarily for the purpose of expressing experience was ritualizing the ambivalence. This was the only group activity in the data collection that was not structured. Rather, my intention was to be as non-directive as possible, so that I could see what emerged when the participants had the opportunity to spontaneously co-create their own ritual. After a discussion in which the participants offered images around the group’s ritualizing the ambivalence, my plan was to simply ring the chimes as a signal to begin the ritual, and then to step back and watch what unfolded.

I created a contingency plan in the event that the group did not move into ritual. In that case, I was planning to invite the group into the hallway outside of the room, and then to imagine the doorway as a threshold to a ritual space. If the group still did not move into ritual, I was planning to invite the participants to move toward the doorway, staying aware of what was happening for them as they moved toward it. If none of the participants moved back into the room, I was planning to invite anyone who wished, to
go through the doorway, again staying aware of what was happening for them as they went through.

As it turned out in the actual data collection, I did not need to use this contingency plan. The group moved into ritualizing their ambivalence soon after I rang the chimes, without any further directives from me. The only part that deviated from my plan was that I had intended to record the ritual on videotape. The ritual ended up taking place in a closet off of the main room behind a closed door, and therefore, it was not recorded. Immediately following Meeting One, the co-researchers and I reconstructed the sequence of events in the ritual from memory and recorded this sequence in writing in order to assist the data analysis process (Appendix 19). The choice to ritualize in the closet, away from the video camera and the primary research space, was made directly in response to my invitation to the group to ritualize their ambivalence. The group’s movement into the closet as an expression of ambivalence is described in Chapter Four: Learnings and Chapter Five: Reflections.

In Meeting Two, I asked the participants to share aloud their responses to my preliminary learnings. This provided an opportunity for the participants to express aspects of their experience in Meeting One that they had not previously expressed. In response to my question of how they had been affected by the research, participants also shared some of their experiences immediately after Meeting One and in the days that followed.

The data that I collected from participants was supplemented by data that the co-researchers and I provided. During the group meetings, my co-researchers and I took field notes both on what was happening in the group and on how we were affected by
this. These notes were oriented toward discerning the key moments in the group meetings and the imagery that was evoked in response to these moments. Immediately following each of the group meetings, I wrote out additions to my field notes, paying careful attention to my reactions to the data and the data collection process.

**Interpreting Experience**

The process of analyzing the data followed the four steps that comprise the Interpreting Experience phase of Imaginal Inquiry: (1) Identifying the key moments in the data, (2) Responding to the key moments, (3) Exploring differences and parallels with co-researchers’ and participants’ responses, and (4) Contextualizing with theory and myth. The data analysis was a collaborative process that primarily involved the participants during segments of the group meetings and the co-researchers outside of the group meetings. The co-researchers and I met together once after Meeting One and twice after Meeting Two for three hours each time, and also communicated with each other via telephone and e-mail in the data analysis process.

Several activities that allowed for the interpretation of the experience were integrated into the data collection meetings. In the integrative group discussion toward the end of Meeting One, I asked the participants to share any new learnings that they had obtained during the day. In doing so, I was able to get a sense of the meanings that were emerging for the group members, and what, in particular, affected them from the day’s activities. In the closing circle, I invited the participants to identify a moment from the day that was meaningful for them. Similarly, at the beginning of Meeting Two, I asked each participant to reflect on their experiences from Meeting One, and then to share a
moment that was memorable for them. In this way, I began to cull the key moments that were important for the participants.

Immediately following Meeting One, the co-researchers and I met to begin the preparation of our preliminary learnings in the data, which we presented to the participants one week later. During this data analysis meeting, my co-researchers and I began by identifying key moments and responding to these moments reflexively, through sharing our field notes, group discussion, and focal space. In this meeting and in the days that followed, my co-researchers and I read through the participants’ journals, underlining passages that we felt were particularly interesting, and jotting down notes, including our own personal reactions to the data.

Our primary task during this first week was to prepare a Preliminary Learnings sheet that we could share with the participants in Meeting Two (Appendix 20). My co-researchers and I established some criteria for what we wanted to include on this sheet. As the presentation of our preliminary learnings was to be given toward the beginning of Meeting Two, we thought that the unabridged sharing of our interpretations could skew the participants’ interpretations, which we hoped to gather in the remainder of Meeting Two. Therefore, we decided to focus the preliminary learnings toward making general observations about the group-as-a-whole and identifying key moments in Meeting One.

We began our analysis of the data by using an intuitive approach, selecting moments that leapt out at us for some initially inchoate reason. Later, we moved toward a condensation approach, uncovering passages that presented similar and/or recurring themes and ideas. For example, the key moments that we identified through our field notes came primarily from an intuitive approach, a collection of moments that had
affected us for any number of reasons. Later on, in reviewing the compiled transcriptions of our field notes, we looked to uncover the general themes that were woven throughout them.

The co-researchers and I asked ourselves what were the various ways in which we would characterize the ambivalence toward ritual that emerged during Meeting One. After clustering our responses, we were able to identify eight themes of ritual ambivalence, which we included in the preliminary learnings. Following the title of each category, we wrote out several first-person statements and questions that we felt captured the essence of the ambivalence that we had observed in the group.

We also wanted to share some of the collective group data from the journals, specifically, how the group defined “ritual” and how the group imagined the figures of resistance and desire. In reviewing the definitions of ritual in the journals, I identified the common elements in the definitions, as well as the questions raised about ritual, the polarities noted about ritual, and the ways in which the definitions diverged from one another, all of which I included with the preliminary learnings. In reviewing the participants’ figures of resistance and desire toward ritual, I compiled lists of each of the attributes that I had asked the participants to describe, such as the figure’s gender or affect. I then focused on the places of convergence in the images, and generated clustered descriptions of how the group imagined each of these figures.

The co-researchers and I agreed that the key moment that required more unpacking was the group’s response to the invitation to ritualize the ambivalence. I therefore wrote out a brief narrative description depicting the events that formed this response, paying careful attention not to include any interpretation in this description.
Along with the other items on the Preliminary Learnings sheet, this was reviewed by the co-participants prior to my showing it to the group.

In Meeting Two, I shared my preliminary learnings with the participants. I wanted to include the participants in an examination of the data, in order to see the commonalities and differences in our responses. Group members took turns reading sections of the preliminary learnings sheet aloud, and following each section, I gave participants the opportunity to respond to the learnings through a group discussion. The co-researchers and I encouraged the participants to let us know not only which items held a resonance with them, but especially to share if there was anything that they disagreed with, that varied from their own experience, or that we may have overlooked. Participants’ responses and reflections, especially those that diverged from our learnings, were taken into consideration later on, when the co-researchers and I finalized our interpretations.

Following the group discussion, I had planned to give the participants the opportunity to further express their responses to the preliminary learnings through a focal space exercise. However, the group was engaged in giving their responses in the group discussion, and this discussion ran into the time I had allotted for the focal space activity. During the break that followed the group discussion, my co-researchers and I were concerned that opening up a focal space so close to the end of the group meetings could evoke experience that we may not have had the time to integrate. We agreed that it was more important to give the group enough time to integrate their experiences in the research rather than to move ahead with the focal space activity. Therefore, rather than introducing focal space, we allowed some additional time for participants to share
responses to the preliminary learnings that were different than what had already been shared. In the end, the co-researchers and I felt that the responses that were generated through the group discussion were sufficient for establishing the convergences and divergences between our interpretations and those of the participants.

After Meeting Two, I reviewed the collected data in more depth and made transcriptions of the data. I made complete transcriptions of the participants’ journals (Appendix 17). The group enactments from the afternoon of Meeting One (focal space and polarity groups) had been recorded on videotape, and I wrote out transcriptions of these activities as well (Appendix 18). Besides the dialogue, I included notations that describe the actions, non-verbal behaviors and observed affects that accompany the dialogue. The group discussions had been recorded on audiotape, and as I listened to the recordings, I marked the passages that either affected me as I listened or had already been identified as key moments. I later made written transcriptions of these selected passages as well.

The co-researchers and I met two additional times following Meeting Two, after all of the transcriptions had been completed and reviewed, to finalize our interpretations of the data. In these meetings, we brought forward our reactions in focal space and engaged in group discussions. We posed questions for ourselves that we then answered verbally or in written form. In this way, the activities that we engaged in as researchers paralleled the activities in the group meetings. I made audio recordings of our discussions and enactments, as our responses provided an additional level of data that informed the research learnings.
In the first of these meetings, we incorporated the feedback that we had been given by the participants on the preliminary learnings and shared our responses to the transcriptions. By this point, most of the key moments in the data had already been identified. Our primary task in this meeting was to respond to these key moments and to identify patterns in the data that could move us closer to addressing the Research Problem.

In our final meeting, my co-researchers and I moved further toward completing our interpretations. As a point of departure for a group discussion, I shared several of the theories I was considering in my analysis of the data. We discussed various ways that these theories could illuminate and help us to make meaning of the key events in the data collection meetings. In particular, we looked at the group’s response to the invitation to ritualize through the lenses of several theories.

On my own, I continued to review the data and moved more fully into the fourth stage of Interpreting Experience: Contextualizing with Theory and Myth. In this stage, I identified the primary theory that is carrying my dissertation: Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory. Within this theory, Omer’s concepts of the Mother and Father Principles point toward a connection between one’s relationship to the archetypal Mother and Father and one’s participation in ritual. In trying to understand the participants’ experiences in desiring and resisting ritual, it was therefore crucial to identify the underlying relationships to the archetypal Mother and Father that gave shape to their experiences.

As I engaged with the data, Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory emerged as the Theory-in-Practice, serving as a conceptual sieve through which I was able to make
meaning of the data. A central concept from Imaginal Transformation Theory that I used in this process was Omer’s Four Modes of Experiencing. In reading over the transcripts, this concept allowed me to categorize the experience that was being expressed in the data as being Symbiotic, Bureaucratic, Decentralized or Collaborative.

Alongside of this primary theoretical concept, I utilized Hill’s Model of Masculine and Feminine Archetypes to identify how the various modes of experiencing were manifesting in relationship to one another. Several theories were useful in making meaning out of particular areas of the data. For example, Peck’s Model of Spiritual Development and Fowler’s Faith Stage Model helped provide a context for understanding the participants’ relationship to religion and sacred ritual. Freud’s theories on taboo and ambivalence and Winnicott’s principle of assessing the safety of the play space helped to shed light on the dynamics encountered at the threshold of ritualizing.

The primary myth that provides a backdrop for my data analysis is the biblical story of the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau (Appendix 21). In this story, Esau, the older brother, exchanges his birthright for a bowl of soup and is later tricked out of receiving his father’s blessing by Jacob, the younger brother. In my reading of this myth, each of the brothers represents a component of ritual ambivalence. Thus, the story provides a mythic lens through which I could reflect on my learnings. This perspective is described in detail in Chapter 5: Reflections.

Integrating Experience

Knowing that the evocation of ambivalence held the potential to uncover deep emotional material, I wanted to make sure that the participants had ample opportunities to
integrate their experiences in the study. Therefore, I encouraged the participants to reflect on their experiences both during and in between the group meetings. I provided periods for journaling and silent reflection throughout the meetings so that participants would have opportunities to reflect on their experience in a careful, measured way.

The process of integration was formalized through integrative group discussions near the conclusion of each meeting. In these discussions, the participants were asked to reflect on their experiences during the research study. I invited the participants to share how participating in the study affected them, and what they may have learned by participating. I asked the group to bring forward any aspects of their experience that did not feel integrated, or felt unfinished in any way. I also invited their questions or concerns about the study. As during the group meetings, my stance in these discussions was to encourage the expression of, and to validate whatever thoughts, comments and reactions the participants were sharing. We finished this integrative discussion in Meeting Two by looking toward the future, and reflecting on how participants’ experiences and learnings could be integrated into their lives.

The group ritualized the end of each meeting with a closing circle in which the participants, the co-researchers and myself stood and held hands. Each person had the opportunity to step into the circle and make a closing gesture and statement to the group. In Meeting One, I asked each person to close by sharing a memorable moment from the day. In Meeting Two, I invited everyone to share something that they were taking home with them from the research. When this was finished, I thanked the group for their participation in the study and made myself available immediately following the meeting to any of the participants who had additional questions or needed additional support in
the process of integrating their experience. Following Meeting Two, I sent out thank-you letters to the participants expressing my gratitude and appreciation for their participation in the study.

Although I did not guarantee any particular outcomes, my hope is that this study benefited the participants in several ways. First, participants stated that they were interested in learning more about ritual. I structured the activities in the data gathering meetings so that these meetings offered effective learning opportunities for the participants. Second, participants stated a desire to bring ritual more fully into their life. Besides providing the opportunity to participate in ritual, the group meetings helped participants to recognize their own ambivalence toward ritual. This attunement to one’s experience and recognition of one’s own resistance could lead to a deeper understanding of oneself, as well as more satisfying participation in ritualizing in the future. Upon approval of my dissertation, I sent each of the participants a Summary of Learnings sheet. This summary was intended to further support the participants’ process of integrating their experience.

My co-researchers provided invaluable support in helping me through my own integrative process. The data collection meetings, especially Meeting One, brought up emotional material for me that I was not able to express in my role as researcher during the group meetings. Following the meetings, my co-researchers offered me both the space to express my responses and assistance in helping me to make meaning out of my responses. Their support greatly furthered my integrative process.
CHAPTER 4

LEARNINGS

Introduction and Overview

The Research Problem in this inquiry is as follows: What are the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual? The guiding hypothesis in the research is that the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual is a symptom of the dissociation between the Mother principle and the Father principle and arises out of a cultural and archetypal taboo associated with ritual.

In this chapter, the six major learnings revealed through the data collection and analysis process described in Chapter 3: Methodology are presented. Each of the learnings is condensed into a propositional statement. The Learnings chapter concludes with a summary of how these major learnings inform the study’s Research Problem.

The first learning is called: Religious versus Spiritual, Imaginal Structures around Religion. The propositional statement for this learning is: Ambivalence toward ritual involves early negative experiences and childhood wounding in conventional religion, especially through ritualisms. This learning describes how the participants, many of whom have been wounded by experiences involving conventional religion, see themselves as spiritual but not religious. At the same time, their predominant view of ritual as a religious action creates a double-bind, evoking ambivalence in the approach to ritual.
The second learning, entitled: Secular Ritual versus Sacred Ritual, Structures around Verticality, describes the ambivalence associated with ritualizing in a contemporary, secular context. This learning focuses on the dynamics that surface in the movement from ordinary activity into active communion with the sacred. The propositional statement for this learning is: Under the influence of sibling culture, contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves an absence of recognition of verticality, uncertainty about how ordinary space becomes converted into sacred space, confusion between rituals of routine and transformative rituals, and trivializing of differences between superficial and sacred rituals.

The third learning is entitled: Loving Mother versus Mad Devouring Mother, Imaginal Structures of the Mother Principle. The propositional statement for this learning is: The approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Mother principle, associated with the desire for safety and connection, in tension with the fear of merging and enmeshment. In this learning, I describe how the approach to ritual catalyzes ambivalence toward the archetypal Mother and the accompanying attributes of unity and affective expression. In the movement toward unity, the desire for intimate connection is accompanied by a fear of enmeshment and loss of individuality. In the movement toward affective expression, the desire for play and spontaneity is accompanied by a fear of evoking extreme affective states associated with madness.

The fourth learning is entitled: Preserver Father versus Rigid Oppressive Father, Imaginal Structures of the Father Principle. The propositional statement for this learning is: The approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Father principle, associated with the desire for supportive structure, in tension with fear of rigid and oppressive
authority. In this learning, I describe how the approach to ritual generates a field in which participants enter into an ambivalent relationship with the archetypal Father, raising issues about structure, authority, and initiative. The desire for structure is accompanied by a fear of the imposition of overly rigid structures. The desire for supportive, encouraging leadership is accompanied by a fear of oppressive authority.

The fifth learning, entitled: At the Threshold, Assessing the Relationship between Mother and Father Principles, emerges out of the imaginal structures associated with the Mother and Father principles discussed in the previous learnings. The propositional statement for this learning is: Ambivalence that arises at the threshold of ritualizing is characterized by an assessment of the relationship between the Mother and Father principles, in which the desire for acceptance and protection in the play space is in tension with the fear of a lack of safety. This learning focuses on dynamics that surface at the threshold to ritualizing, where participants assess the safety and security of the play space. At the threshold, the combined fears of the archetypal Mother and the archetypal Father evoke the necessity to determine whether there is a trustworthy-enough collaboration between the Mother and the Father.

The sixth learning is entitled: Inside the Closet, Transforming Ambivalence into Ritual. The propositional statement for this learning is: The exploration of ambivalence, culminating in the determination of a safe-enough play space, catalyzes ritual trust, temporarily suspending fear and allowing fulfillment of the desire to participate in ritual characterized by collaboration between the Mother and the Father. In this learning, I discuss how the exploration of ambivalence toward ritual catalyzes trust that can propel participants toward collaborative participation in ritual, through which the polarities
involving the archetypal Mother and Father are brought into an active relationship with one another.

Each of these learnings is presented in six steps. These steps are designed in order to present the reader with a clear sense of how the interpretations were arrived at. The primary intention in this presentation is to support the validity of the major learnings:

1. I begin with a description of what happened during that portion of the data collection that is the backdrop for the learning. For purposes of validity, I use participants’ direct quotes to present their ideas as much as possible. In addition, I include observations of the participants from the group meetings and summarized descriptions of the journals and transcribed material that emerged out of the data analysis process.

2. Here I describe how my co-researchers and I were affected by what happened. As this is participatory research, my own personal reactions form a valuable source of information.

3. In this step, I offer my interpretations of what happened. These are the meanings that emerge both from what happened and from how my co-researchers and I were affected by what happened. This section begins with a propositional statement that distills the learning into a single sentence.

4. Here I present the principal theoretical concepts that assisted me in interpreting the data. These concepts are discussed in greater specificity in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

5. In this step, I describe the imaginal structures that were in use for my co-researchers and me in making our interpretations. Being clear about how the
influence of our own structures has informed our judgment ensures a deeper level of validity of the interpretations.

6. Here I present any additional validity considerations that are relevant to the interpretations. Validity in the participatory paradigm is assured through intersubjectivity. Thus, I include various ways that the co-researchers and the participants verified the validity of the interpretations.

Learning One: Religious versus Spiritual, Imaginal Structures around Religion

Propositional Statement: Ambivalence toward ritual involves early negative experiences and childhood wounding in conventional religion, especially through ritualisms.

1. What Happened

In the telephone interview, I asked the applicants to state their birth religion and to describe their current religion. In almost every case, applicants did not include their birth religion in the description of their current religion. Several of the applicants expressed difficulty in describing their current religion. The descriptions were weighted toward personal beliefs and practices, and away from conventional religions. A common response was a variation of the theme of being spiritual but not religious.

In the first meeting, I asked the participants to each write a personal definition of the word ritual. The two most common elements in these definitions of ritual were the following: (1) intentional, purposeful, and personally meaningful actions; and (2) connection to something larger/communion with the sacred. This definition of ritual is congruent with the etymology of the word religion, which has as its root the Latin word ligare, meaning to connect or to bind, the same root from which the word ligament is
Although participants used words such as: *spirit, faith, devotion, communion, the Divine, and sacred* in their definitions of ritual, it is noteworthy that the words *religion and religious* were not mentioned.

In the first round of sharing stories in Meeting One, each group member was asked to describe a personal moment when they were affected by ritual. Although many of the moments of being affected by ritual occurred in a secular context, more than half of the participants included a brief introductory narrative that described their movement away from conventional religion. For example, Erich said the following:

“I grew up Protestant and my first image was of going to church on Christmas, but somehow, Protestantism never really spoke to me. I couldn’t really translate the words to my experience. I was quite pessimistic, and became a Marxist in my twenties.”

Participants also described positive spiritual experiences with ritual that occurred in a context outside of an organized religious setting. For example, Erich continued:

“My moment [of being affected by ritual] was at a dance retreat when I was 29. I came to this retreat because of my passion for dance. First, we connected to the body through Tai Chi-like movements. Then there was dancing to drums, being with a group of people, having plenty of time and a sense of openness to explore.”

In the second round of stories, participants were invited to share a moment that affected their relation to ritual in a negative way. Almost all of these moments occurred within the context of an organized religious setting. For example, Kristin described her boredom during a ritual in the Mormon church where each congregant could “come up and say whatever they had to say, but it ends up being this very rote thing, people saying the same thing over and over and over again.” Maria felt it was oppressive that she had to dress conservatively for Mass so she “wouldn’t be a temptation to men.” Peter described how difficult it was as a child to sit through prayers at his grandmother’s house,
recollecting, “just how tight and constricted I felt in those moments, and how I just wanted to scream and get out.”

Several participants spoke negatively about religious leaders they had encountered earlier in their lives. For example, Rachel talked about a rabbi from her childhood whom she felt was overly traditional and dry. Erich recalled going to his mother’s funeral and thinking that the minister “didn’t really have anything to say, coming off with all this Christian ideology.” Jake spoke of a Zen roshi who was overly formal and rigid. Kristin remembered being humiliated by a teacher at her church for accidentally being in the wrong class.

Participants who had spoken about their movement away from conventional religion in the first round of sharing stories about personal experiences with ritual expounded upon this in the second round of sharing stories. For example, Maria, who introduced herself to the group as a “recovering Catholic” said the following:

“What came to mind was the point when I began feeling that I did not want to belong to the Church. I had a lot of struggle over it. There was a moment in which I caught myself changing the words in Mass, like ‘Guilty, guilty—Not’ or ‘I’m not worthy of You coming into my home—Oh yes I am’… That’s when I began changing… my attitudes about what Catholic ritual meant to me. I changed the way I was leading my life and I completely cut myself off from religion.”

Several participants also identified experiences in conventional religious contexts that were personally meaningful for them—singing Gospel music, meditating in silence following the rabbi’s sermon, and the feeling of sacredness from receiving Communion. During the closing of Meeting One, a participant and a co-researcher chose the sharing of these meaningful experiences associated with conventional religion as key moments in the research.
Following the references to conventional religion that were predominant in the stories in the morning, there was almost no mention of conventional religion in the afternoon and in Meeting Two. One of the exceptions to this was a rabbi figure that Rachel brought into her reflexive dialogue and the polarity groups as a figure of resistance to ritualizing. After arguing that the group could not create meaningful ritual given their separation from tradition, this figure was quickly silenced by Jake, standing on the pro-ritual side, who calmly stated that meaning is relative to each individual. Rachel, who was playing the rabbi, then crossed over resignedly to the pro-ritual side, explaining, “I just had to stand on that [anti-ritual] side a moment to voice that voice.” As she said this, Jake, still on the pro-ritual side, began to play a street fighter, kicking an imaginary opponent on the anti-ritual side, while saying, “… and another thing!” The entire group broke into applause and laughter.

2. How I Was Affected

My curiosity about the ambivalence toward religion that exists in a secular cultural context was one of the primary catalysts for this research. Nevertheless, I was struck by the consistency of the applicants’ responses to the questions regarding their birth religion and current religion in the telephone interview. The descriptions of being spiritual but not religious were familiar to me and congruent with how I might have answered a similar question. At the same time, these responses were fascinating to the researcher in me, and I found myself having to resist the desire to pursue this inquiry further with the applicants on the telephone. I had the feeling that there were volumes of
data behind applicants’ responses to these two questions, and even mused that these questions could form the basis of a separate dissertation study on religious identity.

Prior to the data collection, I had been concerned that participants might not be able to come up with stories of moments when they were negatively impacted by ritual. I was struck by the pervasiveness of the wounding from experiences with conventional religion. Taken together with the stories expressing positive religious experiences, I was acutely aware of the deep ambivalence toward religion that was present in the group.

The introduction and shooting down of the rabbi figure in the polarity groups felt significant and brought up mixed feelings in me. As someone who has largely moved away from a formalized practice of religion, I could feel my alignment with what seemed to be a victory of aliveness and vitality over the staleness and rigidity associated with conventional religion. At the same time, as someone who values many aspects of my own religious upbringing, I felt as though I was witnessing a general devaluing and dismissal of religious tradition, which brought up sadness in me.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

The propositional statement for this learning is the following: Contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves early negative experiences and childhood wounding in conventional religion, especially through ritualisms. Ritual is seen by the participants as a religious action, one that offers the possibility of connecting to the sacred; however, as participants had experienced childhood wounding in association with conventional religion, their ambivalence toward religion contributes to their ambivalence toward ritual.
The phenomenon of ambivalence toward religion was expressed from the outset of the screening process, where participants claimed to be spiritual but not religious. In this view, the word *religious* holds connotations of practicing within the structure of a conventional religion. The word *spiritual* describes the pursuit of contact with sacred dimensions of experience outside of the context of conventional religion. The data suggests that participants are generally at a stage where they have outgrown the structures of conventional religion, but have not yet developed a mystical religious faith. In this stage, religion becomes something one is moving both toward (“I’m spiritual…”) and away from (“… but not religious”), resulting in ambivalence toward religion.

The data shows that this ambivalent attitude toward religion surfaces in the approach to ritual. The desire for spiritual experience is generally considered to be universal in human beings. The participants’ definitions of ritual show that they view ritual as a potentially effective vehicle for catalyzing a spiritual experience, one that can provide a meaningful connection to something larger. Yet, precisely because ritual is viewed as essentially a religious action, the approach to ritual can evoke associations to conventional religion. These associations tend to be negative, involving early wounding experiences, and are sometimes accompanied by positive experiences with religion. The imaginal structures around religion create a double bind: How can a group move toward deep participation in ritual given their sense of ritual as a religious act and their seeming rejection of conventional religion?
4. Theoretical Concepts Assisting in These Interpretations

The connection between religion and ritual is generally understood to be clear. In a review of the literature on ritual, Bell states that “rituals associated with clearly defined religious traditions have long been the dominant examples and primary data for ritual studies.” The participants’ understanding of ritual as a meaningful action that connects us to something larger is consistent with a religious view of ritual.

The participants’ ambivalent feelings toward religion suggest a current identification with the third stage (skeptical, individual) in Peck’s model of spiritual development. According to this model, Stage Three is essentially a secular stance that is flanked by two religious stances—Stage Two (fundamentalism), and Stage Four (mysticism). Without recognizing the difference between Stage Two religion and Stage Four religion, a person in Stage Three would naturally experience ambivalence toward religion. This is evidenced by the participants’ claim of being spiritual but not religious, and the juxtaposition of their predominantly negative view of conventional religion with their desire to connect to the sacred through ritual.

According to Fowler’s six-stage model, the movement away from conventional religion is a normal characteristic of adult faith development. Fowler associates this movement away from conventional religion primarily with Stage Four: Individuative-Reflective Faith, which usually begins in early adulthood. Adults in Stage Five: Conjunctive Faith demonstrate a greater tolerance for ambiguity, allowing feelings of ambivalence to surface in conscious awareness. Weigert sees one source of the contemporary ambivalence toward conventional religion in the limited capacity of
religious institutions to provide extraordinary, ecstatic religious experiences.\textsuperscript{10} This view is supported by participants’ narratives, which generally placed meaningful and satisfying religious experiences in secular contexts, outside of conventional religious settings.

5. Imaginal Structures

Like many of the participants, my co-researchers and I have been wounded by our early experiences with conventional religion. As well, we have all moved away from the conventional religions of our childhood, while holding the conscious desire to deepen our relation to the sacred in contexts outside of conventional religion. Thus, it was essential for us as researchers to reflect on how our own stories may have shaped our particular sensitivities to the data.

Although our basic narratives are similar, we found that the differences in our stories led to us having distinct perspectives from which to view the data. For example, my own upbringing as a Reform Jew provided childhood experiences with religion that were not particularly intense. My co-researcher, Ruth, on the other hand, grew up in a Fundamentalist Christian family that provided her with intense religious experiences, both positive and negative. Whereas I saw the general trend of the group to be dismissive of religion, Ruth recognized the significance of the stories that several participants shared of positive experiences with conventional religion. Held together, our perspectives provide a more complete and accurate view of the group’s ambivalence toward religion.
6. Validity Considerations

The criteria I used for selecting the participants in this study may have attracted participants who were at a particular stage of religious development. My primary inclusion variable in selecting participants was their stated interest in learning more about, and participating in ritualizing. I sought this characteristic because the aim of the research was to study the ambivalence that lives unconsciously alongside the conscious desire to ritualize. Thus, each participant’s conscious desire to ritualize was a prerequisite criterion for this research. At the same time, I selected participants who did not currently have a formal, fixed religious belief or practice that would prevent them from being open to participating in other forms of ritual practice. The combination of these inclusion and exclusion variables may have contributed to the selection of participants who were at a particular stage of religious development.

Learning Two: Secular Ritual versus Sacred Ritual, Structures around Verticality

Propositional Statement: Under the influence of sibling culture, contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves an absence of recognition of verticality, uncertainty about how ordinary space becomes converted into sacred space, confusion between rituals of routine and transformative rituals, and trivializing of differences between superficial and sacred rituals.

1. What Happened

As noted earlier, participants generally defined ritual as an action involving a connection to the sacred (Appendix 17). For example, Kevin said that ritual involves “coming into spirit,” Peter wrote that ritual is “a sacred moment… a portal,” and Maria described it as “communion with the Divine.” At the same time, there were varying...
opinions on whether daily personal habits and ordinary actions could also be considered rituals. Most of the participants defined *ritual* as an action that goes beyond the ordinary. Jake explicitly stated that ritual is “different than habit because it’s undertaken with the purpose of interfacing with a Mythos.” Erich described ritual as the following:

> A space/time of heightened awareness. A place beyond the ordinary, everyday experience. A formalized action, beyond the personal. Embodied enactment of meaning beyond the obvious.

In contrast, several participants included daily habits in the range of what they considered to be ritual. For example, Latoya said that it could be a “relaxing habit,” Maria said that “it can be a group of women sitting together over coffee,” and Sumi wrote that ritual “can be as simple as [one’s routine] in the morning to wake up.”

In the beginning of the afternoon, when I first invited the group to ritualize, I proposed that one way to view ritual is as a way of making contact with the sacred. In the journaled responses to the invitation, several participants wondered about what making contact the sacred might look like. For example, Kristen wrote:

> Touch the sacred how? Haven’t we already been doing that? Where is the altar? Is someone going to get naked? What is holy? What do we want at the center?

The theme around connecting to the sacred emerged as well in the polarity groups, when the group was considering whether or not to ritualize. David reflected:

> “What’s sacred for me, or a ritual that might be sacred for me might not be sacred for someone else. Words or tones or actions that might feel sacred for me may not feel sacred at all to someone else. And is our goal of this ritual… does it have to be sacred to everyone or maybe are there things we have to let go of to create?”

Latoya began the polarity groups on the anti-ritual side, expressing a reservation about whether the group could actually create a ritual within the given timeframe:

> “I doubt that ritual could be created in such a short period of time. For real ritual, I think we need more time. Rituals have tradition.”
Rachel, articulating a mythic sensibility, responded by asking Latoya to consider “the first people that enacted the rituals that have now become traditions.” Latoya again gave the rational argument: “In our group, in one day, I don’t think we have enough time.” Kevin’s response to Latoya offered a more symbolic view of ritual time:

“Ritual doesn’t have a time limit. It can be created among people in a very short time, or it can be a drawn-out process. I think that it’s a mindset of people getting together and wanting to make that spiritual connection, whatever the ritual may be—exciting, scary—all those feelings come into play with all of that and just let it be.”

Latoya remained on the anti-ritual side for most of the exercise, arguing that she couldn’t see how the group was going to be able to cohere and create sacred space, given the time constraints and the diversity and lack of a shared tradition among the participants. Latoya said that she could not imagine “logistically” how this would happen. It was only when someone proposed that ritual could be “just being with a bunch of friends over coffee” that she casually shrugged, and then strutted over to the pro-ritual side for the first time. The group laughed and applauded, after she had held out for so long. On the pro-ritual side, Latoya said:

“Ritual is as simple as a cup of coffee. You go get your Sunday paper. You’re at the café—that’s a ritual.”

Following this, Sumi posed a question about group ritual, “It can be superficial but how sacred can it actually be?” A chorus of voices answered this question *en masse*, saying that each person might experience the ritual differently, as each person holds a distinct idea of what is sacred. When the polarity groups ended, Peter wrote, “I sense that some of the ambivalence is related to whether or not a person has been exposed to
transformational ritual’, and not to the dry, static, non-evolving/historical dead ritual often linked with religion.”

The invitation to ritualize brought up concerns about doing ritual in the research room. David said, “I can’t do ritual in this unsacred office space in the daylight.” Rachel commented that the space offered no cultural cues to aid in the creation of ritual. When the group finally had the opportunity to ritualize their ambivalence, Jake immediately left the room where we had been the whole day and went into an empty storage closet. The entire group followed and the ritual took place inside the closet. Afterwards, when the group reflected on the elements that contributed to the success of their ritual, many of them expressed appreciation that there was another space that they could move into, separate from the primary locale of the research.

2. How I Was Affected

When Latoya moved to the pro-ritual side, equating ritual with going to a café, I had mixed feelings. A part of me was relieved to see, as I sensed the group was, that she was finally expressing a part of herself that wanted to ritualize. I also thought, with some frustration, that if ritual were really as simple as going to a café, then we would live our lives in ritual, which we do not. Her words seemed to trivialize the distinction between secular actions and sacred rituals. This led me to feel some sadness as I sensed the limitation in her imagination of what ritual could be. I began to wonder whether the group would be able to approach the sacred in ritual.

It was understandable to me that the group expressed dissatisfaction about the physical environment. If I had been facilitating a group ritual, I would have either made
more of an effort to make the space beautiful, or invited the group to create a space that they thought would be conducive to ritual. But since I was collecting data on ritual ambivalence, I did neither. When participants commented negatively on the space, I felt sympathetic, and could sense into the gravity that the profane, secular culture exerts on the imagination. Inside the closet, I felt as though I was transported to a liminal space that belonged to no one, as opposed to the primary research space, where I was the host. The closet felt like a new territory with a fresh energy that the group could claim as their own, making it conducive to their process of creating a ritual.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

The propositional statement for this learning is the following: Under the influence of sibling culture, contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves an absence of recognition of verticality, uncertainty about how ordinary space becomes converted into sacred space, confusion between rituals of routine and transformative rituals, and trivializing of differences between superficial and sacred rituals.

The data suggests that the opportunity to participate in ritual raises questions about the distinction between sacred ritual and secular ritual, and around whether to, and how to move toward the sacred. While the group was in agreement about moving away from conventional religion, they expressed differences in terms of defining the particular spirituality that they are moving toward, and how that spirituality could be expressed through group ritual.

Under the influence of sibling culture, contemporary society is characterized by the domination of rational thought and an absence of the recognition of verticality.
Without recognizing verticality, the differences between ordinary, secular actions such as going to a café and participating in sacred ritual can be trivialized. Ritualizing requires the emergence of a mythic sensibility that allows for the imagination of moving out of ordinary, secular activity into active communion with the sacred. The research process uncovered differences between group members in terms of their capacity for the imagination of the sacred and their degree of willingness to move toward creating sacred space. These differences suggest varying stages of faith development among the participants.

The dissatisfaction with the primary research location and the change of rooms in order to ritualize suggest the presence of ambivalence around moving from ordinary activity into sacred space. The main research room was perceived as a profane environment, an impediment to the process of creating ritual. I sense that some internal resistance to ritual was projected onto the physical space. Rather than struggling to find a way to move into the sacredness of ritual in a space which was perceived as being profane, the change of location immediately resolved this tension. By moving to a new space, the group could experience this space as one they had “discovered,” which supported their creative ritualizing process.

4. Theoretical Concepts Assisting in These Interpretations

Bly sees the loss of the imagination of the sacred as a central quality of sibling culture. He connects the lack of meaningful initiation to the loss of vertical thought, essentially, an inability to recognize and be in relationship to the sacred. Omer describes a decentralized mode of experience that is prevalent in sibling culture in which verticality
is unrecognized and differences, such as those between the sacred and the profane, are trivialized. The image that ritual is as simple as a cup of coffee typifies the trivialization of the decentralized mode. The question of distinguishing between superficial and sacred ritual can be seen as an attempt to move beyond the dynamics of sibling culture.

Several authors write about the dominance of rational thought over mythic sensibility that can limit any movement toward the sacred. Somé notes that in modern culture, it can be difficult for individuals to foster a belief in spirits or in the efficacy of ritual as a means of communicating with them. Eliade sees modern culture as being essentially desacralized, having lost the effective means of being in relation to the sacred. He speculates that the dominance of rational thought obscures one’s affective and imaginative engagement in the world to the point where an individual can no longer see when the sacred presents itself.

Eliade views the sacred as being distinct and offset from the profane world, as if separated by an invisible barrier. He describes an active element in the profane world that can cross this barrier and desecrate the sacred. Growtowski attributes the habitual focus on interpersonal communication in a secular cultural context as an impediment to achieving authentic communion with the sacred. Coincidental to the image of the café ritual that surfaced in the research, he refers to ordinary, secular activity as behaving “as if one were in a bistro.” Clearly, Growtowski makes a firm distinction between going to a café and participating in ritual.

Fowler sees the imagination of the sacred as a capacity that grows according to the stages of faith development. According to his model, Latoya, the woman who
remained on the anti-ritual side for most of the polarity groups, can be seen as holding the position of Stage Four: Individuative-Reflective faith, with its demythologizing strategy and reliance on rationality and the egoic self.\textsuperscript{19} The participants on the pro-ritual side tended to express views that are more indicative of Stage Five: Conjunctive faith, with its appreciation of the mythic and symbolic.

Fowler writes that the development from Stage Four: Individuative-Reflective faith to Stage Five: Conjunctive faith is characterized by the emergence of a mythic sensibility that breaks out from under the domination of rational thought.\textsuperscript{20} This dialectic between voices favoring the rational or the symbolic can be seen to underlie several passages in the dialogue throughout the polarity groups. One example of this occurred when Latoya expressed her doubt that ritual could be created in such a short period of time, and Rachel and Kevin responded by asking her to consider the creative process that began what are now traditional rituals, as well as a more symbolic view of ritual time that emerges out of the mindset of the participants.

Eliade describes how ritual requires a clear demarcation of sacred space in order to offset the sacred from the profane world.\textsuperscript{21} The creation of sacred space constitutes a mythic reenactment of creating the center of the universe. Grimes writes that the “discovery” of a place is conducive to participation in ritualizing.\textsuperscript{22}

5. Imaginal Structures

As someone who grew up in sibling culture, I view my own attraction to ritual as an attempt to develop beyond some of the limitations of the culture. Yet, each time I ritualize, I am faced with the task of having to overcome the gravitational pull of the
profane, secular culture that I have internalized. Out of this practice, I have developed sensitivity to the way that I, and others, carry the profane, secular culture, and restrict our imagination of the sacred. This sensitivity informed my choice of the key moments in this learning, for example, the statement, “Ritual is as simple as a cup of coffee.”

My sense that the group was projecting some of their internal ambivalence toward ritualizing onto the physical environment comes out of my own experience with ritual. Although it is true that a beautiful environment can support ritual, there have been many times when I have been in such an environment and still I was resistant to ritualizing. On the other hand, I have been able to create sacred space in environments that did not seem conducive to it. From these experiences, I understand “sacred space” to be more psychological than physical. The dissatisfaction with the physical space felt like a projection of the “unsacred office space” that I, and most individuals in sibling culture, carry internally within our psyche.

6. Validity Considerations

When I presented my preliminary learnings to the group in Meeting Two, I offered several themes of ritual ambivalence that emerged in the research. This included the question “Can we create sacred space in this profane environment?” under the category of “Sacred Connection.” The participants verified that this question was congruent with their experience. When I asked if there were other themes that I had omitted, someone suggested that “Sacred Space” should be listed as its own category.
Learning Three: Loving Mother versus Mad Devouring Mother, Imaginal Structures of the Mother Principle

Propositional Statement: The approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Mother principle, associated with the desire for safety and connection, in tension with the fear of merging and enmeshment.

1. What Happened

Throughout the day, participants expressed desires and fears about intimacy, connecting to the group, and emotional expression. Several participants wrote in their initial journal entries that they hoped to be able to be open and to connect with the group. Participants expressed fears about how they might act in the presence of the group or how they might be perceived by the group, for example, by displaying too much affect, being too overbearing on others, and having one’s shadow material uncovered by the group.

Many of the participants reported feeling closer to the group after hearing others’ stories of positive and negative experiences with ritual. In the focal space exercise that began the afternoon, participants had the opportunity to come into the middle of the circle to express their reactions to the invitation to ritualize. One of the participants, Erich, sat silently in the middle of the circle, and after some time, reflected softly to the group:

“I wanted to sit here and feel the heat of your attention. It feels uncomfortable and at the same time, it’s a feeling of very deep desire in me.”

In focal space, participants expressed their desire to sing, dance, play, and have deeply authentic and heartfelt experiences in ritual. Alongside this, they expressed fears of displaying too much emotion and exposing their vulnerabilities to the group. David, who had said earlier that he didn’t like to dance, stood up with a sheepish grin, and told the group that if they all wanted to clap or make noise, he would get over his shyness of
dancing. The group went wild with applause and laughter, and clapped rhythmically while he moved ecstatically in the center of the circle. Several participants later referred to this moment as a key moment in the research.

Shortly after this, Rachel said something critical about another participant’s response to the dancing, and then brought her internal reaction forward, crying out:

“I’m feeling so vulnerable right now! Just feeling really vulnerable! I’m feeling like, ‘Oh my God, they could say something bad about me!’ Oh I feel so vulnerable!”

The group sat in silence for some time after her outcry. Participants who entered focal space after this expressed the desire for creating a safe space that allowed for both vulnerability and safety, a non-judgmental environment where the “hidden children” parts in everyone that are nervous and scared to come out, could be brought forward.

Later on, in polarity groups, the group explored some of the complexities in creating a non-judgmental environment. Jake brought up the desire to be in a ritual space where everything, except violence, would be welcome. Maria noted that this receptivity would invite a range of intense emotional states. Sumi remarked that in such a space, everyone would have to be judgment-free. Several participants responded that they were judgmental by nature, and could not commit to being judgment-free.

In the polarity groups, Latoya challenged the assumption that everyone desired to connect with the group:

“I’m just a head person. I’m not afraid of the ritual, I’m not afraid of participating, but all of us coming together in that alignment that you say, and I don’t know if that can happen. I mean, I know you’re like, ‘OK, everyone has a desire, everyone wants to do it’, but I guess that’s where I think it’s not going to happen.”
In response to this remark, a majority of the participants changed their positions. The primary movement of participants was from the positive side to the negative.

Several individuals who had expressed excitement about the possibility of the group connecting deeply in ritual now began to express doubts about whether this could happen, if everyone was not fully invested in it. Rachel offered the following suggestion on how the group could connect by acting in unison:

“So I was starting to see a ritual where we all sat in a circle, and we all brought our attention to one spot on this wall. (Points and pauses.) And then we all brought our attention to another spot. (Points and pauses.) And then we brought our attention to our breathing. We got ourselves to this moment. Because in this moment, with our common humanity, we are all in alignment.”

Jake, who was holding the position of resisting ritual, responded:

“I want to make sure that there’s a ritual that includes my desire not to look at that same spot. To be together doesn’t mean to be the same together. It means to be every perfect, different thing that we all are in our lives.”

The group explored how they could come together in ritual in spite of their individual differences. Some of the variations that participants spoke to were: personal differences in culture, intention, emotional investment, levels of acceptance, ideas about what is sacred, and ideas about what ritual is. Several participants expressed that they felt the individual differences were not so great that they could not be surmounted.

2. How I Was Affected

Going into the first meeting, I was unsure about the degree to which the group would want to connect or engage in the process. I had a recurring fear that when it came time to ask for reactions to the invitation to ritualize, there wouldn’t be any. As a researcher, I was internally pulling for the group to cohere. So I was relieved to see that
the group quickly formed attachments to one another, as evidenced by their animated conversations during the lunch break. I felt like a successful group matchmaker!

The moment in focal space when Rachel cried out how vulnerable she was feeling affected me in several ways. In the first moment, I was surprised that she went into such extreme affect without any notice. I too felt vulnerable, as I perceived the safety of the container and the structure of the research in jeopardy. At the same time, I was appreciating her willingness to participate authentically, as it felt like a portal into a deeper experience for the group. I wondered how the group was holding this. I flashed back to my early days at the Institute, when any display of extreme affect triggered a negative response inside me, as I felt threatened and destabilized by it. As focal space continued, I was relieved that the container, although rattled, was not broken beyond repair.

Overall, my co-researchers and I were struck by the intensity of the group’s hunger for connection. It seemed to all of us that increasingly, as the day went on, the primary motivation for most group members was not to participate in research, but rather, to have the opportunity for deep connection with the group.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

The propositional statement for this learning is the following: The approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Mother principle, associated with the desire for safety and connection, in tension with the fear of merging and enmeshment.

In the group meetings, the participants explored issues around desire, intimacy, connection, and affective expression—all qualities associated with the archetypal Mother.
The participants consciously viewed ritual as a context in which the longings for connection with something larger and for authentic affective expression could be fulfilled. In the approach to group ritual, the desire for intimacy and connection was primarily directed toward the group, paralleling the child’s need for intimate connection to the mother.

The approach to ritual catalyzes the Mother principle, and its accompanying attributes of unity and affective expression. The bipolar nature of the archetypal energy results in an ambivalent state when the imaginal structures around the Mother principle are evoked. In the movement toward unity, the desire to connect with the group is accompanied by a fear around the enmeshment and loss of individuality involved in this connection. This dynamic was highlighted in the exchange around the suggestion that everyone could look at the same spot. The group also expressed their ambivalence toward unity by grappling with how they could effectively ritualize as a whole, considering their individual differences in culture, intention, emotional investment, and the imagination of the sacred.

In the movement toward affective expression, the desire for play and spontaneity is accompanied by a fear of evoking extreme affective states. The group expressed this ambivalence in terms of desires and fears around emotional self-expression. The extreme affect in Rachel’s outcry brought this ambivalence to the surface, raising questions about vulnerability, safety, and the level of acceptance in the container.
4. Theoretical Concepts Assisting in These Interpretations

Maternal ambivalence is at the foundation of object relations and developmental theories. Klein theorizes that the infant forms loving and hating feelings toward the mother, based on experiences when the infant’s needs are being met or not met. Bowlby observes the ambivalent feelings that children and parents naturally have toward one another. Mahler describes the ambivalence in the child’s simultaneous desires for attachment and differentiation from the mother that surface during rapprochement. Loewald states that these opposing drives for merger and autonomy continue into adulthood.

Several authors support the idea of a maternal projection onto the group in ritual. Rizzuto’s research demonstrates the importance of the mother and other caregivers in the process of forming a relationship with the sacred. Durkheim theorizes that for participants in ritual, the group can take on a sacred parental quality. Erikson describes how early experiences of bonding with the mother in early childhood can shape the adult’s capacity for relating to the numinous in ritual. Berg and Smith note the merger-abandonment paradox in groups that parallels the mother-child relationship.

From an archetypal perspective, the maternal projection onto the group can be seen as the evocation of the Mother archetype. Jung conceptualizes the complex that coalesces around a bipolar archetypal core. Neumann describes positive and negative aspects of the Great Mother archetype that he refers to respectively as the Good Mother and the Terrible Mother. According to Neumann, the Good Mother is associated with the life-giving functions of bearing and releasing, while the Terrible Mother is associated with the dangerous and deadly functions of holding fast, fixating and ensnaring.
Drawing upon Neumann’s work, Hill offers a model of the Self that differentiates static/dynamic and positive/negative aspects of the archetypal feminine. In his model, the desire for the unity, wholeness, and acceptance of the positive static feminine can be accompanied by a fear of the smothering entanglement of the negative static feminine, the Devouring Mother. Similarly, the desire for the play and emotional expression of the positive dynamic feminine can bring up a fear of being overcome by the negative dynamic feminine, the Mad Mother.

According to Omer, the Mother principle states that a clear relationship to the archetypal Mother catalyzes the desire for participation in ritual. The symbiotic mode of experiencing described by Omer corresponds to the presence of the archetypal Mother. In the positive pole of this mode are qualities of acceptance, compassion, and receptivity, which Omer characterizes as the Loving Mother. The negative pole involves disapproval and discounting behavior, as well as the denial of difference between self and other. Omer states that the negative pole of the symbiotic mode is problematic for the emergence of ritual, as ritual requires the engagement of distinct individualities.

5. Imaginal Structures

For the most part, the participants were open about wanting to bond with the group and move toward play and authentic emotional expression in ritual. My feeling was that the fear of the negative feminine was generally more submerged in the unconscious, and could be seen only indirectly, by participants expressing their need for maintaining their individual differences and by their caution around extreme affect.
In choosing the moments that pointed toward a fear of the archetypal Mother, I therefore needed to take into consideration my own responses and my empathic sense of what the participants may have been feeling. The child within me who is reactive to the Mad, Devouring Mother alerted me to those moments. For example, when Rachel cried out how vulnerable she was feeling, my own feelings of vulnerability brought my attention to my memories of fearing intense affect. This provided me with an empathic understanding of what others may have been feeling. From this, I was able to make an interpretation of the group’s silence and subsequent call for safety as an expression of their fear of madness.

Similarly, during the suggestion that everyone could look at the same spot, the child in me felt irritatingly smothered, as if I was being asked to conform. From my internal response, I was able to sense into the presence of the Devouring Mother, which informed my interpretation of the event.

6. Validity Considerations

As I mentioned earlier, my co-researchers and I were in agreement about the group’s hunger for intimacy and connection. In the preliminary learnings that I shared with participants in Meeting Two, I outlined themes of ambivalence including: “Intimacy,” “Trust/Vulnerability/Safety,” and “Autonomy versus Conformity to the Group” (Appendix 20). The participants verified that these themes were congruent with their experience during the research.
Learning Four: Preserver Father versus Rigid Oppressive Father, Imaginal Structures of the Father Principle

Propositional Statement: The approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Father principle, associated with the desire for supportive structure, in tension with fear of rigid and oppressive authority.

1. What Happened

Throughout the group meetings, the participants explored issues about order, structure, discipline, and authority. For example, in the sharing of stories at the beginning of the day, participants spoke of elements in religion such as strict dress codes for women, patriarchal language, and the formality and rigidity of both the religious leaders and the rituals that they led. Later on, the figures of resistance to ritual that I asked participants to imagine included authority figures such as parents, religious leaders, and soldiers, and also troll-like characters and rock imagery. Descriptions of these figures clustered around their being adult, old, serious, and controlling. Their emotionality was frequently described as being closed, rigid, and judgmental.

Similar figures emerged in the polarity groups as well, usually on the side of arguing against ritual. The voices of these figures tended to be dry or cynical, claiming that ritual was risky and pointless, or that there was not enough time or structure to support a group ritual. For example, Erich spoke the following:

“Frankly, I think this is one of those Californian things. You come together and you do these odd things, you think it’s… lord knows what. And you become uplifted. And you go home. And then two days later you don’t even remember what you did… Ritual has to be grounded in culture. You can’t just take some Native American drumming, and some Eastern meditation, and some Jewish I-don’t-know-what, and then you mix it all together, and then you think, ‘It works!’ Ritual has to be grounded.”
This figure evoked a more encouraging response from Peter on the pro-ritual side:

“My experience is that when a ritual is structured in a powerful and effective way, everyone leaves transformed, and it’s a transformation that lasts. You may not recognize it two days later, but in some way, you’re going to be different... Ritual isn’t always comfortable... There is a risk involved... because it’s a calling forth to do something in a different way. A really good ritual is one that takes into account discomfort and safety, addresses that right from the start, so that there’s some way of holding that discomfort.”

Participants had varying reactions to the Tibetan chimes that were used to signal the beginning and end of experiential activities. Sumi journaled that upon hearing that participants could ring the chimes to stop an activity, she had a fear that a ritual could become too intense and bring up grief about losing her father. Later on, in arguing for a group ritual, she said that although she had doubts about the safety of the container, she felt reassured and encouraged by the fact that she could chime out whenever she wanted, if the ritual didn’t feel right.

Peter was the only group member who was chimed during the first round of sharing stories for going over the allotted time. In the second round, when asked to bring forward a negative experience with ritual, he spoke of a wounding incident in a graduate course in Group Process where a teacher chimed him out in the middle of telling a story and confronted him about how he wasn’t sharing properly. Later on during Focal Space, Peter chimed us out to get some clarification about the activity, saying, “I really wanted to do this!” The entire group laughed and applauded for him. Peter later reported having a positive, reparative experience. While reflecting on his personal learnings at the end of the day, he smiled and said, “I now have a new relationship to the chimes.”

Participants expressed a variety of reactions to my leadership and to the structure of the research. Before the meeting officially started, Rachel found fault with some
details about the accommodations and criticized me in front of the group, saying “That’s two things you’ve done wrong.” Although in the end, the participants expressed strong feelings of appreciation for the research and for my leadership, their journals included occasional critical responses along the way. Jake was bothered by my asking for additional reactions during the journaling periods. Kristen expressed her discomfort with the video camera. Several participants felt confined by the amount of structure in the research during the afternoon up though the polarity groups. Their perception was that I was holding them back from ritualizing. Others appreciated how the structure supported their learning and allowed them to have a fuller experience of their own ambivalence toward ritual.

2. How I Was Affected

Just before the meeting began, when I was criticized openly by Rachel, I was suddenly reminded of the potential for projections to be directed toward me during the research. Although I sensed an element of playfulness in her criticism, I could feel the sting of her words. I felt depersonalized and defensive about being judged as incompetent without having done anything to merit such an accusation.

I noticed my own sensitivity to the rigid father imagery that emerged in the stories about conventional religion. It felt to me like the group was carrying strong negative projections toward the Father. As I was in a leadership position, I wondered if I would become the target of these projections. While I felt empathy for the participants, a part of me was pulling for the expression of a more balanced view of the Father. I was therefore encouraged by the emergence of more positive masculine voices that came forth in the
polarity groups, such as when Peter said, “My experience is that when a ritual is structured in a powerful and effective way, everyone leaves transformed, and it’s a transformation that lasts.”

The participants’ expressions of appreciation and gratitude at the end of the research affected me in several ways. For the most part, I was pleased to be hearing such positive feedback about my work, especially when it was focused on a particular aspect of the research. I felt proud when Kristen suddenly realized that I was reading from a script, and yet, I had followed the emergence of her ambivalence so closely, which meant that I had anticipated her ambivalence beforehand. Following the exuberance of the ritual, some of the comments seemed to idealize my leadership. These comments were difficult to take in, as I was aware of the enormous collaborative team effort that went into the research, including my support through the Institute, my co-researchers, and the participants themselves. In response, I expressed my gratitude for the participants’ contributions to the research.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

The propositional statement for this learning is the following: The approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Father principle, associated with the desire for supportive structure, in tension with fear of rigid and oppressive authority.

The participants explored themes associated with the archetypal Father, such as order, structure, authority, and initiative. The participants view ritual as a potential means for providing a sense of order and meaning. In the approach to group ritual, the desires and fears around structure and authority are primarily directed toward the group
leader and the leader’s tools—in this case: the chimes, the recording equipment, the room, the script, and the structure and design of the group activities.

The approach to ritual generates a field in which participants enter into a relationship with the Father principle, raising issues about structure, authority, and initiative. The bipolar archetype of the Father is at the core of imaginal structures that are characterized by ambivalence toward the Father principle. The desire for structure, the positive aspect of the static masculine, is accompanied by a fear of the imposition of an overly rigid structure that is characteristic of the negative static masculine. The desire for the supportive, encouraging leadership of the dynamic masculine in its positive aspect is accompanied by a fear of oppressive authority, the negative dynamic masculine.

These ambivalences can be seen through the varying reactions to the chimes and the structured activities. Figures representing the Rigid Oppressive Father emerged in the participants’ stories and in their imagery of their resistance to ritual. The exchange from the polarity groups illustrates the split between a cynical Senex figure brought by Erich, and the reasonable, encouraging masculine voice of Peter’s figure.

4. Theoretical Concepts Assisting in These Interpretations

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory is built around the phenomenon of paternal ambivalence stemming from unresolved Oedipal conflicts. The varying reactions to my leadership parallel the attitudes that Freud noted in his clients’ transferences onto him in psychoanalysis. He theorizes that transference expresses the ambivalent feelings that are evoked in a context that promotes regressive behavior. Freud suggests that ritual actions stem from unresolved guilt and ambivalence remaining from the primordial
killing of a father-leader by the horde. From this perspective, a group approaching ritual may project unresolved, ambivalent feelings toward the Father onto the group leader, or any object that represents the leader’s authority. Authors such as Bly and Zoja note the pervasive loss of fathering in contemporary culture and the complex that has developed in relation to the archetypal Father out of this loss. The loss of fathering is tied to the loss of initiation. Omer describes the ambivalent reactions that can surface in an initiatory field around the return of the Father. Hill differentiates static/dynamic and positive/negative aspects of the Father archetype. In his model, the desire for the order and meaning of the positive static masculine can be accompanied by a fear of overly rigid structure of the negative static masculine, the Senex, or the Rigid Father. Similarly, the desire for the encouragement and goal-directedness of the positive dynamic masculine can bring up a fear of being overcome by the oppressive willfulness of the negative dynamic masculine, the Oppressive Father. The bureaucratic mode of experiencing described by Omer corresponds to the presence of the archetypal Father. In the positive pole of this mode are qualities of structure, discipline, and encouragement, which Omer characterizes as the Preserver Father; the negative pole of the bureaucratic mode involves suppression, rigidity, and criticism. These polarities are illustrated by the dialogue between the figures enacted by Peter and Erich in the polarity groups, as well as by the varying reactions to the chimes and the structured activities.
5. Imaginal Structures

During the group meetings, I was acutely aware of holding the position of the Father in a stronger way than I am used to. Although I had been leading groups for many years, this was the first time that I was also in the role of researcher, which seemed to add an additional layer to the Father role: I had completely structured the activities, scripted my directives, and on top of this, I was recording the meetings and would later be analyzing the data. I was conscious of my own ambivalence in holding this dual researcher-facilitator role. A part of me was concerned that I would appear overly rigid, and I wanted to share with the group that I’m normally much more spontaneous and non-directive in my facilitation style. At the same time, it was clear to me how essential it was to have scripted out the day’s activities. I was grateful for the collective intelligence that went into planning the methodology. The script felt like I had the Preserver Father with me holding the larger container, so I could attend to what was happening in the moment.

In reflecting on the participants’ reactions to the chimes, I remembered my own initial reactions to the chimes at the Institute, and how my relationship to the chimes had evolved over the years, reflecting my changing relationship to structure and authority. This informed my interpretation of the participants’ reactions to the chimes as indicative of a transferential relationship to the archetypal Father. It was gratifying to me that my research could provide the context for a reparative experience in terms of a participant’s relationship to the chimes. I felt like this work represented the reclaiming of a fuller and more conscious relationship to structure and authority, which felt liberating both to witness and to be a part of.
6. Validity Considerations

My sense that I was holding a father projection for the group was validated by my co-researchers. Both reported afterwards that they could feel the group’s projections both toward me and toward my tools in the research. Although they were in more of a supporting role, they too occasionally experienced these projections; for example, Ruth reported that when she chimed out Peter for exceeding his time limit, she could feel his anger directed toward her.

In my preliminary learnings, I outlined themes of ambivalence toward the Father principle, including: “Structure” and “Authority/Leadership” (Appendix 20). In Meeting Two, the participants verified that these themes were congruent with their experience during the research.

Learning Five: At the Threshold, Assessing the Relationship between Mother and Father Principles

Propositional Statement: Ambivalence that arises at the threshold of ritualizing is characterized by an assessment of the relationship between the Mother and Father principles, in which the desire for acceptance and protection in the play space is in tension with the fear of a lack of safety.

1. What Happened

After the Polarity Groups exercise, I invited the group to ritualize their ambivalence. This was a transition point at which, after holding a tight structure for the entire day, I was about to open up a completely non-directive play space, in which the group would be free to ritualize however they wanted. As a prelude to having the group ritualize their ambivalence, I invited them to share images about how they might actually
go about doing this. The initial images were suggestions around how the ambivalence might be represented symbolically, such as written out on slips of paper, or represented by a particular space in the room. When I probed for additional images, Rachel said she had something inappropriate to share. She spoke of a Native American ritual she had attended recently where the leader took out a razor blade and began cutting some of the participants. The group was visibly affected by her story.

A moment later, Erich expressed his confusion about what was happening in the process. He noted that this was research for my dissertation and that I had structured all of the day’s activities thus far. He wasn’t sure if I was really going to let go of the structure and allow the group to ritualize freely, or if this was simply a trick—another scripted activity through which I would gather more data about the approach to ritual. This was the first time during the meeting that I was asked about what would happen next, and I wasn’t sure how much information to share. I sensed some paranoia and mistrust in the room, and at the same time, I wanted to preserve a sense of mystery around what was unfolding. With measured words, I agreed that, yes, this was research, and we were gathering images about what the group might do in terms of ritualizing. One of my co-researchers asked Erich to restate his question more clearly, and Peter finally asked simply, “Are we moving toward ritual?” After I responded with my intention to let the group ritualize, other participants asked for details about the rest of the day’s activities and how much time was being allotted for the ritual.

When I provided this information, the group went back to discussing the ritual, now setting intentions. Peter wondered aloud how the group might deepen their connection. To this, David replied:
We’ve actually been doing this all day—exposing ourselves and sharing our vulnerabilities. I certainly feel more trust in this room, more safe, more willing to go for it.”

Following this, I proposed to ring the chimes as a signal for the group to move into ritual with whatever images they were holding. Rachel, who told the cutting story, asked if she could suggest a structure for the ritual. I gently stopped her and repeated my proposal to ring the chimes. She thanked me for stopping her. Maria asked, “So when you ring the chimes, everybody will just come from where they want to?” I told her I didn’t know what would happen. Holding the chimes in my hands, I said, “We’re at the threshold of a great mystery.” The group laughed and Peter yelled, “Get on with it, man!” I rang the chimes to begin the ritual.

2. How I Was Affected

The segment of the data collection that I just described was both tense and thrilling for me. Even though I had designed the research, I had absolutely no idea how this final segment would unfold. It seemed to me that the closer we got to actually ritualizing, the more the level of excitement and anxiety increased in the room. I was initially surprised to hear the story about the cutting ritual, as it seemed to come out of nowhere. While the researcher in me was grateful that the story seemed to bring in a shadow element of ritual that could serve to deepen the process, the group leader in me was wondering how the others were receiving it. I imagined that some of the participants could be frightened by the story, and I feared that it could shut down their participation in ritual altogether.
I was still reflecting on this when I was asked to clarify my intention in the research process. I was caught slightly off-guard by this request, as I perceived a challenge to my research design in this participant’s concerns. I sensed some paranoia and annoyance directed at me, and I felt defensive and a bit nervous as I stumbled through my response. I was relieved when, through the assistance of my co-researchers, the question about whether we were moving toward ritual was put to me in a clear way. At this point, I recovered and was able to resume a sense of my authority and efficacy as the group leader.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

The propositional statement for this learning is the following: Ambivalence that arises at the threshold of ritualizing is characterized by an assessment of the relationship between the Mother and Father principles, in which the desire for acceptance and protection in the play space is in tension with the fear of a lack of safety.

At this final threshold to ritual, my invitation to the group to ritualize their ambivalence evoked a qualitative shift in the group around leadership. Whereas up to this point, I was directive in structuring all of the activities for the group, I was now letting go of the reigns, offering the group an opportunity to structure their own experience. The combination of the imminent ritual and the shift in leadership catalyzed the terror of the unknown, drawing out the participants’ need to assess the safety and the trustworthiness of the container. Participation in ritual is a regressive process that places adults in relation to archetypal energies in a way that parallels a child’s relation to adults.
Entering into this regressive state requires a sufficient level of trust in the container. The threshold to ritualizing brings up gatekeepers that mistrust the safety of the container.

The need for safety can be understood as an attempt to determine whether there is a trustworthy-enough collaboration between the Mother and the Father. Although ritual holds open the potential for deep play, connection, and transformation, the movement toward ritual requires the determination of a sense of structure and order that bounds the play space, as well as assurance that one’s free play will be accepted. Participants are looking for this acceptance and protection, a “good-enough” collaboration between the Loving Mother and the Preserver Father. At the same time, participants have fears about these parental archetypal figures, arising from experiences when the Rigid Oppressive Father, dissociated from the positive feminine, and/or the Mad Devouring Mother, dissociated from the positive masculine, have negatively affected their participation in ritual.

Thus, the events that occurred at the threshold of ritualizing can be seen as tests to assess the safety and security of the play space. The story about the cutting evoked anxiety and insecurity about what could happen in ritual when the Mother and the Father are not working together collaboratively. The request for me to clarify my intention felt like a test to determine if I was the Rigid Oppressive Father, simply interested in collecting data and controlling the group, or was I the Father who was connected to the Mother—trustworthy, compassionate, and willing to let the group play as I had invited them to. After I stated my intention to allow the group to play and I provided a clear timeframe for the ritual, the group assessed that the container was “safe-enough” to move
toward participation in ritual, because the determination of a good-enough collaboration between the Mother and the Father was clear.

4. Theoretical Concepts Assisting in These Interpretations

Several theorists describe aspects of the dynamics at the threshold to ritualizing that are congruent with the events in the group meeting. Otto writes of the *mysterium tremendum*, the terror and awe that may be experienced as one approaches the sacred.\(^{48}\) Turner describes how on the verge of ritual, the transformation of the normal structures and relationships in a community "can appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions."\(^{49}\) Omer sees ritual as a means of transforming ego-identity, noting that the structures protecting one’s existing identity may resist any experience that could lead to an expanded identity.\(^{50}\) As Freud writes, the ego hates any object that may be seen as a threat to its self-preservation.\(^{51}\) Omer notes that gatekeepers are especially active at an initiatory threshold, with the intent of restricting one’s experience.\(^{52}\)

Several writers note the need for assessing the safety of the container before entering into ritual or any play space. Shelley’s research shows that judgments about the dangers of play can serve as barriers to play.\(^{53}\) Winnicott speaks of a zone of safety that is required for the child to be able to enter into a transitional space. This involves the internalization of the security and reliability provided by the parental relationship.\(^{54}\)

For Freud, the surfacing of ambivalent feelings signals the approach of a taboo, which he links to unresolved feelings that emerge out of the Oedipal complex.\(^{55}\) In the Oedipal drama, Freud notes the emerging dynamics in the child’s psyche around the
dissociation between the mother and father. In the context of my research, if the group-as-a-whole represents the Mother, to whom each participant as the Child wants to connect in ritual, then I as the group leader could represent the Father, a potential threat to the Mother-Child dyad. From this theoretical perspective, the threshold to ritual brings the participants in relationship to a taboo—their unconscious impulses to want to join with the mother (the group) coupled with aggressive impulses toward the father (leader) who may move to prevent this union.

Omer views ritual as an opportunity to catalyze a collaborative mode of experience, in which the Loving Mother and the Preserver Father come together in support of the individuation process. This is contrasted with the dissociation of the Mother and the Father, resulting in a symbiotic mode of experience characterized by the Mad or Devouring Mother, or a bureaucratic mode of experience characterized by the Rigid or Critical Father. Omer notes that in an initiatory field, the Preserver Father aspect of collaborative leadership can be mistakenly perceived as the Rigid Father associated with bureaucratic experience. This offers an explanation for the group’s need to ascertain if my invitation for them to ritualize was sincere.

5. Imaginal Structures

My decision to focus on this particular sequence of events and my interpretation of them comes out of how I was affected by my own experience of the events. Therefore, it is particularly important to describe the imaginal structures that informed my analysis in this section. A key moment for me was when I was asked about my intentions in the research and I felt uncomfortable in providing an answer. Reflecting on this moment
later on, I realized that my discomfort stemmed from the *Puer* in me who didn’t want to be seen as the authority figure holding the group back from play. I wanted the group to like me and not see me as the Rigid Father. Because of this structure, I felt guilty at merely the suggestion that I would not allow the ritual to happen.

My interpretation of the behavior of the group as having to do with father issues was strongly influenced by my own structures around holding the authority of the Father. It seems to me that my structures were activated by the potency of the paranoia and mistrust in the field that was being directed at me. I felt like the recipient of projections that viewed me as wanting to control and shut down play. The intensity of these projections suggested to me that I was evoking archetypal energies that went beyond the personal. In the context of the research and my role of researcher, these projections seemed to carry the question of whether the Father was working in collaboration with the Mother.

6. Validity Considerations

One validity consideration in this learning is my leadership style. If I had actually embodied the Rigid Father as the group leader, then I would not be able to discern between a participant’s negative projection and an objective response to my rigidity. Thus, in order to establish validity, it is necessary to assess the degree to which my leadership was collaborative rather than bureaucratic. Because of my awareness of the potential for Father projections, I was particularly careful to bring the voice of the Father who was connected to the Mother. Whenever I could, I welcomed with appreciation what the participants were bringing in, while encouraging them to bring in more of their
authentic experience. In instances where I felt I wasn’t able to do this effectively, I was able to turn to my co-researchers for assistance.

Both during and after the research, I checked in with my co-researchers about my leadership style, to make sure I was not too harsh or controlling. Both of my co-researchers held the opinion that my leadership was collaborative, blending authority with warmth, compassion, and playfulness.

Learning Six: Inside the Closet, Transforming Ambivalence into Collaborative Ritual

Propositional Statement: The exploration of ambivalence, culminating in the determination of a safe-enough play space, catalyzes ritual trust, temporarily suspending fear and allowing fulfillment of the desire to participate in ritual characterized by collaboration between the Mother and the Father.

1. What Happened

After I rang the chimes to signal the beginning of the ritual, the group gradually stood up and in silence, began to slowly spread out around the room. Suddenly, Jake darted into an 8-by-12 foot closet off of the main space, and quickly closed the door behind him. A few seconds later, Kristen also ran into the closet and closed the door behind her. Surprised by their unexpected movement away from the group, I crossed the room and went over to the closet door, putting my ear up to the door to show my curiosity about what was happening inside.

The powerful pull of the emerging ritual on the other side of the door overtook me. Before I knew what was happening, I opened the door, entered the closet and closed the door behind me. Inside the closet, I found Kristen and Jake chasing each other around the perimeter of the tiny room. Within a minute, the rest of the participants and
the co-researchers, a total of 13 people, crowded into the darkened closet. This was the setting for the ritual, out of the range of the video camera, and without the chimes and the tape recorder, which in the power of the moment of the ritual’s emergence, I had neglected to bring with me.

Inside the closet, the group formed a circle and then spiraled into a huddle in the middle. Peter offered an invocation to Mother Earth and Father Sky, and various group members contributed to a collective free association. This began with series of seemingly unconnected words, and then phrases that were said aloud popcorn-style, such as, “My favorite color is orange,” then, “Boy, those apples were delicious.” The group seemed to drop into a more serious and self-reflective place when Jake said, “I passed by a homeless man today.”

Soon after this, Kevin, who was in the middle of the huddle, disclosed to the group that he was going through a break-up with his partner and would soon need to look for a new home. The group responded by offering, and then giving him a group hug that lasted for a few minutes. Afterwards, the group moved back into a circle, and each participant took a turn in the middle, specifying what they wanted, and receiving a few minutes of intimate, focused attention from the group: David also asked for a group hug. Peter requested that the group lift him in the air and hold him as he reclined on his back. Later, Rachel asked for this as well. Jake, and later Erich asked the group to form a tight circle and put out their hands. Each stood and stiffened his body, and was gently bounced around the circle from person to person.

Maria told the group how open her heart was as she reclined on the ground and asked everyone to hold her. Kristen also reclined on the ground and asked the group to
make sound. The group responded by singing long, sustained, harmonic tones, filling the small room with sound. Sumi said that she wanted this as well. Latoya disclosed to the group that she was in a new relationship and did not want to “mess it up.” She asked for supportive advice and each group member offered her a personal response.

Following this, the group sat together in silence, clearly moved by the power of what had just occurred. Several participants spoke about how open their hearts were and how connected they felt to the group. Afterwards, in response to an invitation by one of my co-researchers, several participants spoke in languages other than English, and the group sang a Hebrew song in round, *Shalom Chavurim*, to close the ritual.

Peter set up three chairs by the doorway, then slid through the “tunnel” back out into the main room. Everyone followed, finding different ways to leave the closet. For example, some of the participants stepped over or around the chairs. Some were held onto by the participants in the closet or pulled out by the participants in the main room.

When everyone was out in the main room, most of the group danced around energetically for about a minute, while clapping, singing, and making percussive sounds. Some participants went over to the window, where someone in an office across the way had noticed the group. Soon, the energy of the group dissipated, and I rang the chimes to end the ritual.

Every participant reported that ritualizing together was an extremely positive experience. Their journals were filled with descriptions of feelings of deep connection to the group, characterized by trust, vulnerability, sharing, warmth, love, openness, and willingness to give and receive. For example, Sumi wrote:
Wow. So incredible. Great group of people—open, loving, willing… like-minded. That made it so easy. That people were willing to share their vulnerabilities—I felt so touched, so honored.

Many participants described a feeling of inner peace, a dissipation of the tension they were feeling earlier. For example, Maria wrote, “The tension in my being has disappeared and it has given way to a new sense of being…” Rachel wrote, “My body is feeling relaxed and present and I feel 100% more connected with everyone, having transcended the personality-based responses…” David noted, “I feel more grounded, more able to stand comfortably on this earth, more ready to accept my being here… I feel clear, nothing to question or to doubt.”

Several people expressed surprise at the depth of their own participation and the power of the ritual. For example, Latoya wrote, “I’ve been known to find a space for expressing myself among strangers but this time it was coming from a place of truth and trust. I believe I made myself vulnerable by expressing my true fear and divulging a current fear rather than keeping it all surface…” Kristen wrote:

I feel a big wow inside. I can’t believe it worked! I can’t believe how beautiful it was and that we all allowed it to happen. There was so much TRUST in the process. I was surprised I let myself be so loving so spontaneously.

Some participants noted that each person in the group contributed a unique aspect to the ritual; there was a feeling of being part of a successful, collaborative team effort. For example, Maria wrote, “Everybody’s conception of what ritual entails for them seemed to be honored as part of our time together.” Kristen reported, “It was like everyone was leading and no one was leading at the same time.”

There were also descriptions of a dissolution of boundaries, and a transcendence of the differences between people. Maria wrote, “Wow! Somehow boundaries have
been destroyed by the power of Love.” David wrote about the ritual, “Love knows no culture. Love knows no boundaries.”

Participants referred to the experience metaphorically in terms of play, birth, and sex. Erich wrote that the participants were “children playing in a closet, hiding from the demands of the world of the grown-ups.” He described the closet as “the cave, the small protected space.” Some thought of the closet as a womb, as it was suggested that the chairs set up to leave the closet were “a birth canal.” Several participants spoke about the close intimacy inside the closet and in the discussion that followed the ritual, both Peter and Rachel referred to the group work leading up to the ritual as “foreplay.” The group also played with the idea of being “in the closet” as representing a taboo or a place hidden from mainstream culture. Immediately after I rang the chimes to end Meeting One, Erich asked the group playfully, “Are we now out-of-the-closet ritualizers?” The group laughed and clapped with a sense of accomplishment.

The group expressed agreement that the structured exploration of ambivalence contributed to the depth and effectiveness of the ritual. For some participants, there was a marked change in how they viewed the exploration of ambivalence before and after the ritual. For example, just prior to the ritual, Peter wrote the following:

I’m ready for ritual. It’s agitating being ready for something and being held back at the starting gate… My motivation to participate in a ritual process with this group has been dampened by the long process. Exploring ambivalence when I was originally not ambivalent had the effect of decreasing my passion. I feel stuck with this group.

In contrast to this, the same man, Peter, wrote these words immediately after the ritual:

I got the body buzz going… inspiring ritual… I’m convinced that our ritual would not have been what it was without the “prep-work” we did of exploring
ambivalence. The “ambivalence” work created clarity, deeper understanding, and a stronger intention/commitment to join together in ritual.

Group members noted several particular benefits of exploring their ambivalence toward ritual. David described how initially, he thought he was alone in his doubts about ritual. The awareness that others in the group also had ambivalence toward ritual brought him closer to the group. Rachel said that exploring the ambivalence gave the experience of ritualizing a level of integrity that it would not have otherwise had.

In the integrative discussion that followed the ritual, participants began to speak about their imminent separation and raised doubts and questions about their experience. Erich said that the feeling of belonging triggered grief about living far away from his home culture. He told the group, “Belonging brings up a lot of longing. There’s a lot of pain around it.” In this discussion, some of the participants brought forward doubts concerning whether the feelings of loving connection that were evoked in the ritual could be sustained. The group also raised questions about the meaning of the ritual, given that the group was about to separate.

I discovered in Meeting Two that none of the participants remembered my invitation to them to ritualize their ambivalence. Some group members felt that they left their ambivalence behind in the large room when they went into the closet. Others saw the ambivalence as a catalyst for the ritual. For example, David said:

“The ambivalence is feeling so crucial. It’s what enabled us to have such a deep experience. The image I get is of looking over the cliff of ambivalence and at some point deciding to surrender, to take a chance. And that action of letting go creates the opening. That allows for the experience of being held. I think a lot of the potency of the ritual came from the ambivalence.”

After reflecting further on the experience of ritualizing the ambivalence, Kristen wrote to me a few weeks later:
I do think the ambivalence WAS ritualized. By your implementing the processes about ambivalence, we were able to create a space together that was large enough to hold our ambivalence. We did not have to leave anything out of the ritual—we did not have to split off our doubts and worries, but brought our whole selves into the ritual… And I believe this is why the ritual turned out to be so incredibly healing and transformative for me.

2. How I Was Affected

For me, the group’s movement into the closet to ritualize was a key moment from the group meetings. It was an unexpected turn of events that brought me into deeper participation in exploring the mystery of ritual ambivalence. I was totally surprised when the participants began going into the closet. I had not considered this possibility beforehand while writing up my contingency plan.

In the moment when I went into the closet, the power of the emerging ritual overshadowed my researcher’s role of bringing recording equipment. When the group was inside, and it became clear that this was where the ritual would take place, I considered going back out into the main room to retrieve the tape recorder. I felt disempowered as a researcher without recording equipment. However, it seemed to me that leaving the closet and bringing back the recorder would have been awkward and invasive to the group’s flow, so I decided to stay.

I remained quiet and non-directive for most of the ritual. I recognized that I needed to step back, in order to let the group process unfold. It seemed to me that there was a certain necessity playing out among the participants in the ritual, and I felt that any move on my part to shape it would have interfered. No one engaged with me during the ritual and I sensed the group wanted me to remain silent, which at one point caused me to feel excluded.
However, my dominant feeling during the ritual was one of feeling privileged and moved to be in the presence of the power and the beauty of the group. I felt as though I was present at a birth—not in an active way, as the mother would be, but more like a father who had played an essential role in preparing for the event, and now could step back and witness its unfolding. I was proud of how the group was moving both collaboratively and autonomously, in the absence of my active, direct leadership.

I was surprised by the degree to which the group, who had only been together for several hours, was able to organize itself and move into a depthful ritualizing process. The effectiveness of the collaboration in the ritual had a redeeming quality for me. It eased my concerns that I had over-structured the day’s activities or over-explored the ambivalence to the point that the group would become mired in their resistance.

3. My Interpretations of What Happened

The propositional statement for this learning is the following: The exploration of ambivalence, culminating in the determination of a safe-enough play space, catalyzes ritual trust, temporarily suspending fear and allowing fulfillment of the desire to participate in ritual that is characterized by collaboration between the Mother and the Father.

The exploration of ambivalence throughout the day generated awareness of the combination of the desires and fears that were present in the approach to ritual. This exploration led up to the threshold dynamics discussed in the previous learning, in which the group assessed the relationship between the Mother and Father principles. The determination of a safe-enough play space resulted in the catalyzing of ritual trust. This
ritual trust had the effect of temporarily suspending participants’ fears, propelling them toward collaborative participation in ritual and sustaining their participation throughout the ritualizing process.

Being “in the closet” can be interpreted as being in a space hidden from or taboo in mainstream culture. Within the context of the research, the primary room in which the research took place up until the point of the ritual can be seen as representing mainstream culture. This was the space in which the norms of the group culture developed, and that contained the associations to the research, such as the recording equipment and the chimes. Going into the closet, away from the recording equipment, the chimes, and the norms that had been developed in the primary space, supported the group’s creation of a liminal play space outside of the conventions of mainstream culture.

In this liminal play space, the polarities involved in the ambivalence were brought into an active engagement with one another, resulting in a temporary suspension of the tensioned duality between them. For example, ritualizing offered the group a means of resolving the conflict between unity and differentiation. Participants took initiative in expressing their individual needs and receiving the individualized attention of the group. At the same time, in caring for others and being cared for, they were able to experience a connection to the larger unified whole. As well, ritualizing offered a means of resolving the polarity between order and chaos. Participants were able to experience play and spontaneity within a structure that they themselves were active in creating.

Following the fears that surfaced in the threshold to ritual, the actual ritualizing brought about a generally successful collaboration between the archetypal Mother and the archetypal Father. To a large extent, the group was able to form the Mother-Child dyad
with the support of the Father. My decision not to record and my silent, appreciative witnessing of the ritual allowed for the imagination of a Preserver Father who is not oppressive or controlling. There had been sufficient good-enough leadership from me that I could step back and watch the group organizing itself effectively. With this protection and acceptance, the group was able to embody the Loving Mother, bringing opportunities for connection and wholeness to each of the participants. This was done in a balanced, attuned way. Each participant had the space to ask for what they wanted and be responded to, transcending their fear of the Devouring Mother and evoking a sense of deep connection within the group.

4. Theoretical Concepts Assisting in These Interpretations

Omer states that entering into deep participation in ritual requires ritual trust.58 Omer defines ritual trust as “trust engendered through participation in ritual that enables a temporary submerging of differences, ambivalences and conflict, liberating a revitalized Eros within the relationship or group.” 59 The exploration of the group’s ambivalence toward ritual can be seen as a process of meeting their gatekeepers around ritualizing, which has the effect of catalyzing ritual trust. According to Omer, with ritual trust one can temporarily suspend one’s ambivalence and move toward deeper participation in ritual despite the threat this entails to one’s personal identity.60

Winnicott describes a potential space that is catalyzed in play activities between the child and the play-object.61 This refers to the intersubjective field in play that serves as a creative matrix in which psychological growth can occur. Winnicott views this
process as the formation of the child’s object relations, in which the play space serves as an intermediary zone between inner and outer realities.\textsuperscript{62}

Potential space parallels Turner’s concept of \textit{liminality}, a quality of ritualizing in which fixed roles and structures are broken down, and new ones can emerge. Turner compares the liminal space to a womb, which is congruent with the participants’ experience of their ritual.\textsuperscript{63} In this view, ritual is seen as adult play that allows for the transformation of personal identity and social structures. Turner writes that this transformation occurs through \textit{communitas}, the state of communal bonding through the transcending of individual differences among ritual participants who are in connection to the sacred.\textsuperscript{64}

Weigert notes the ambivalence that is inherent in the relationship with the sacred, and writes that religious ritual functions as a container that provides a structured framework in which the sacred can be approached.\textsuperscript{65} Grimes writes that ritualizing occurs when the polarities in a psychosocial rift are too important to choose between, and instead, must be brought into a dialogical relationship.\textsuperscript{66} Jung sees the individuation process through the metaphor of Alchemy, involving the interplay of masculine and feminine forces, and their union in the \textit{Coniunctio}.\textsuperscript{67} Hill discerns two axes along which these forces engage with one another—an order/chaos polarity between the static masculine and the dynamic feminine, and a unity/differentiation polarity between the static feminine and the dynamic masculine. In Hill’s model, initiatory experience occurs when there is an unimpeded flow between these poles.\textsuperscript{68} This is analogous to Omer’s collaborative mode of experience, in which the Loving Mother and the Preserver Father are working together in the service of individuation.\textsuperscript{69}
5. Imaginal Structures

Reflecting on my own leadership in this part of the research has provided me with a sense of the liminality that emerged in the collaborative ritualizing process. While I was aware of being the leader, I no longer knew exactly how to be in the role of the leader. When I moved over to the closet and went inside, I was moving intuitively. I initially felt some shame about going into the closet so quickly and not bringing the tape recorder. I felt that the Puer in me had taken over and undermined my leadership.

Later on, in reflecting on why this structure took control of me at that particular time, I realized that I was participating in a collaborative process, and responding intuitively to what the participants needed to be able to move into ritual. The group had just let me know in the threshold to ritualizing that they were afraid of the Rigid Oppressive Father. By going into the closet, I was showing the group that I sanctioned their play. Through my attentive witnessing and by protecting the group from the invasiveness of being recorded, I showed respect for the intimacy that was developing in the ritual. My moves, although intuitive and spontaneous, seemed to deepen the level of ritual trust among the group, further catalyzing their participation in ritual.

6. Validity Considerations

Part of the validity of this learning is that, to a large degree, it was culled directly from the responses of the participants. Following the ritual, they were able to articulate the connection between the exploration of their ambivalence and the depth of their collaborative participation in the ritual. Jake raised the question of what it would have
been like if the group had ritualized at the beginning of the day. The group expressed agreement that such a ritual would not have had the same level of depth and meaning for them.

My co-researchers agreed with me that although there were several places in the group’s ritualizing that seemed forced or artificial, on the whole, their level of intimacy and collaboration was extraordinary for a group that had been together for such a short time. We were also in agreement with the participants that the exploration of the ambivalence prior to the ritual was a primary factor that resulted in the depth of the ritual.

**Chapter Conclusion**

The purpose of this inquiry was to research the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual. Each of the six major learnings identifies a particular aspect of the ambivalence that surfaces in the approach to ritual: Learning One states that contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves early negative experiences and childhood wounding in conventional religion, especially through ritualisms. Learning Two states that under the influence of sibling culture, contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves an absence of recognition of verticality, uncertainty about how ordinary space becomes converted into sacred space, confusion between rituals of routine and transformative rituals, and trivializing of differences between superficial and sacred rituals.

Learning Three states that the approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Mother principle, associated with the desire for safety and connection, in tension with the fear of merging and enmeshment. Learning Four states that the approach to ritual evokes
ambivalence around the Father principle, associated with the desire for supportive structure, in tension with fear of rigid and oppressive authority.

Learning Five states that ambivalence that arises at the threshold of ritualizing is characterized by an assessment of the relationship between the Mother and Father principles, in which the desire for acceptance and protection in the play space is in tension with the fear of a lack of safety. Learning Six states that the exploration of ambivalence, culminating in the determination of a safe-enough play space, catalyzes ritual trust, temporarily suspending fear and allowing fulfillment of the desire to participate in ritual that is characterized by collaboration between the Mother and the Father.

These major learnings are organized conceptually in order to inform the Research Problem. A closer look at the conceptual progression of the six major learnings can support an understanding of the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual. The ambivalent feelings revealed in Learning One: Spiritual versus Religious form a foundation for conceptualizing ritual ambivalence. Although the desire for spiritual experience is generally considered to be universal in human beings, many of the participants have had wounding experiences involving conventional religion. As the participants view ritual predominantly as a religious action, their wounding experiences with conventional religion are evoked in the approach to ritual, creating ambivalence.

While the movement away from conventional religion can be considered a normal stage of faith development, this process can lead to the loss of recognition of verticality that is indicative of sibling culture. Learning Two: Secular Ritual versus Sacred Ritual
focuses on the ambivalence that surfaces under the influence of sibling culture as individuals consider the transformation of ordinary activity into active communion with the sacred through ritualizing. This ambivalence involves uncertainty about how ordinary space becomes converted into sacred space, confusion between rituals of routine and transformative rituals, and trivializing of differences between superficial and sacred rituals.

Creating sacred space through ritualizing can be understood as a means of entering into a relationship with archetypal energies. The next two learnings illustrate the particular imaginal structures that characterize the relationship to the archetypal Mother and Father. Learning Three: Loving Mother versus Mad Devouring Mother describes ambivalence toward the attributes of unity and affective expression associated with the Mother principle that is encountered in the approach to ritual. In the movement toward unity, the desire for intimate connection with something larger is accompanied by a fear around the enmeshment and loss of individuality involved in this connection. In the movement toward affective expression, the desire for play and spontaneity is accompanied by a fear of evoking extreme affective states.

Learning Four: Preserver Father versus Rigid Oppressive Father describes how the approach to ritual generates a field in which participants enter into an ambivalent relationship with the Father principle, raising issues about structure, authority, and initiative. The desire for structure is accompanied by a fear of the imposition of overly rigid structures. The desire for supportive, encouraging leadership is accompanied by a fear of oppressive authority.
At the threshold to ritualizing, the combined fears of the Mad Devouring Mother and the Rigid Oppressive Father evoke the necessity to determine whether there is a trustworthy-enough collaboration between the Loving Mother and the Preserver Father. Learning Five: At the Threshold relates the dynamics by which participants assess the safety and security of the play space.

If the play space is considered safe enough, then these fears yield to the desire to ritualize. Learning Six: Inside the Closet proposes that the exploration of ambivalence catalyzes ritual trust that propels individuals toward collaborative participation in ritual. Ritual trust can be seen as providing a counterweight to the fear and resistance that emerged at the threshold to the ritual. In ritualizing, the group fulfilled their desire to play within the safety of a space that is characterized by the collaborative relationship between the Mother and the Father.

Each of these major learnings illustrates a particular aspect of ritual ambivalence. Taken together, these learnings offer a perspective of the imaginal structures that may be associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual.
CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the significance and implications of the learnings in this research study. The chapter includes four sections, entitled: Significance of Learnings, Mythic and Archetypal Reflections, Implications of the Study, and Areas for Further Research.

The first section, Implications of the Study, begins with a reiteration of the six major learnings that emerged in response to the Research Problem: What are the imaginal structures associated with contemporary ambivalence toward ritual? Following this is a discussion of how the learnings support the research hypothesis: The contemporary ambivalence toward ritual is a symptom of the dissociation between the Mother principle and the Father principle and arises out of a cultural and archetypal taboo associated with ritual. This discussion situates the significance of the learnings within the theories that frame the study, drawing especially upon concepts and principles from the theory-in-practice, Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory.

The second section, Mythic and Archetypal Reflections, uses the biblical story of Jacob and Esau as a reflective surface to further communicate the significance of the major learnings. This section highlights psychologically the dynamics of ambivalence
and the tensions between sacred and secular, as well as how these can find some resolution.

The third section, Implications of the Study, begins with a description of how I have been affected personally by the research process. The discussion branches out from more individually oriented implications to the wider community, concluding with a consideration of the implications of this study on cultural transformation.

The final section, Areas for Further Research, offers suggestions of possibilities for future research that could carry forward the learnings from this study. These suggestions for further research are aimed at continuing to elucidate an understanding of ritual ambivalence.

**Significance of Learnings**

The purpose of this inquiry was to research the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual. The analysis of the data resulted in six major learnings, each of which identifies a particular aspect of the ambivalence toward ritual: Learning One states that contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves early negative experiences and childhood wounding in conventional religion, especially through ritualisms. Learning Two states that under the influence of sibling culture, contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves an absence of recognition of verticality, uncertainty about how ordinary space becomes converted into sacred space, confusion between rituals of routine and transformative rituals, and trivializing of differences between superficial and sacred rituals.
Learning Three states that the approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Mother principle, associated with the desire for safety and connection, in tension with the fear of merging and enmeshment. Learning Four states that the approach to ritual evokes ambivalence around the Father principle, associated with the desire for supportive structure, in tension with fear of rigid and oppressive authority.

Learning Five states that ambivalence that arises at the threshold of ritualizing is characterized by an assessment of the relationship between the Mother and Father principles, in which the desire for acceptance and protection in the play space is in tension with the fear of a lack of safety. Learning Six states that the exploration of ambivalence, culminating in the determination of a safe-enough play space, catalyzes ritual trust, temporarily suspending fear and allowing fulfillment of the desire to participate in ritual that is characterized by collaboration between the Mother and the Father.

These six learnings are nested within an overall learning, which can be stated as follows: The contemporary ambivalence toward ritual involves the desire to participate in ritual that is characterized by collaboration between the positive aspects of the Mother and the Father, in tension with the fear of evoking negative aspects of the dissociated Mother and Father.

The guiding hypothesis in the research is: The contemporary ambivalence toward ritual is a symptom of the dissociation between the Mother principle and the Father principle and arises out of a cultural and archetypal taboo associated with ritual. This hypothesis contains two components that I will look at separately.
The data offers support for the first component of the hypothesis, that the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual is a symptom of the dissociation between the Mother principle and the Father principle. The learnings suggest that the desire to ritualize is characterized by the longing to participate in ritual that can be described as a collaboration between the positive aspects of archetypal Mother and Father—the unity, wholeness, and acceptance of authentic affective expression associated with the Loving Mother in combination with a sense of order, meaning, and initiative associated with the Preserver Father. This desire is in tension with a fear of evoking negative aspects of the dissociated Mother and Father, rooted in past experiences of being wounded in rituals where the collaboration between the Mother and Father was not intact.

An imagination of ritual that contains the qualities of collaboration between the positive aspects of the Mother and Father principles was apparent both in the participants’ definitions of ritual and in their stories of positive, memorable moments of participating in ritual. As well, the desire to participate in ritual that had the qualities of such a collaboration was expressed throughout the data collection process, most notably in the Figures of Desire in the participants’ journals and many of the pro-ritual figures that were brought forth during the polarity groups (Appendices 17 and 18).

At the same time, the resistance to ritual can be seen as arising from a fear that the collaboration between the positive aspects of the archetypal Mother and Father is not intact. In the absence of an effective collaboration between the Mother and Father principles, the negative aspects of these archetypal energies can be evoked. Without the support of the Preserver Father, the archetypal Mother can show up as the Mad or
Devouring Mother. Similarly, without the support of the Loving Mother, the archetypal Father can show up as the Rigid or Oppressive Father.

Participants’ stories of moments when they were negatively affected by ritual were uniformly characterized by the presence of such dark archetypal energies. For example, their depictions of religious leaders were often of rigid or oppressive figures who personified negative aspects of the Father principle. Their descriptions of the boring routine, collective conformity and lack of individuality in the rituals associated with conventional religion show the presence of negative aspects of the Mother principle as well. Negative aspects of the dissociated Mother and Father also were expressed in the Figures of Resistance in the participants’ journals and many of the anti-ritual figures that were brought forth during the polarity groups (Appendices 17 and 18).

Thus, the data suggests that underlying the desire to ritualize is an imagination of the Loving Mother and Preserver Father working together, while underlying the resistance to ritual is fear rooted in the awareness of the negative effects of ritualizing when this collaborative relationship is not intact and negative aspects of the dissociated Mother and Father are evoked. Held together in the psyche, these contrasting images of collaboration and dissociation coalesce in ambivalence toward ritual. Therefore, at the threshold of ritualizing, participants needed to assess the play space in order to determine the functionality of the relationship between the archetypal Mother and Father. The determination of the possibility of a good-enough collaboration between the Mother and the Father allowed the group to move forward toward participation in ritual. This interpretation of the data further supports the hypothesis that the ambivalence toward
ritual is a symptom of the dissociation between the Mother principle and the Father principle.

The data also offers support for the second component of the hypothesis, that the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual arises out of a cultural and archetypal taboo associated with ritual. There were several places in the data collection that suggest an association between ritual and taboo. First, there was the heightened level of anxiety that emerged at the threshold of ritualizing. The moments just prior to ritualizing brought forth a story about ritual cutting and a challenge to my leadership. My sense was that for both the group and for myself as a researcher, there was an awareness of being at a threshold of a restricted area of experience that we normally did not have access to, in other words, a taboo. From this perspective, the anxiety can be understood as a symptom of the combination of desire and fear about crossing the threshold and transgressing the taboo.

When the group finally had the opportunity to ritualize, the first response was to move into the closet, away from the primary research locale and out of the view of the video camera. The movement into the closet supported the creation of a liminal play space outside of the conventions of mainstream culture. The colloquial usage of “being in the closet” is suggestive of being in a space hidden from or taboo in mainstream culture. The ritual itself involved a heightened level of intimacy and touch—our bodies were close together in a small, darkened space. Afterwards, the participants spoke about the experience metaphorically in terms of sex, birth, and play, activities that are often the objects of cultural taboos and prohibitions.
The relationship between ritual and taboo that emerged from the data collection can be viewed from several theoretical standpoints. Drawing on Otto’s concept of the *mysterium tremendum*, ritual can be understood as an action that approaches the sacred, whose powerful, numinous quality is protected by taboo. A Freudian perspective focuses on the evocation of the Oedipal Complex at the threshold of ritualizing, involving aggressive impulses directed toward the paternal figure and incestual impulses directed toward the maternal, both of which are taboo. A Kleinian perspective might emphasize the double-bind associated with maternal ambivalence, involving the tension between the desire to merge with, and the fear of being engulfed by the maternal figure. Turner’s view emphasizes the liminal quality associated with ritualizing, wherein cultural norms are temporarily suspended, allowing for the exploration of normally taboo roles and behaviors.

Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory, especially the concepts of collaborative experience and cultural gatekeeping within this theory, weaves together these perspectives, offering an integrated way of understanding the relationship between ritual and taboo. In Omer’s theory, collaborative experience involves a liminal play space that is characterized by the effective association of the Mother and Father principles. It seems to me that although the soul may desire collaborative experience, this experience is normally not supported in the mainstream of contemporary, secular culture. According to Omer, any experience such as ritualizing that holds the potential to expand one’s normative identity may appear as threatening to the ego. In this view, taboos serve to maintain the status quo, preventing transformative experience by delineating the seemingly unacceptable regions just beyond the boundaries of one’s identity.
In Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory, the preservation of the boundaries of normative identity is achieved through gatekeeping. In the same way, cultural gatekeeping preserves the current normative identity of a collective. Thus, any potentially transformative experience that could possibly serve to expand the identity of the collective may be considered taboo, protected by cultural gatekeepers. I imagine that a culture characterized by a collaborative relationship between the Mother and Father principles would support and encourage ritual participation among its members. Alternatively, in a culture marked by the dissociation between the Mother and Father principles, participation in collaborative ritual falls outside of the collective identity, and thus could be construed as a transgressive act. From the perspective of Omer’s theory, it is the collaborative and transformative qualities of ritualizing that may be considered taboo, and can evoke ambivalence.

The Research Problem in this study is: What are the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual? The major learnings from this inquiry point toward a complex phenomenon that coalesces in the approach to ritual. The ambivalence that is associated with ritual is comprised of a web of interconnected imaginal structures around conventional religion, secular culture, and the Mother and Father principles. These structures suggest a transferential field that is catalyzed through ritualizing, involving the archetypal Mother and Father.

In reflecting on these interconnected imaginal structures through the lens of Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory, ritual can be imagined as a container that allows for transformation through contact with an archetypal Family. Ritualizing can be viewed as an activity that places adults in relation to the sacred in much the same way
that children are in relation to adults. It seems to me that the potential for psychological
growth through participating in ritual paradoxically requires a surrender in the service of
forming a relationship to archetypal presences that are larger than oneself.

This leads to a consideration of the loss of initiation in contemporary culture. The
learnings suggest a perspective for understanding initiation as a means for bringing
members of a culture into an active relationship with the positive aspects of the Mother
and Father principles. Initiation both models collaborative experience and teaches
individuals how to effectively participate in ritual. With the loss of initiation in
contemporary culture, individuals are left to struggle with both a lack of collaborative
experience and a lack of knowledge about how to move toward collaborative experience
through ritual.

Without the experience and knowledge that comes from initiation, it is easy to
imagine how the soul’s desire to be in relationship to the collaboration between the
Mother and Father can be drowned out by the fear and inhibition that arises out of the
imagination of split-off negative aspects of the archetypes, born of past experiences of
dysfunction in families and group contexts. This dynamic could limit both one’s
willingness and one’s capacity to participate in the transferential field that is constellated
in ritual.

It seems to me that effective initiation is crucial to the development of a mature,
healthy sense of self that is able to surrender to being in relationship to the sacred in
ritual. Traditional initiations typically involve ways in which the unique gifts and
qualities of initiates are recognized by the community. In some cases, initiates are
renamed according to the unique gifts and qualities that they could potentially bring to
the community. Combined with the successful navigation of the many ordeals and hardships involved in initiation, this public recognition of the emerging capacities of the initiate seems essential in developing a healthy sense of self that can function in relationship to the community and the sacred.

Conversely, the loss of initiation represents the collective failure of a community to provide both the supportive mirroring and the disciplined practices (the collaboration between the Mother and Father principles) that are needed to grow a healthy, mature sense of self in its members. It seems to me that this developmental failure in the collective can be experienced on a personal level as a profound failure to be seen, resulting in a deep wounding to one’s sense of self. In this way, the collective loss of initiation may inflict a narcissistic wound within the psyche of each uninitiated adult.

As initiation catalyzes the capacity to participate in collaborative experience through ritualizing, the narcissistic injury resulting from the loss of initiation must limit ritual participation in various ways. Given the widespread aversion to ritual in contemporary, secular culture, it seems clear that for many people, the loss of initiation primarily translates directly into a loss of sacred ritualizing. I suspect that many adults not only do not experience meaningful participation in ritual, but also do not imagine this as a loss. In the mainstream of sibling culture, where verticality goes unrecognized, meeting the archetypal Mother and Father through collaborative ritual is simply not a consideration.

Even for individuals who express a conscious desire to ritualize, this narcissistic wound may also serve to undermine their participation in ritual. In Chapter One: Introduction, I described how during my years of coursework at the Institute, it was
common for me to experience feelings of anxiety, dissociation and confusion during ritualizing. The freeze-fear that gripped me was often experienced by other students also, limiting our capacity for depthful participation, despite our conscious desire for this.

In the past, I had ascribed this freeze-fear to a simple case of performance anxiety. Now, at the conclusion of this inquiry into ritual ambivalence, my hunch is that it has more to do with the narcissistic wound that results from the loss of initiation. If initiation is viewed as the birth of a spiritual adult, then the loss of initiation must result in an extremely underdeveloped part in the adult identity, the result of trauma and/or developmental arrest.

In secular culture, sheltered from the intensity of direct encounters with the sacred, this underdeveloped part can often go unnoticed. In the threshold to ritual, however, in the tension of the potential of unleashing immense archetypal presences, this uninitiated, underdeveloped part can feel absolute terror and fear of annihilation. Lacking sufficient collaboration between the Mother and Father principles, a developmental struggle can ensue.

Omer speaks of an I-factor, which refers to the limiting effects that one’s feelings of inferiority can have on ritual participation. When the insecurity associated with the I-factor is present, an individual can be overcome by gatekeepers, causing a freezing effect which undermines participation. This seems to be what occurred after I invited the group to ritualize in Meeting One, and the group responded by expressing fear and resistance.

Similarly, Harry Guntrip describes the ego weakness that can coalesce out of severe early deprivation, leading to a pervasive withdrawn stance. In this case, the fear of contact with any object evokes a desire to return to the womb, a flight from life.
Guntrip contrasts this flight born of fear with other regressive situations that emerge from life-affirming desire and the struggle to live.\textsuperscript{7}

In reflecting on this, the meaning of the group ritual in the closet takes on an additional level of ambiguity. On one hand, the movement into the closet and the recreation of a group “womb” (in which one group member at a time was lovingly surrounded by the group) can be understood through Guntrip’s concept of ego weakness, as representing a flight from life based on fear. On the other hand, these actions can be interpreted as the group’s founding of a safe \textit{temenos} in which they could encounter the Mother and the Father.

Was the group fleeing from the main room and forming a safe circle out of fear or out of desire? My sense is that there were probably elements of both in the group’s action, indicative of the ambivalence that was present in the collective. I imagine that there are distinct subjectivities that are evoked and come into a dynamic relationship at the threshold of ritualizing. Perhaps it is that one of these parts is the withdrawn, infantile weakened ego, wounded by the loss of initiation, while another part holds onto the imagination of the collaboration of the Mother and Father, and moves toward ritual.

Further reflection on the learnings in this study brings up the questions of what is gained when the Mother and Father principles are kept separate, and what must be sacrificed in order to bring them together. Here it is helpful to turn to the theory-in-practice, Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory. According to this theory, the transformation of personal and collective identity is possible through participation in creative ritual. This transformation occurs through the transmuting of imaginal structures which takes place in a ritual container that allows collaboration between the Mother and
Father principles. However, imaginal structures do not transmute easily. The existing identity of the individual or the collective is held firmly in place through gatekeeping. According to Omer, any experience that threatens the existing identity will be restricted and resisted by gatekeeping.

By keeping the Mother and Father principles separate, there is a preservation of the status quo, the existing personal and collective identities. The process of change, catalyzed through the reunion of the Mother and the Father, brings death to the existing identity, and is naturally resisted. I believe there is, as well, a deep emotional layer to the resistance to collaborative experience that is rooted in personal and cultural developmental processes. Neumann writes of a Hero myth in the evolution of consciousness that follows the separation of the World Parents, involving first the slaying of the Mother, and then, the slaying of the Father. Stated in Hill’s terminology, this is the triumph of the dynamic masculine over the static feminine and the static masculine. This has resulted in the domination of secularism and sibling dynamics in modern culture, where the verticality associated with the Mother and Father principles is no longer widely recognized.

I find it interesting to consider the parallels between the collective and the personal. Individuals in modern culture participate in its sibling aspects in some manner. All of us have participated in decentralized experience that is characterized by the loss of recognition of verticality. In this sense, the slaying of the Mother and the Father is carried within each of us. These words reverberate with the imagery of the psychoanalytic theorists who described parental ambivalence: Freud’s image of the
murder of a primal father-king, Klein’s image of the infant’s desire to attack the Bad Breast.

I imagine that one of the primary reasons why ritual is resisted and why the Mother and Father principles are kept apart is that any movement toward the recognition of verticality may evoke a range of overwhelming feelings. Feeling one’s own personal responsibility for turning away from the Mother and the Father may bring up tremendous guilt. The idea that an initiation was withheld could trigger anger and rage. And the sense of deep loss in the dissociation between the Mother and the Father brings a profound sense of grief. It is possible that any combination of these emotions could surface at the threshold to ritualizing, where imagery of the Mother and Father and initiation, and thus the imagination of the dissociated Mother and Father and the loss of initiation, may be evoked and brought into awareness.

If it is the habitual comfort of the existing identity and the fear of change or of evoking overwhelming emotions that keeps the Mother and Father apart, perhaps this is what needs to be sacrificed in order to bring them together. Participation in collaborative experience requires finding a way to creatively transgress the restrictions set in place by personal and cultural Gatekeepers. Omer speaks of the necessity to surrender to imagination in order to catalyze transformative learning. The action of surrender is driven by a collaborative leadership function that is attuned to the unfolding of soul.

Mythic and Archetypal Reflections

A mythic source that offers an additional perspective for this research is the biblical story of Jacob and Esau (Appendix 21). In this story, Jacob and Esau are twin
brothers who struggle with one another in the womb. Esau, the physically stronger of the two, is born first, putting him in the position to obtain the birthright that will make him the spiritual leader of the family. Later on, when they have grown up, Jacob tricks Esau out of receiving the birthright from their father. My interest in this story was kindled when I came across the term, “Esau Complex” in a book by Luiji Zoja, called The Father. Zoja introduces the term in the context of discussing the psychological effects of the widespread loss of initiation in contemporary culture. He describes the Esau Complex as stemming from a wound at the core of the identity of the uninitiated adult, giving rise to such feelings as rage and envy.

I would like to turn to the story of Jacob and Esau in order to provide a mythic perspective on the phenomenon of the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual. My primary reason for choosing this story is that the principal characters are twins who are involved in dynamics around obtaining a birthright that will allow one of them to carry on the spiritual leadership of the family. I view the characters of Jacob and Esau as representing imaginal structures within the psyche that are involved in a polarized struggle around initiation, and by extension, around participation in ritual. As such, they may provide a useful reflecting surface by which to better understand the imaginal structures that characterize ritual ambivalence.

Esau, although entitled to receive the birthright on account of his winning the struggle to be the first-born of the twins, develops into a successful hunter who cares little about the birthright. Jacob is much more interested in the birthright, and sees his opportunity when one day, Esau returns from a long day of hunting famished, and asks Jacob for some soup that he has just made. Jacob says that he will give Esau some soup
in exchange for his birthright. Esau agrees, remarking that a birthright will not be of any use to him anyway if he starves to death.

This part of the story furthers my understanding of the influences of sibling culture on ritual that I describe as Learning Two: Secular Ritual versus Sacred Ritual, Structures around Verticality. In my interpretation of the myth, Esau represents the part of psyche that favors the practical over spiritual concerns, resulting in a limited imagination of the sacred. Without the mythic sensibility that Jacob holds, one cannot discern how a birthright could be more valuable than a bowl of soup. In the context of my research, Esau can be viewed as representing an imaginal structure that trivializes the difference between superficial ritual and sacred ritual. The story portrays an opposition between this trivializing structure that discounts the sacred, and another part of psyche, represented by Jacob, which has the capacity to imagine the sacred and seeks to establish the means for being in relationship to the sacred. The myth suggests that this psychological split is not simply an effect of modern culture, but rather, is a phenomenon that has occurred since ancient times.

The next part of the story reveals a lack of collaboration between the twins’ mother and father, Rebecca and Isaac. While Rebecca favors Jacob because of his sensitive nature, Isaac values the hunting prowess of Esau and looks with favor toward him as the firstborn. One day, Rebecca overhears Isaac, now aged and blind, telling Esau to go out and hunt and bring him some venison stew, and he will bestow the blessing of the birthright upon him. Rebecca quickly creates a plan to dress up Jacob as his brother, in order to trick the aged, blind Isaac into giving Jacob the blessing. Jacob is initially afraid, but with Rebecca’s encouragement, he agrees to go along with the plan.
This section of the story illuminates some of the dynamics that are constellated in moving toward ritual. First, we see the dissociation between the Mother and Father principles that constitutes the cultural status quo. While Jacob wants the birthright and is supported in this desire by his mother, he is not entitled to it according to the established rules and order of the society. Jacob and Rebecca represent the Mother principle that lacks the support of the masculine. I describe some of the dynamics associated with the Mother principle as Learning Three: Loving Mother versus Mad Devouring Mother, Structures around the Mother principle.

On the other side, Esau has the support of his father, and is entitled to the birthright according to the established rules, but he is not in touch with his desire to obtain the blessing. Esau and Isaac represent the Father principle that is separated from the feminine. I describe some of the dynamics associated with the Father principle as Learning Four: Preserver Father versus Rigid Oppressive Father, Structures around the Father Principle.

The two parent-child dyads exist completely separate from one another, representing the dissociation of the Mother and Father principles. Rebecca’s plan for Jacob to pretend he is Esau in order to receive the blessing from Isaac places these two separate parent-child dyads in an active engagement with one another. Jacob’s first reaction upon hearing the plan is one of fear and anxiety. He is afraid that he will be cursed and despised, and it is only after Rebecca says that she will take on the curse herself that he agrees to carry out the plan.

This section of the story bears a similarity to the threshold dynamics that I describe as Learning Five: At the Threshold, Assessing the Relationship between Mother
and Father Principles. This learning proposes that at the threshold to ritualizing, there is a need to assess the safety and security of the play space to determine whether there is a trustworthy-enough collaboration between the Mother and the Father. In the data collection meeting, when I invited the group to ritualize, the participants needed to determine that I would not show up as the Rigid Oppressive Father who would interrupt their play. Similarly, Jacob is worried that his attempt to obtain the birthright by disguising himself will be discovered, and he will invoke his father’s oppressive rage. It is only after receiving the assurance of his mother’s support and protection that he agrees to move forward with the plan.

With Rebecca’s help, Jacob succeeds in tricking his father and receiving the blessing. Jacob’s actions involved in obtaining the blessing from Isaac can be seen as effective participation in ritual that moves forward out of his determination that a good-enough collaboration between the archetypal Mother and Father is in place. Jacob is already in contact with the Mother principle; his desire, supported by his mother, is carrying him forward. The plan, which is both well thought out and well executed, brings Jacob into alignment with the Father principle, the discipline and structure that provides containment for the play. According to Omer, it is this union between desire and discipline, the Mother and Father principles working in tandem, which allows for deep participation in ritual.12

This section of the story offers an additional perspective on the relationship between ritual and taboo. By dressing as his brother in order to trick his father, Jacob is committing a transgressive act that shakes up the existing order. The rules for who is supposed to get the birthright are clear; yet, Jacob is in touch with a deeper knowing that
he is in a better position than his brother to be the spiritual leader of the family. Moving out of his sense of what is true and right, Jacob’s action successfully transgresses existing cultural norms, and has the effect of changing culture. It would be a very different story if Jacob did not possess the courage to risk this transgression. Although his actions transgress a taboo, they are seen in the context of the story as having a positive effect on the larger society. The story seems to indicate that, as Omer has suggested, ritualizing holds an essential function as a means of forwarding culture, by transgressing the taboos that prevent cultural growth and development.\(^\text{13}\)

This transgression carries difficult consequences for Jacob. Esau reacts to the betrayal with rage, and vows to kill his brother. Rebecca, having anticipated Esau’s fury, helps Jacob to escape to his uncle’s home far away. Jacob endures a great deal of hardship; he must live away from his family in exile for many years in the servitude of his deceitful uncle, who tricks him into working for no pay. Despite this, Jacob eventually amasses wealth and a large family of his own.

After many years, Jacob decides to risk seeing Esau again, although he has no idea how he will be received. Alone in the wilderness on the eve of this reunion, Jacob struggles throughout the night with a stranger who assaults him. In the morning, Jacob agrees to let the stranger go in exchange for a blessing. The stranger reveals himself as an angel, and renames Jacob as “Israel,” meaning “one who struggles with God.” During his struggle with the angel, Jacob had been touched in the hollow of his thigh and as a result, has a painful limp the rest of his life. Following this encounter of being both wounded and blessed, Jacob, foregoing any protection, presents himself to Esau, who runs toward his brother and gives him an embrace of forgiveness and friendship.
I view Jacob’s encounter with the angel as a symbolic enactment through which he is able to ritualize his ambivalence about his imminent meeting with his brother. In the midst of the ritualized struggle, the Other, who is first mistakenly perceived as a mortal enemy, becomes transformed in Jacob’s eyes into a divine friend. I imagine that in the morning following this encounter, Jacob had a fresh viewpoint on how he perceived his decades-long struggle with Esau. What may have felt like a destructive and frustrating antagonism could now be viewed from a larger perspective, as a constructive dynamic process that fuels spiritual development. This new perspective that comes from ritualizing clears the way for an effective reconciliation between Jacob and Esau.

Jacob’s struggle with the angel is, as well, a wounding experience that leaves him with a painful limp. Here, the myth seems to be saying that in encountering the sacred, there can be a wounding to our egos or narcissism. Jacob originally mistakes the angel for a mortal stranger, and engages him in a fight as if they are equals. The wound and the resulting limp serve as reminders of Jacob’s mortality. I imagine that the vulnerability required in facing his brother alone the following morning arose out of both the sacred struggle and the sacred wounding from the night before.

The reconciliation between Jacob and Esau parallels Learning Six: Out of the Closet, Ritualizing the Ambivalence. The data suggests that the conscious exploration of ambivalence, culminating in the determination of a safe-enough play space, catalyzes ritual trust, temporarily suspending fear and allowing fulfillment of the desire for collaborative participation in ritual. In turn, such collaborative participation in ritual can transform the way that one is in relationship to their ambivalence.
During the data collection meeting, several participants who had felt frustrated about the process of exploring their ambivalence expressed a markedly different attitude immediately following the ritual. In ritualizing, the participants were able to experience a temporary reconciliation in the unity/differentiation and order/chaos polarities that had contributed to their ambivalence up until that point. Participants were able to see a connection between their experiences of first exploring, and then resolving these polarities. From this, they were able to form a view of ambivalence as a constructive dynamic force and see the value in a process that made their ambivalence more conscious.

The story of Jacob and Esau comes to a close soon after their reconciliation. The two families meet and then move in separate directions, eventually becoming two distinct nations of people. Woven through this story is a prophecy, first revealed to Rebecca when she was pregnant and later included in Isaac’s blessing, that the descendants of Jacob will always prevail over the descendants of Esau.

In my reading of the myth, in which Jacob and Esau represent the poles of ritual ambivalence within the psyche, an individual could contain the lineages of both Jacob and Esau. Although the Bible does not offer specific descriptions, I imagine that the religious practices of the descendants of Jacob developed quite differently than those of the descendants of Esau. The possibility that a single individual could carry both of these lineages brings me to the double-bind that I described as Learning One: Spiritual versus Religious, Ambivalence toward Religion. In the data collection meetings, the participants expressed their desire to move away from conventional religion; at the same time, they expressed their desire for positive religious experiences. In the approach to
ritual, this ambivalence toward religion can result in a double-bind, in which one experiences internal pulls both toward and away from participating in ritual.

Prior to the data collection, the prophecy that the descendants of Jacob would prevail over the descendants of Esau seemed psychologically untrue to me. Observing the widespread lack of participation in sacred ritual and the domination of the practical over the spiritual under the influence of contemporary sibling culture, it appeared to me that the descendants of Esau were firmly in charge. In reflecting on my learnings, I now understand this prophecy differently. I take it to mean that when the polarities represented by Jacob and Esau enter into an active, conscious engagement with one another, the pull toward sacred ritual will prevail, as occurred in my data collection meetings.

It seems to me that in many areas of contemporary culture, these polarities are not typically brought into active engagement with one another. Rather, the polarities of ritual ambivalence often remain separated, with one pole being lived out consciously while the other pole is submerged in the unconscious. This phenomenon may be understood within the context of the myth as a normal condition of separation between the brothers that exists throughout most of the story—their upbringing, in which they participated in separate activities apart from one another, Jacob’s years in exile away from his brother, and the parting of the families following the reconciliation. The story suggests that it takes an unusual or crisis situation, such as when the blessing was about to be given, to catalyze an active relationship between the two polarities. Similarly in contemporary culture, it may require a life crisis or one’s immersion in a transformative learning
process in order to bring the polarities of ritual ambivalence into an active engagement with one another.

**Implications of the Study**

This study holds implications on several different levels. In this discussion, I begin by describing how the study has affected me personally, and then widen my focus by speculating on more collective implications.

Conducting this inquiry has dramatically affected my understanding of the phenomenon of ritual ambivalence. Although it was my interest in ritual that guided me into this research, the study has had a particularly transformative effect on my perception of ambivalence. Ambivalence is a complex phenomenon that does not lend itself to clear experience or simple explanations. Not only is ambivalence comprised of intense forces and feelings, but as well, these energies are set in opposition to one another. Looking back, it makes sense to me that prior to the study, I was more in touch with the resulting symptomology of ambivalence, the wash of gray indifference that comes out of the mixture of intense blacks and whites. Although I could feel my own combination of resistance and desire to ritualize, I could not obtain enough reflexive distance from my own experience to discern the particular structures that were fueling my ambivalence.

As well, I could not be sure that my ambivalence toward ritual was not merely some idiosyncratic neurosis that was held by me and a small handful of others. It was a leap of faith for me to imagine that many other people outside of my circle at the Institute were unknowingly carrying this same ambivalence. Going into the data collection
meetings, I was therefore not entirely certain that the group of participants would even identify any ambivalence toward ritual. All I had to go on was a hunch that they would.

The experience of effectively helping the group to identify their ambivalence and tease out the polarities that comprised their ambivalence profoundly affected me in several ways. First, it served as a clear affirmation of the psychological truth of ritual ambivalence. The inquiry revealed that this phenomenon was present in the participants, even though they were generally unaware of it prior to our exploration. This has supported my growing belief that ambivalence toward ritual is a pervasive psychological condition in contemporary culture, although it often is not experienced in full consciousness.

Second, the inquiry allowed me enough reflexive distance to be able to glimpse into the workings of ambivalence in the psyche. Identifying the imaginal structures that may underlie ritual ambivalence has provided me with a framework through which to better understand this phenomenon. Now, when I am faced with my own or another’s ambivalence, I am no longer satisfied to simply accept the wash of gray that manifests. Rather, I wonder about the extreme fears and desires that may be fueling the process. Inevitably, I move in the direction of considering the relationship to parental archetypal energies that may be shaping the experience.

Third, the research showed me the importance of engaging in a process in which one’s ambivalence is made conscious. My sixth learning describes how this process of exploring ambivalence can catalyze deeper participation in ritual. Out of this learning, I have looked for ways to bring ambivalence into fuller consciousness through forms that allow for the full expression of both poles of the ambivalence. For example on several
occasions, I have invited my team of expressive arts therapists to explore our ambivalence around particular challenges that we face in the hospital where we work. These explorations have generated rich insights about our collective experience and moved our team toward a deeper level of collaborativity.

Throughout the research process, my perspectives on ambivalence have shifted dramatically. Prior to embarking on this research, my primary view of ambivalence was that it was an obstacle to be overcome. As I reviewed the literature on ambivalence, I developed my awareness about the centrality of ambivalence in the psyche and the significance of ambivalence in human development. However, it was only after witnessing the transformative processes that occurred through the exploration and ritualizing of ambivalence in the data collection meeting, that I gleaned an embodied understanding of ambivalence as a doorway to the sacred.

It is interesting that this same shift, of viewing ambivalence first as an obstacle and later as a doorway to the sacred, was paralleled in the participants’ experiences in the data collection meeting. This perceptual shift was described in Learning Six: Out of the Closet, Ritualizing the Ambivalence, by comparing participants’ journal entries immediately prior to and following ritualizing.

In reflecting on my shifting views toward ambivalence, I am left with a sense of the mysterious and paradoxical nature of this phenomenon. No single perspective can adequately capture the complexity of ambivalence in its entirety. Rather, my research has shown me that ambivalence can function as both an impediment and a catalyst to growth, as both an obstacle and a portal to the sacred.14
I have come to believe that one of the primary functions of ritual is to hold this paradox. In ritual space, where both poles of the ambivalence can be experienced, what had appeared in ordinary space to be an impediment to be overcome can be transformed into a portal to the sacred. My explanation for this is that when we struggle with the complexities and paradoxes of our own ambivalence, like Jacob, we are brought closer to the heart of our experience, where the sacred dwells.

Perhaps the most significant learnings for me personally in this research have emerged out of my own psychological struggles with ritual ambivalence in the dissertation writing process. It is generally understood that completing a dissertation is an enormous initiatory task. In fact, Hill uses the dissertation as his primary example of a fiery initiation, in which the grandiosity and willfulness of the dynamic masculine must subordinate to the order and authority of the static masculine.\footnote{15}

Even more so for me, this process has been a watery initiation, a “dark night of the soul” through which I have been confronted with the chaos of my own split-off dynamic feminine subjectivities.\footnote{16} Sitting down at the computer to write, my awareness of the enormity of the initiatory task often evoked feelings of dread and anxiety that were sometimes so overwhelming as to render me unable to type a single word. In turn, these experiences of freeze-fear left me feeling deflated about my abilities as a writer and depressed about the slow pace of my output. Simultaneously feeling anxious about writing and depressed about not writing, I was assaulted by gatekeepers from all sides.

I knew from both my coursework at the Institute and from my research that the only effective way out of this chaotic fragmentation was to ritualize the writing process. To be sure, there were occasions when I was able to successfully develop ways to
ritualize my ambivalence and face the task at hand. However, it was much more frequent for me not to ritualize. In deciding whether to ritualize, my resistance toward writing easily translated into resistance toward ritual.

In reflecting on this, I have come to understand my struggles during the writing process as an encounter with a sacred teaching, offering me an intense, embodied experience of ritual ambivalence that went deeply into my bones. Like Jacob after his struggle with the angel, this sacred encounter has involved a wounding to my narcissism, catalyzing a sense of humility that will remain with me for a long time.

As I near the completion of this dissertation, I can view the entire process as an initiation that has involved a wounding to my narcissism from the beginning. Years ago, when I was first developing my topic, I wanted to conduct a study that would provide evidence of the benefits of creative ritualizing. Looking back on this, I can now see that my desire to demonstrate the benefits of ritual was driven largely by a narcissistic structure within me that wanted to showcase my own beliefs and talents. The Institute’s guideline to research something that was genuinely unknown challenged me to move beyond my narcissistic desires and open myself up to a topic that was choosing me. When I dug down deep into the shadows of my own experience of ritual, the topic that came to me was ritual ambivalence.

I can see now that this topic of ritual ambivalence both emerged out of, and has continuously held me close to my own narcissistic wounding and ambivalence. Earlier in this chapter, I reflected on the personal wounding that can result from the loss of initiation. I noted that without the supportive mirroring and disciplined practices (the collaboration between the Mother and Father principles) that are required to grow a
healthy, mature sense of self, a developmental failure ensues that can lead to narcissistic injury. From this perspective, I can see how my early interest in ritual was, in part, a compensatory defense that helped me to avoid seeing or feeling this wound. Rather than attending to my grief and anger around the loss of initiation and the underlying dissociation between the Mother and Father, I was acting as if there was no wound.

The connection in my research between ritual ambivalence and the dissociation between the Mother and Father principles holds significant meaning for me personally. This learning has revealed for me a link between my ambivalence and my interest in ritual. As a child, I was blessed in having both a mother and father who encouraged my participation in, and nurtured my love for the arts. At the same time, the limitations in my parents’ collaboration were a source of great pain for me. I believe it was the combination of my passion for the arts and my desire to heal this pain that catalyzed my interest in ritual and my work as an expressive arts therapist.

By helping me to see my own woundings and ambivalence more clearly, the learnings in this dissertation have served as a healing agent for me. Although this process of self-reflection has sometimes been painful, I feel that it has ultimately brought me to a greater sense of wholeness, as I have begun to reclaim and integrate the previously split-off and repressed poles of my own ambivalence. My understanding of how the dissociation between the Mother and Father principles lives within the psyche has grown my compassion for the wounded child who lives within all of us. Seeing this dissociation clearly feels like a necessary step in the process of moving towards reconciliation, both within myself and with others.
The process of collecting and interpreting the data in this research has reaffirmed my beliefs both in the power of ritual as well as in the brilliance of Omer’s theoretical and practical teachings. Although I was familiar with Omer’s methodology of Imaginal Inquiry from my coursework at the Institute, the experience of conducting such participatory research really brought Imaginal Inquiry to life for me. It feels like a rare privilege to have been able to collect data on experience that is not accessible to normative identity. There were several points throughout the research process, most notably the group ritualizing toward the end of Meeting One, in which I felt graced by the potent presence of the numinous. Reflecting on these experiences, I can trace their roots in the concepts, principles, and practices that comprise Omer’s Imaginal Transformation Theory, especially the centrality of ritual in this theory.

Along with deepening my understanding of the power associated with ritual, this study has made me acutely aware of the ethical responsibility that goes along with the roles of researcher and ritual facilitator. The effective facilitation of Imaginal Inquiry required me to check in with my Dissertation Committee, my co-researchers, and myself throughout the research process, to make sure that the leadership that I was providing as a participatory researcher was collaborative, rather than narcissistic. Omer differentiates between collaborative leadership, in which ego is aligned with the unfolding of soul, and narcissistic leadership, characterized by the dissociation between ego and soul, resulting in the constriction of experience.¹⁷

I look back on the depth of the extensive training I received at the Institute that enabled me to provide effective collaborative leadership in my research. Realizing how uncommon collaborative leadership is in contemporary society, I have since reflected on
the potentially harmful effects of narcissistic ritual leadership. Participants in ritual are in a vulnerable state, and the leader’s embodiment of split-off negative aspects of the Mother and Father can result in wounding and retraumatizing experiences for the participants. Ethical ritual leadership requires a deep capacity for reflexivity on the part of the leader.

The intimacy that is generated in the transference field in ritual raised ethical and professional considerations for me as well. Following Meeting One, I felt proud and moved by the depth of the participants’ ritualizing and the level of intimacy that emerged out of the day’s structured activities. Although I was still feeling this a week later during Meeting Two, I was surprised that I was also feeling some shyness around the participants. When I reflected on my shyness, I realized that it was around my having initiated something intimate for the group without providing any means of sustaining this intimacy within a structured container. I could feel the close transference relationship between the participants and me that had begun to coalesce. It felt somewhat awkward to hold this alongside of the awareness that in all probability, we would never see each other again.

This particular facet of the experience has evoked a shift in the way that I imagine my future work. For a long time, I had wanted to facilitate rituals in the context of intensive time-limited workshops. Although a workshop setting could provide an effective means of deepening participation in ritual, my experience in Meeting Two made me acutely aware of some of the limitations in doing short-term work. From this, I have begun to imagine contexts through which I could foster more sustainable participation in ritual. For example, I would be interested in using ritualizing as a primary approach in
conducting small, ongoing expressive arts therapy groups. I could envision using this
approach in providing an advanced training to expressive arts therapists through an
ongoing supervision group. In addition, I may consider working as a consultant, to help
effect positive changes in organizations that could be sustained with my ongoing support.

The articulation of the structures that underlie participation in ritual could hold
significance for any professionals involved in facilitating ritual, including therapists,
clergy, educators, and organizational leaders. Toward this end, I am planning to share
my learnings with the larger professional community by revising the Dissertation as a
journal article and by teaching classes for graduate students and professionals. As well, I
am planning to continue experiential and didactic presentations of this work at
professional conferences.

The published learnings may be useful to anyone who is interested in ritual. For
professionals, a recognition and understanding of ritual ambivalence could support the
effectiveness of their facilitation of ritual. I imagine that an article summarizing the
learnings could also be relevant for individuals who participate in ritual or are interested
in understanding more about their relation to ritual. A reading of such an article may
catalyze reflection on one’s own personal relationship to ritual, and the recognition of
one’s own ritual ambivalence. This awareness could lead to a deepening of one’s
participation in ritual.

This study may hold implications for the profession of psychotherapy. The
perspective of viewing psychotherapy as ritual is well established in the literature. Several authors, especially in the areas of Jungian and expressive arts therapy, have
described psychotherapy as a healing ritual and as an initiatory rite-of-passage. From this
perspective, my learnings about ambivalence toward ritual could be applied to understanding ambivalence toward psychotherapy. For example, a client’s fear of evoking negative parental archetypal energies could inhibit their forming a transference with the therapist. Or a client’s ambivalence around religion could prevent them from bringing their relation to the sacred into the therapy.

As well, this study could help therapists to better understand some of their own countertransference issues. In the same examples, a therapist’s unconscious fears of embodying the archetypal Mother or Father could prevent the fostering of a transferential field, thus limiting opportunities for their clients’ growth. A therapist’s own unreflected ambivalence around religion could limit the extent to which they are able to bring a sacred dimension to the therapy.

Several writers have written about the benefits of introducing specific ritual interventions into psychotherapy. Similar to the self-help literature around creating personal rituals, these authors rarely discuss the ambivalence that a therapist may feel in making a ritual intervention. In one of the few formal studies on the experience of ritualizing, Staehle, who also completed her dissertation at the Institute of Imaginal Studies, found that supervisors and supervisees sometimes experience ambivalent feelings around the conscious introduction of a ritual intervention into their clinical supervision.19 My learnings could help therapists to recognize their own ambivalence toward ritual, and potentially, the gatekeeping that may prevent them from bringing ritual more fully into their clinical practice.

This study could hold particular implications for the orientation of Imaginal Psychology. As ritual forms an integral part of both the theory and practice of Imaginal
Psychology, a better understanding of the structures that underlie participation in ritual seems essential. This study was largely constructed upon a foundation that was provided by theorists from within the orientation of Imaginal Psychology, especially Omer. My hope is that this study will in turn form a stepping-stone for future inquiries in Imaginal Psychology that can further illuminate various aspects of the workings of soul.

Although ritual is a cornerstone of the curriculum at the Institute of Imaginal Studies, my sense is that ritual is not given the same level of importance in the larger academic discipline of Psychology. This study holds relevance for other orientations in Psychology such as Depth Psychology and Transpersonal Psychology, as well as particular areas of study such as Drama Therapy and Expressive Arts Therapy. Therefore, I can imagine that this research could serve as a bridge between Imaginal Psychology and the larger academic discipline of Psychology, as well as other fields of study that are concerned with ritual, such as Theology and Anthropology.

Finally, this study could hold implications for contemporary culture and cultural transformation. The primary impetus behind this research was born of a tension between my awareness of the importance of ritual to collective life and my perception of the widespread aversion to ritualizing in contemporary culture. I asked myself if ritual was so important, then why was the collective participation in ritual so limited. As I reflected upon my own personal ambivalence toward ritual, I began to connect my own experience to a larger psychological phenomenon that seems to be occurring throughout the collective of contemporary culture.

As I discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, ritual can be seen as playing an essential role in both the origins and the ongoing transformation of culture. In this view,
ritual constitutes a play space in which the elements that comprise culture can be taken apart, examined, and re-assembled in new and unexpected ways. Ritual is a direct and potent means of effecting transformation on a collective level.

Thus, a further understanding of the dynamics that limit participation in ritual could play a crucial role in effecting change on a cultural level. Knowledge of the imaginal structures that may underlie the ambivalence toward ritual represents a first step. The next step is how to actually apply this knowledge, so as to move toward deeper and broader participation in ritual on a collective level.

Areas for Further Research

At the end of this inquiry, I am left with an appreciation of the immensity of the mystery of ritual. Having illuminated a small corner of this immense mystery and glimpsed the richness and complexity of the imaginal structures associated with the contemporary ambivalence toward ritual, my curiosity moves toward the darkness that lies just beyond the reach of my single candle’s light. It is from this place of curiosity that I would like to recommend areas for further research.

The testing of the hypothesis in this inquiry raises additional questions for me. In designing my methodology, I was careful not to reveal anything to the participants that was related to my hypothesis in the study. I did not mention the word ambivalence in Meeting One until it was already apparent that this is what was evoked in the group. Similarly, I did not say anything about the Mother and Father principles or about taboo. I did not want to skew my results by leading the participants in particular directions. The
fact that the participants explored these areas without my suggestion contributes to the validity of the study.

Yet, having completed my inquiry, I am now interested to know what could be uncovered in a study that focuses more overtly on the role of the dissociation of the Mother and Father principles or of taboo in ritualizing. For example, it could be interesting to directly explore participants’ relationships to the various masculine and feminine archetypal energies. Part of this inquiry could involve gathering stories about participants’ families-of-origin, the collaboration between their parents, and their relationships to their parents. From this, we might learn more about how the dissociation between the Mother and Father principles is experienced on a personal level, and how this dissociation affects one’s participation in ritual. As well, the relationship between ritual ambivalence and taboo bears further investigation. It would be interesting to explore how one understands taboo and what is experienced in approaching something that one considers to be taboo.

Each of the learnings in this study offers a direction for future research. It seems that there is a great deal of information that has yet to be unpacked around the ambivalence toward religion that is pervasive in contemporary culture. Alongside of this, it would be essential to better understand how we imagine the sacred and our relationship to the sacred. Exploring participants’ capacities and limitations around the imagination of the sacred may prove to be a fruitful direction for research. As well, it could be interesting to focus an inquiry specifically on the ambivalence toward the archetypal Mother or the archetypal Father.
In the integrative group discussion at the end of the data collection meetings, the participants raised several questions that suggest directions for future studies. I would like to offer my responses to these questions in terms of their relationship to my study and their viability for further research.

First, the participants were curious about what might have happened if the group had ritualized right at the beginning of the first group meeting. Several group members expressed the opinion that such a ritual would have lacked the depth that came from ritualizing after a day of exploring ambivalence. Although this may be accurate, such a methodology could uncover other aspects of ritual ambivalence, for example what happens in the aftermath of ritualizing. My study concentrated on evoking and meeting the gatekeepers that surface in the approach to ritual. It was clear to me that immediately following the ritual, gatekeepers arose in the transition back into secular culture. This was evident both in the rapid dissipation of energy in the group soon after someone noticed an office worker, as well as the doubts and questions about the meaning and the sustainability of the ritual that were brought forward in the discussion which followed the ritual. In order for ritualizing to truly be effective, it would therefore be important to know more about the gatekeepers that surface in its wake, so that the transformative effects of the ritual experience are not diminished in the return to the daily routines of one’s life.

The participants also wondered how the results might have been different with a broader selection of participants, including individuals who do not express any conscious interest in ritual. For my study, I purposely selected participants who expressed some desire toward ritual, as I wanted to explore the unconscious resistance to ritual that I
assumed lived alongside this desire. A study conducted with participants who do not express any desire to ritualize could unearth other aspects of ritual ambivalence and potentially increase our understanding of the gatekeeping that limits participation in ritual in a broader section of the population.

Third, the participants reflected on what might happen to the group over time. This brings up the idea of a longitudinal study that examines how ambivalence toward ritual shifts over time. Some of the participants spoke about the possibilities of conflicts that might arise if the group was to stay together. A longitudinal study could uncover how the desire and resistance to ritualize are affected by the development of a group culture over time. Such a study could also examine the effect of a consistent group ritual practice on one’s participation in ritual, both within and outside of the research group.

To date, there are few research studies that examine contemporary ritual from within the experience of ritual itself. Participatory research offers a viable means of investigating the mystery of ritual, through collecting data directly on the experience of participating in ritual. This study represents a small step toward understanding a particular aspect of the ritual experience in contemporary culture. My hope is that with the emergence of the participatory research paradigm, there will be more studies that illuminate the multifaceted richness of the ritual experience, opening the doors for deeper and broader participation in ritual in contemporary culture.
APPENDIX 1

ETHICS APPLICATION

Ethics Review

1. Population

The population in this research study is adults who are willing to explore their experience of ritual. I am seeking participants who feel that their current ritual practice is limited, and who express the desire to participate more in ritual activities. Since the study requires participants to be able to reflect on their experience, I am looking for individuals who have a sufficient level of psychological awareness. Participants will need to have at least two years of prior experience with psychotherapy and/or group process, so that they are familiar with processes of self-reflection and experiential group work.

I am seeking demographic diversity among the participants, including variables such as age, gender, and ethnicity. I am also seeking demographic diversity in terms of religious practice, although participants cannot currently have a formal, fixed religious belief or practice that prevents them from being open to exploring and participating in other forms of ritual practice. The only demographic similarity I am seeking is that all participants are adults, over 21 years old.

I would ideally like to have seven to 12 participants for this study. Due to the possibility of participant attrition, I will begin with at least ten, and no more than 12
participants. I will recruit participants by sending out a recruitment letter through e-mail newsletters in the expressive arts therapy community (Appendix 8). This letter describes the nature and purpose of the study, the characteristics of potential participants, and details concerning the time commitments of participating in the study. I will request that recipients assist me by forwarding the letter to friends and colleagues who may be interested in participating. In this way, I will be able to recruit a wider range of participants from both inside and outside the expressive arts therapy community. I will include my e-mail address and a confidential telephone number so that potential participants can get in touch with me.

2. Procedures Involving Research Participants

I will screen participants through a telephone screening interview (Appendix 7). Through this screening interview, I will collect demographic information and ascertain that participants have all of the characteristics that I require. In my initial contact with potential participants on the telephone, I will describe the nature of the study (Appendix 6). This description will provide information about the general area of inquiry, without revealing the specific intent of the research. I will provide information about the time and place of the group meetings, and outline the various activities involved in the research, such as journaling, group discussions and experiential work.

I will telephone those applicants who I would like to invite to participate in the study and read them an invitation (Appendix 8). I will send out simple, courteous rejection letters to the applicants who I am not inviting to participate (Appendix 9). In the telephone invitation, I will run through another description of the study, outlining the
potential risks. I will invite questions and concerns and allow each individual a few days to consider whether they would like to participate, if they have not yet decided. Immediately following the telephone conversation, I will send each person who is considering participating an e-mail copy of the invitation. For applicants who accept the invitation to participate, I will also send out directions, parking suggestions and additional information via e-mail (Appendix 10). I will also telephone each participant a few days before each of the meetings, as a reminder.

All of the directions and information that I will give in the group meetings have been scripted (Appendix 14). These include scripts for all information given prior to the actual data collection: introducing myself and my co-researchers, a description of practicalities, a reminder of confidentiality, a description of the nature and purpose of the study, and a general description of the meeting’s activities. Likewise, all of the procedures for data collection are scripted and described in detail. The procedures for data collection include: focal space enactments, polarity group enactments, group discussions, storytelling, and written responses to questions.

Immediately following the second group meeting, I will send out thank-you letters to each of the participants (Appendix 12). I will mail out a summary of my learnings upon approval of my dissertation.

3. Consent Process

I will invite participants to come to the first group meeting at the Flood Building, in San Francisco, at 9:15 AM. For the first half hour, I will answer any questions
participants have about the study and have them sign the Informed Consent form in person with me, prior to the data collection. (Appendices 2 and 11)

4. Risks

There are potential risks in participating in a group process that can include troubling encounters with self or others. The activities in the data collection do not involve much interpersonal physical movement, and thus, the risk of physical injury is minimal.

The risk of emotional distress is more of a concern. Participation in group discussions holds the risk of disclosing personal information that may be sensitive and uncomfortable. The forms of focal space and polarity groups are designed to evoke the enactment of various subjectivities that can carry an affective charge. There is a risk that participants could experience aspects of themselves that are new and unfamiliar, resulting in gatekeeping that may be uncomfortable. Additionally, the polarity groups may evoke interpersonal encounters that could be potentially disturbing to the participants.

5. Safeguards

This study is designed to minimize potential risks in several ways. First, I will begin to warn participants of possible risks from the time I invite them to participate in the study. I will speak to them about potential risks on the telephone, I will send them a written copy via e-mail, and I will include a section on risks on the Informed Consent form (Appendix 2). At each of these points, I will invite participants to bring forward any questions or concerns about participating in the study. I will attempt to address these
concerns as best as I can. A second safeguard is the screening process, which seeks to select participants who have prior experience with therapy and group process, have an ongoing practice of psychological exploration, and are open to exploring ritual. I believe this will be an important factor toward ensuring that participants can integrate their experiences in the study.

There are several safeguards that are built into the design of the data collection itself. In an effort to minimize the risk of evoking disturbing interpersonal interactions, I have chosen to limit the activities that focus on group dynamics. Polarity groups is the only activity that calls for responses between the participants. The majority of the data collection activities will focus on personal explorations, which will sometimes be shared with the group through discussions and enactments.

In the beginning of the first group meeting, I will stress that participation at all times is completely voluntary. I will also invite participants to use the chimes to stop an activity for any reason. I believe that both of these suggestions will serve to empower the participants to have control over their participation.

The primary purpose of the first activity, the sharing of personal stories, is to build a sense of cohesion in the group, so that participants feel safe enough to express deep responses later on. I am hoping that my decision to share my own personal story in the beginning will help to show my vulnerability and establish rapport with the participants. I will also have my co-researchers participate in the storytelling, as their participation will deepen the level of trust in the field, creating a greater sense of safety for participants.
I will invite participants to journal and sit in silence at various points throughout the two meetings, so that they will have opportunities to reflect on their experience in a careful, measured way. And I will end each meeting with an integrative discussion, inviting participants to ask questions and bring up anything that feels unfinished. A closing ritual at the end of each meeting will further this process.

The primary intention in these safeguards is that there will be sufficient containment for the experiences that are evoked during the two group meetings. I will also make myself available to participants for a few minutes following each of the meetings, to address any further questions or concerns that participants may have. In the Informed Consent, I will let the participants know that as a researcher, I cannot provide psychotherapy, but I will have referrals to mental health professionals on hand, if such a need should arise.

It will be important for me to track my own reactions throughout the process of data collection, so I can stay in a reflexive relationship with the study. I will leave myself time following each of the meetings to journal my reactions. I will also ask for personal assistance with my reactions from my co-researchers and my therapist.

6. Benefits

Although I cannot guarantee any particular outcomes, my hope is that this study will benefit the participants in several ways. First, participants will have stated that they are interested in learning more about ritual. I am structuring the activities in the data gathering meetings so that these meetings will offer effective learning opportunities for the participants. Second, participants will have stated a desire to bring ritual more fully
into their life. Besides providing the opportunity to participate in ritual, my hope is that the group meetings will help participants to recognize their own ambivalence toward ritual. This attunement to one’s experience and recognition of one’s own resistance could lead to a deeper understanding of oneself, as well as more satisfying participation in ritualizing in the future.

The published learnings may be useful to anyone who is interested in ritual. This includes professions who are involved in the facilitation of ritual, such as therapists, educators, clergy, and organizational leaders. For professionals, a recognition and understanding of ritual ambivalence could support the effectiveness of their facilitation of ritual. I imagine that the research will also be relevant for individuals who participate in ritual or are interested in understanding more about their relation to ritual. A reading of the published learnings may catalyze reflection on one’s own personal relationship to ritual, and the recognition of one’s own ritual ambivalence. This awareness could lead to a deepening of one’s participation in ritual.

7. After the Study

I will send out thank-you letters to each of the participants following Meeting Two (Appendix 12). I will mail out a Summary of Learnings following the approval of my dissertation. The Summary of Learnings will be one to two pages, and will be written for a layperson. In the Summary of Learnings, I will state the Research Problem and briefly describe the major learnings that emerge from the data analysis.
APPENDIX 2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To the Participant in this Research:

You are invited to participate in a study on ritual. The study’s purpose is to better understand the experiences of adults who participate in small group ritualizing processes.

Participation will involve experiential group processes, storytelling, guided visualization, writing, and group discussion. This will take place at the Flood Building in San Francisco, and will involve two meetings. The first meeting will take place on Sunday, November 21, 2004 from 9:15 AM to 5 PM. The second meeting will take place on November 29, 2004, from 7 to 9 PM. Portions of these meetings will be recorded on videotape and audiotape, which will later be transcribed.

For the protection of your privacy, all tapes and transcripts will be kept confidential and your identity will be protected. All data will be stored in a locked file under the researcher’s control, and only the co-researchers will have access to these files. In the reporting of information in published material, any information that might identify you will be altered to ensure your anonymity.

This study is of a research nature and may offer no direct benefit to you. The published learnings, however, may be useful to therapists, educators, clergy, and organizational leaders, and may benefit the understanding of how adults experience ritual. This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. However, some of the procedures such as group discussions and group experiential work may touch on sensitive or uncomfortable areas for some people. Respect and attentive consideration will be given to whatever you bring up individually and in the group. If at any time you develop any concerns or questions, I will make every effort to discuss these with you. I, the researcher, cannot provide psychotherapy, but at your request or using my personal judgment, will facilitate referrals to an appropriate mental health professional, if such a need should arise.

If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time and for any reason. Please note as well that I, the researcher, may need to terminate your participation from the study at any point and for any reason.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me at (415) 600-2537, Mon-Fri, 9-5, or you may contact the Dissertation Director at the Institute of Imaginal Studies, 47 Sixth Street, Petaluma, CA, 94952, telephone: (707) 765-1836. The Institute of Imaginal
Studies assumes no responsibility for any psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

I, ______________________, consent to participate in the study of ritual. I have had this study explained to me by Craig Garfinkel, the researcher. Any questions of mine about this research have been answered, and I have received a copy of this consent form. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

Participant’s Signature  Date

Craig Garfinkel, Researcher  Date
APPENDIX 3

CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE OF GROUP MEETINGS

Evoking Experience

Meeting One
• Shared personal stories.
• Invited group to ritualize.
• Encouraged group to bring forward reactions to invitation.
• Gathered images about ritualizing the ambivalence.

Meeting Two
• Participants reflected on experiences in Meeting One.
• Researcher shared preliminary learnings with participants.

Expressing Experience

Meeting One
• Journal entries in response to personal stories, invitation and enactments.
• Enactments in focal space.
• Sociometric spectrum exercise.
• Participants wrote reflexive dialogue.
• Enactments in polarity groups.
• Participants ritualized their ambivalence.

Meeting Two
• Participants shared responses to researcher’s preliminary learnings.
Interpreting Experience

Meeting One

• Participants shared new learnings from the meeting.
• Participants chose memorable moments in closing circle.

Meeting Two

• Participants shared key moments from Meeting One.
• Participants gave responses to researcher’s preliminary learnings.

Integrating Experience

Meeting One

• Participants shared how they were affected by the day’s activities.
• Participants discussed any aspects of the experience that felt unfinished.
• Participants made closing gesture/ statement to the group.

Meeting Two

• Participants shared how the experience of being in the study had affected them.
• Group discussion on any aspects of the experience that did not feel integrated.
• Participants reflected on how this experience may be integrated into their lives.
• Participants made closing gesture/ statement to the group.
APPENDIX 4

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF GROUP MEETINGS

Meeting One—Morning

I. Consent Forms
   A. Greeted each participant individually.
   B. Discussed any questions participants had.
   C. Obtained participants’ signatures on consent form.

II. Introduction Circle (15 minutes)
   A. Researcher provided general information.
      1. Schedule (breaks, ending time, etc.).
      2. Space (bathrooms, exit locations, etc.).
      3. Introduction and role of co-researchers.
      4. Participation and confidentiality.
         a. Participation at all times is voluntary.
         b. Researcher and participants are required to hold confidentiality.
   B. General overview of procedures, including use of the chimes.

III. Initial Journaling (15 minutes)

IV. Sharing Personal Stories—Round One (60 minutes—Audiotaped)
   A. Tape recording and reactions.
   B. Invited group to reflect on a moment when they were affected by a meaningful ritual.
   C. Invited each participant to share their moment aloud with the group.
D. Researcher began by relating a personal ritual moment.

E. After everyone shared, participants journaled their reactions.

V. **Sharing Personal Stories—Round Two** (60-70 minutes—Audiotaped)

   A. Invited group to reflect on moments when they were affected negatively by ritual.
   
   B. Invited participants to share these moments aloud with the group.
   
   C. Participants journaled their reactions to the stories.

**Meeting One—Afternoon**

I. **Invitation to Ritualize/Focal Space** (30-40 minutes)

   A. Invited the group to ritualize together.
   
   B. Participants wrote initial reactions to the invitation.
   
   C. Proposed focal space for participants to bring forward reactions.
   
   D. Participants enacted responses in focal space. (Videotaped)

II. **Sociometric Spectrum/Reflexive dialogue** (50 minutes)

   A. Participants lined up along an axis of desire-aversion toward ritual. (Videotaped)
   
   B. Participants were guided through visualization.
   
   C. Participants wrote reflexive dialogue based on their ambivalence.

III. **Polarity Groups** (30 minutes—Videotaped)

   A. Proposed dialogue between polarity groups wanting and not wanting to ritualize.
   
   B. Participants enacted polarity groups.

IV. **Ritualizing the Ambivalence** (30-40 minutes—Videotaped)

   A. Invited group to ritualize their ambivalence.
   
   B. Participants had opportunity to ritualize their ambivalence.
C. Asked participants to journal responses to questions.

V. **Integrative Group Discussion** (50 minutes—Audiotaped)
   A. Participants shared verbally how they were affected by their experience.
   B. Participants shared any new learnings they obtained from the experience.
   C. Group discussion on any aspects of the experience that did not feel integrated.

VI. **Closing Circle** (10 minutes—Audiotaped)
   A. Each participant made closing gesture/statement to the group.
   B. Researcher thanked participants for their participation in the research study.
   C. Researcher stated availability for further questions or support.

**Meeting Two**

I. **Opening Circle** (20 minutes—Audiotaped)
   A. Two to three minutes of silence.
   B. Participants shared aloud their remembered key moments from Meeting One.

II. **Preliminary Learnings** (40 minutes—Audiotaped)
   A. Researcher shared written preliminary learnings with group.
   B. Participants gave responses to researcher’s learnings in focal space.
   C. 10 minute break.

III. **Integrative Group Discussion** (50 minutes—Audiotaped)
   A. Invited group to sit in silence and reflect on their experience during the study.
   B. Participants shared how participating in the research study affected them and any new learnings they obtained from the experience.
   C. Group discussion on any aspects of the experience that did not feel integrated.
   D. Participants discussed how this experience could be integrated into their lives.
IV. **Closing Circle** (10 minutes—Audiotaped)

A. Each participant made closing gesture/statement to the group.

B. Researcher thanked participants for their participation in the research study.

C. Researcher stated availability for further questions or support.
Subject: Call for Research Participants

I am a doctoral candidate in psychology and am conducting a research project on ritual. I am presently recruiting participants for this study and am asking for your assistance.

Transformative practices are often rooted in ritual. My research proposes to explore the experience of adults who come together to participate in a ritual process with a small group. This will be a learning opportunity for anyone who has a genuine interest and desire to bring ritual more fully into their life. Participants should have at least two years of experience with psychotherapy and/or group process. They should also have the ability to self-reflect and engage in psychological exploration, preferably with the ability to witness their own inner diversity and complexity.

Participants will be asked to commit to two group meetings in November 2004, including a full-day meeting on a Sunday and a two-hour follow-up meeting on a weeknight. The meetings, held at an expressive arts studio in San Francisco, will include 10 to 12 participants. This research project will include experiential group processes, storytelling, guided visualization, writing, and group discussion. Informed consent will be requested and confidentiality will be upheld.

If you are interested in participating in this study and would like more information, please contact me at cbgarfinkel@yahoo.com or (415) 600-2537. I am also interested in recruiting participants outside of the expressive arts therapy community. If you have friends, colleagues, or clients who may be interested, please let them know about the study as well. Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

Craig Garfinkel

P.S. Please feel free to forward this message to anyone on your mailing list who may have an interest in participating in the study.
APPENDIX 6

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

The following description was read aloud to all applicants over the telephone at the beginning of the Telephone Interview:

This is a research study about ritual. Ritual has always been a vital part of the human experience; yet, it remains a mystery that we know relatively little about. This study seeks to further our understanding about the experiences of adults who come together to participate in a ritual process with a small group.

There will be two group meetings, including a full-day meeting on a Sunday and a two-hour follow-up meeting on a weeknight. The meetings, held at a studio in San Francisco, will include myself, two co-researchers, and up to 12 participants. The activities in these meetings will include experiential group processes, storytelling, guided visualization, writing, and group discussion.

Participants need to have at least two years of experience with psychotherapy and/or group process. Participants should have the ability to self-reflect and engage in psychological exploration, preferably with the ability to tolerate some ambiguity and to witness their own inner diversity and complexity. My hope is that this experience will be interesting and meaningful for anyone who has a genuine interest and desire to bring ritual more fully into their life.
APPENDIX 7

TELEPHONE SCREENING INTERVIEW

Hello, is this [person’s name]? [If yes:] My name is Craig Garfinkel. I’m conducting a research study on ritual, and you expressed interest in being a participant in the study. I have a series of questions that I’m asking to those who expressed interest in participating. It will take about 10 to 15 minutes to run through them. Is this a good time for you now, or is there a better time when I could call you back?

Before we begin, let me read you a description of the study. [Read Description of the Study.] I’m wondering if you have any questions for me about the study. [Answer questions.]

Let me make sure I have all of your contact information. [Ask only about the items that are not already known.]

Name __________________________ Telephone number __________________________
Address ________________________________________________________________
E-Mail Address ___________________________________________________________

I’d also like to get some demographic information from you. I want to let you know that I will keep all of your information confidential. And your responses to any of my questions are optional, so if there’s anything you don’t feel comfortable about answering, that’s fine. Just let me know, all right? [Ask only about the items that are not already known.]

Date of Birth _______________________ Place of Birth __________________________
Gender __________________________ Ethnicity _________________________________
Religion by Birth __________________ Current Religion _______________________

Questions:

1. Do you belong to a faith community or religious organization? [If yes:] What is the name?

2. Do you have any religious beliefs or practices that would prevent you from exploring and participating in other forms of ritual practice?

3. Can you tell me about your interest in engaging in psychological exploration, through dreams, art making, play, movement practices, meditation, or by other means?
4. Can you briefly tell me what experience you have had with therapy and group process?

5. Have you ever participated in a ritual activity with a group? [If yes:] Can you give an example of a ritual that was meaningful for you?

6. In general, how often do you currently participate in ritual activities?

7. Can you briefly describe what these ritual activities are?

8. If you had the opportunity, would you participate more frequently in ritual activities?

Great, I just have one final scheduling question for you. The first group meeting will take place in San Francisco on Sunday, November 21. The second meeting will be on a weekday night, one or two weeks later. Are there any weekday nights during those weeks that you know you will not be available?

Thank you so much for taking the time to answer my questions. I will be in touch with you as soon as I have spoken with everyone. Before we end, do you have any questions for me? [Answer questions.] Let me give you my telephone number, in case any questions come up. It’s (415) 600-2537, and if you get my voicemail, just leave a message and I’ll call you back. Thanks again for your time. I’ll be in touch with you soon. Goodbye.
Hi, this is Craig Garfinkel getting back to you. We spoke earlier about my research study on ritual. I enjoyed speaking with you, and thought that you are an appropriate person to take part in the research. So I’m calling to invite you to participate in the study. Do you think you still may be interested in participating? [If yes:] I have some information about the study that I’d like to read to you, so you can make an informed decision about participating. Do you have a few minutes to talk, or is there a better time when I could call you back?

[If yes:] I’m going to read through some information. If there’s anything that’s not clear, or that you have a question about, just stop me, and I’ll answer it for you, all right?

The research will take place at the Flood Building in San Francisco, just south of the Van Ness Muni Station. There will be two group meetings, on Sunday, November 21st, from 9:15 AM to 5 P.M., and on Monday, November 29th, from 7 to 9 P.M. You will meet with me, two co-researchers, and a group of up to 12 participants, to explore the experiences of adults in small group ritualizing processes. Our time together will involve your participation in experiential group processes, storytelling, guided visualization, writing, and group discussions.

Portions of these group meetings will be recorded on videotape and audiotape. Some parts of the written responses and the written transcriptions of the group discussions and experiential work will be included in a dissertation. The original copy of your responses to questions will be returned to you when the data has been analyzed. Any publication of the project will protect your anonymity.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you. Even so, it is not possible to identify all potential risks in a research study. The risk of physical injury is limited. There are potential risks in participating in a group process that can include troubling encounters with self or others. You may experience a range of emotions before, during and after the group process and group discussions. You may talk about situations and areas in your life that are sensitive and uncomfortable. Respect and attentive consideration will be given to whatever you bring up individually and in the group, assistance will be provided if needed, and confidentiality will be upheld.

I’m wondering if you have any questions about the study? [Answer questions.] Are there any concerns that you have around your participation? [Address concerns.]
Do you know at this point whether or not you would like to participate, or would you like to take some time to think about it?

[If no:] That’s fine. I certainly appreciate your interest and your taking the time to speak with me on the telephone. I hope that I haven’t inconvenienced you too much. Thanks again for your time.

[If not sure:] That’s fine. Would it be alright with you if I contact you again in two or three days, so you can have some time to think about it? [If yes:] O.K. In the meantime, if any questions come up, please feel free to give me a call. Do you have my number, or should I give it to you again? [Give number.] Thank you very much, and I’ll be calling you back soon.

[If yes:] Great, I will e-mail you with information about the study, including directions to the Flood Building. Let me make sure I have your correct e-mail address. [Confirm e-mail address.] I’ll probably be phoning you with a reminder a few days before the first meeting. Meanwhile, if any questions come up, please feel free to call me. Do you have my number, or should I give it to you again? [Give number.] Thank you very much, and I look forward to meeting you on Sunday, November 21st.
APPENDIX 9

LETTER OF REJECTION

Craig Garfinkel
4508 Steele Street
Oakland, CA 94619

(Date)

Dear ______________,

Thank you for your interest in my research study on the experience of ritual. I received more requests to participate than I could accommodate. Unfortunately, I am not able to select you to participate in the study. I certainly appreciate your interest and your taking the time to speak with me on the telephone. I hope that I haven’t inconvenienced you too much. Thank you again for your time.

Sincerely,

Craig Garfinkel
APPENDIX 10

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in this research on group ritual, and for agreeing to participate in this study. I believe it will be an interesting and meaningful experience, and I want you to know that an important part of this experience is what it means for you personally and individually.

The dates for our meetings will be:

Sunday, November 21, 2004, 9:15 am—5:00 pm.
Monday, November 29, 2004, 7:00 pm—9:00 pm.

The meetings will be held at the Flood Building, located at 870 Market Street, in San Francisco. This is the building with a Gap store on the ground floor, next to the cable car turnaround and the Powell Street BART station. The front entrance is on Market Street between Powell and Stockton Streets. We will meet in Room #1185, on the 11th Floor. Please allow time for travel and parking, so you can arrive on time.

If you are driving, street parking should be available, as meters and commercial vehicle restrictions are not in effect on Sundays and after 6 PM on weeknights. If you prefer to park in a garage, the Ellis-O’Farrell Garage is adjacent to the north side of the Flood Building, on Ellis Street between Powell and Stockton Streets. On Sundays, the garage costs $6 for the whole day. On weeknights, it costs $1/hour.

All materials will be provided, as well as some light snacks, tea, and water. For lunch during the first group meeting, I will be providing pizza with vegetarian toppings; or if you prefer, feel free to bring a bag lunch with you to the first meeting. Wear comfortable clothing, and socks if your feet get cold.

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to call me with any questions that may arise. I look forward to meeting you on Sunday the 21st.

With warmest regards,

Craig Garfinkel, M.A.
(415) 600-2537
cbgarfinkel@yahoo.com
870 Market Street, Room #1185
APPENDIX 11

SCRIPT FOR SIGNING INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

[Hand participant consent form and say:] In order to participate in this research study, I’ll need for you to read over and sign this Informed Consent form. Before signing, please feel free to let me know about any concerns you may have about participating, or ask me any questions about anything in the form that isn’t clear.
APPENDIX 12

THANK-YOU LETTER

Craig Garfinkel
4508 Steele Street
Oakland, CA 94619

December 6, 2004

Dear _______________,

I want to thank you again for your participation in my research study on the experience of ritual. It was truly a pleasure to work with you, and I want you to know that you have been an essential part of bringing this research forward, for which I am very grateful.

Upon acceptance of my dissertation, I’ll be sending you a Summary of Learnings. I will also return your written responses to you. In the meantime, I will be available by phone or e-mail, if you need to get in touch with me for any reason. Again, thank you so much for your participation, and I wish you the best of luck in all of your endeavors, especially your future ritualizing!

Sincerely,

Craig Garfinkel
APPENDIX 13

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS USED IN CONDUCTING THE STUDY

1. Audiotape Recorder
2. Video Camera
3. Written Responses to Questions
   a. Writing tablets were distributed to participants at the beginning of each meeting.
   b. Pens were provided.
4. Chimes
APPENDIX 14

GROUP MEETING SCRIPTS

Meeting One—Morning

Introduction Circle

I’d like to invite everyone to gather in a circle. [After everyone is seated:] Before we get started, I’d like to give you some general information. We’ll be meeting twice in this room, today until 5 PM and next Monday night from 7 to 9 PM. Today, we’ll break for lunch around 12:30. We’ll also have some short breaks during the meetings. There are some light snacks, and tea and water available over in the corner. There’s a key here for the bathrooms, which are down the hallway. If you need to use the bathroom at a time other than a break, that’s fine, just go and come back.

I’d like to introduce my co-researchers, Tim Willison and Ruth Kalter. Tim and Ruth completed coursework with me at the Institute of Imaginal Studies, and the three of us have been working together for the past six years. They will be assisting me by tape recording the meetings and taking written notes. I may call on them from time to time to help provide clarification. Also, they will serve as timekeepers during some of the activities throughout the day.

I’d like to go over some of the items on the Informed Consent forms that you’ve signed. During these two meetings, there will be some group discussions, written responses to questions, and experiential work. While I certainly welcome your full participation, I want to stress that your participation at all times is completely voluntary. If for any reason you do not wish to participate in an activity, you do not have to.

I also want to let you know that my co-researchers and I will hold your participation here in complete confidence. We will not share your names with anyone,
and in the dissertation, your names will be changed. And while you have agreed to keep your fellow participants’ identities confidential, I’m not asking you to keep anything I do confidential. You may freely discuss anything my co-researchers and I do and say, and can freely provide our names to anyone outside of the study. Are there any questions about this? [Answer questions.]

[Point to chimes.] During these meetings, we’ll use these chimes to signal the beginning and end of each activity. If we’re in the middle of an activity, and you wish to stop it for any reason, you can ring the chimes, and chime us out of the activity. For example, if the intensity of the experience is for some reason too great for you, know that you can chime out to stop the activity or slow down the process. Are there any questions about this, or anything else that I’ve spoken about, before we start? [Pause for questions.]

**Initial Journaling**

I’d like to have you do some journaling. Does everyone have a pad and pen? [If yes:] Throughout the day, I’ll have questions that I’d like to get your written responses to. These journals will be collected at the end of the day to be included in the research. I want to let you know that we won’t be reading any of our journal entries aloud to the group, so you can be as candid as you want about your authentic experience here right now. Each time we journal, I’ll ask you to number your entry. So write a number 1, and just jot down a few lines about how you’re feeling this morning. Anything you want to say about how you’re doing physically or emotionally is fine. You don’t have to go into great detail. Just a few lines are O.K.

[After two minutes:] Take a moment to finish up. [Pause] Now skip a line and write a number 2. For this entry, please describe some of the hopes and fears you have around our time together today.
[After three minutes:] Take a moment to finish up. [Pause] And finally, number 3. For this entry, I’d like for you to write your own definition of “ritual.” Just jot down whatever comes to mind for how you define “ritual.”

[After three minutes:] Take a moment to finish up. [Pause] O.K. You can put down your pads for now.

**Ritualizing the Recording**

[Pause] As all of you are aware, we will be recording portions of these meetings on audio and videotape for our research. Although everyone here has agreed to this, I’d like to provide some space for any reactions we may have about being recorded. When I say “reactions,” I’m referring to the voices within us all that speak for one part of how we are feeling. In most social situations, we tend to filter these voices. But here, in exploring our authentic experience, I’d like to provide a space for these voices to be heard. So during the study, I’ll be asking you to write about, or share your reactions aloud from time to time.

In a moment, I’m going to push the ‘record’ button on the tape recorder. When I do, I’d like to invite all of you to let out whatever reactions you may have around being recorded, in the form of a sound. So on the count of three, I’ll push the button and that will be everyone’s cue to let out your reactions all at once. Any questions? [Answer questions.] O.K. then, here we go: one… two… three! [Push ‘record’ button and make a sound.] O.K., thanks.

**Sharing Personal Stories: First Round (Audiotaped)**

[Read off the page.] As a way of beginning, I’d like to share a little about my background and my interest in ritual. Ever since I was a child, I’ve been very interested in the expressive arts and in foreign cultures. In college, I became fascinated by the ways that traditional cultures provide opportunities to participate in the expressive arts through
And so I went to live in West Africa, and later in India and Bangladesh, to learn more about their ritual practices. Currently, I am a doctoral candidate in Psychology, at the Institute of Imaginal Studies, in the North Bay. This study is for the purpose of my dissertation research.

[Pause.] My understanding of ritual is that it is not limited to certain cultures, but is universal to human culture. It can be considered an essential part of being human, and in this sense, each of us here has a particular relationship to ritual. In our adult lives, we all have experiences of participating in rituals of various sorts. We also have experiences from childhood that were formative in shaping our relationship to ritual.

I’d like to invite you to take some time in silence to find a moment that has shaped your personal relationship to ritual. You may reflect on some of the memorable experiences you’ve had with ritual as an adult, the moments when you were affected in some way. You might also consider experiences from childhood. I’ll ring the chimes, and then let’s take a few minutes in silence and see what comes up for us. Any questions? [Answer questions, and then ring chimes.] [Silence for two minutes.] [Turn off tape recorder.]

[Turn on tape recorder.] [Chime out of the silence.] It would be good if each of us could choose one moment to share with the group. I can start, and then we can go around the circle. When it’s your turn, please start by telling the group your name. Because our time together is limited, we’ll need to hold each story to three minutes. Ruth will assist us by ringing the chimes after three minutes into each sharing. If you’re still speaking, try and finish up your story in a sentence or two when you hear the chimes. The idea here is to really get to the heart of your experience. Is that clear? [Hand chimes to Ruth.] [Tell my personal moment.]

[Following the sharing of stories:] Thank you all for sharing your stories. Let’s take out our pads for some journaling. [After participants are ready:] So skip a line from your last entry, and write the number 4. Take a moment to journal about how you are
affected by hearing these stories. See what reactions are coming up for you now. [Turn off tape recorder.]

[After a few minutes, while participants are writing:] Notice if you have any additional reactions coming up in you that are different than what you have already written. If so, be sure to write these down as well.

[When some of the participants have finished writing:] Let’s take a break and come back together in 10 minutes. [Ring chimes]

Sharing Personal Stories: Second Round (Audiotaped)

I’d like to invite the group to continue with our sharing of stories. Once again, I invite you to consider moments from your life, either as a child or as an adult, when you were affected by ritual. Except this time, I’d like for you to give particular focus to those moments that were especially problematic for you, the moments that affected your relation to ritual in a negative way. Any questions? [Pause for questions] So again, let’s take some time in silence and just see what comes up for you. [Ring chimes]

[After two or three minutes, ring chimes. Turn on tape recorder.] I’d like to propose that we do this round of stories popcorn-style. Anyone who wants to can start, and when they’re finished, anyone else who feels moved to share can go next. I’m not necessarily looking to hear from everyone this time, although that would also be fine. And we can go a little longer this time. If you’re still speaking after five minutes, Ruth will ring the chimes, and then try and finish up your story in the next minute or so. Is that clear? [Pause] O.K., when Ruth rings the chimes, anyone who wants to share their moment can start. [Ruth rings chimes]

[After everyone who wants a turn has taken one:] Is there anyone else who would like to share their moment? [Afterwards:] Ruth, could you chime us out? [Ruth rings chimes.] Thank you for sharing these stories. Again, let’s take a moment to journal
about how we are affected by hearing these stories. See what reactions are coming up for you now. Skip a line from your last entry and write a number 5. [Turn off tape recorder.]

[After a few minutes, while participants are writing:] Notice if you have any additional reactions coming up in you that are different than what you have already written. If so, be sure to write these down as well. [When some of the participants have finished writing:] Take another minute to finish up. [After a minute, ring chimes.] We’re going to break for lunch. We’ll be bringing in some pizza in a few minutes.

[During lunch, facilitate conversation:] Can anyone share a story related to your mealtime rituals—either in your family of origin, in your adult families, or a single meaningful meal ritual you recall?

Meeting One—Afternoon

Invitation to Ritualize

Let’s take a moment in silence to check in with ourselves, and bring ourselves more fully here. In the silence, I’d like to invite you to reflect on the stories you heard so far today. What was easy to hear, and what was difficult? What did you feel drawn toward, and what repelled you? What moved you, and what disturbed you? Take a moment to sit with this. [Ring chimes, and then again to end the silence.]

One way to view ritual is as a way of making contact with the sacred. [Pause] Keeping this in mind, I’d like to invite the group to ritualize. [Pause] This is an invitation to the group to create a ritual here with one another. I realize that you may have some questions about what this means. Rather than moving into a discussion, I’d like to suggest that we take a few minutes to jot down any initial reactions to this invitation. Remember that there is no “right” response. Any response, or any combination of responses that you have will be welcome. And, as a reminder, we won’t
be reading these aloud to the group, so you can be candid about your authentic experience here right now. Just skip a line in your journal and begin this entry with the number 6.

[After a few minutes, while participants are writing:] Again, notice if there are any other reactions within you that are different than what you have already written. Pay particular attention to any doubts, questions, or concerns that may be arising in you. Be sure to jot these down as well.

Focal Space (Videotaped)

[After writing is finished, turn on video camera.] You are probably holding some questions about this invitation to ritualize. And it may be useful to see the various reactions to this invitation that are living here in the group. Let’s try something as a way of bringing our reactions to the group. I’d like to propose an activity called “Focal Space.” In this activity, anyone who likes can come into the center, one at a time, and share any kind of reaction they may be having to this invitation to ritualize. Your sharing can incorporate sound, movement, gestures, and words. As I said this morning, reactions are the voices within us that speak for particular parts of how we feel. So really, any reaction you feel like sharing is O.K. The idea here is to give yourself permission to let yourself carry your reaction forward as fully as possible, to see what lives there. You can be as dramatic as you like.

During Focal Space, we’ll give our attention to whoever is in the middle. When the person in the middle is finished, they simply go back to their seat in the circle. In this activity, there’s no discussion or commenting on what someone has done. The next person just comes into the center with whatever is arising for them in the moment. Feel free to bring in anything that’s coming up for you. It may be something that you wrote down in your journal or it may be something else. [Pause] I will ring the chimes to signal the beginning and the end of the Focal Space activity. Anyone can chime out at any time, either to get clarification or to address a concern. Are there any questions? [After questions, ring chimes.]
[After ringing chimes to end Focal Space, acknowledge the work of the participants.] [Pause.] So we’ve seen a variety of responses to the invitation to ritualize. In order to see these responses in a different way, I’d like for us to try something. For this next activity, we’ll need to clear the space, so let’s move the chairs over to this side. [Point]

**Sociometric Spectrum (Videotaped)**

[After the chairs are moved:] Imagine that there’s a line going across the center of the room. [Gesture where the line is.] At this end [Point] is absolute desire and readiness to participate in ritual. At that end [Point] is absolute resistance and aversion to participating in ritual. The line is a spectrum that goes all the way from absolute desire to absolute aversion, with all of the combinations of those two extremes in between. I’d like for you to check in with yourself about what you are feeling about ritual right now, and when I ring the chimes, take your pads and pens with you, and go to the place on the spectrum that feels right for you.

[Walk to desire side.] So standing by this wall means that you’re totally ready and wanting to do ritual right now. Your very being depends on it, and no matter what it may look like, you’re one hundred percent ‘all systems go’. [Walk to resistance side.] Standing by this wall means that you would have to be dragged kicking and screaming into any kind of ritual right now. There’s not a cell in your body that wants to take part in ritual and there’s no way anyone’s going to force you to.

You can also stand anywhere in between that reflects your particular combination of wanting and not wanting to participate in ritual at this moment. Any questions? [After answering questions:] O.K., take a moment in silence to check in with yourself, and when I ring the chimes, we’ll take our pads, and move to a position on the spectrum. [After a moment, ring chimes.]
[After everyone has found a position on the spectrum:] Has everyone found the place that feels right to you? [If yes:] Our next activity will take about 40 minutes, and will involve some guided visualization and journaling. I’d like for you to stay in the place on the spectrum where you are. You could either bring over a chair to sit on, or sit on the floor, whichever is more comfortable for you. [Turn off video camera.]

**Reflexive Dialogue**

[After everyone is seated:] I’d like to guide you through a brief visualization. At certain points, I’ll ask you to jot down some things, so open your pads to the next blank section and set them aside. [Pause] I invite you to close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Without changing it, just notice your breath. Focus your attention on the air coming in and filling your lungs, then coming back up and leaving through your mouth or nose. [Long Pause.]

As you relax, see if you can imagine, in your mind’s eye, a figure that represents your pure resistance to ritual. This figure may be a person, an animal, a mythological being, or any kind of being that you can imagine. [Long Pause.] Notice whether this figure is male or female. [Long Pause.] Notice the details of your figure and take some time to look carefully at their face. [Long Pause.] Also notice the emotional state of this figure, and what it feels like for you to be in their presence. [Long Pause.] I invite you to greet your figure and ask them what their name is. [Long Pause.] Ask your figure what the risks might be of participating in ritual at this time. [Long Pause.] Also ask your figure what would be gained if you did not participate in ritual. [Long Pause.] And when you’re ready, you can thank your figure for coming, and slowly open your eyes. [Pause.]

I’d like for you to do some journaling. Skip a line from your last entry and write a number 7. [Pause] Jot down your figure’s name, whether they are male or female, and a brief description of what they look like. [Long Pause.] Now skip a line and write a number 8, and jot down some words about the figure’s emotional state and how they affected you. [Long Pause.] Number 9, note what they shared with you about the risks
of participating in ritual. [Long Pause.] And finally, number 10, note anything they said about what would be gained by not participating.

[After some participants have finished writing:] Take a moment to finish up. [Long Pause.] Now I invite you to close your eyes again and focus on your breathing. Again, focus your attention on the air coming in and filling your lungs, then leaving. [Long Pause.]

As you relax, see if you can imagine a figure that represents your pure desire for ritual. Again, this figure may be a person, an animal, a mythological being, or any kind of being that you can imagine. [Long Pause.] Notice whether this figure is male or female. [Long Pause.] Notice the details of your figure and take some time to look carefully at their face. [Long Pause.] Also notice the emotional state of this figure, and what it feels like to you to be in their presence. [Long Pause.] I invite you to greet your figure and ask them what their name is. [Long Pause.] Ask your figure what the benefits might be of participating in ritual at this time. [Long Pause.] Also ask your figure what would be lost if you did not participate in ritual. [Long Pause.] And when you’re ready, you can thank your figure for coming, and slowly open your eyes. [Long Pause.]

Again, I’d like for you to do some journaling. Skip a line from your last entry and write a number 11. Jot down your figure’s name, whether they are male or female, and a brief description of what they look like. [Long Pause.] Now skip a line and write a number 12, and jot down some words about the figure’s emotional state and how they affected you. [Long Pause.] Number 13, note what they shared with you about the benefits of participating in ritual. [Long Pause.] And finally, number 14, note anything they said about what would be lost by not participating.

[After some participants have finished writing:] Take a moment to finish up. [Long Pause.] Now I invite you to close your eyes again and focus on your breathing. [Long Pause.] See if you can imagine yourself in a beautiful, quiet place in nature, a place that you know and that’s special to you. [Pause.] Notice what it looks like around
you. [Pause] Feel the ground supporting you. [Pause.] Feel the temperature and the quality of the air. [Pause] Breathe in the fragrances in the air. [Pause.] And listen for the sounds of nature around you. [Long pause.]

So just enjoying being in this special place in nature, imagine seeing one of the figures that you just met coming toward you from faraway. This one comes closer and closer, right over to where you are. [Long Pause.] Just as you’re greeting this figure, you notice, out of the corner of your eye, the other figure approaching you. This one also comes right over to you, so the two figures are together with you. [Long Pause.] You let them know that you’ve just been invited to participate in ritual, and they both become very animated, both of them having strong opinions about this.

Now I’d like you to pick up your pad, and begin writing a dialogue between you and the two figures. Listen to what each of them has to say. You could ask questions, and they could also speak directly to each other. Just see how it unfolds. And as a reminder, we won’t be sharing these aloud, so feel free to bring in anything at all about your experience here. Any questions? [After answering questions:] O.K. Just skip a line from your last entry and write a number 15. And please write the name or the initials of each speaker at the beginning of each line of dialogue. We’ll have about 10 or 15 minutes for this.

[After 10 minutes.] When you’re finished writing, feel free to get up and stretch, get something to drink, or go to the bathroom. If you want to talk, please go out into the hall, so you don’t disturb anyone who’s still writing. We’ll convene as a group in 10 minutes.

**Polarity Groups (Videotaped)**

[Clear the space in the center of the room. Line up some chairs along one wall. Turn on video camera.]
[While standing, ring chimes and call for group to come together:] Clearly, we have ambivalence about ritual. In order to see how this ambivalence is alive in the room, I’d like to propose another activity. This one is called “Polarity Groups.” In this activity, the group will divide into two groups. [Pointing to the desire side:] One side of the room will be for anyone who wants to take the position of speaking in favor of creating ritual together. The other side of the room will be for anyone who wants to express any doubts or objections to creating ritual together. The two groups will engage each other in a dialogue. I’d like to invite you to bring in the passion of the figures that just visited you. The idea here is to really see the difference between these two positions.

There will be a third witnessing area along the wall for anyone who does not wish to speak. When you’re in the witnessing area, notice how you’re responding to what is happening. It is fine to change positions during the activity as you feel the need to do so. In fact, I’d like to encourage you to move around, so you will have a chance to experience more than one position. Again, I want to remind you that anyone can “chime out” of the activity at any time, either to get clarification or to address a concern. Are there any questions about this activity? [After questions:] So just go to the position where you feel most drawn, and then I’ll chime us in. [When everyone has moved to a position, ring chimes to begin the Polarity Groups.]

[When the Polarity Groups activity is finished, ring chimes.] Please get your pads and we’ll take a few minutes in silence to do some journaling. [After everyone has their pads:] Skip a line from your last entry and write a number 16. Check in with how you’re feeling in your body. Are you feeling any tension? Is your heart racing? Try to get down some of the ways that you feel affected right now. Pay particular attention to any images that surface as you reflect on your experience. [Replace videotape and turn off video camera.]

[After a few minutes:] Imagine if you were to take a place on the spectrum, where would it be now? Is it the same as before, or closer to desire or resistance? Take another minute to finish up. [After a minute, ring chimes:] I’d like to ask you to place
your pads and anything else you have against the wall, to clear as much space in the center as possible, and then let’s gather back together in a circle.

Ritualizing the Ambivalence (Videotaped)

[Turn on video camera. Sit on floor. When everyone is seated in a circle, turn on tape recorder:] We’re here in this room with our ambivalence. I’d like to offer the group the opportunity to let the ambivalence unfold even further, in ritual. [Pause] How could we move into ritual in a way that includes the ambivalence that’s here with us now? Does anyone have any ideas about how we might do this? [Participants engage in group conversation.]

[If group cannot imagine a direction for ritual, say:] I’d like to suggest that we go into silence for a moment. [Pause] Does anyone have an image emerging for an aspect of what this ritual might look like, in this room, for this group, at this moment?

[Aafter 5-10 minutes, say:] We’ve heard a number of different images of what a group ritual might look like. In a moment, I’ll ring the chimes, and when I do, that will be an invitation for the group to move into ritual with the images that we’re holding. O.K.? [If yes, ring chimes. Turn off tape recorder.]

[If the group does not move into ritual:] I’d like to invite the group to come with me into the hallway. [Standing in the hallway with the participants, say:] I’d like for you to imagine the doorway as a threshold to a ritual space, a place that holds the possibility to bring expression to what’s living inside us right now. Let’s take a moment in silence to consider this invitation, and when you hear the chimes, feel free to respond to the invitation however you like. [After a pause, ring the chimes.]

[Observe the actions of the group without speaking. If nobody moves for several minutes, say:] I’d like to invite anyone who wants, to move toward the doorway, staying aware of what’s happening for you as you move toward it.
[Observe the actions of the group for several minutes. If some participants move toward the doorway, but not into the room, say:] I’d like to invite anyone who wants, to go through the doorway, staying aware of what’s happening for you as you cross it.

[If there is no movement from the group for several minutes, or when the ritual enactment is finished, ring chimes.] Let’s take a few minutes in silence to do some journaling. [After everyone has their pads:] Skip a line from your last entry and write a number 17. Check in with how you’re feeling in your body, and try to get down some of the ways that you feel affected right now. Pay particular attention to any images that surface as you reflect on your experience.

[After a few minutes:] If you haven’t finished yet, you can take some more time to finish up. I’d like to propose that we take a short break, and come back together in five minutes. [Ring chimes.]

**Integrative Group Discussion (Audiotaped)**

[Ring chimes to end the break.] Let’s bring our chairs over and come back together in a circle. [After everyone is seated, turn on tape recorder:] As we’re nearing the end of the day, I would like to offer the group a chance to integrate our experiences. Take a moment to notice how you are affected by the day’s activities, especially our ritualizing together. [Pause] I’m wondering if anyone would like to share with the group anything about how you are affected.

[Prompt to invite learnings:] I’m wondering if anyone would like to share with the group what you’ve learned by participating today.

[After participants respond:] As we’re in a process of integrating our experience, I’d like to know if there are any aspects of your experience that do not feel integrated, or
feel unfinished. Also, if there are any questions or concerns, I’d like to have the chance
to address those here. [Address any issues, questions or concerns that are brought up.]

[After questions and concerns have been addressed:] What do you imagine from
your experience today that you might incorporate into other parts of your life?

Closing Circle (Audiotaped)

[After participants respond:] We’ll need to end shortly. Before we do, I’d like to see if there’s anything left unfinished, that we can clear up before we end. I’ll also be here afterwards for a few minutes, if anyone needs to talk with me individually.

[After questions and concerns have been addressed:] So let’s all stand for our closing. [After everyone is standing:] I’m wondering if anyone has an image for how we might close today?

[If nobody has an image, or the group cannot decide:] Let’s try this. One at a time, each of us could take a step into the center and tell the group the most memorable thing for you that happened today. I’ll ring the chimes, and then someone can start us off, and we’ll go around the circle from there. [After a moment, ring chimes:] 

[After everyone has had a turn, acknowledge participants’ work:] I look forward to seeing you again on Monday night next week. I’ll be here afterwards and also available by phone or e-mail, if anyone needs to get in touch with me. Again, thank you. [Ring chimes to end.]
Meeting Two

Opening Circle (Audiotaped)

Let’s begin with a few minutes of silence, so we can bring ourselves more fully here. [Ring chimes, then after a minute of silence:] Keeping your eyes closed, I’d like to invite you to bring your attention to our first meeting together. See what comes up now as you search for a key moment from our first meeting. What seems key or most memorable may have changed during the week since we met. This is a moment that really affected you in some way. Usually, there is some insight or new awareness that comes out of moments such as these. Just notice what comes up for you.

[After a minute, ring chimes to end the silence, then turn on tape recorder:] In remembering, not only do we connect with the past, but we allow more of ourselves to come into the present. So it may be helpful to share these remembered moments with the group. Also, if there was any kind of learning for you that came out of that moment, that would be good to know as well. We’ll do this sharing popcorn-style, so anyone who wants to start can take a turn.

[After everyone has had a turn:] The co-researchers and I have prepared some preliminary learnings from our first meeting. I’d like to share them with you. [Hand out copies of the preliminary learnings.] Let’s read through them together. Anyone who wants to start can read one of the items, and we’ll just go around the circle from there. As we’re reading, if there’s anything that’s not clear, just speak up, and I’ll try and clarify it for you.

[After finishing the reading:] We would like to get your responses to our learnings. It would be good to know which items hold a particular resonance with you, and also, if there’s anything you disagree with, or that varies from your own experience in any way, we’d like to know that too. We’re interested in knowing anything that we
may have overlooked, so if there’s something that you think we missed, please bring it to
our attention. We can go around popcorn-style again, so anyone who wants to start can.

**Focal Space** *(Audiotaped)*

[After participants finish responding:] It would be good if we could share with
the group our reactions to the learnings. I’d like to propose “Focal Space” again as a way
for us to carry forward our reactions. Remember, in Focal Space, you can use sound,
movement, gestures and words in your enactments. We’re not really as interested in your
analysis of the learnings, as much as we are in how the learnings have affected you
personally. And really, any reaction that the learnings have brought up in you is O.K.
Any questions? [After answering questions, ring chimes to begin Focal Space.]

[Ring chimes to end Focal Space.] [Acknowledge participants’ work.] Let’s take
a 10-minute break, and then we’ll meet back for a discussion to finish out our time
together. [Ring chimes.]

[Ten-minute break.]

**Integrative Group Discussion** *(Audiotaped)*

[After everyone is seated:] As we’re nearing the end of our time together, I would
like to offer the group a chance to integrate the experiences we’ve had together. Let’s
take a moment for silent reflection. Notice especially how you’ve been affected by
participating in the study, if there’s anything you’ve learned, or any thoughts that have
occurred to you during the week. Let’s just take a moment for that. [Ring chimes.]

[After chiming out of the silence, turn on tape recorder:] Would anyone like to
share how you’ve been affected, or anything you’ve learned, or any thoughts you’ve had?
[After participants respond:] I’d like to know if there are any aspects of your experience that do not feel integrated, or feel unfinished. Also, if there are any questions or concerns you may have that arise out of the study, I’d like to have the chance to address those here. I’ll also be around for a few minutes afterwards, if anyone would like to talk with me individually. [Address any issues, questions or concerns that are brought up.]

[After questions and concerns have been addressed:] I’d like to invite further reflections on how our experiences and learnings here may be integrated for us. Is there anything you would like to take from this experience, to incorporate into other parts of your life?

**Closing Circle (Audiotaped)**

[After participants respond:] So let’s all stand for our closing. [After everyone is standing:] Let’s close in a similar way as we did last time. Take a moment to consider something that you’ve gotten from this experience. I’ll ring the chimes, and then someone can start us off by taking a step into the circle and letting the group know what you’re taking home with you. We’ll go around the circle from there. [After a moment, ring chimes:]

[After everyone has had a turn, acknowledge group for their participation.] [Then say:] I’ll be here after we end, if anyone would like to talk with me individually. When my dissertation is approved, I’ll be sending each of you a Summary of Learnings. In the meantime, I’m available by phone or e-mail, if anyone needs to get in touch with me. Again, thank you everyone, for being here. [Ring chimes to end.]
APPENDIX 15

LIST OF JOURNAL QUESTIONS

Initial Journaling
1. How are you feeling now?
2. What are your hopes and fears about our day together?
3. What is your definition of ritual?

Sharing Personal Stories: First Round
4. How are you affected by hearing these stories? What reactions are coming up for you?

Sharing Personal Stories: Second Round
5. How are you affected by hearing these stories? What reactions are coming up for you?

Invitation to Ritualize
6. What are your initial reactions to this invitation to ritualize?

Figure of Pure Resistance to Ritual
7. Describe the figure’s name, gender, and a brief description of what they look like.
8. Describe the figure’s emotional state and how they affected you.
9. What does the figure say about the risks of participating in ritual?
10. What is gained by not participating in ritual?

Figure of Pure Desire for Ritual
11. Describe the figure’s name, gender, and a brief description of what they look like.
12. Describe the figure’s emotional state and how they affected you.

13. What does the figure say about the benefits of participating in ritual?

14. What is lost by not participating in ritual?

**Reflexive dialogue**

15. Write out a dialogue between you and the two figures.

**Polarity Groups**

16. How do you feel affected right now? What images surface as you reflect on your experience? If you were to take a place on the spectrum, where would it be now?

**Ritualizing the Ambivalence**

17. How do you feel affected right now? What images surface as you reflect on your experience?
APPENDIX 16

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The names below are fictitious in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. All demographical information, including current religion, was provided by each participant during the telephone screening interview (Appendix 7).

Peter—male, 44, Caucasian American, Christian by birth, currently Ecumenical, Earth-based.

Kristen—female, 27, Caucasian American, Mormon by birth, currently Atheist, Buddhist-Goddess oriented.

Latoya—female, 31, African American, Catholic by birth, currently Spiritual.

Maria—female, 41, Hispanic Puerto Rican, Catholic by birth, currently Non-Religious Spirituality.

Jake—male, 28, Caucasian American, Christian by birth, currently Buddhist.

Rachel—female, 57, Caucasian American, Jewish by birth, currently Taoist.

Erich—male, 44, German, Protestant by birth, currently Buddhist-influenced.

David—male, 28, Caucasian American, Jewish by birth, currently Spiritual, faithful.

Sumi—female, 32, Korean, Methodist by birth, currently Taoist, unbounded.

Kevin—male, 39, Caucasian American, Presbyterian by birth, currently not a church-goer, believe in Spirit.
APPENDIX 17

JOURNAL TRANSCRIPTS

Peter

Definition of Ritual  A sacred moment to signify/initiate a transition into a new moment—new beginning—new understanding—new opportunity—a portal.

Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize  Yipee! Sounds great. I am excited. I look forward to what evolves and manifests. Unsure, however, about how much of my own experience and background to bring into this process. I think I’ll move slowly and follow my intuition.

Figure of Resistance  Stonehenge—genderless—a beautiful work, a monolith jutting out of the ocean along the seashore. Emotional state: heavy, disappointed.

Figure of Desire  “Wind”—male—Bald Eagle—very majestic, stately. Soaring high above the canyonlands. Confident, grounded, assured, balanced, equanimity, excited, full of passion.

Reflexive dialogue  1st—Eagle (E); 2nd—“Stonehenge” (S)

S—Hey, Eagle… I know you’re excited and ready to jump in ritual, but when you’re doing it with a group of people you are just getting to know, there are pitfalls, primarily not everyone having the same comfort and familiarity.

E—You are exactly right! I recognize this reality. And speaks to the importance of creating safety and flexible structure. An effective ritual takes into account varying levels of comfort, and moves at a pace that brings participants into alignment.

S—I’m just afraid you’ll be disappointed if everyone doesn’t “show up.”

E—Could happen. And it’s worth the risk. If it does happen, the process may not be as impactful as it could have been. And—like I said—an effective ritual process creates a container and a pace that builds comfort and safety. In other words, the volume is turned up gradually.

S—I’m confused. I always thought that the most powerful rituals had an element of risk, surprise, and challenge to them.

E—Stonehenge, you’re very wise. I appreciate you supporting me at looking at the big picture. A powerful ritual often does involve risk, and the risk does not happen until a level of comfort/readiness has been mobilized in the group. And if someone does not “show up,” I’m open to what learnings that might bring.

S—I’m ready to join you and bring my strength and power and boldness and wisdom.

E—Let’s proceed…
How Affected by Polarity Groups  I’m ready for ritual. It’s agitating being ready for something, and being held back at the starting gate. I sense that some of the ambivalence is related to whether or not a person has been exposed to “transformational ritual,” and not to the dry, static, non-evolving/historical dead ritual often linked with religion. Interestingly, my motivation to participate in a ritual process with this group has been dampened by the long process. Some air has been released from my big balloon. Exploring ambivalence when I was originally not ambivalent had the effect of decreasing my passion. I feel stuck with this group.

How Affected by Ritual  I got the body buzz going… inspiring ritual… I am convinced that the ritual would not have been what it was without the “prep-work” we did of exploring ambivalence. The ambivalence work created clarity, deeper understanding, and a stronger intention/commitment to join together in ritual.

Kristen

Definition of Ritual  A behavior done (and repeated possibly but not necessarily) in a certain interval of time that has meaning for the person or group doing the behavior. This can be on the level of daily, monthly, yearly, once in a lifetime. Ritual can be sacred or mundane: getting dressed in the morning.

Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize  Sing. Please have sound be a part of it. Ritual for what? Touch the sacred how? Haven’t we already been doing that? Where is the altar? Is someone going to get naked? What is Holy? Holy object? What do we want at the center? Who are we as a group? Would I have to give up part of myself? Can I participate? Do we need props? Are we really going to create something new? I can’t do this. I don’t know what I am doing. I have never done this before—maybe that’s the point. Let’s remember and honor the whole world somehow. Draw pictures. Is there going to be a leader to guide the process?

Figure of Resistance  Martha Rose. Female, tall, slender, Caucasian. She looks like the queen of snobbery. She is ultra-thin, like models in magazines. She is in expensive, well-kept clothing. She appears calm, cool and collected on the surface. She has stuffed all her feelings down deep inside of herself and covers over her fear with this pseudo-peace. Underneath she is writhing with doubt and fear, anxiety, and self-hate. I feel unworthy around her—ashamed, and afraid of being judged.

Figure of Desire  Ashley. My figure was both female and male. Ashley is two figures superimposed. And image of a woman made of white light is superimposed over a male white wolf. Ashley was both deeply calm and full of life. Ashley, as shown in her image, is comfortable with her spirit and his instincts. Ashley made me feel safe and secure.
**Reflexive dialogue** Martha Rose appeared first.

Martha Rose: Oh no! Look who is coming! That woman with her horrid dog!
K: Oh!
A: Hello.
MR: Ugh, why…
A: I am so excited for you to participate, Kristen.
MR: You don’t mean…
A: Of course I mean…
K: Hey let me speak.

As this conversation is happen, MR’s being in the presence of Ashley begins to change her. All the emotions that have been pushed down for so long underneath the cool, calm surface start to spill out. MR is crying and wretched. Seeing Ashley and her spirit and base instinct so comfortably together elicits this response in MR. MR has a somatic shift and understands she has a deep split between her spirit and instincts. In seeing Ashley, she witnesses a new way of being. She is unable to pour out her venomous criticisms of ritual and risk-taking in general.

Kristen watches as all of this happens, taking it in. The dialog has shifted. Ashley has encompassed MR with her love. MR opens up a bit to risk-taking, but is still afraid.

A: Don’t be afraid, darling. You are you. That is all you can be. (To MR)
MR: (Crying) But I am so unlovable.
A: You are simply hurting and shut down. For good reason, I imagine. But that does not make you unlovable.
MR: I am not sure about taking a risk. But maybe it would be a bigger risk to not try at all.
K: Well, I’m going to have to decide for myself. I hope the group will want to share with me and not make fun of me. I hope I can risk. I hope we find a structure.

**How Affected by Polarity Groups** Anxiety. Throat tight. Lonely. Alone. Blue. Coming out of a pool of water. Dark water. Cold water. My body is still, cold, and stiff. Where is the fire? Where is the heat to warm myself? Will I get to sing? I feel repossessed of my own space. I have stopped trying to own things for others. Those others seem to be taking on their own work (other people in the group). I was very concerned about the interaction between Rachel and Maria. I wondered if the group leaders really think things are going badly. I wonder if they spoke about during the break. I wonder how all this material will analyzed and evaluated. I feel we’ve been ruminating for so long and haven’t been able to plan our ritual. I feel more resistant and wonder how things will turn out. Whatever it will be, it will be my experience—how lovely! I guess it is a paradox, really. Individual and community. All is not lost.

**How Affected by Ritual** I feel a big wow inside. I can’t believe it worked! I can’t believe how beautiful it was and that we all allowed it to happen. There was so much TRUST in the process. I was surprised I let myself be so loving so spontaneously. There was really something in it for me, and I got to be in it. We were individuals and a group. We had individual identities and a group identity that coexisted. I see how everything that happened was necessary—even the discomfort and the doubts and especially the
room to explore the ambivalence. I am sitting with my back to the door—that is how safe I feel. It was very important what Erich said right before the ritual started—his question about if we were going to actually have time for the ritual or not. It got me connected again. I loved it! I see how important I was and each of us was to the process. I feel more connected to the sacred as a shared human experience that can spontaneously occur under the right conditions. Humanity shared.

Maria

**Definition of Ritual** For me ritual entails so much. It can be as elaborated as going out into Machu Picchu and experience all sorts of meditation, initiation, visualization, etc. or it can be a group of women sitting together over coffee sharing their lives. It is a communion with the Divine, whatever that might mean for any individual.

**Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize** I am excited about the prospect of ritualizing in the comfort of this group, but there is a part of me that wonders if I will really be able to open up as much as it’s needed to have this be a successful experience. Even as I wrote that last line I realized that what is meant to happen will happen and that it will be OK, that it will be exactly as it has to be. My main concern is the camera. It has been my experience that at times it takes away from the truthfulness of the experience. All in all, I am up for it and will do my best to forget that it is on. Or will remember that it is OK to be aware of it. It really doesn’t matter.

**Figure of Resistance** Christina. Female. My figure was my mom; she was angry, as she always was when I was young. She was judgmental and had the power to crush my best feelings by keeping me in a state of continuous sadness. Nothing I did was right. So, the woman who came to me today was critical, judgmental, and had that amazing power to make me feel inadequate.

**Figure of Desire** Amber. Sexless. Amber was a phoenix, its colors were violet and green, and yellow, and there were other shades that I don’t remember. It had a crown of feathers, with light emanating from it. This figure was in total peace and calmness. It transferred those sensations, that way of being to me.

**Reflexive dialogue** Mom first.

Me: I really wanted to participate of this ritual study. I came all the way here today; leaving my study time behind. Now, I am not so sure that I want to be a part of this.

Mom: See, I told you this would happen. If only you would listen to me, but NO, you have to go about the business of putting yourself in harm’s way.

Phoenix: Please, listen to me. You have come a long way. Not just today, but in life. You have risked feeling foolish and vulnerable in the past and you have lived through many experiences, always getting to the other side feeling better about yourself. This is only part of life. This is only part of your healing process.

Mom: Her sanity.
Me: I feel really sad right now, you know? I was so afraid at some point and when I saw David dancing I felt free, really free for the first time this morning, so I wanted to express it, to thank him for the gift of freedom, which in the end was mine all along and I just happened to tap into that truth thanks to him.

Phoenix: Yes, so what do you have to lose by staying with that feeling?

Me: I don’t know. I guess nothing. It’s just that the impact of what I perceived as judgment for my expression was too big to bear.

Phoenix: You know? You have a choice here. And you are free to stand by whatever you decide is best for you right now, but I really think that you owe it to yourself to give this a try.

Me: I owe it to myself… Well, truth be told, I have come a long way in my life. And, for the most part, I haven’t cared that much about other people’s opinions. So why do I feel so vulnerable right now? What was it that this woman said that was so terrible? Why did I take it so personally that I shut down completely?

Phoenix: Only you can answer that question. You know your life better than anyone else. Can you try and answer?

Me: I can try. I felt like a child all over again, both in the sense of freedom that came from wanting to participate of the happiness of another, which touched me deeply. And, also, by feeling as if my spontaneous act had been scrutinized, even crushed. I did take it personally, but I realize that I was reacting to Mom, here, and not to what was said in the moment.

Phoenix: And?

Me: And I guess it is OK to be here and to explore the context of this experience ever further. See what comes forth and how I react to it.

Phoenix: So, will you stay and give it a try?

Me: I guess I will.

How Affected by Polarity Groups I am feeling a sense of peace all over my being right now. I feel as if I have found my voice and that I finally can relax into this experience. The tension in my jaw still exists at some level, but I can definitely say that I feel a sense of ease that comes with knowing that whatever has to happen will happen in its own space and time. Life in this space has become sacred. No, I correct myself here. I have suddenly recognized that this is sacred space, it has been all along. Only my perception of it has shifted. I right now feel a great deal of desire to participate in this study and in ritual. A great shift from an hour or so ago. I feel more compassionate toward others and myself. This, in truth, is the meaning of ritual for me.

How Affected by Ritual Wow! Somehow boundaries have been destroyed by the power of Love. I never imagined that just by staying with the process I would be in such a different place in my being and in such a little time. I feel relaxed and even happy. The tension in my being has disappeared and it has given way to a new sense of being, a new sense of being. The unknown seems to be everywhere I go. In every situation I am presented with a choice (or several) and it is more and more clear with every experience lived that when I choose Love over fear or any of its manifestations I am rendered speechless and happier than ever before. Ritual took its own form. Everybody’s conception of what ritual entails for them seemed to be honored as part of our time
together. I sense that to be the truth, but am clear in the fact that I can only speak for myself. Being able to step into whatever is going on in my experience at any particular point in time and allow others to see it is such an amazing and new experience for me. I am grateful for the friction of the morning, for it allowed me to step fully into who I am and to honor myself for my own choices; and honor others for theirs. Gosh! I thank Amber, the Phoenix, for Its gift of wisdom, of Love, and for allowing me to see that there is opportunity in all I live through.

Latoya

**Definition of Ritual** A scheduled practice/or observation of a spiritual, meditative or relaxing habit.

**Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize** Where do we begin? I expect the ritual will involve movement. There are people here who like to dance and seem in tune with their bodies. I expect as we are encouraged to interact I may find myself sitting on the outside not sure how to bring myself forward. I don’t like being in the middle—the center of attention—but I do hate feeling as if I’m not participating. I also know that being present is a kind of participation but is that enough for the study?

**Figure of Resistance** My mother—Lorraine. Female. This was during her Jerry Curl phase—she is smiling—it’s the face on the photo in my room from 8th grade awards ceremony. Her cheeks are shiny. While there was a smile on her face her emotional state is variable. She could be happy one minute and angry the next. It makes me unsure of how to proceed because I am unsure about how she will react.

**Figure of Desire** Oshun. Female. She is calm with a slight smile on her face—no teeth are shown. She creates a peaceful space.

** Reflexive dialogue** Oshun appeared first. After I introduce my mother to Oshun they talk about my participation in ritual.

O: What do you think about Latoya participating in ritual?
M: She can do whatever she wants. She’ll learn the hard way.
O: Learn about what?
M: Life!
L: Why does everything have to be the hard way with you?
M: Because that’s how life is!
O: But that’s not the way it has to be. Life can be beautiful if you let it.
L: I want to try and let it be. I don’t want it to be so hard.
O: Ritual creates a space for peace.
M: You two can do whatever you think is best. Everyone has their own life to lead. (She begins to walk away.)
L: So, you don’t want to join us.
M: Nope. (And turns away.)
L: OK—it’s your choice (with a sad look on her face).
O: Let’s begin (with a smile on her face).
L: Let’s!

How Affected by Polarity Groups  I’m feeling good about the process. I was able to voice my opinion in a productive manner without hurting anyone’s feelings. Images of light white candles surface for me. Place on spectrum—closer to desire.

How Affected by Ritual  I’ve been known to find a space for expressing myself among strangers but this time it was coming from a place of truth and trust. I believe I made myself vulnerable by expressing my true fear and divulging a current fear rather than keeping it all surface or getting too deep—Freudian deep with my mama issues—as can be seen in my dialogue sketch. I’ve learned that as an adult I can play. I look to kids because they are fun and innocent. I need to believe that adults and especially men have the same potential. There’s no need to be so guarded all the time. I don’t always have to be in my head. I know how to be in my body, but now can I learn to be in my spirit to channel my soul and be free as a child in an adult world.

Jake

Definition of Ritual  Intentional motions, words, sequence of events, actions, interactions, undertaken with the purpose of interfacing with a Mythos. Different than habit because of interfacing with a Mythos.

Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize  Ritualize? For what purpose? Does there need to be a purpose? For play? —a ritual where we anoint each other as Animals. For connection? —a ritual where we dance or share movement to embody each other—“in-body” For sacred touching? —a ritual where we offer up something to the greater good—I have a reaction when Craig says “Notice any other reactions in you.” As if where my attention is focused is limited rather than expanded. What other reactions should I be having? Re-Action = one part of me responds to an event. Action = organic spontaneous.

Figure of Resistance  Stone. Neither gender. Emotional state… calm, wise, deep knowing. I felt instantly at ease and yet not nurtured—in the way a stone is primordial and yet not soft or “caring.”

Figure of Desire  Max—a boy. Blond, 8 or 9, skinny, tan, buzzing with energy. Excitable, nervous anxious to feel connected, aware of things lurking in the shadows. I felt like I was seeing myself at this age hoping for some connection amidst a sea of wild every which way waves.

Reflexive dialogue  Stone appeared first.
   Stone: (silent)
   Max: (climbing Stone)
   Me: (helping Max up onto the stone)
Max: What are we going to do?
Me: Let’s sing!
Max: Okay.
Stone: (smiling as we sit upon it, or maybe it’s a him?)
Max: Row, Row, Row Your Boat, Gently Down the Stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream.
Stone: (smiles)
Stone: Sing it!
Max: Ganesha Saranam, Saranam Ganesha, Ganesha Saranam, Saranam Ganesha, Gangan ganupati, Saranam Ganesha, gangan ganupati, Saranam Ganesha Jaya Ganesha jaya jaya gurunatha jaya ganesha jaya jaya gurunatha—
Me: Alright!
Max and I: Jaya Ganesha jaya jaya gurunatha jaya ganesha jaya jaya gurunatha—
Stone: See those birds?
Us: Yep. (Max is up on my lap)
Stone: Sing them.
Max: Wow! How?
Stone: Just try—Jake knows.
Max: You do—
Me: Just watch how they fly and follow your voice’s own flight—
Max: Huh? Cool!
Us: (quiet humming and swaying, watching the birds.)
Me: Stone? How does one maintain this joy?
Stone: Stay where you can sing.

**How Affected by Polarity Groups** Shoulders ache. I feel excited. Want to climb and run a little. Getting tired of being inside yet enjoying the information this process brings up. Enjoying seeing there is no where to stand. Any viewpoint has a viewpoint—what’s it like there? No hometown. What is the need to feel safe? Is a successful ritual one that unites or divides? My slant is Buddhist and every time I think of a ritual I think it should lead to an awareness of being both form and emptiness—one close to God and one with God. But none of this is a prerequisite. Must I stand somewhere? Spectrum: I would stay where I was—a desire to create a ritual. This is it. Whenever I experience deep processing intellectually I come to a place where there really is no other place to stand but in the moment as it is unfolding. My perception of the unfolding cannot be accurate.

**How Affected by Ritual** This is how we can support each other. Simply by honoring each person’s request. Simply by sharing unagenda’d love. Simply by being careful with each other’s hearts. It is here. I am here. What else is God but this?
Rachel

**Definition of Ritual**  Being at cause for a deliberate experience… designing the 5 senses for the purpose of re-membering, re-connecting with source by being source and sourceful.

**Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize** Creating a group ritual. Invited to co-create ritual…
I first go to ice-breaking experiences from the past… desire to connect. I see a circle and connecting with each person. Went to the circle at the end of journey to the center with right palm on partner’s heart, left over partner’s hand and eye gazing/ now switch. Now I am here… back from memory, open to hear ideas from others in an artistic process of synergy!

**Figure of Resistance** Rabbi Metzger—male. Built like a cube, sweaty brow, German accent, very emotionally closed. He affected me by having me close emotionally in response.

**Figure of Desire** Marcella—female. 30+ long red hair and blue bright eyes, looks like an illustration from the book of fairies. Turned ON! Vulnerable, excited and creative. Grounded. I feel moved and inspired and motivated to participate around her.

**Reflexive dialogue** Marcella appeared first. She was sooo!!! excited to hear about the invitation. Now Kurt Metzger walked up to us with a stern look on his face.

Kurt: You both are so childish. Don’t you know that it is serious business creating and participating in ritual? You have to be sure that everything is definite and everyone knows exactly how to do their part.

Marcella: (grinning mischievously) Oh, Kurt, you know you want to play. You don’t have to be so uptight about your relationship with spirit! Ritual can be a lot of fun and can even include dance and music, improvisation and games.

Kurt: I think you are disrespectful and irresponsible in your approach to ritual. Unless you give it its due weight and proper preparation, you will lose the power of its practice. It must be well grounded in tradition and for this you need a professional like myself to guide you to do it properly.

Marcella: I feel that rituals that have been executed over centuries have lost their life like an old shirt. We need fresh expressions to revive our authentic passion for the sacred. I love that Rachel has the chance to express her unique, core passion for the divine in herself, her community and her universe! C’mon Rachel, let’s go!!!

**How Affected by Polarity Groups** I feel alive, heart pumping, present, relaxed, anticipating whatever we create next. I am feeling less individual, more safe with everyone’s voice heard. I notice I was tense when people were holding back their voice feeling afraid of judgment. I feel interested now in co-creating and support those who don’t want to play in standing out of the process without judging them!!! I feel even more enthusiastic about participating.
How Affected by Ritual  My body is feeling relaxed and present and I feel 100% more connected with everyone, having transcended the personality-based responses… as usual after any team building ritual. Feeling calm and out of my head into my body. Not feeling compelled to do or say. Learning to trust others and as Marcella would say, “Trust the space.”

Erich

Definition of Ritual  A space/time of heightened awareness. A place beyond the ordinary, every day experience. A formalized action, beyond the personal. Embodied enactment of meaning beyond the obvious.

Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize  There was a big question mark in my mind. The room that was so full with our chatter and developing relationships felt empty. I felt questioned by the intended activity to ritualize. And I started to question the group. Like: What is it that connects us? What is sacred? Do we have enough of commonalities to be able to create and perform a ritual? I felt some nervousness around the question if I can hold my own personal power in a group activity.

Figure of Resistance  “Gremlin,” a male old figure, kind of dried up, hunchback. He is annoyed and cynical. Takes things very serious. He doesn’t trust in other people much. Wants to rely on himself.

Figure of Desire  “Fairy tale,” androgynous gender, young and beautiful, with a glow in the face. Fair hair, outworldly, but deliciously embodied. Innocent, enthusiastic, calm, open hearted. It affected me positively, I was attracted to the figure.

Reflexive dialogue  Gremlin (G) appeared first, then Fairy tale (F)

G: this is ridiculous. You’re sitting here with these strangers to “ritualize.” What the heck, one of these Californian follies.

Myself: Give me a break. I am here and whatever I do counts. Want to feel comfortable and make this moment more beautiful.

F: Finally you guys listen to me. There is no chance to get through to you usually. I want to bring the magic to your life. I hate to just trot down the same dusty road everyday. There is so much more to life.

G: We got to eat. We got to pay rent. And what about making sense for a change. What is magic, sacred anyway. The maniacs like Bush are taking over the world and you want to dance around? If you want to change the world like that, good luck.

Myself: What can we do together that will work for everyone?

F: Not with this guy (points at G). You got to surrender, full heartedly believe in what you are doing.

Myself: You are a bit perfectionistic maybe.

F: You will never find out what I have to offer you, if you don’t risk to give yourself fully. No chance to experience the wonders that there are.
G: I know it all. The world out there is not what it looks like. But you can only know what you know, you can’t know what you don’t know.
Myself: You are saying that, Gremlin?
G: Yes, but some game would make you smarter. It is hard work.
Myself: What if we agree. We all don’t know what we don’t know. We can be with who we are and be open to change. Let me try things out and not expect that it will be a life-altering experience. Just this: A step taken consciously.

How Affected by Polarity Groups I am not sure how I feel. I am more aware of the dilemma that I experience around ritual. I want to be with the people that are significant in my life in an agreed upon understanding about rituals. But I can’t have the energy to create the container for it without the social background that supports the rituals we are creating. My desire to create ritual in this group today has decreased. I feel more of my doubts about self-created ritual and its significance for me. I miss a natural environment to draw inspiration from here in this office building.

How Affected by Ritual I feel warmer for the people in the group. It was great sharing this experience and getting to know each other in this very different way. The non-verbal makes it easier to connect. The verbal often distances me from others. Sadness comes up. I experienced a sense of belonging in the closet. But I become keenly aware that I lost the belonging to my country, culture, friends and family by living in different places for so long. There is one idea which I like. And I ask myself if it is more than an idea: The idea that somebody brought up that we are a group, some kind of tribe, those who are interested in transforming themselves and the planet through meditation, arts, conscious living, and so on. But then again: How much does that hold? We hold diversity and we can still share this moment together, be moved by each other’s stories, expressions, touch and sound. I felt like crying during our ritual time together. Sadness about what divides us and my holding back from sharing my common humanity to preserve my individuality. The cave, the small protected space. Children playing in a closet. Hiding from the demands of the world of the grown-ups.

David

Definition of Ritual Something/anything done with an intention to be present and connect with spirit. It does not have to be done regularly. I believe that it should involve faith and a sense of devotion but this is not always the case nor necessary.

Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize I got a little nervous. Will I have to participate in someone else’s idea of a ritual. Will I have the courage and creativity to put forth suggestions that are meaningful to me? Will I have to “perform” in front of others. How do I feel about sharing this experience, am I comfortable? It has been OK sharing stories and experiences thus far, but how about having/creating a new experience together. OK just do it, face your fear. Be brave and let go if you can of attachment to specific results. Can you give yourself permission to be seen in a group, to be a part of the group? I feel my voice shutting down. May as well go for it. Let’s just surrender. Let’s go for it.
These people are just like me. They cry, they laugh, they worry, they question and judge, they love. They’re genuine. I’ve got faith in this. How else can I explain my being here?

**Figure of Resistance**  Tyrone. Male. Was clad in the armor of a medieval/futuristic soldier. He was strong and steady. He was stiff, not limber, very rigid, firm. He was clear/unwavering. He was firm. He made me feel confused and weak. He made me feel uncertain and doubtful. Like I didn’t know what was best for me because I wavered or because I was open to different possibilities.

**Figure of Desire**  Cassandra or Cleopatra, female. Long curly hair, clear face, light skin, wings or something to hover with, dressed in white, had a headdress on. Very angelic. Present, emotionally aware, clear, soft yet present, helped me to see the value in being vulnerable.

**Reflexive dialogue**

Me: Why do you want me to not participate so badly?
T: It’s stupid. It’s a waste of time.
Me: What’s so stupid about it?
T: It’s just make believe.
Me: How can we show Tyrone that it’s very wonderful?
C: He’d need to let down his armor and allow himself to participate.
Me: How can we convince him to do so?
C: We can’t. He’ll have to do so for himself. We can’t face his fears for him.
Me: What about me. I want to face my fears but sometimes it’s so hard?
C: Look to faith. Go for it having faith that you will be held. It’s worth a try.

Otherwise you’re still stuck in a place that no longer works for you.

Me: I wish I had a partner to help me along, to make it less scary.
C: I’m hear, I’m your partner. You can call to me anywhere at any time.
Me: Isn’t that living in fantasy?
C: why does it matter what it is? Why label it? If it works and it is harmless to others and helpful to you, use it. It’s a gift.
J: This is cool. I feel like I’ve got a support person. It makes me feel safer. But is it dangerous to let my imagination go like this?
C: Don’t you do it all the time? What is real anyway? Is it what you believe, is it what you see, is it what your parents told you or your government? It’s really up to you to decide. You are the chooser in your life. It is your gift. You choose.
Me: What do you think about that?
T: Well yeah, I guess we do choose.
Me: Why do you choose to remain alone or in armor?
T: It’s just what I know best, it’s familiar. I can count on it.
Me: But it doesn’t really serve you.
T: Yeah, but that doesn’t just simply allow me to let it go.
Me: It’s a process, right?
C: Yes that’s exactly it.
T: Yes, I agree too.
Me: How fast can I move in this process? I want to rid myself of the armor, I don’t like it.

C: Be aware and also be patient with your self. When you feel confident take a chance. When you don’t it’s OK to waiver or not take a chance. You are the best guide. Trust yourself.

Me: But sometimes I’m so unclear. And then I look to others and this doesn’t help. It confuses me.

C: Be patient with yourself. Give yourself permission to go slow when needed. There is no race. Besides, the donkey with the armor on can’t run anyway. He’s stuck… I didn’t mean to call you a donkey.

Me: But you are kind of a jackass… I’m gonna do it. What have I got to lose? I feel calm and grounded. This is a comfortable place to be. Now I feel more ready.

Where did the name Cleopatra come from? And Tyrone?

How Affected by Polarity Groups I feel lighter. Wind or air like. I feel less attached. With all the talk, all the wavering, all the do it, don’t do it, all the curiosity the comfort and discomfort. We consistently flip flop. So let’s just go for it. Let’s take a chance, see what happens. Before I felt grounded in my fear. Now I feel less grounded but also less hyperaware and sensitive. I feel less vulnerable. I’ve already done that with this group and they have done that with me. I do feel a level of trust with most people here today. Is it strong enough, well I can’t know unless I try. I think everyone is vulnerable, we are all human. I feel a lot less resistance and this time it feels less like a surrendering on faith and more like a belief that I can trust from earlier experience. One ritual may be more sacred than another. I can not form my definition of ritual from one particular experience I may have had or hope to have.

How Affected by Ritual Love knows no culture. Love knows no boundaries. I feel more grounded, more able to stand comfortably on this earth, more ready to accept my being here. I have a right to be here. I have a right to love and to be loved. I feel clear, nothing to question or to doubt. Nothing to wrap my brain around. I like it that way…

Sumi

Definition of Ritual Some kind of act, done with an intention in mind. It can be as simple as counting each finger on my hand in the morning to wake up or as elaborate as a celebration created in commemoration of my graduation next year.

Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize Self consciousness, fear, judgment. I wish I could say I feel excited at the prospect, but it seems for me that ritual feels like a private act. I know that just in sharing our own stories this morning, we felt the sacred from each other, but faced with the task of creating a ritual together so soon after meeting one another feels somewhat daunting. Now, having said that, my mind turns to the feeling of curiosity that is arising. Now I’m imagining that we’re going to do this regardless of my reservations so I realize I CAN and will do it. How will we end up doing it as a group, I wonder. What will we begin with? How ceremonial will it be?
**Figure of Resistance**  Pete. Male. Funny little squirrel holding an acorn and quickly taking bites from it. Anxious little guy. Really speedy. Chatted with me while chewing, chewing, chewing. He’d stop abruptly and spin his head left and right before snapping back to me and his acorn. He was trying to be cool, but he made me feel a bit scattered, anxious.

**Figure of Desire**  Shandra. Female. Bright sunshine or rays of light behind her. She’s robed, flowing outfit with a hood. It was hard to see her face and when I saw it, she was so normal, but sweet looking. She felt calming, open. She felt inspiring, relaxed.

**Reflexive dialogue**

Pete: (1st)  What for? I mean, what if? I mean, you don’t even know these people. You don’t want to be pushed into what THEY want, do you?

Shandra:  It’s ultimately up to you to go as far as you feel comfortable. Then you can stop at any time if it doesn’t feel right.

Pete:  Yeah, right. And risk offending the sensitive ones?!

Shandra:  Yes. Do what’s right for you. Embrace the opportunity because it’s something YOU want to experience. A newness. Such possibility. Don’t do it for the wrong reasons.

Pete:  Fine. Do it cuz you want to, but don’t forget that I told ya so!

Shandra:  It’ll be fine. The spirit of the group seems right. Nice group of people.

Conscious group of people.

Pete:  Yeah, some are a little TOO conscious, if ya know what I mean!

Shandra:  If you allow your judgment to get in the way, again, it’s your choice. Remember, it’s what you make of it and what you take from it. So make it what you want. Take from it what you came for. You came here for a reason. You’ve gotten a taste of it already… see what it’s like when you push past your fears. Remember: what would you do if you weren’t afraid? And really, what is there to be afraid of? No one will judge you for feeling what you feel as long as you don’t judge yourself.

Pete:  Blah, blah, blah. Feely, schmeely. Why does it have to be so feely schmeely?????

Shandra:  Why are YOU so afraid of that? Leave the judgment behind… it’ll be fine.

**How Affected by Polarity Groups**  I’m feeling fairly calm and open right now. It was so freeing to hear that some people had some of the same concerns that I did… and some of the same pro-ritual creation feelings as well. I feel even more strongly this ritual of conversation, airing of our fears, hearing one another opened more of my willingness to trust that we can, as a group, create something here today. It’s interesting to notice how like-minded this group seems. Perhaps when we all think about it, everyone is like-minded—nah. Nice brief thought though. I’m much closer to going for it. I think I was even before we had a conversation. It’s truly deciding to make this what I want and taking from it what I want. We can, in our differences, still create something unifying, I think.
How Affected by Ritual  Asking a group of strangers for what we need. How strange that it was so possible. How wonderful that it was so lovingly received and responded to.  Sound. When Kristen asked for sound, I knew instantly that that was what I wanted. Did I know how great it would be? Not in the least! Wow. So incredible. Great group of people—open, loving, willing… like-minded. That made it so easy. That people were willing to share their vulnerabilities—I felt so touched, so honored. And now, now that it’s over… now that we’re out of that small and cozy space… it’s still there—that feeling of warmth—that feeling of community… but there’s a question mark somewhere in me.  Not sure what it is.  When we all stand together in our nakedness, it seemed somewhat easier, but now, fully clothed, there’s a layer of defense again.  What defense?  I don’t know.  Something.  Maybe it’s a question of what now.  Do we all come together for such support and then just walk away?  How am I with endings, I’ve been asked.  I’m still working that out.

Kevin

Definition of Ritual  Coming into spirit, a feeling of clarity, dreams hopes.  Participation in aiding others to see things more clearly, or to have a great connection.

Reaction to Invitation to Ritualize  At first I felt fear of the ritual, whatever that may be.  Doing ritual with others that I am unfamiliar with and what they may be thinking brings up fear, (little) anxiety of possibly being intimate with others, holding hands, rubbing shoulders and etc…

Figure of Resistance  Cye.  Male.  Cye is a very hairy person, with one eye in the middle of his forehead.  His eye is very beautiful, blue, sky blue, and has much vision coming.  The emotional state of Cye is he is just walking along, enjoying life, and he seems emotionally at peace.  This affected me as that I concentrated more on my breath, and felt more at ease with going into the ritual.

Figure of Desire  Glinda.  Female.  She is very beautiful, in a satiny pink gown and a crown of diamonds.  She has a very beautiful face and makeup on.  Her hair is blond and very curly.  Glinda is at peace and very soft spoken.  She affected me by feeling more at peace with going into this ritual.

Reflexive dialogue  1st appeared—Cye.

C: It’s time for you to join in the ritual.
G: Yes Tim, I encourage you to join and feel the whole experience of the ritual. Let yourself be happy.
C: Happy, yes Tim, that is what you are going to experience, I see with one eye all the beauty and love and nurturing that is coming forth for you in this ritual.  Take it all in, let it just be.
G: You have so much to offer from the group as well as to the group.
Me: I am ready to get my feet wet and experience with my cohort what a new and exciting ritual will hold for me.
Together, the three of us sit for awhile on the rocks near my cabin, and feel the warmth of the sun and the sounds of the birds and the water running over the rocks in the river.

**How Affected by Polarity Groups** I am feeling a little bit of tension with the group at waffling. I want to hold everyone in my hand and say it’s OK, your experience is what it is, accept that. If you are not at peace with your beliefs, accept that. What is coming up for me also is the fact that I waffle back and forth at times and don’t make a decision. I want to do this ritual and stick with my decision to do it. I would be at the far end of the spectrum, the one near “let’s do this.”

**How Affected by Ritual** At this given moment, I feel very excited and happy with the experiences I just went through. I felt such love and warmth from everyone in the room, a real sense of family, for what definition it may be for me. At the beginning of the ritual, I was scared, but I pushed through that and was very at ease with the group. It was such an elation for me to be held by so many people.
APPENDIX 18

POLARITY GROUPS TRANSCRIPT

(-) — Against Ritualizing

(+) — For Ritualizing

Latoya (-): I doubt that ritual could be created in such a short period of time. For real ritual, I think we need more time. Rituals have tradition.

Rachel (+): So the first people that enacted the rituals that have now become traditions, how long do you think it took them?

Latoya: Years and years. Your point is that it had to start somewhere, but in our group, in one day, I don’t think we have enough time.

Kevin: Ritual doesn’t have a time limit. It can be created among people in a very short time, or it can be a drawn-out process. I think that it’s a mindset of people getting together and wanting to make that spiritual connection, whatever the ritual may be — exciting, scary — all those feelings come into play with all of that and just let it be.

Maria: There’s an element of safety. I’m willing to be vulnerable, but to what extent in such a limited amount of time and such structure, that I don’t feel I can be myself, as I want to be, and not be judged for that. Maybe that decision can be made in a second, but I haven’t felt that way. So for me, it’s very hard to step into the ritual when there is not an environment of safety. I have been known to do ritual for a long time, and in many cases, it has taken just a split second (snaps fingers) for me to be able to enter that space freely, but that’s not the case when I’m feeling constricted.

Sumi: I have doubts too, but I decided the ritual will be whatever I make it, and the bells and chimes I can hit whenever I like, if it doesn’t feel right, and I just thought, “Why don’t I just give it a try with the intention of creating some kind of ritual in a way that feels safer?”

(I chime, and invite the participants to try out different positions.)

David: After all of us sharing our reactions in the center, I just felt like I wanted to just surrender and just “go for it.” I could remain in a place of being afraid, and then I thought, “You got nothing to lose.” And it could be painful or not go the
way I hoped it would go, but I’d rather just try. Try to have the opportunity to have an uplifting experience, or just face my fear and see what that’s like.

**Erich:** Of course there’s something to lose. There’s time to lose and we could make a complete fool of ourselves… And frankly, I think this is one of those Californian things. You come together and you do these odd things, you think it’s… lord knows what… and you become uplifted… and you go home… and then two days later you don’t even remember what you did.

**Peter:** Not a very effective ritual. We all have our own ritual experiences, and my experience is that when a ritual is structured in a powerful and effective way, everyone leaves transformed, and it’s a transformation that lasts. You may not recognize it two days later, but in some way, you’re going to be different. And the other thing I know about ritual is that it’s not always comfortable, and there is a risk involved, and part of an effective ritual is that there’s a risk element tied in, because it’s a calling forth to do something in a different way. And a really good ritual is one that takes into account discomfort and safety, and addresses that right from the start, so that there’s some way of holding that discomfort. And how can you move it, so that everyone in the group is in alignment, so you can start turning up the volume, so that there is… (laughs) I’ll stop. I saw some reaction here. I’m starting to sound like I’m from California… And the other thing is that all cultures historically have ritual. It’s not a California thing.

**Erich:** Culture is a good point. Ritual has to be grounded in culture. You can’t just take some Native American drumming… and some Eastern meditation… and some Jewish I-don’t-know-what… and then you mix it all together, and then you think, “It works!” Ritual has to be grounded.

**David:** But maybe we’re a culture of bravery, of individuals who are here to unite. Maybe it’s not as, I don’t want to use the word “rigid,” familiar of a culture as we’d normally look at cultures, but we are actually a culture. We are all here together.

**Latoya:** I’m just a head person. I’m not afraid of the ritual, I’m not afraid of participating, but it’s more of like, all of us coming together in that alignment that you say, and I don’t know if that can happen. I mean, I know you’re like, “OK, everyone has a desire, everyone wants to do it,” but I guess that’s where I think it’s not going to happen.

(Peter, Kevin and David (+) move to (-). Erich (-) moves to (+) along with Rachel and Jake. Latoya sits down. Maria joins (-).)

**Peter:** Something I get concerned about is that if everyone’s not full hearted, and everyone isn’t in alignment, and we’re not all on the same page, and we’re not all showing up in the same way, how might that affect the potency of our ritual? And I want to participate in a ritual where I’m pretty confident right at the start, that there’s a high
potential for initiation and transformation in some way. And if I’m getting the sense that some folks are: “I’m not sure about it.” I’m not really sure how they’re going to step in. If they’re going to do this (makes tentative gesture) then I’m not sure if I want to be a part of that, and that may not be the right group or the right container for me right now.

David: I can’t do ritual in this unsacred office space in the daylight.

(Sumi joins (-). David sits down.)

Maria: That’s what I meant earlier by “safety.” There’s an element here that is missing and I don’t know if it is a cultural thing, or what is it. We come from different cultures, as you see, and maybe we have to go past the same idea of how it should be? You mentioned earlier about Jewish and other religions, and I was thinking, “Why can it not co-exist in the same space? Why not?”

Rachel: You’re on the wrong side.

Maria: What I’m saying is that until we get in a place where we’re all on that (+) side of the room, it won’t happen.

Rachel: I have to agree with you, that it can’t happen until that’s there. And I was actually seeing a ritual where in the silence, where our common humanity becomes clear, that we’re breathing the same air.

(Peter switches to (+) and David switches to (-).)

Rachel: We’re looking at the same white walls. In Neuro-Linguistic Programming, when people breathe together and they sit similarly, they start to perceive things the same way. If you start shadowing a person and walk the way they walk, you’ll start to notice things exactly the way they perceive them.

Maria (crossing to (+) side): “Walk in the footsteps of the stranger.”

Rachel: Yes, literally. So I was starting to see a ritual where we all sat in a circle, and we all brought our attention to one spot on this wall… and then we all brought our attention to another spot, and then we brought our attention to our breathing. (Jake crosses to (-) side.) We got ourselves to this moment. Because in this moment, with our common humanity, we are all in alignment. And that’s the kind of ritual I was imagining, in this setting, with this group. It would be simple getting present, getting connected to the divine in each of us, the divine in the universe.

Kevin (in the middle): I’m going to stand here for just a minute. (Group laughs) What a beautiful thing that everybody has come here today. We’re here for a reason. We’re here to… regardless of ritual or not, we all have a connection
somehow today. We will remember this day, for whatever reason it may be for us, so… I think that’s really cool. (Kevin moves to (+), group laughs again.)

**Jake:** I want to make sure that there’s a ritual that includes my desire not to look at that same spot. To be together doesn’t mean to be the same together. It means to be every perfect, different thing that we all are in our lives. So the silence is great…

**Rachel:** So now we’re in the process of negotiating the ritual, which I think is fabulous.

**David:** I want to go back to the cultural differences. Most of my own experience with ritual that has touched me in the deepest way has been on my own. Most of them I performed on my own. So there wasn’t any concern about differences or genres or cultural sensitivities or borders or boundaries. And that feels very real right now, that what’s sacred for me, or a ritual that might be sacred for me might not be sacred for someone else. Words or tones or actions that might feel sacred for me may not feel sacred at all to someone else. And is our goal of this ritual… does it have to be sacred to everyone, or maybe are there things we have to let go of to create?

**Maria:** Can we all co-exist? We can co-exist. (Jake moves to (+) side.)

**Sumi:** Well, I think as long as we can… For me, it’s about trusting that everyone else will also find it as sacred as I do. For the same reason as having the differences and feeling like you’re not going to intrude on someone else’s space and they’re not going to intrude on yours.

**Maria:** Coming from my own experience, I mentioned my apprehension earlier. What I can offer is, again, the question, “Can people co-exist? Can we?” Because the truth of the matter is that we come from different backgrounds, that’s true, and at the same time, in essence, we are all the same. So if each of us owns whatever we’re feeling, why not?

(David and Sumi cross to (+) side. Erich crosses to (-) side.)

**Latoya:** What is the definition of ritual? And how do we come to what it really means, and how do we get to that point? For me, it’s just that whole logistics of how it can happen.

**Sumi:** It seems like we need to have a conversation where we can air our concerns. It helps to alleviate them.

(Erich crosses to (+) side. Jake crosses to (-) side.)

**Jake:** I’ve only been to one ritual, and I’m 28, so that’s not many years, but only one ritual where every single person there was completely welcome, and it was a ritual… and anything was possible… And that was Burning Man. (Group laughs) And I’m not
kidding, like, I’ve never been in a place where everything you are, except violent, is welcome… And can you do that here… in this room?

**Maria:** Can you really be in a space in which someone is yelling and crying and kicking? (Jake says “Yeah.”) So then you can be in ritual.

**Suni:** You mean where everyone is judgment-free?

**Jake:** Everyone.

**Latoya:** (Throws up hands and laughs) I’m sorry… Judgment-free?

**David:** (Crosses to (-) side.) I was just going to… I can’t make any promises.

**Latoya (Laughs):** I cannot deny that I’m a judgmental person. (Kevin (+) sits down.)

**David:** I could not attach to the judgments.

**Maria:** OK, I hear you on that one, but still there is a freedom there. The judgment can be good or bad. (She is referring to her positive response to David’s dancing earlier in the afternoon.) As it happened before, I thought that what we did was great for me, and that was judgment as well. (David dances again, and group laughs.) Oh boy, I’ve created a monster.

**Latoya:** I don’t know… I just like this side. (Group laughs) I’m trying not to go over there, it’s not like I’m doing that, it’s just like… It’s just a question I’m pondering: “Are we ever going to get there? Do we just talk about it, and then we decide what our ritual is, or…

**Maria:** I don’t think you can feel into my expression of ritual, or anyone else’s for that matter. It’s just that it’s something so personal. As I said earlier today, for me, ritual is being with a bunch of friends over coffee when the conversation is ritualistic, or I can make it that, or not.

(Latoya shrugs, then struts over to the (+) side for the first time. Group laughs and claps.)

**Jake:** Then why is there this attempt to try? ‘Cause I agree. There’s a part of me that so strongly… it is personal… and every time I come back to my home, there’s no shared experience, other than being home. And whatever your home is and whatever my center is… (Moves) We can dance in this room together in that place, but it doesn’t mean that there’s this attempt at synthesis other than that freedom to be wherever we are. Because the minute you attempt to somehow join freedoms… I’ve never seen it work, and I don’t want to be skeptical, I’m willing for it to work today, right now, and have that transformative experience that Peter was excited about earlier, but…
**Maria:** As I said, this is such a personal journey for each one of us, and at the same time, we can co-exist. Our definitions of ritual can be the same. It could, but it doesn’t have to. If you saw me earlier, I was the one closest to the “total resistance” area, and I have to deal with myself and with my expectations. Frankly, my biggest expectation today was that I was going to be free to express my idea of freedom, as I wanted to. It was a powerful choice. No one could make that choice for me.

**Jake** (agreeing): That’s like, no one can force me to participate. That’s where it’s so fascinating, that in the end, even when you think you’re having a collective experience, that’s a perception… It’s a funny paradox. (Jake crosses to (+) side. No one is on (-) side.)

**Latoya:** Ritual is as simple as a cup of coffee. You go get your Sunday paper. You’re at the café—that’s a ritual.

**Kevin:** It’s what we want it to be. It doesn’t matter what anyone else feels that it is, it’s what you personally want it to be, and that’s all that matters.

**Maria:** There are no rights and wrongs.

**Rachel:** Well, I’m just standing here as Rabbi Metzger here, and I’m here to tell you that I actually agree with this gentleman over here who was talking about “ritual needs to be grown in a culture,” so it may seem like an oxymoron. You can have a superficial ritual here, but it wouldn’t really have substance.

**Jake:** To who?

**Rachel:** Well, I guess substance is relevant… relative, but there’s a certain groundedness to ritual that’s been around…

**Jake:** For you. (Rachel says “Yeah”) … ’Cause for me, this might be it.

**Rachel** (crossing to (+) side, leaving no one on the (-) side): I just had to stand there a minute to voice that voice.

**Jake:** (Plays a street fighter with an invisible enemy.)… and another thing! (Kicks invisible opponent. Group laughs. Jake crosses to (-) side) Alright, I’ll be that guy…

**Kristen:** I was going to ask a person there before, what brought them today. If ritual can’t happen in one day with a group of people, why did they sign up for a ritual in one day with a group of people? (Group laughs.)

**Latoya:** I didn’t know we were going to be doing ritual. I just thought we were going to talk about ritual in ourselves, and in our cultures, and explore that.
Rachel: So I guess from your point of view, there is really no possibility of peace on earth, 'cause everyone’s sort of walking around in their own autistic reality, is that the truth?

Latoya: I would really love for that (peace on earth) to happen, but I don’t believe it can.

Rachel: You’re pretty resigned about it.

Latoya: Yeah. Hope. Pray, but it has to be everyone.

Rachel: Yeah, and the only way I can see that peace on earth can ever happen is if we are able to extemporaneously live inside of sacred space every moment of every day, connecting on every level, while respecting who the other person is. It feels like in that honoring space, of honoring life, is where peace has occurred when it has occurred.

Latoya: But if you do believe that peace needs to start with us, I would like to see if those people who have the power to, do something about it.

Rachel: So you feel powerless to start peace where you are?

Latoya: Well, I can have it here, we can have it in this room. But for peace on earth to happen, it has to happen at another level.

Jake (crossing to (+) side): Some of the most amazing teaching moments from my evolution as a person have come from conflict. And I wonder… well, there is definitely a way we could utilize resources and each other’s freedoms a lot better… Peace has to include some agitation to be useful… and it always will. I don’t ever see it being a place where we all get along. I want to respect, but I don’t just “get along.” It’s fun to have conflict.

Jake (crossing to (−) side): I’m just saying peace on earth is a strange goal.

Rachel: Well, what about Burning Man?

Jake: I don’t know if you create peace there, ’cause there’s definitely…there is not violence. There is not necessarily safety, so I guess we’d have to define what is peace, what are we talking about?

(Witnesses speak: “I think it’s more tolerance, acceptance. Freedom.” I chime out, saying the form is getting a little jumbled here. The participants regroup, and I chime back in.)

Sumi: I like the question of, “It can be superficial but how sacred can it actually be?”
Rachel: It seems sort of pointless, really. What is it forwarding?

Peter: That’s for us to decide.

Kevin: Yeah, we don’t know until we try.

Jake: For each of us, it may be different.

Maria: … and what is sacred for each of us?

Kristen: And does it have to forward something? Maybe it’ll be fun, maybe it’ll be horrible, but whatever it is, you’ll take it away from here.

David: Can you let go of the need for it to be something sacred, or does it have to meet an expectation?

Peter: I’m open to outcome… not attached.

Erich: Ritual has to be something special, it can’t just be something…

Maria: Who defines “special?”

(Sumi and Rachel cross over to (+) side)

Erich: That’s true.

Peter: Well then, come on over, come on now!

(Erich crosses over to (+) side, leaving no one on (-) side and ending the form)
APPENDIX 19

DESCRIPTION OF GROUP RITUAL

After I rang the chimes to signal the beginning of the ritual, the group gradually
stood up and in silence, began to slowly spread out around the room. Suddenly, Jake
darted into an 8-by-12 foot closet off of the main space, and quickly closed the door
behind him. A few seconds later, Kristen also ran into the closet and closed the door
behind her. Surprised by their unexpected movement away from the group, I crossed the
room and went over to the closet door, putting my ear up to the door to show my
curiosity about what was happening inside.

The powerful pull of the emerging ritual on the other side of the door overtook
me. Before I knew what was happening, I opened the door, entered the closet and closed
the door behind me. Inside the closet, I found Kristen and Jake chasing each other
around the perimeter of the tiny room. Within a minute, the rest of the participants and
the co-researchers, a total of 13 people, crowded into the darkened closet. This was the
setting for the ritual, out of the range of the video camera, and without the chimes and the
tape recorder, which in the power of the moment of the ritual’s emergence, I had
neglected to bring with me.

Inside the closet, the group formed a circle and then spiraled into a huddle in the
middle. Peter offered an invocation to Mother Earth and Father Sky, and various group
members contributed to a collective free association. This began with series of seemingly
unconnected words, and then phrases that were said aloud popcorn-style, such as, “My
favorite color is orange,” then, “Boy, those apples were delicious.” The group seemed to
drop into a more serious and self-reflective place when Jake said, “I passed by a homeless
man today.”

Soon after this, Kevin, who was in the middle of the huddle, disclosed to the
group that he was going through a break-up with his partner and would soon need to look
for a new home. The group responded by offering, and then giving him a group hug that
lasted for a few minutes. Afterwards, the group moved back into a circle, and each
participant took a turn in the middle, specifying what they wanted, and receiving a few
minutes of intimate, focused attention from the group: David also asked for a group hug.
Peter asked the group to lift him in the air and hold him as he reclined on his back. Later,
Rachel asked for this as well. Jake, and later Erich asked the group to form a tight circle
and put out their hands. Each stood and stiffened his body, and was gently bounced
around the circle from person to person. Maria told the group how open her heart was as
she reclined on the ground and asked everyone to hold her. Kristen also reclined on the
ground and asked the group to make sound. The group responded by singing long,
sustained, harmonic tones, filling the small room with sound. Sumi said that she wanted
this as well. Latoya disclosed to the group that she was in a new relationship and did not
want to “mess it up.” She asked for supportive advice, and each group member offered
her a personal response.

Following this, the group sat together in silence, clearly moved by the power of
what had just occurred. Several participants spoke about how open their hearts were and
how connected they felt to the group. Afterwards, in response to an invitation by one of
my co-researchers, several participants spoke in languages other than English, and the
group sang a Hebrew song in round, *Shalom Chavurim*, to close the ritual.

Peter set up three chairs by the doorway, then slid through the “tunnel” back out
into the main room. Everyone followed, finding different ways to leave the closet. For
example, some of the participants stepped over or around the chairs. Some were held
onto by the participants in the closet or pulled out by the participants in the main room.
When everyone was out in the main room, most of the group danced around
energetically, while clapping, singing, and making percussive sounds. Some participants
went over to the window, where someone in an office across the way had noticed the
group. Soon, the energy of the group dissipated, and I rang the chimes to end the ritual.
APPENDIX 20

PRELIMINARY LEARNINGS

Research Study on Ritual Ambivalence—Preliminary Learnings

Definitions of Ritual

- Participants were generally in agreement that ritual includes: intentional and purposeful actions, connection to something larger/communion with the sacred, embodied actions holding personal meaning, going beyond the ordinary and the personal, bringing heightened awareness and clarity, involving the arts.

- Participants held questions as to whether rituals needed to be conducted with regularity, whether daily personal habits and mundane actions could be considered rituals, whether rituals require faith and devotion, whether one could authentically participate in another culture’s rituals, and whether elements of traditional rituals could be combined.

- Participants noted polarities including: traditional versus contemporary ritual, sacred versus secular ritual, individual versus group ritual, scripted versus creative ritual, scheduled versus spontaneous ritual.

Figures of Resistance

Mostly masculine
(Male or masculine aspect of female)
Controlling authority figures
Adult, old, serious, judgmental
Emotionally closed, rigid, anxious
Rock and hard imagery

Figures of Desire

Mostly feminine
(Female or feminine aspect of male)
Goddesses, angels, and children
Young, beautiful, playful, balanced
Emotionally open, vulnerable, calm
Bird and light image

Themes of Ritual Ambivalence

- Trust/Vulnerability/Safety—Ritual involves being open and vulnerable, and I want to move toward that, but I fear being hurt or shamed. Is there enough safety in this space for me to bring forward my vulnerability? Can I trust myself?
• **Sacred Connection**—I both long for, and am afraid of losing myself in communion with the sacred. Will I be able to connect to the sacred in a ritual? What will that look like? Can we create sacred space in this profane environment? How can a group with diverse beliefs and practices connect to the sacred?

• **Intimacy**—Ritual will involve getting close to this group of people that I’ve just met. I want to get close, but I’m not sure I’m willing to risk that, or if real intimacy is even possible under these circumstances.

• **Autonomy versus Conformity to Group**—I want to belong to this group and I don’t want to give up my individuality. Will I need to compromise my own beliefs and ideas in order to participate in ritual with this group? Will there be space for the parts of me that don’t want to go along with the group?

• **Structure**—Some structure in ritual may be necessary, but too much structure feels oppressive. I want there to be some containment, but I also want to feel free.

• **Authority/Leadership**—Who is really in charge here? Who gets to decide what the structure will be in ritualizing? Can I trust this leadership?

• **Creative Self-Expression**—Will we just make something up or do things that we’ve done before? I want to express myself in ritual, but I’m not sure I know how. Will I be able to bring my authentic self? Will my performance be judged?

• **Purpose/Meaning**—What is it that needs to be ritualized? What is our intention? Does it need to be serious, or can we just play? Will a ritual have any long-lasting effects or deep meaning in my life?

**Response to Invitation to Ritualize the Ambivalence**

• Two participants went into a closet, followed by the researcher, then the rest of the participants and the co-researchers. The researcher did not bring a tape recorder and the group shut the door, so the ritual was not recorded on videotape.

• Inside the closet, the group formed a circle, and then spiraled into the middle. Each participant took a turn in the middle, receiving attention from the group, including: hugging, sounding, lifting, holding, and offering support and blessings. Several participants spoke in languages other than English, and the group sang a song in round.

• A participant set up three chairs by the doorway, then slid through the “tunnel” back out into the main room. Everyone followed, finding different ways to leave the closet. Out in the main room, most of the group danced around, clapped, sang, and made percussive sounds. Some participants went over to the window, where someone across the way had noticed the group.
APPENDIX 21

THE JACOB AND ESAU MYTH

According to biblical myth, Abraham prayed to one god and became the founder of a spiritual tradition, one that gave rise to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. God tested Abraham’s faith by asking him to sacrifice his oldest son, Isaac. Abraham brought Isaac, who was still a boy, up to a mountaintop. Just at the moment when Abraham was about to kill his son, God intervened and provided a ram for the sacrifice instead. The story of Jacob and Esau begins some years later, when Isaac was a grown man. He was 40 years old when he married Rebecca. Many years went by, and still they didn't have any children. Isaac prayed that his wife would be able to conceive, and soon, Rebecca was pregnant – with twins.

Before her twins were even born, Rebecca could feel them kicking and fighting inside her. She was very distressed by this, and prayed for an explanation. She received a prophecy that the two children inside her would become the fathers of two nations. Just like the two were fighting with each other now, the two nations would struggle with each other. One would be stronger than the other, and the older would serve the younger.

Soon it came time for the children to be born. The first baby was a boy. He was all red and covered with hair, and so Isaac and Rebecca named him Esau, meaning “hairy.” The second baby was also a boy, and he was born grabbing onto Esau’s heel, so Isaac and Rebecca named him Jacob, meaning “he who takes by the heel,” or “he who supplants.” Isaac was already 60 years old when Esau and Jacob were born.
The boys grew up. Esau became a strong and great hunter who loved the outdoors. Isaac preferred Esau because he loved the wild game he brought home from hunting. Jacob was a quiet, sensitive man, who liked to stay indoors. He was the more spiritually minded of the two, and Rebecca, remembering the prophesy about her sons, preferred Jacob over Esau.

One day, Jacob was at home cooking. He had just made a huge pot of lentil stew. Esau came home from a long day of hunting and was famished. “Give me some of that red stuff. I am so hungry!” Esau demanded. Jacob, who had been waiting for a moment such as this, answered him, “Sure, I’ll give you some stew if you will give me your birthright.”

Now, the birthright was a very important thing. It was supposed to go to Esau because he was born first. When Isaac died, Esau’s birthright would make him head of the household. He would get twice as much of his father's wealth as Jacob would, and more importantly, he would become the spiritual leader in the family.

But Esau had little regard for the spiritual heritage of his father and grandfather. He said, “What good will a birthright do for me if I starve to death?”

Jacob insisted that Esau promise to give him the birthright, and Esau promised, so Jacob gave Esau some stew and bread. Esau ate, drank, and when he was done, got up and left. He gave up his birthright of spiritual leadership for a bowl of lentil stew.

Years later, when Isaac was so old he could no longer see, he called to Esau, his oldest son, and said, “My son, I am so old that I may die soon. Take your bow and arrows and go out hunting. When you come back, cook the venison you hunted and bring it to me in a stew to eat. Then I will bless you before I die.”
Rebecca overheard everything that Isaac had said to Esau. As soon as Esau left, Rebecca said to Jacob, “Your father has sent Esau away to hunt. When Esau gets back, he is going to fix your father’s favorite dinner, and your father is going to give him his blessing. Quick! Do what I say! Go out into the fields and bring me two young goats, and I will make a stew using them. Then, you take it to him, and your father will think you are Esau, and he will bless you.”

But Jacob said, “Esau is all hairy, and I am not! If my father feels me, he will know I am trying to trick him, and he will curse me instead of blessing me!”

“Let the curse be on me,” Jacob’s mother said, “just do what I say.”

Jacob did as his mother asked and went out to get the goats. Rebecca prepared a delicious meal from the goats that Jacob had brought her. Then she took some of Esau’s clothes and had Jacob put them on. She took the skins from the goats and put them on Jacob’s arms and on the back of his neck so that he would be hairy like his brother.

Carrying in the meal, Jacob called out to his father. “Yes,” replied Isaac, “Which of my sons are you?”

“I am Esau, your first born,” Jacob said. “I have done as you asked. Now eat so that you may give me your blessing”

“How did you do it so quickly?” his father asked. “Your God was with me,” Jacob answered. Isaac said, “Come here. Let me touch you.” Jacob went to him and Isaac felt the fur on Jacob’s neck and arms. Isaac said, “The voice is Jacob’s, but the arms are Esau’s.” Once more Isaac asked, “Are you really my son, Esau?”
“I am,” Jacob said. And so Isaac ate the meal he thought Esau had brought him. When he was finished he said, “Come here, my son, and kiss me, and then I will give you my blessing.”

So Jacob went to his father and kissed him. Isaac could smell the smell of Esau’s clothes, and so he said, “The smell of my son is like the smell of open country the Lord has blessed. May God give you the dew of heaven, and the richness of the earth, corn and new wine in plenty! Let nations and peoples serve you. May you rule over your brothers, and may they bow down to you. Let anyone who curses you be cursed, but blessed be anyone who blesses you!”

Jacob had barely left when his brother Esau came in from his hunting. He fixed his father’s favorite meal, just as his father had asked him to. He brought it in to him, so that he could get his blessing. “Who are you?” Isaac asked. “I am Esau, your firstborn son.”

“Then who was just here? Who brought my favorite meal, the one that I just ate? I gave him the blessing and I can’t take it back!” Esau cried out a great and bitter cry, “Bless me also, Father!”

“I can’t,” Isaac said, “your brother has tricked me, and he has stolen your blessing.” Esau was furious, and from that day on Esau hated his brother, Jacob. “One day, my father will die,” he said in rage, “and then I will kill Jacob!”

Esau’s words got back to Rebecca. She said to Jacob, “Your brother wants to kill you. Go to my brother’s home far away, and stay there until Esau has settled down. I will tell your father you went away to look for a wife, and I’ll send for you when things calm down.”
Fleeing from his brother’s wrath, Jacob traveled across the desert for many weeks, until he reached his uncle’s home. Jacob ended up staying there for twenty years, during which time he himself was tricked by his uncle into working for free for many years. But in the end, Jacob married, prospered, and became the head of a large family. Eventually, Jacob became wealthier than his uncle, and realizing that he was no longer welcome in his uncle’s home, he decided to leave.

Jacob took his wives, and his many children, and their families and servants, and all of their flocks, and scores of cattle and camels, and set out across the desert in the direction of his childhood home. Even after many years, he was still very much afraid of Esau, and so Jacob sent some messengers ahead, to check up on Esau. After some time, the messengers returned with the news that Esau was advancing upon them with four hundred men.

Jacob was scared, and sent everyone in his camp off in another direction. Alone that night for the first time in many years, he encountered a strange man, who wrestled with him all night. During this struggle with the stranger, Jacob was touched in the hollow of his thigh. As a result, he had a painful limp for the rest of his life. As dawn approached, Jacob realized that the man was an angel, and asked him for a blessing. The angel replied by giving Jacob the name Israel, meaning “he who struggles with the sacred.”

That morning, still afraid, but trusting in this guidance, Jacob began walking alone in the direction of Esau and his men. When finally the two brothers caught sight of one another, Esau started running toward Jacob. Not knowing what to expect, Jacob was
relieved when Esau reached him and gave him a warm embrace. The two brothers were reconciled with each other at last!

And the prophecy Rebecca had received many years before turned out to be true. Both Jacob and Esau were the heads of large families that later grew into two nations. Jacob’s descendants carried forward his spiritual tradition, and were given blessings in many ways. While Esau’s descendants had material success, they were cut off from a spiritual tradition and thus, from their true source of power. And it is said that the descendants of Esau served the descendants of Jacob for many years to come.
NOTES

Chapter 1


2. Ibid., s.v. “sacred.”


8. Grimes, Beginnings, 253; Bell, Ritual: Perspectives, 224-25.


10. Ibid., 90.


13. The most vocal of these authors is Ronald Grimes, who has been instrumental in his role in pioneering the interdisciplinary field of Ritual Studies.

14. Reform Judaism is a movement that first gained popularity in the United States in the late 1800s. The movement allows members to practice a form of Judaism that does not interfere with their assimilation into a larger secular culture. Thus, while my family celebrated Jewish holidays and I attended an extracurricular Hebrew school throughout my childhood, there were no outward signs of my being Jewish: I did not wear a yarmulke (skullcap) or taliis (prayer shawl), my family did not observe the Sabbath, and we did not keep Kosher, so I was free to eat whatever foods I wanted to.

15. This book is John Chernoff Miller’s African Rhythms and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). In it, Miller, an American ethnomusicologist, gives an account of his experiences studying the traditional music and rituals of West Africa. Fascinated, I read and reread the chapter on his initiation into a drum orchestra in a village in northern Ghana. Something in my soul was stirred, and I took this stirring literally, deciding to travel to this faraway village to become initiated.
16. This act of throwing dirt into the river was based on the Jewish custom of *tashlich*. On Jewish New Year, it is traditional to throw bread crumbs or lint from one’s pockets into a body of water to symbolize a “letting go” of the baggage from the previous year.


22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.


35. Ibid., 96-7.


38. In my own experience, this knowledge came to me through a dream image during a restless night after an unsuccessful attempt to ritualize. I dreamed of driving a car with the brakes and the accelerator pressed down at the same time. Upon waking, I reflected on the role of ritual as a self-regulating guidance system that allows the driver to know when to brake and when to accelerate, so that the destination can be reached without burning out the engine of the car.


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**Chapter 2**


3. Ibid., 94.

4. Ibid.


8. Ibid., 115.

9. Ibid., 128.

10. Ibid, 128-29.


18. Eliade, *Sacred*, 20, 68.


21. Ibid., 90.


23. Ibid.


25. Ibid., 214-25.


31. Ibid., 96-7, 133.


33. *Bar Mitzvah* is a traditional Jewish rite of passage to mark a male child’s thirteenth birthday, through which the child enters into the adult spiritual community.


38. Ibid., 51.

39. Ibid., 28-29.

40. Ibid., 35-36.


42. Ibid., 3-4.


44. Ibid, 28.


47. Somé, *Ritual*, 112.

50. Ibid., 60-65.
51. Ibid., 66-72.
52. Ibid., 69-70.
53. Ibid., 69.
55. Ibid.
58. Ibid., i-ii.
60. Catherine Davidson, “Reclaiming Rites of Passage through Ritual: Soulwork for Midlife Women,” (Ph.D. diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2001), i-ii.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 293.
73. Eliade, Rites and Symbols, 21-40.
75. Grimes, Beginnings, 253.
76. Bell, Ritual: Perspectives, 224-25.
77. Ibid., 240.
78. Ibid., 258-9.
83. Freud, Totem, 33-34.
84. Ibid., 176-178.
85. Ibid., 38-39.
88. Grimes, Beginnings, 69.
89. Ibid.
91. Freud, Totem, 194-95.


102. Somé, Ritual, 33.


110. Durkheim, Elementary Forms, 208-16.

111. Ibid., 298.

112. Freud, Totem, 182-83.

113. Rizzuto, Living God, 44-47.


121. Ibid, 256-67.


123. Ibid., 357.


130. Ibid., 39-41.


135. Ibid., 3.

137. Ibid., 12
138. Ibid., 24-38.
139. Ibid.

141. Note that Hill’s representation of the static feminine as the Great Mother differs from Neumann’s use of this term. For Neumann, the Great Mother archetype includes both the elementary and transformative feminine principles, which corresponds to Hill’s static and dynamic feminine. Hill differentiates between the static and dynamic feminine by assigning separate archetypal figures to represent each of them.

143. Ibid.
144. Ibid., 107-10.
145. Ibid., 3-22.


148. Ibid.
149. Ibid.


153. Ibid.


156. Ibid., 10, 141.

158. Ibid., 38-42.
160. Ibid., 3
164. Ibid.
170. Ibid.
172. Ibid., 18.
175. Ibid., 28.
176. Ibid., 17.
177. Ibid., 29.
178. Ibid., 33-36.
180. Ibid., 67-68.

181. Ibid., 68.


183. Erikson, Toys, 90.

184. Edinger, Ego and Archetype, 69.


187. Fowler, Stages, 106-14. The 359 participants in Fowler’s study were of all ages and almost equally divided between male and female. It is noteworthy that the participants were predominantly Caucasian Americans from Judeo-Christian backgrounds.

188. Ibid, 113.

189. Ibid., 133-73.

190. Ibid., 318.


192. Fowler, Stages, 201.

193. Ibid., 31.


196. Ibid.


199. Ibid.


201. Shapiro, Bodily Reflective Modes, 174.


205. Ibid.


215. Ibid.

216. Ibid.


219. Ibid., 75-77.


227. Ibid, 66-68.


229. Ibid., 226. Also see Neumann, *Great Mother*, 3-17.


233. Ibid., 116-17.


238. Ibid., 80-1.


240. Ibid., 60

241. Ibid., 44.

242. Ibid., 60.


247. Ibid., 179.
248. Ibid., 21.
249. Ibid., 179.


252. Ibid., 5.
253. Ibid., 6-7.


257. Glenna Spitze and Mary Gallant, “‘The Bitter and the Sweet’: Older Adults’ Strategies for Handling Ambivalence in Relations with their Adult Children,” *Research on Aging* 26, no. 4 (July 2004): 387.


259. Ibid., Mother Love, 5.


261. Ibid.


264. Ibid.

265. Shapiro, *Bodily Reflective Modes*, 175.

266. Ibid.

267. Ibid., 177.

270. Ibid.
275. Ibid., 18-27.
276. Ibid., 8-10.
277. Ibid., 19-20.
281. Ibid., 24-5.
282. Ibid., 8, 22-3.
283. Ibid., 8.
285. Ibid., 87-97.
286. Ibid., 27.
290. Ibid., 85-9.
291. Ibid., 114.
292. Ibid., 90.
294. Ibid., 11-12, 108.
295. Ibid., 11-12.
297. Ibid., 14.
298. Ibid., 108-10
299. Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 11.
301. Ibid.
302. Ibid.
305. Ibid, 73-4.
306. Ibid., 74.
307. Ibid., 67.


316. Ibid., 40-1.


319. Ibid., 126-27.

320. McNiff, Art as Medicine, 72-3.


322. Ibid., 133-36.


325. Ibid., 17.

326. Ibid., 256-57.


328. Grotowski, Poor Theatre, 34.


337. Ibid., 45.

338. Ibid., 76-82.


343. Ibid., 23-5.

344. Winnicott, Playing, 47, 100.


350. Ibid., 109.

351. Institute of Imaginal Studies, Course Catalog, 27.

352. Grotowski, Poor Theatre, 251.

Chapter 3


3. “Focal space” is a practice within Imaginal Inquiry in which individuals bring forward reactions in the center of a group circle, through sounds, movements, gestures, and words. This practice was introduced to me by Aftab Omer at the Institute of Imaginal Studies.

4. “Polarity groups” is another practice within Imaginal Inquiry that was introduced to me by Aftab Omer at the Institute of Imaginal Studies.

5. Further details about these four steps can be found in the Institute of Imaginal Studies *Dissertation Handbook*, 54-55.

6. This theory and others that I mention in this chapter are described in more detail in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

Chapter 4

1. These steps are described in the *Dissertation Handbook*, 61.

2. This information is included in Appendix 16: Participant Demographic Information.

3. Several applicants included Buddhism or Taoism in their description of their current religion. However, upon probing further, I discovered that none of them were involved with any formal Buddhist or Taoist organizations. All reported that Buddhism or Taoism influenced them as a belief system, rather than as a formal religion.


7. Ibid., 192-95.


9. Ibid., 184-86.


16. Ibid., 20.
18. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 186-87.
33. Ibid., 65.
37. Ibid.

39. Freud, Outline, 52-54.

40. Freud, Totem, 176-78.


44. Ibid, 13-16.


47. Ibid.


52. Aftab Omer, lecture in Integrative Seminar I course (Petaluma, CA: Institute of Imaginal Studies, December 1999).


54. Winnicott, Playing, 47, 100.

55. Freud, Totem, 24-33, 164.


57. Ibid.


59. Ibid.

61. Winnicott, *Playing*, 41. Winnicott also refers to potential space as “transitional space.”
62. Ibid., 11-12.
64. Ibid.

**Chapter 5**

4. For example, see Somé, *Ritual*.
7. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

13. These ideas are discussed in Aftab Omer’s article “The Spacious Center,” 32-33.

14. This idea was suggested to me by Jay Rice in a Dissertation Support letter (Petaluma, CA: Institute of Imaginal Studies, April, 2006).


18. For example, see Kobak and Waters, “Family Therapy as a Rite of Passage.”

REFERENCES


Spitze, Glenna and Mary Gallant. “‘The Bitter and the Sweet’: Older Adults’ Strategies for Handling Ambivalence in Relations with their Adult Children,” *Research on Aging* 26, no. 4 (July 2004): 387-412.


