

TENDING THE BONES:
TURNING TOWARD ANCESTORS IN SERVICE TO EROTIC WELLNESS AFTER
TRAUMA

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to the healing of those who came before, the erotic liberation of those now, and the embodied wholeness of those yet to come.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to
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Chair: Dr. Joseph Kramer
Major Department: Somatic Psychology

Sexual violence leaves traumatic wounds on victims, families, and communities. When not addressed, trauma persists and can be inherited transgenerationally through parental behavior, silence and/or absence of information, and epigenetics. Research shows that sexual wellness is an integral part of human well-being. While there is little research on establishing sexual wellness after trauma, and little research about healing transgenerational trauma, there is a complete lack of research on how to address and support those suffering from transgenerational sexual trauma.

In the absence of significant research-based treatments, practitioners have often been left to their own means to support their clients who are victims of sexual violence. Traditional healers such as Sangomas in South Africa utilize ancestral relating to support their clients' healing. This dissertation investigates if ancestral relating can support the development of sexual wellness after sexual trauma, either individual or transgenerational, and if so, what are the safe and effective principles?

Using Grounded Theory methodology, a qualitative interview process was conducted to address this question. Over a 6-month process in 2017, data was gathered from 16 research subjects in semi-structured, full-length interviews. Data were later verified by seven research subjects in anonymous, online written survey. Data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

This study finds an important connection between ancestors and the erotic. There is an impact, both positive and negative, of ancestral sexuality. Choosing to heal sexuality by working with ancestors does produce healing from sexual wounding. The results of healing sexuality with ancestors include releasing trauma, finding forgiveness for past harms, and deepening embodiment, as well as greater sexual pleasure, heightened overall well-being, permission for sexual expression, and an experience of sexual wholeness.

The findings of this study are curated in a list of effective principles, for both individuals and practitioners, who wish to work with ancestors to heal sexual trauma and develop sexual wellness. The recommendations for expanding this work included developing a training for mental health professionals on how to use ancestral reverence to support the resolution of transgenerational trauma, more funding for research in somatic sexual therapeutic modalities, and research into how this intervention might successfully be applied with sex offenders wishing to rehabilitate.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM FORMATION

Background of the Study

According to Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN, n.d.), the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the United States, an American is sexually assaulted every 98 seconds. Millions of people worldwide are negatively impacted by sexual trauma (Yount, 2014). According to Browne and Finkelhor (1986) in their review of the research on the impact of sexual abuse, sexual trauma causes a plethora of negative impacts. Short term it can cause fear, anxiety, depression, anger and hostility, aggression, and sexually inappropriate behavior. Their research review also shows the impact of sexual abuse long term, including depression and self-destructive behavior, anxiety, feelings of isolation and stigma, poor self-esteem, difficulty in trusting others, a tendency toward revictimization, substance abuse, and sexual maladjustment (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986).

Sexual trauma is a serious problem, with far-ranging consequences and a wide variety of tools are necessary to assist individuals, families, and communities in recovering from sexual trauma. Without support for healing, trauma continues to cause harm (Schützenberger & Devroede &, 2005). In current research on epigenetics, the study of changes in organisms caused by modification of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself, scientists like Dr. Rachel Yehuda are exploring how environmental factors like trauma can impact biology in significant ways powerful enough to change gene expression in future generations (Yehuda, 2013). Additionally,

studies on second and third generational offspring of Holocaust survivors are showing that trauma does not just go away if ignored (Kellermann, 2013).

Transgenerational trauma is the concept that trauma is unconsciously passes from generation to generation, and that the unhealed issues of prior generations are expressed in later generations (Baum, 2013; Berger, 2014; Gardner, 1999; Schützenberger, 1998; St. Just, 2009). Like all trauma, sexual trauma can be transgenerational. These are the wounds that will not heal, and sometimes they persist for many generations.

Transgenerational trauma manifests in repeating patterns and issues in each subsequent generation, with problems that can be physical, emotional or relational, as in the case of attachment wounds (Doucet & Rovers, 2010; Salberg, 2015a).

To really understand the importance of this research, it is vital that the reader comprehend not just with the mind but also with the heart the suffering that is caused by unresolved transgenerational sexual trauma. It is possible to experience traumatic symptoms that you yourself may not have lived through, but your ancestor did, and holding this awareness invites compassion for the suffering millions endure.

The following passage, included intentionally in its entirety, is from acupuncturist, author, and recovering heroin addict Dr. Michael Aanavi (2012). Aanavi (2012) described the experience of transgenerational ancestral trauma more poetically and viscerally than a mere clinical description ever could. Thus, it is included here in this very first section of this dissertation as an important, heartfelt frame to direct the reader's attention to the relevance of transgenerational trauma and its research. Aanavi (2012) wrote:

A few years ago, an image came to me, a fantasy that would not leave me alone--an image of a little girl in the distant past, dead of starvation, doll-like with hollowed eyes and tattered dress. In the darkness I saw her in a doorway, hand outstretched, face sunken; I was aware of her presence both visually and through the physical experience of starvation and abandonment, and through the experience of the pit in my abdomen. I was not simply aware of her pain, her fear, her deep hunger--I was those experiences. I was her. Her hunger was in me, and I could not feed her, could not sufficiently assuage the depth of her longing, could not comfort her fear nor change her fate. And I knew in my heart that this was an ancestral image.

Although perhaps this image was literally an ancestral “ghost” (the lingering, haunting spirit of an ancestor who died unresolved), or perhaps simply the symbolic residue of historical trauma emerging from the deep layers of the psyche, the real truth of this image lies simply in my experience. And my experience is that my ancestors emerge in me, live through me; that the deep deprivation of which I have long been aware is not simply the result of a disruption in my early childhood care. For despite later chaos, my parents were quite present in my early childhood, quite aware, quite caring. This lifelong experience of deprivation is neither explained by mainstream psychological theories nor by theories of addiction; it is explained by what I know intuitively. It is explained by the reality that I am linked deeply, in body and psyche, to those who came before.

This transpersonal, historical, ancestral awareness has been remarkable in allowing me to sit with my body in a different way. I remind myself that it is not simply about me, nor about a wound I received in my infancy, but about them, my ancestors, about my connection with a larger process of resolution, and by giving this deprivation both context and meaning I find myself able to bear my experience in a different way; I find I am able to be kinder, both to myself, and to her, in all her forms. (pp. 28–29)

This then, is the awareness of transgenerational trauma, and Aanavi's (2012) implication is that the recognition of it allows a certain healing to occur. Dr. Sandra Easter (2016), author of *Jung and the Ancestors*, also discussed the importance of framing the healing of transgenerational wounds through developing an understanding of the phenomena which creates them. Easter (2016) wrote:

Without a framework that allows for the possibility of the reality and existence of our ancestors as more than pieces of DNA and bones in the ground, their presence fixed without our personal, conscious memory, we are limited in our ability to listen and to respond to the ways they address us. Our ability to respond, to continue what previous generations left unfinished, to heal the sick energy which haunts us, to listen for the ancestors' guidance and benefit from their wisdom, to explore their unanswered questions, I would suggest, depends on reconnecting with the origins of our shared human consciousness. (p. 84)

Regarding transgenerational sexual trauma, the unresolved sexual trauma of our ancestors is a weight we may carry, in addition to any of our own wounds. Sexual trauma can, in general, limit access to choice and free expression of sexuality. As of yet, there is

no research describing the impact of transgenerational sexual trauma, and how it is experienced. This is an important piece this dissertation contributes to the professional discourse.

According to therapist and sexologist Barnaby Barratt (2005), repression of sexual expression leads to repression of our *elan vitale*, less access to the healing resource of pleasure, and a restricted sense of who we are as erotic beings. Barratt (2005) wrote:

The psychology of repression manifests as the inhibition of sensual and sexual expression . . . we see all around us people who have never danced naked in the sunlight, people who allow themselves to become severely deprived of touch, people who have never explored their genitals, people who have never laughed or cried with erotic exhilaration . . . repressed and inhibited, we soldier on, like the walking wounded. (p. 126)

Research shows that sexual satisfaction is an important factor in overall human wellness (Planned Parenthood, 2007). Research also shows there is a strong connection between healthy sexuality and women's empowerment (Hawkins, Cornwall, & Lewin, 2011). Clearly, sexual wellness is a necessity, akin to mental wellness and physical wellness. Not only are there shockingly few studies on effective treatment which could help people heal from trauma and restore to a baseline of sexual wellness, what comes sadly as no surprise, there is almost a complete lack of research on the development of radiant and thriving sexual wellness. As Romm (2018) stated:

Sex is seen as such a taboo topic in our society, and all the funding for sexuality research goes toward risk reduction, HIV, unintended pregnancy. It's never focused on; how do we optimize people's sex lives? We're not seeing any

research grants go out to improve sexual well-being. But I would argue that if our society at large could become more sexually healthy through sexual well-being, and through improving pleasure and satisfaction and communication, then we would see a larger and more population-level change in some of these sexual-health outcomes that are being funded, like STIs and unintended pregnancy.

There is an absence of research about pleasure. For example, in their discussion of the study of pleasure, sexuality researchers John Coveney & Robin Bunton write, “In pursuing the study of pleasure in relation to health, even documenting the absence of a pleasure focus may be of immediate interest.” (p. 175)

So how are survivors of sexual violence to bridge the gap between sexual traumatization and general human well-being? And in cases of transgenerational sexual trauma, when someone is experiencing symptoms of sexual trauma that they themselves may not have experienced, but their ancestors did, how can people heal?

Generally speaking, it has fallen to practitioners and clinicians, including traditional healers, to attempt to serve and support survivors of trauma, in the absence of research-based effective protocols (Berg, 2003; Bogopa, 2010; Bojuwoye & Edwards, 2011; Coulter, Persson, & Utas, 2008; Honwana, 1999; McCabe, 2008; Stobie, 2011). Traditional healers can also provide culturally-relevant care and are often more accessible than Western healing modalities (Sorsdahl et al., 2011).

In countries such as Mozambique, Angola and Sierra Leone, where war and violence have left devastating consequences on the humans living there, countries where rape has been used as a weapon of war, ritual, and ceremony connecting with the wisdom

of ancestors has been one method of treating the pain and suffering of victims (Coulter et al., 2008; Honwana, 1999). Could these traditional forms of healing be a support to victims of sexual trauma and transgenerational sexual trauma worldwide? Do survivors of sexual violence experience relating with ancestors as a resource as they work through their trauma?

These are the questions that this research dissertation seeks to explore, with deep desire to contribute to the healing and wellness of those who experience their own and their ancestors' sexual trauma, as well as to make a valuable offering to the field of professional research on effective strategies for the development of sexual wellness after harm.

Statement of the Problem

Since every human on the planet has historically arrived here due to the sex of our ancestors, sex is an enormous part of the human experience, and can lead to our well-being, but can also wound us in profound ways. The research shows that sexual satisfaction is a crucial part of human well-being. However, there is an absence of research on how to develop sexual satisfaction. In North American contexts, not only do humans not teach or even know how to develop this vital aspect of our well-being, sexual violence is an all too frequent occurrence, resulting in millions of sexually traumatized adults in the United States alone (CDC, 2012). Sexual violence systematically strips human of the potential for sexual satisfaction. There is an absence of research on how to heal after sexual violence, and therefore there is an imminent need for further research in what supports the development of sexual wellness after sexual trauma.

While modalities do exist that support the development of sexual wellness after trauma, like Sexological Bodywork and somatic sex therapy, they are not yet clinically researched and need investigation in clinical efficacy. The body-based trauma healing modalities like EMDR and Somatic Experiencing are considered clinically effective, however, little research has been done on their efficacy for treating sexual trauma.

The research that exists about treating victims of war rape and violence, much of which comes from Sierra Leone discusses how the burden for treating these clients often falls on traditional healers (Coulter et al., 2008; Duran, Firehammer, & Gonzalez, 2008). Traditional and seemingly effective healing methods such as ancestor ceremony to support victims of trauma in reintegrating into their lives are, however, under-researched (Delugach, 1999). Dr. Olaniyi Bojuwoye, a psychology researcher and professor at University of the Western Cape in South Africa, speaks to the importance of further research culturally competent research investigating the role of traditional psychotherapeutic practices for the treatment of patient wellness. He writes, “Research is especially needed for better understanding, reconstructions and interpretations of cultural practices that are relevant to counseling and psychotherapeutic practices” (Bojuwoye, 2013, pp. 85–86).

There has been a lot of research on the impacts of torture and violence on survivors of the Holocaust and their generations of offspring, establishing the field of transgenerational trauma. However, sexual violence as a legacy of harm and suffering--transgenerational sexual trauma--has not been researched. There is a definitive absence of academic research on the phenomenon itself, as well as the complete lack of research on

clinical treatment for an international epidemic (Picard, 2017; Shapiro, 2018; Smith & LaDuke, 2005).

Because of these gaps in the research and literature, because millions of humans are suffering without treatment, and because practitioners are trying to serve the suffering without enough research, this dissertation research study is vital in beginning a conversation about transgenerational sexual trauma and its effective treatment, as well as bringing a focus to the importance of transgenerational sexual wellness. The necessary and significant impact of this discourse cannot be overestimated.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a beneficial correlation between ancestral reverence practices and the development of sexual wellness. If so, what are effective principles of working with ancestors to promote sexual wellness? At the heart of these questions is the query: Can transgenerational sexual trauma be positively addressed through ancestral relating?

This study uses the qualitative approach of Grounded Theory methodology, in which the results are informed not by testing a hypothesis but rather by an iterative process of determining answers to the research questions based on the findings of the research data. Through conducting a series of full-length interviews with research subjects, the research investigates how ancestral reverence practices might support the development of sexual wellness after sexual harm. The interview format follows an interview question protocol, which are also flexible enough to pursue salient threads of information that slightly deviate from the research questions. Interviews are recorded and transcribed, then double-checked with research subjects for accuracy.

The research subject group is purposive in that selection criteria are used to determine eligibility. The selection criteria are self-reported answers to the following four questions: Do you or have you worked to recover from sexual wounding? Do you or have you worked to develop your sexual wellness? Are you connected with your ancestors? Is your work with your ancestors connected to your sexual wellness practices in any way? Ideal interview candidates relate to their ancestors (biological or lineage), identify as someone who works/or has worked to recover from sexual wounding, and to develop sexual wellness, and has experienced a connection between their ancestor relating and their sexual wellness, or has worked to interrupt and/or resolve sexual trauma in their lineage. They can also articulate what has worked for them, in terms of ancestor relationships supporting sexual wellness.

The interview data will be verified by conducting an anonymous, written survey in which slightly abbreviated versions of the interview questions will be used. The survey is conducted to ensure the data collected without the interviewer is similar in content to the data collected during interviews. The interview data is analyzed through an iterative coding process involving three levels of inquiry and discernment. The levels of inquiry produce descriptive, conceptual and theoretical categories and subcategories of coded data. The data will then be collated and presented in Chapter Four as findings. In Chapter Five, the findings will be assessed for meaning. Finally, a list of recommendations for both individuals and professionals will be curated, derived from the research findings. Recommendations will be given for next steps and further research, based on the findings of this dissertation study.

Research Questions

The research questions informing this project are:

How does ancestral reverence support the resolution of sexual trauma, both personal and transgenerational, and support the development of sexual wellness?

And, if it does, what are effective principles for working with ancestors that support the development of sexual wellness?

Importance of the study

This dissertation research project begins to fill the gap of information found at the intersection of sexual trauma, both personal and transgenerational, and one aspect of the development of sexual wellness, namely, looking to the ancestors as a source of resource for support and healing of sexual trauma.

This research hopefully benefits both individuals seeking support around transgenerational sexual trauma, as well as the practitioners who serve them. The most specific contribution of this dissertation research is a curated list of principles for effective ancestral relating for the sake of developing sexual wellness, as well as a list of helpful considerations for practitioners. The intent is to provide access to transpersonal tools based on traditional healing modalities and subjectively tested by research subjects, that effectively address hard-to-get-at symptoms of transgenerational sexual trauma.

Individuals seeking to address transgenerational sexual trauma through developing relationships with ancestors will benefit by reading the words of others who have sought, and succeeded, to do the same. Practitioners seeking to support clients facing transgenerational sexual trauma will benefit from the accumulated resources on this very much under-researched topic. If there were a book on addressing

transgenerational sexual trauma, that would be the recommendation. However, in the absence of that book yet being in the world, this dissertation project serves as a starting point for a discourse on transgenerational sexual trauma, and possible treatment strategies. Practitioners will also benefit from the curated findings that provide the detailed and collective wisdom of the research interview participants, who together have many, many years of ancestral reverence practice. The findings suggest some practices of ancestral reverence that are necessary for successful ancestral relating, which will be useful for any practitioner seeking to support their clients in this manner.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this dissertation research study are limited. The Grounded Theory methodology used “fails to recognize the embeddedness of the researcher and thus obscures the researcher’s considerable agency in data construction and interpretation” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 417). However, only if the researcher does not hold an awareness of their positionality and power within the research process is this a major issue. Through attention to the positional nature of this researcher and reflexivity of both researcher bias and researcher power, this limitation is mitigated (Engward & Davis, 2015). Holt (2004) stated:

I do not assume that all my motivations are conscious or that all of my self is knowable (even to myself). It is useful for researchers to admit the partiality of both their accounts and self-knowledge. This is especially pertinent as fully conscious agency is rarely accorded to the researched.

(p. 15)

This approach produced a large amount of data, and there are no rules that help identify the categories of codification, other than the interest, intellect and discernment of the researcher as to how that data answers the research questions. While this would be a serious drawback in a deductive study, and would invalidate such, it is an inherent limitation in any inductive study, rather than a problem with Grounded Theory as an approach. “Grounded theory provides a methodology to develop an understanding of social phenomena that is not pre-formed or pre-theoretically developed with existing theories and paradigms.” (Engward, 2013, p. 37-41).

In addition to limitations to the methodology used, there are further notable limitations of this research study. The criteria for participant selection were purposive, thereby ensuring the information gathered would speak to the questions asked. In a different study, this would be a serious limitation of subject bias and invalidate the results. However, because of the nature of this research it is imperative for the collection of relevant data. It is the role of future researchers to do more statistically significant research in which subject bias is eliminated. Although there was a small sample size, which would be a limitation had the study sought statistically significant results, for the purposes of this study, the sample size reflected that of many exploratory qualitative research studies. Most of the research participants in this study reside in North America, and it is unclear how participants from more diverse geographical locations would affect the data. Most participants had come to ancestral reverence on their own, rather than as part of a lineage or family tradition. This, like the narrow geographical spread of subjects, is a limitation on the applicability of the results rather than on the validity of the study.

Interview skills were learned during the interview process, as is usual in the course of students conducting semi-structured and unstructured interview-based inquiry (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). This learning curve inevitably leads to some missed opportunities for follow-up questions. Also, the interview process was iterative, allowing for questions to evolve through the interviews, which was part of the original research design, as is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Lastly, because of the research assumptions upon which the dissertation rests, namely that transgenerational transmission of sexual trauma exists, and that ancestors are real, research subjects responded to questions that are informed by those assumptions. However, all research conducted is informed by researchers' assumptions (Haraway, 1988). Therefore, it is for other researchers to investigate similar research questions, resting on different assumptions, to compare results.

Definitions

Ancestors

Ancestors are all the people (human and otherwise) who lived on Earth before us, the life of the past that nourishes and shapes the present. More specifically, the ancestors are the human dead, the collective love, wisdom and suffering of Homo Sapiens over the past 300,000 or so years. Even more narrowly, our ancestors are those among the dead who are well in spirit (in contrast to ghosts or the troubled dead). Ancestors are not limited to blood and family lineages (Foor, 2017).

Epigenetics

Epigenetics is a sub-discipline of biology and genetics that studies differences in genomic expression that do not involve changes in the underlying DNA sequence,

including mitotically or meiotically heritable changes (Jablonka & Raz, 2009). The word “epigenetics” is a combination of “epi” from the Greek meaning over, or above, and genetics, and is defined as the study of gene functions that do not involve changes in the DNA sequence (Jelenik, 2015; Wu & Morris, 2001).

Sexual Health

According to the current working definition by the World Health Organization (WHO), sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled. (WHO, 2006).

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is defined as a sexual act committed against someone without that person’s freely given consent. Sexual violence is divided into the following types:

- Completed or attempted forced penetration of a victim
- Completed or attempted alcohol/drug-facilitated penetration of a victim
- Completed or attempted forced acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else
- Completed or attempted alcohol/drug-facilitated acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else

- Non-physically forced penetration which occurs after a person is pressured verbally or through intimidation or misuse of authority to consent or acquiesce
- Unwanted sexual contact
- Non-contact unwanted sexual experiences (WHO, 2006).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), sexual violence is defined as: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.

A wide range of sexually violent acts can take place in different circumstances and settings. These include, for example:

- rape within marriage or dating relationships;
- rape by strangers;
- systematic rape during armed conflict;
- unwanted sexual advances or sexual harassment, including demanding sex in return for favors;
- sexual abuse of mentally or physically disabled people;
- sexual abuse of children;
- forced marriage or cohabitation, including the marriage of children;
- denial of the right to use contraception or to adopt other measures to protect against sexually transmitted diseases;
- forced abortion;

- violent acts against the sexual integrity of women, including female genital mutilation and obligatory inspections for virginity;
- forced prostitution and trafficking of people for the purpose of sexual exploitation (CDC, n.d.).

In these definitions by the WHO and the CDC, sexual violence is clearly delineated as a specific form of violence that commits a sexualized act on a person and disregards the concept of consent.

Trauma

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) defines a traumatic event as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. It can be an emotional shock following a stressful event or a physical injury that may be associated with physical shock leading to long term neurosis. The DSM-V describes the diagnosis as a person who has been exposed to, experienced, witnessed, or confronted a traumatic event or events that involved actual, threatened death or serious injury of self or others, or sexual violence. A common response to that association may include intense fear, helplessness, or horror. To identify the diagnostic feature of this disorder, the traumatic event is persistently re-experienced through recurrent and intrusive recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions. Events or situations that are experienced as traumatic are defined as events or situations normally outside usual experiences, and which by most standards are deemed difficult to cope with because the usual repertoire of coping skills is not sufficient (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

PTSD is “a delayed or protracted response to a stressful event or situation of an exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost anyone” (WHO, 2006). Typical symptoms include: episodes of repeated reliving of the trauma in intrusive memories (“flashbacks”), dreams or nightmares, a persistent sense of “numbness” and emotional blunting, detachment from other people, unresponsiveness to surroundings, and avoidance of activities and situations reminiscent of the trauma (WHO, 2006).

Transgenerational Trauma

Generational trauma may be defined as a secondary form of trauma that results from the transfer of traumatic experiences from parents to their children (Davidson & Mellor, 2001; Motta, Joseph, Rose, Suozzi, & Leiderman, 1997). This form of trauma is also referred to as intergenerational, transgenerational, or secondary trauma. Generational trauma can result from any number of different types of disturbing incidents or experiences (Doucet & Rovers, 2010).

Said Myron Eshowsky (n.d.), clinician tending international transgenerational trauma:

Transgenerational trauma is the notion of unhealed issues of prior generations being expressed in current generations. In some cases, these unhealed issues can continue for thousands of years. Transgenerational trauma often shows itself in repeated patterns (stories) of personal healing issues in each generation. These patterns are transmitted through a wide range of psychological, physical, and spiritual mechanisms. Physically, they may be inherited through a process of epigenetics. Psychologically, there are four primary mechanisms of

multigenerational trauma transmission. These mechanisms include; silence or lack of communication of relevant information, over disclosure by adults to children of their past traumas, identification of children with their parents' traumas, and reenactment. (p 1)

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In response to the research questions regarding the connection between ancestors, sexual wounding, and developing sexual wellness, this literature review surveys several different fields of academic and lay research. First, it addresses the phenomenon of trauma, and how it lives in the body following a traumatic event. Next, the prevalence and impact of sexual violence on individuals, families, and communities is examined, followed by a more focused consideration of transgenerational trauma, and transgenerational sexual trauma. Trauma healing modalities and their efficacy have been addressed in each topic. The literature review has focused in depth on the relationship between ancestors and healing, including a discussion of modalities that utilize ancestral connection as a resource for healing.

Lastly, the current research on sexual satisfaction and wellness is presented in brief. Although sexual wellness is a desired outcome, the focus of this dissertation research examines the healing potential of ancestral relationships for survivors of sexual trauma. Therefore, these ancestral dimensions are given more attention within the literature review than the field of sexual wellness. It is not the intent of this review to statistically evaluate the research presented in this study, nor will it produce any statistically significant outcomes. However, most studies included in this review present results that are statistically significant. Where problems in the research or controversy in the field have been found, they have been presented within that section of the literature

review. Additionally, in several of the fields of research examined, a choice was made to list important voices in that field, and to give a brief biography of each. The research of these academics and practitioners is woven throughout the literature review and informs the entire dissertation project. Since this is a dissertation project investigating ancestral reverence, it felt important to this doctoral student to include these biographies as a point of thoroughness and also a reverence practice honoring of the work on which this dissertation rests, especially since some of these researchers have struggled to receive the academic aplomb they merit, based on the brilliant yet sometimes radical nature of their research. It is with humility and gratitude they are named herein.

Trauma

This section of the literature review surveys the field of trauma in general. Beginning with a timeline of trauma research, this segment then investigates and presents information on the current definition of trauma, types of trauma, and impacts of trauma, including PTSD, disruption of time, memory, numbing, and loss of intimacy. This section of the literature review concludes with a brief overview of two somatic approaches to healing trauma, namely Somatic Experiencing and EMDR.

Timeline of Trauma Research

This part of the literature review begins with an overview of the history of the study of generalized trauma, which informs the more specialized field of sexual trauma, the study of which underpins this entire dissertation. To begin at the beginning, however, the reader's attention is first guided toward what is now called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the most well-known consequence of trauma. PTSD will be examined in greater detail below, with this introduction serving as a history of trauma research.

The first examination of symptoms of what is currently diagnosed as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (DSM-V) are traceable throughout historical world literature back to Herodotus in the fifth century BC. He wrote of a Spartan commander excusing courageous soldiers who were, “out of heart and unwilling to encounter the danger” (Saigh, Green, & Korol, 1996).

In the 1800s, Kraepelin termed the anxiety symptoms he was observing after injury or accidents “fright neurosis” (Kim, 2012). During both the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War, doctors attempted to treat the psychological problems veterans of combat were experiencing. Descriptions of European railway accidents added to early understanding of conditions caused by trauma (Friedman, 2017). This led to the term “Railway Spine” based on the injuries sustained by passengers in railroad accidents, and the symptoms of sleeplessness and anxiety that resulted (Friedman, 2017). “Irritable Heart” or “Soldier’s Heart” were other names given to the symptoms of what is now diagnosed as PTSD (Da Costa, 1951).

During World War I, soldiers experiencing what was then termed “Shell Shock,” which was a reaction to the intense bombing and fighting. They experienced a profound helplessness, during which those affected were unable to reason, sleep, or even walk and talk (Hochschild, 2011). It was defined as either a psychological or physical injury, or a lack of moral character. The diagnosis of Combat Stress Reaction (CSR) also known as “battle fatigue” came into existence during World War II (Friedman, 2017).

Senior Advisor for the National Center for PTSD Dr. Matthew Friedman named a need for the continued evolution of the PTSD diagnosis. In 1952, with the release of the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I) the American

Psychiatric Association (APA) included the diagnosis of “gross stress reaction” for people who experienced symptoms of trauma from either disaster or war.

This diagnosis was problematic, since it assumed that the trauma symptomatology would quickly resolve (Andreasen, 2010). The DSM-II eliminated this diagnosis, and included instead “adjustment reaction to adult life” which had three criteria: unwanted pregnancy with suicidal ideation, fear over military combat, and Ganser syndrome, a mental illness in which a person deliberately and consciously acts as if he or she has a physical or mental illness when he or she is not really sick (Friedman, 2017).

It was not until 1980 that the diagnosis PTSD was added to the DSM-III. This was a result of research on returned Vietnam Veterans, survivors of the Holocaust, sexual trauma victims, and others (Crocq & Crocq, 2000). In the DSM-V, PTSD is no longer classified as an anxiety disorder, but rather has its own category: Trauma and Stressor-related Disorders (Mouledoux, Legrand, & Bracket, 2013).

What is the Current Definition of Trauma?

The DSM-V (APA, 2013) defined a traumatic event as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. Trauma interventionist and creator of Trauma Releasing Exercises, David Berceli (2005), defined trauma as “any experience that overwhelms one’s normal coping mechanisms.” He went on to say, “Trauma is primarily an autonomic, unconscious and instinctual response of a living organism” (Berceli, 2005, p. 12).

Trauma researcher and creator of Somatic Experiencing trauma renegotiation method Levine and Frederick (1997) corroborates that trauma is a physiological response to threat. He explained in his seminal work *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* that “when faced with threat, humans and animals both use the immobility response. The

important thing to understand about this function is that it is involuntary” (Levine & Frederick, 1997, p.17).

Levine and Frederick (1997) explicated that humans struggle to discern the right course of action when faced with threats to our survival; to fight or to flee, often resolving in this immobility, or freeze, response. He postulates that in the animal kingdom, the burst of adrenaline energy is used to resolve the response to a survival threat and enables animals to move through survival threats and return to homeostasis. Whereas in humans, the immobility response means there is never a resolution of the adrenaline energy through “discharge” and it is this energy that remains “trapped in the nervous system where it can wreak havoc on our bodies and spirits” (Levine & Frederick, 1997, p. 19).

Levine and Frederick (1997) went on to discuss the necessity of discharging the energy created by the threat to not suffer trauma. Levine and Frederick (1997) wrote:

A threatened human (or impala) must discharge all the energy mobilized to negotiate that threat or it will become a victim of trauma. This residual energy does not simply go away. It persists in the body, and often forces the formation of a wide variety of symptoms e.g., anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic and behavioral problems. These symptoms are the organism’s way of containing the undischarged residual energy (p. 20).

According to Levine and Frederick (1997), trauma is a set of symptoms that exist in the body long after the event that has caused them. Somatics and trauma researcher Rob Baum (2013) said, “trauma is foremost a wound in the body” (p. 34). Traumatic wounds create changes in an individual’s nervous system, said trauma researcher Bessel

Van Der Kolk (2015), who added: “After trauma the world is experienced with a different nervous system that has an altered perception of risk and safety (p. 80).

Types of trauma. In 2018, Dr. Bethany Brand of Towson University Trauma Lab created a list of different types of trauma. This list highlights types of trauma, including sexual assault, child maltreatment, domestic violence, war related trauma, terrorism, combat-related trauma, school violence and community violence, medical trauma, traumatic loss, and natural disasters (Teach Trauma, n.d.). In this dissertation, sexual assault and sexual abuse are the prime causes of trauma focused upon, because they most directly relate to the research questions.

Impacts of trauma. Individuals, families, and communities are all impacted by trauma. Trauma researcher Bessel Van der Kolk (2017) said, “people become living testimonials for things that no longer exist, but they need to hold it in their hearts and minds and bodies and brains” (Personal communication). Although a traumatic injury site in the flesh may heal, the often-invisible scars of trauma remain through time, creating physical, emotional and psychological symptoms that can be present for years, unless treated. “In trauma, the body’s alarm systems turn on and then never quite turn off. And we experience the intense suffering of never truly feeling realized, at ease in life, always intensely on guard” (Emerson & Hopper 2011, p. xv). Trauma is also a wound to the spirit (Lunday, 2010).

Trauma leaves victims living with “the effects of overwhelming and extraordinary experiences . . . in a state of helplessness [without] their sense of personal efficacy, their relational capacity, and their ability to psychologically integrate the upheavals of life in meaningful ways” (Doucet & Rovers, 2010, p. 94). Traumatic experiences can destroy

common perceptions about life and may significantly shatter one's beliefs and worldview (Realmuto, 1994).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is the most well-known consequence of trauma. The DSM-V describes the diagnosis for PTSD as a person who has been exposed to, experienced, witnessed, or confronted a traumatic event or events that involved actual, threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence to self or others. A common response to that association may include intense fear, helplessness, anger, shame or horror.

To identify the diagnostic feature of this disorder, the traumatic event is persistently re-experienced through recurrent and intrusive recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions, dreams, flashbacks, and triggers. Events or situations that are experienced as traumatic are defined as events or situations normally outside usual experiences, and which by most standards are deemed difficult to cope with because the usual repertoire of coping skills is not enough (Freedy & Hobfoll, 1995). It is important to note that not every trauma causes PTSD, and some traumatic experiences are resolved/discharged quickly.

Disruption of Time

“So how do you sit with a shattered soul? Gently, with gracious and deep respect. Patiently, for time stands still for the shattered” (Steele, 1987). One of the impacts of trauma is the disruption to one's sense of time (Stolorow, 2003). Trauma researcher Bessel Van Der Kolk (2015) wrote, “Trauma makes you feel as if you are stuck forever in a helpless state of horror” (p. 273) and somatic trauma researcher Rob Baum (2013) wrote, “The body in trauma returns to the event repeatedly . . . Time is also ineradicably

body laden: known and experienced through the body, even unconsciously. Trauma destroys the body's sense of time" (p. 34). Trauma creates fear, terror, dread and alarm that persist past the traumatic event or events (Weingarten, 2003).

Memory

Traumatic memory is also stored differently than non-traumatic memory. As trauma interventionist David Berceli (2005) wrote,

Because traumatic experiences are taken in as an overwhelming and intrusive arousal of your system, they are taken in more as fragments of an experience rather than as the whole experience. Instead of being processed immediately, they are stored in the somato-sensory area of the brain until they can be processed at a later date. These stored and unprocessed sensations are precisely what cause flashbacks, disturbing memories and nightmares. (p. 29)

Emotional and Physical Numbing

In attempts to lower the experienced suffering, victims of trauma often use numbing as a coping strategy. They find ways to control the emotional or physical experiences they are having.

Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies. The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. (Van der Kolk, 2015, p. 97).

Loss of Intimacy

Trauma researcher Bessel Van der Kolk (2015) said that trauma shatters one's capacity to live a normal life, including having intact and intimate relationships. The capacity to attach, relate, and attune to others can be negatively impacted by trauma, especially if the trauma was relational in nature (Cohn, 2011). Being unable to be close, and continual mistrust and suspicion of others who wish to be close are trauma legacies, as the brain's amygdala remains fearfully hypervigilant, attempting to prevent trauma from reoccurring (Van der Kolk, 2015).

If an organism is stuck in survival mode, its energies are focused on fighting off unseen enemies, which leaves no room for nurture, care and love. For us humans, it means that as long as the mind is defending itself against invisible assaults, our closest bonds are threatened, along with our ability to imagine, plan, play, learn and pay attention to other people's needs. (Van der Kolk, 2015, p. 76)

The loss of the capacity for intimacy is a hallmark of interpersonal trauma, especially sexual trauma (Martinson, Sigmon, Craner, Rothstein, & McGillicuddy, 2013).

Healing Trauma

There are many approaches and methodologies that seek to address the wounds of trauma (Condon & Cane, 2011; Van Etten, & Taylor, 1998). In Western culture, clinical talk psychotherapy has been the standard of care for treating PTSD. According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (2016),

Trauma-focused psychotherapies are the most highly recommended type of treatment for PTSD. The trauma-focused psychotherapies with the strongest

evidence are: Prolonged Exposure (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) and Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). (p. 1)

However, some studies show that the results of talk therapy alone are often unsuccessful in completely remediating traumatic symptoms (Olssen, 2013). In the last 30 years, trauma healing methodologies have become increasingly somatic in nature, meaning they address trauma as it is held in the body, not just in the mind (Barratt, 2013). Bessel Van der Kolk wrote, “Fundamentally, words cannot integrate the disorganized sensations and action patterns that form the core imprint of the trauma” (Wylie, 2004, pp. 30-41).

While the focus of this literature review is to provide an overview of the fields of ancestor study, trauma and transgenerational trauma, and sexual wellness, it behooves the research to include a brief discussion of two well-researched and clinically effective somatic trauma healing modalities.

Somatic Experiencing (SE)

According to the official Somatic Experiencing (n.d.) website:

The Somatic Experiencing method is a body-oriented approach to the healing of trauma and other stress disorders . . . The Somatic Experiencing approach releases traumatic shock, which is key to transforming PTSD and the wounds of emotional and early developmental attachment trauma. The Somatic Experiencing Approach offers a framework to assess where a person is “stuck” in the fight, flight or freeze responses and provides clinical tools to resolve these fixated physiological states.

The Somatic Experiencing approach facilitates the completion of self-protective motor responses and the release of thwarted survival energy bound in

the body, thus addressing the root cause of trauma symptoms. This is approached by gently guiding clients to develop increasing tolerance for difficult bodily sensations and suppressed emotions. (p. 1)

Somatic Experiencing has shown significant clinical benefit in healing PTSD in peer reviewed studies (Brom et al., 2017; Olssen, 2013; Parker, Doctor, & Selvan, 2008).

Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

According to the official Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing website, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) is a psychotherapy treatment that was originally designed to alleviate the distress associated with traumatic memories (Shapiro, 1996).

Shapiro (1996, 2018) hypothesized,

EMDR therapy facilitates the accessing of the traumatic memory network, so that information processing is enhanced, with new associations forged between the traumatic memory and more adaptive memories or information. These new associations are thought to result in complete information processing, new learning, elimination of emotional distress, and development of cognitive insights. (p. 322)

EMDR has also shown clinically significant results in the treatment of PTSD (Acarturk et al., 2015; Haagen, Smid, Knipscheer, & Kleber, 2015; Shapiro, 1996).

This concludes the literature review section on generalized trauma. In summary, this section has investigated and presented information on the timeline of trauma research, current definition of trauma, types of trauma, and impacts of trauma, including PTSD, disruption of time, memory, numbing, and loss of intimacy. This section of the

literature review concluded with a brief overview of two somatic approaches to healing trauma, namely Somatic Experiencing and EMDR.

Sexual Violence

This section of the literature review investigates sexual violence and healing from sexual trauma. It begins with a definition and an overview of the statistics of the prevalence of sexual violence. It then presents information on the impact of sexual trauma on victims, loved ones of victims, communities of victims, as well as the financial impacts of sexual violence. This section then presents information on the research relating to the healing of sexual trauma and concludes with a discussion of problems in the research surrounding sexual healing from trauma.

Sexual violence is as “a sexual act committed against someone without that person’s freely given consent” (CDC, n.d., p. 1). According to the CDC, sexual violence includes different types of unwanted sexual contact, including completed or attempted forced penetration of a victim either with or without alcohol facilitation, as well as completed or attempted alcohol/drug-facilitated acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else. Additionally, non-physically forced penetration which occurs after a person is pressured verbally or through intimidation or misuse of authority to consent or acquiesce, and non-contact unwanted sexual experiences (CDC, 2012). According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), sexual violence is not typically about sexual desire. Sexual violence is about power. Sexual violence is “typically motivated . . . by the desire to control, humiliate, and/or harm” a victim (NSVRC, 2010, p. 1).

Statistics on Sexual Violence

An overview of statistics relating to sexual violence is provided here to elucidate the prevalence of sexual violence, especially against girls and women, in the world today, and to provide justification for the work of this research study. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, a nationally representative survey of adults from 2010 conducted by the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, found that:

- Nearly 1 in 5 (18.3%) women and 1 in 7 men (1.4%) reported experiencing rape at some time in their lives.
- Approximately 1 in 20 women and men (5.6% and 5.3%, respectively) experienced sexual violence other than rape, such as being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact, or non-contact unwanted sexual experiences, in the 12 months prior to the survey.
- 4.8% of men reported they were made to penetrate someone else at some time in their lives.
- 13% of women and 6% of men reported they experienced sexual coercion at some time in their lives.
- In a nationally representative survey of adults, 37.4% of female rape victims were first raped between ages 18-24.
- In a study of undergraduate women, 19% experienced attempted or completed sexual assault since entering college.

In a nationally representative survey

- 42.2% of female rape victims were first raped before age 18.
- 29.9% of female rape victims were first raped between the ages of 11-17.

- 12.3% female rape victims and 27.8% of male rape victims were first raped when they were age 10 or younger. (CDC, 2012)

These statistics demonstrate the importance of new and continued research addressing sexual trauma, its impacts, and healing (Black et al., 2010).

Impact of Sexual Trauma

Sexual trauma has specific and devastating far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for the individuals who experience it, their close family and friends, their caregivers, and their communities (Chen et al., 2010). The various types of impact resulting from sexual trauma include emotional, relational, psychological, and somatic impact (Kaltman, Krupnick, Stockton, Hooper, & Green, 2005; Martinson et al., 2013; McCarthy, & Farr, 2011; Van Der Kolk, 2015). For example, research from the Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium (2001) showed that, "Being exposed to sexual harassment and sexual violence and not being able to exercise choice in their sexual relationships affects women's well-being and ultimately undermines political, social and economic empowerment" (p.1). While many of the same symptoms are present in survivors of sexual trauma diagnosed with PTSD as others who are diagnosed with PTSD, there are some specific impacts sexual trauma can cause (Abrahams et al., 2014; Carretta & Burgess, 2013; Lang et al., 2003).

In their review of the research on the impact of childhood sexual abuse, psychologists and researchers Browne and Finkelhor (1986) delineated short-term and longer-term impacts. Reported short-term reactions include anxiety, fear, anger, depression, aggression, hostility, and sexually inappropriate behavior (pp. 66–77). Longer term effects frequently reported include: "depression and self-destructive behavior,

anxiety, feelings of isolation and stigma, poor self-esteem, difficulty in trusting others, a tendency toward re-victimization, substance abuse, and sexual maladjustment. (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986). Sexual trauma in children can create lifelong symptoms (Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1996). Somatic trauma researcher Levine and Frederick (1997) stated:

Many victims of rape may spend months or even years talking about their experiences, reliving them, expressing their anger, fear, and sorrow, but without passing through the primitive “immobility responses” and releasing the residual energy, they will often remain stuck in the traumatic maze and continue to experience distress. (p. 21)

The CDC offers an extensive list of short- and long-term effects of sexual violence on victims, delineated by physical, psychological, social, and high-risk behaviors, enumerated in entirety in Appendix A.

Impact of Sexual Violence on Loved Ones

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC, 2010) stated that sexual violence can have impact on the family, friends, parents, children, partners, coworkers, and children of the survivor of sexual violence. “As they try to make sense of what happened, significant others may experience similar reactions and feelings to those of the survivor. Fear, guilt, self-blame, and anger are but a few reactions” (NSVRC, 2010, p. 2).

Impact of Sexual Violence on Communities

Communities can also feel impact of sexual violence if a sexual assault happens within them. For example, workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, campuses, and cultural

or religious communities may feel anger, disbelief or fear. There are also financial costs communities bear (NSVRC, 2010).

Financial Impact of Sexual Violence

In their epic study “Ripple Effects of Sexual Assault” researchers Morrison, Quadara, and Boyd (2007) of The Australian Institute of Family Studies funded by the federal Australian Government, have documented the tremendous impact of sexual trauma not only on the individual, but on families, helping professionals, and communities, as well as international economies:

If we only conceptualize sexual violence as an issue of private trauma, social costs of sexual assault, including the economic costs, are made invisible. Yet in countries such as Britain, the US, Canada and Australia, where researchers estimate between a fifth to a quarter of women will experience some form of sexual assault in their lifetime, sexual assault inevitably have an effect on health and economic issues at a national level. (p. 5)

These financial costs include criminal justice expenses, medical services, crisis and mental health service fees, and the lost contributions of individuals affected by sexual violence. Rape is an economic crime, as well as a personal one (Loya, 2014).

Healing Sexual Trauma

Because of the intimate nature of trauma created through sexual violence and predation, the specific healing of sexual trauma deserves consideration (Lebowitz, Harvey, & Herman, 1993). Interestingly, while there is a great body of research about sexual violence and sexual abuse, there is very little in the academic research about healing sexual trauma. Across the literature are found statements like this, from Talbot et

al. (1999) in their study on effective treatment for sex abuse: “Empirical support for the effectiveness of group therapies for women with a history of childhood sexual abuse is scant” (p. 686). There a gap in the research, and the subject requires more study (Frazier, West-Olatunji, St. Juste, & Goodman, 2009; Price, 2005).

There are resources available for survivors of sexual violence and abuse who wish to heal; two early examples are *The Courage to Heal* by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis (1988), and Wendy Maltz’s (1991) *The Sexual Healing Journey*. More recent resources include the books of Staci Haines, including *The Survivor’s Guide to Sex: How to Have an Empowered Sex Life After Child Sexual Abuse* (1999) and *Healing Sex: A Mind-Body Approach to Healing Sexual Trauma* (2007). The evidence speaking to the efficacy of these methods is only in subjective reports. There has been one study on body-oriented therapy in recovery from child sex abuse, done by Dr. Cynthia Price in 2005, which found that women who received eight 1-hour sessions of either body-oriented therapy or massage found positive benefit in healing their sexuality after abuse (Price, 2005).

Research done in Sierra Leone on girls and women who had experienced war-related sexual violence found that most employed traditional healing methods as they sought to recover, including consulting with traditional herbalists and healers. There was no information on the efficacy of the treatment. (Utas, 2009). Utas (2009) also noted the need for further research on effective healing for victims of sexual abuse. One somatic method addressing sexual trauma is deserving of mention. Sexological bodywork is a hands-on modality that assists clients in focusing attention on somatic sensations. As numbness and loss of sensation, as well as loss of personal boundaries are impacts experienced from sexual trauma, this modality seeks to restore clients’ ability to feel, as

well as to set and express verbal boundaries (Pelmas, 2017). In their study of 116 women with various sexual difficulties ranging in age between 18 and 70, Danish researchers of somatic sexology found hands-on interventions effective. Sexuality, mental health and quality of life improved in all participants (Ventegodt, Braga, Kjølhede Nielsen, & Merrick, 2009).

Problems in the Research on Sexual Trauma and Wellness

While many forbears of psychology like Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Wilhelm Reich have acknowledged and worked in-depth with the impact of sexual trauma, there remains little scientific investigation into effective healing protocols. There is even less focus on pleasure after sexual violation (Daglieri, & Andelloux, 2013). What little investigation there is (like the Ventegodt study listed just above) has been fraught with allegations of unethical treatment by practitioners. Ventegodt was stripped of his medical license in 2012 by Danish courts for “His use of ‘vaginal acupressure’ which the Doctor’s Law Council (Retslægerådet) would not condone as a verifiable doctor treatment and instead indicated that it had an underlying tone of sexual abuse” (Copenhagen Post, 2012).

This concludes this literature review section on sexual violence and healing from sexual trauma. In summary, this section began with an overview of the statistics of the prevalence of sexual violence. It then presented information on the impact of sexual trauma on victims, loved ones of victims, communities of victims, as well as the financial impacts of sexual violence. This section continued by presenting information on the healing of sexual trauma and concluded with a discussion of problems in the research surrounding sexual violence and sexual healing from trauma.

Transgenerational Trauma

This section begins with a definition of transgenerational trauma, followed by brief biographies of important researcher voices in the field. It then investigates the mechanisms of how transgenerational trauma is transmitted, through silence, traumatized parents, and epigenetics. The literature review continues with an exploration of healing transgenerational trauma, including the use of ritual. A list of important lay and practitioner voices is next shared. The field of transgenerational trauma is the one significant field of inquiry in this literature review in which controversy was found, and this section next speaks to that controversy. Problems in the research are named, and this section concludes with a discussion of transgenerational sexual trauma, and an investigation of healing for transgenerational sexual trauma.

Transgenerational trauma is a relatively new field of study. Much of the research about transgenerational trauma (also sometimes called generational trauma or intergenerational trauma) has focused on trauma experienced by second and third generations of offspring of Holocaust survivors. (Davidson & Mellor, 2001; Doucet & Rovers, 2010; Motta et al., 1997). According to Doucet and Rovers (2010), “Generational trauma may be defined as a secondary form of trauma that results from the transfer of traumatic experiences from parents to their children” (p. 94). Transgenerational trauma is a process through which trauma experienced by one generation is transferred to a second or even third generation (Clezy, 2017).

This means that children and grandchildren experience traumatic symptoms from traumas they themselves did not experience (de Mendelssohn, 2008). It is important to note that the transmission from parent to child of traumatic material is unconscious, in

that parents do not intend to pass trauma to their progeny (Clezy, 2017). As Carl Jung (1961) stated, “I feel very strongly that I am under the influence of things or questions which were left incomplete and unanswered by my parents and grandparents and more distant ancestors” (p. 233).

Transgenerational trauma is a painful legacy resulting from war, slavery, rape, and genocide. Cross-culturally and consistently within the field of research, transgenerational trauma is a burden thought to impair the wellness of individuals and communities and prevent healing for generations (Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; DeGruy, 2005; Ralph, Hamaguchi, & Cox, 2006).

Important Researcher Voices in the Field of Transgenerational Trauma

Beginning in the 1960s, the study of transgenerational trauma has continued to grow, with much research in the transmission and symptoms of transgenerational trauma. Brief biographies of significant researchers are included here for the sake of thoroughness and to acquaint the reader with the breadth of research being done. While each of these researchers focuses on different demographics, such as Native Americans, African Americans, Holocaust survivors, survivors of Vietnam among others, all of these researchers have independently concluded that the transmission of transgenerational trauma is prolific among communities that experience traumatic events. Further research has focused not only on how exactly transmission of transgenerational trauma takes place, but also the exact nature of the outcomes, i.e., the effect on children and grandchildren (Clezy, 2017). In 1966, Dr. Vivian Rakoff published the first study examining the effects of transgenerational trauma. Dr. Rakoff and his colleagues were

seeing several patients who were survivors of the Holocaust and began to note symptomatology in their offspring.

Dr. Yael Danieli is a clinical psychologist, a victimologist, and traumatologist. In the late 1960s, she set up a treatment center in New York, tending Holocaust survivors and their children. She found that many of her patients had had their experiences in concentration camps dismissed by medical providers. Their stories were too brutal to be considered (Danieli, 1998). She co-founded the Group Project for Holocaust Survivors and their Children in 1975, the first such program in the world. She has studied post-war responses and attitudes toward them, and the impact these and the Holocaust had on victims' lives. Most recently, she has created the Danieli Inventory for Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma that allows scientifically valid assessment and comparative international study of the phenomenon. Deserving of mention is the seminal work she edited, *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*. This work deserves mention because it is a comprehensive academic exploration of contributors the enduring impact of war, genocide, slavery, tyranny, crime, and disease in many countries, including Turkey, Cambodia, and Russia. It addresses the Nazi Holocaust, the atomic bomb in Japan, the Vietnam War and the war in Yugoslavia, and the legacy of slavery in America (Danieli, 1998).

Judith Kestenberg was a child psychiatrist who was an early pioneer in her research with children of Holocaust survivors. Her work centered on healing interventions for both children of Holocaust victims, as well as children of Holocaust perpetrators. Her work is important because it focuses on remembering, rather than

forgetting, in the healing process. Her work led to a greater understanding of the impact of PTSD on children (Kestenberg, 1980, 1993).

Dori Laub, M.D. is a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale University School of Medicine and a psychoanalyst in private practice in New Haven, Connecticut, who works primarily with victims of massive psychic trauma and their children. His work on trauma extended studies on survivors of the “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia and of other genocides. He was instrumental in creating the Holocaust Survivors Film Project, today the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, which video documents the testimony of Holocaust survivors (Hamilton, 2018).

Selma Fraiberg was a child psychoanalyst who was one of the founders of the field of infant mental health. Her work on intergenerational transmission of trauma was described in her landmark paper, “Ghosts in the Nursery” in which she claims that problems in infant development and attachment stem from the “ghosts” that their parents live with. She theorizes that the unresolved past traumas of parents prevent them from fully developing the developmentally-necessary deep attachment with their child (Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1975). More recently, Daniel Schechter has focused his research on families impacted by the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. His study shows that traumatized children could trigger the PTSD of their surviving parent, which suggests that transgenerational trauma can transfer in either direction in family lines (Schechter, Coates, & First, 2002).

Dr. Rachel Yehuda is Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, and the Director of the Traumatic Stress Studies Division at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. She grew up in Cleveland in a neighborhood populated by many Holocaust survivors, an

experience that ultimately prompted her research on intergenerational trauma (Berger, 2015). She has authored more than 250 published papers, chapters, and books in the field of traumatic stress and the neurobiology of PTSD, including research in the epigenetic impacts of intergenerational trauma (Icahn School of Medicine, n.d.). Thanks to research by these and other researchers, the field of transgenerational trauma is expanding to include study of the impact and possible treatments of generations of wounding.

Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma

The study of transgenerational trauma is an interdisciplinary field. Researchers examining the mechanisms of transmission are found in psychiatry, psychology, neuroscience, evolutionary biology, epigenetics, and medicine. As the field of transgenerational trauma is only recently convened (since the 1960s), and as it is a multidisciplinary field, there are both conflicting and complementary theories on the actual mechanism of how trauma is transmitted generationally.

The literature displays several major theories of how trauma is transmitted, including: communication style of survivors, including the use of silence or absence of information; traumatic behaviors enacted by parents and observed by children; direct abuse and/or neglect by a traumatized parent toward their child; the impact of attachment wounds on children; the vicarious identification of children with the suffering of their parents; as well as the biologically-determined effects of epigenetics (de Mendelssohn, 2008; Doucet & Rovers, 2010; Kellermann, 2001; Salberg, 2015a; Walker, 1999; Weinhold, 2006).

Communication: Silence and Absence of Information

The focus on trauma transmission coupled with silence in Holocaust families is prevalent in the literature. (Danieli, 1998; Fogelman & Savran, 1979; Kestenberg, 1980; van der Kolk, 2015). Professor of Psychology, Anne Ancelin Schützenberger (1998) wrote, in her seminal work *The Ancestor's Syndrome*, that within family systems information is transmitted both consciously and unconsciously.

In traumatized families, silence can be a powerful form of communication, one which is often utilized after unspeakable trauma. The homes of trauma survivors and the families may be haunted by what is unspoken; and behaviors, beliefs, and responses may be inextricably shaped by the absence of language (Baum, 2013). Silence and the absence of information can become both the form of communication, as well as the content of transmission (Wajnryb, 2001). When silence takes the place of spoken language and sharing of experiences, trauma can become written into the second and third generations (Krystal & Danieli, 1994).

As Dr. Eva Metzger-Brown (1998), Director of Intergenerational Healing in Holocaust Families wrote:

Survivor-parents maintain two kinds of Holocaust silences: conscious and unconscious. In the former, the full story is not told because parents fear they will be retraumatized through remembering, that they will traumatize their children and that they will not be understood if they tell about their experiences. In unconscious silence, denial, splitting, dissociation and/or repression keep the terrorizing events and the repeated psychic assaults outside of awareness and without words. In both forms of silence, the psychic trauma that results from the

impact of brutal separations from people whose presence one once took for granted, and the fears for one's own life, are not addressed.

These traumas create a “traumatic core” (Gampel 1992, p. 47) which manifests itself behaviorally both as a heightened sensitivity to anxiety and other intense affects, and a diminished capacity to contain and regulate strong affects intrapsychically. These changes permeate the emotional atmosphere in families in ways that have a profound impact on interactions with the next generation. (p. 268).

Traumatized parents. In her early work, Rachel Yehuda (2002), Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, Director of the Traumatic Stress Studies Division at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, and researcher/author in the field of traumatic stress and the neurobiology of PTSD, found that children of trauma victims are more likely to develop PTSD when presented with an overwhelming event.

There is a large body of research on the effects of the Holocaust on the children of parent-survivors. Across the literature, researchers agree that second and third generation offspring continue to experience impacts of the collective trauma (Berger, 2014). Of note is *Generations of the Holocaust* by Bergmann and Jucovy (1982), which compiled data from a large group of clinicians working with second-generation clients. Judith Kestenberg (1993), a prominent researcher in the group, has conducted extensive research on the impact of the Holocaust on children of survivors.

Survivor research often shows the tremendous accomplishments of survivors, as they go on with their lives, and this over-achieving is notable in their offspring as well. Researchers Sigal and Winfeld (1989) found in their empirical study that children raised

in families of trauma survivor parents are, “hyperactive overachievers, or depressed underachievers, anxious, fearful and unable to separate from their parents, have problems in the control of aggression (either under-controlled or over-controlled) and suffer from low self-esteem and from identity problems” (Berger, 2014, p.173). Other effects are noted by Braga, Mello, and Fiks (2012) include:

Clinical studies reported a wide range of affective and emotional symptoms transmitted over generations: distrust of the world, impaired parental function, chronic sorrow, inability to communicate feelings, an ever-present fear of danger, pressure for educational achievement, separation anxiety, lack of entitlement, unclear boundaries, and over-protectiveness within a narcissist family system. (p. 2)

Children, born of either traumatized or non-traumatized parents, attempt to attach to their parent (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 2005). However, as transgenerational trauma researcher Jill Salberg (2015b) wrote:

When trauma revisits a person transgenerationally through dysregulated and disrupted attachment patterns, it is within the child’s empathic attunement and search for a parental bond that the mode of transmission can be found. This will become the texture of traumatic attachment: how it feels to this child to feel connected to the parent. (p. 79)

Children of trauma survivors can become adept in patterns of “defensive” caretaking behaviors which contribute to intergenerational transmission of anxiety, silence, and losses related to the Holocaust. These are classified as second-generation behaviors where the child focuses on meeting the parental needs to escape their own felt

experience of unspoken trauma (Metzger-Brown, 1998). There is evidence to suggest that parents suffering from PTSD or who are victims of abuse are at higher risk for abusing their own children (Famularo, Kinscherff, & Fenton, 1992; Pearsa & Capaldia, 2001). Clearly, there are many implications that children of trauma survivors endure because of their parents' unresolved trauma. There is also evidence to suggest that interpersonal partner violence (IPV) is transmitted transgenerationally (Ehrensaft et al., 2003).

Epigenetics. In addition to the psychological and behavioral components to the transgenerational transmission of trauma, the burgeoning field of epigenetics provides biological theories for how trauma can be transmitted between generations. For the purposes of this dissertation, an in-depth literature review of the field of epigenetics was not conducted, but it would be remiss not to provide the reader with a brief introduction to this theory of transgenerational transmission of trauma.

Epigenetics is the study of generationally-transmitted changes in gene expression, not involving changes to the DNA sequence. This means there is a change in phenotype without there being a change in genotype. This change affects how cells read the genes. Changes in gene expression can be inherited for up to four generations, however, they do not automatically indicate future results (Jelinek, 2015).

Reviewing more than 100 studies of transgenerational epigenetic inheritance, researchers Jablonka and Raz (2009) described the phenomena as occurring in many different organisms, including bacteria, plants, and animals. These studies included various kinds of detrimental circumstances, including early stress and emotional trauma of the first generation which changed gene expression in following generations.

In a talk presented at the American Association of Psychoanalysts, Dr. Kohler (2015), in summarizing research findings on the effects of environment on epigenetics, stated:

Some epigenetic “marks,” i.e., specific chemical attachments such as a methyl group, can be transgenerationally transmitted. In the context where epigenetic changes can be inherited and passed on to subsequent generations, the “nurture” of one generation contributes to the “nature” of subsequent generations. (p. 79)

Epigenetics may account for some of the findings of transgenerational transmission of stress as measured by increased cortisol levels, as in recent neuroscientific research conducted by Rachel Yehuda et al. (2016) that demonstrated “an association of preconception parental trauma with epigenetic alterations that is evident in both exposed parent and offspring, providing potential insight into how severe psychophysiological trauma can have intergenerational effect” (p. 372). This study is important because it was the first to correlate trauma in human parents with effects in their offspring. Child abuse is also a factor that is being studied as creating epigenetic changes in the brain (McGowan et al., 2009). While epigenetics is a fascinating field of study and an important part of the study of transgenerational trauma, and this literature would be incomplete without including mention of it, the research in this dissertation is not informed by the field of epigenetics, as it is a qualitative, social study, not a quantitative, biological one.

Healing Transgenerational Trauma

According to Jungian therapist Dr. Sandra Easter (2016), clients must have a framework for the concept of transgenerational trauma to acknowledge its impact. She

wrote, “what remains unlived, unresolved, unredeemed and unanswered will be passed on to future generations” (Easter, 2016, p. 64) and then discussed how understanding the phenomenon of transgenerational trauma enables those suffering with burdens of the past to begin to find resources for healing. Unfortunately, it is incumbent upon those suffering from the trauma bequeathed by their ancestors to take healing action. Said Eshowsky (2016), “transgenerational trauma is viewed as the responsibility of all of us to heal so the ancestors may be freed from that which was left unresolved at the time of their deaths” (p. 80).

Historically, groups that have experienced trauma such as the result of war have been left to their own devices to determine how to heal. Much of the literature on the healing of transgenerational trauma comes from leaders in the communities that have experienced the impact. As with the academic research, leaders actively working with communities to heal transgenerational trauma also focus on different demographics, such as working with victims of the Holocaust, ongoing conflicts between Israel and Palestine, African-Americans, and Native North Americans, for example (Brave Heart, 1998; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Coulter et al., 2008; Coyhis, 2015; Menzies, 2008).

Ritual for healing. There are many instances across the literature, from many different cultures utilizing indigenous or shamanic healing practices, of the use of ritual for healing. There is evidence to support that the use of transpersonal tools like ritual to address trauma is effective (Kalischuk, Solowoniuk, & Nixon, 2008; Kuek, 2012). From child soldiers in Mozambique and Angola, to victims of war rape in Sierra Leone, to Australian Aborigine people seeking to heal from forced attendance at boarding school and loss of culture, to supporting Native Americans with substance abuse issues, ritual is

used to address issues of trauma and transgenerational trauma (Brave Heart, 1998; Coulter et al., 2008; Coyhis, 2015; Honwana, 1999; Liebling-Kalifani, Mwaka,, Ojiambo-Ochieng, Were-Oguttu, & Kinyanda, 2011).

Eshowsky (2016), shamanic counselor and tender of international transgenerational trauma, wrote:

Healing transgenerational trauma requires the profound ability of symbolic ritual acts. They help to transform space, to communicate that which is invisible to our normal senses to transform worldviews, identities and relationships. Ritual acts can penetrate what often appears intransigent and impenetrable in healing transgenerational trauma. Ritual can overwhelm the defenses and convey complex messages, bringing a new consciousness, without saying a single word. (p. 96)

One modern ritualized technology for healing transgenerational trauma is drama therapy, including the modalities of Psychodrama, developed by Dr. Jacob L. Moreno in the early part of the 20th century, and Playback Theater, founded in 1975 by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas. Both modalities utilize improvisational theater techniques to enact stories and situations, bringing externalization and perspective to participants, and claim benefit in the healing of transgenerational trauma (Kellermann & Hudgins, 2000).

Armand Volkas (2009) has developed his work called *Healing the Wounds of History*, which is a drama therapy approach to healing international conflict that has created transgenerational trauma. The process uses experiential techniques to work with a group of participants who share a common legacy of historical trauma, building understanding and healing between historically opposed groups.

In one of the only field-tested approaches to traditional healing, Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (1998) explored unresolved historical grief among the Lakota. Over the course of a several-day workshop with participants of Lakota Origin, she studied the effect of traditional communal grief ritual. She concluded that sharing grief in community about historical injustice and trauma the Lakota experienced was helpful. She provides hope in the field of transgenerational trauma healing when she writes, “Healing from generations of trauma and unresolved grief appears feasible” (Brave Heart, 1998, p. 302).

Important lay and practitioner voices in the field of transgenerational trauma. There are a select handful of practitioners whose work addresses transgenerational trauma, and their work is both specific to the populations they are researching, as well as applicable to the field of transgenerational trauma study in general. Brief biographies of each of these people are included here to introduce the reader to the work being done by practitioners in the field of transgenerational trauma. The work done by clinicians and practitioners is in general not funded, nor peer reviewed, and yet is an example of people in service to cultural wellness. It is important to include these biographies here to both honor the work of these people, as well as explicate the point that much of the work of healing transgenerational trauma is being done by clinicians, as opposed to academics. There is very little research on actual healing modalities, and so these practitioners take it upon themselves to do the work, in the absence of academic, research-based guidance. Also, each of their work has been examined during this literature review, and is woven throughout different sections, as well as addressed in individual biographies.

Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, mentioned above, is a Native American social worker and professor. She developed a model of historical trauma for the Lakota people. Through examining the historical trauma research of Holocaust survivors, she identified events in United States history that created mass trauma for Lakota and other native tribes. The events she cites include the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890, the abduction of tribal children and indoctrination in federal boarding schools, and the removal and assimilation policies enforced by the United States Federal Government. She also proposes a model for healing which includes education, sharing the effects of trauma, and resolving grief ritually through collective mourning. (Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1998)

Dr. Joy DeGruy is an author, social worker, and teacher whose work explores the historical trauma endured by descendants of African slaves, which she calls Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). Her theory states that transgenerational trauma stemming from slavery, institutional racism like Jim Crow laws and mass incarceration strongly impacts African Americans. These injustices necessitated survival strategies in victims, which have resulted in a legacy of maladaptive behaviors. According to DeGruy (2005), PTSS cannot merely be treated clinically, but must be remedied through massive social evolution.

Anne Ancelin Schutzenberger is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Nice and co-founder of the International Association of Group Psychotherapy. Her work focuses on a psycho genealogical approach to psychotherapy, meaning that in her work with clients, they examine the family tree of the client, exploring parallels between the client's life, and the lives of their forebears, especially in terms of trauma. Her seminal work *The Ancestor Syndrome: Transgenerational*

Psychotherapy and the Hidden Links in the Family Tree has had significant influence on the field of transgenerational trauma. Schutzenberger (1998) wrote:

We continue the chain of generations, and knowingly or not, willingly or unwillingly, we pay the debts of the past: as long as we have not cleared the slate, and “invisible loyalty” impels us to repeat and repeat a moment of incredible joy or unbearable sorrow, an injustice or a tragic death. (p. xii)

Dr. Annwyn St. Just is a systemically oriented social traumatologist, a cultural historian, psychotherapist and somatic educator who specializes in developing multi-modal cross-cultural methods based upon easily transmitted concepts for trauma education and recovery. Her work takes a systems approach to considering generational and land-based traumatic wounds and their resolution. Based on her study of the social impact of trauma, she believes history repeats itself, on the land on which traumatic events occurred, until the original trauma is acknowledged, and healing attention is paid (St. Just, 2009).

Don Coyhis, Mohican Nation, is the President and Founder of White Bison, Inc., an American Indian non-profit organization, located in Colorado Springs, CO. Over the past 26 years, Don has developed a series of culturally-based programs to address recovery and treatment, youth prevention and treatment, programs for healthy families, and healing from unresolved grief and traumatic loss due to intergenerational trauma. One of the programs he and his organization The Wellbriety Training Institute (2015) has created is “Mending Broken Hearts: Healing from unresolved grief and intergenerational trauma,” a process for Native Americans to learn about and ritually address the trauma of

loss of culture, forced boarding school, removal from land base, and disconnect from traditional ways.

Francesca Mason Boring, an enrolled Western Shoshone Tribe member, is a facilitator of Family, Human and Natural Systems Constellation and ceremony. She is the author of many articles on Family Constellations, as well as the book *Connecting to Our Ancestral Past, Healing Through Family Constellation, Ceremony & Ritual* (Boring, 2012). Ms. Boring facilitates community ritual blended with Family Constellations that help Native Americans and others reconnect with ancestors and bring healing to traumatized lineages through ritual and ceremony.

Dr. Judy Atkinson (2002) works in the field of violence and trauma in Australian Aboriginal populations. She is Professor of Indigenous Australian Studies at Southern Cross University, where her work bridges indigenous healing practice and Western trauma recovery process. Her book *Trauma Trails, Recreating Song Lines* (Atkinson, 2002) documents the transgenerational trauma experienced by Australian Aboriginal people. Her main theme in this work is that violence produces trauma, and if trauma is unhealed, it can compound, creating traumatic effects on families and communities, and colonization is a form of trauma that creates dysfunctional, sometimes violent, behavior (Atkinson, 2002).

Myron Eshowsky is a founding member, International Consortium for the Treatment and Research in Transgenerational Trauma. He conducts shamanically-influenced work as a counselor and ancestral healer, as well as international peacemaking work, that combines transpersonal tools of shamanism with conflict resolution skills aimed at remediating transgenerational trauma (Eshowsky, n.d.). Eshowsky's work

includes facilitating rituals for individuals and communities that help shift grief and trauma into healing.

Armand Volkas (2009) directs *Healing the Wounds of History*, a therapeutic approach in which theater techniques are used to work with groups of participants from two cultures with a common legacy of violent conflict and historical trauma. *Healing the Wounds of History* has received international recognition for its work in bringing groups in conflict together: Germans and Jews; Palestinians and Israelis; Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans; Armenians and Turks; African-Americans; and European-Americans (Volkas, 2009). Lay reports share the power and efficacy of these techniques that workshop practitioners experience, including more understanding and compassion (Joint Christian Committee for Social Service in Lebanon, n.d.). As was mentioned above, these brief biographies of these international practitioners in the field are included in this literature review to demonstrate both the breadth of the field, as well as to explicate the great need for trauma healing held within a transgenerational approach.

Controversy in the field of transgenerational trauma. The field of transgenerational trauma is the only field of research covered in this literature review in which significant controversy was found. Some of the important questions the field has faced include:

Are the symptoms of a child of a trauma survivor detectable and traceable? Is the mechanism for transmission of trauma psychological, behavioral, biological, or environmental? What is the impact of an individual's personality and background on the development of symptomatology? Can resilience also be transmitted to offspring? How much of the pathology a child experiences can be attributed to the (Holocaust)

experiences of the parents (Bergman & Jucovy, 1982; Braga et al., 2012; McNally, 2014)?

Because the field of transgenerational trauma is a multidisciplinary field, the answers to these questions continue to be explored and argued in their respective clinical and lay settings (Danieli, 2007). Recently, the question of the transmission of resiliency as well as the transmission of trauma has been under investigation. For example, Braga et al. (2012) in their research “Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma and Resilience: A Qualitative Study with Brazilian Offspring of Holocaust Survivors” conducted in-depth individual interviews with 15 offspring of Holocaust survivors. This research found, “not only traumatic experiences, but also resilience patterns can be transmitted to and developed by the second generation” (Braga et al., 2012, p. 1).

Problems in the research of transgenerational trauma. There were few studies found in this literature review that seek to validate the efficacy of any of the clinical or traditional or alternative interventions currently being used to address transgenerational trauma. While the literature clearly documents the experiences of victims of transgenerational trauma, as well as what coping strategies they employ, there is little research on how useful these strategies are, except for subjective reports of practitioners (Brave Heart, 1998; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Coulter et al., 2008; Menzies, 2008; Wellbriety Training Institute, 2015).

Most of the academic and clinical research on transgenerational trauma has addressed Holocaust survivors and their offspring. There is very little in the literature about the effects of transgenerational trauma or its healing in other populations. There is supporting clinical data that proves offspring of Holocaust survivors experience

psychopathology, however, there are several methodological challenges including the dependency on case studies, inconsistent and imprecise definitions of psychopathology, small sample sizes, sampling biases, absence of control groups, and lack of standardized testing instruments (Solkoff, 1992).

In summary, there are several ways in which transgenerational trauma is transmitted: through silence and the absence of communication about traumatic events; through traumatized parents, with children overidentifying with their elders' traumatic symptoms; and through epigenetic encoding of DNA. Transgenerational trauma is a relatively recent field of study, within the past 50 years. There has been controversy if transgenerational trauma is indeed valid, and the work of researchers like Rachel Yehuda have proven that impact can be traced transgenerationally. Healing transgenerational trauma has often been the domain of lay practitioners and ritualists, with more research to be conducted on clinically-proven effective methods to address transgenerational trauma.

Transgenerational sexual trauma. Only two pieces of academic research from peer reviewed journals that specifically address transgenerational sexual trauma were uncovered during this literature review process. Neither of these pieces of research are clinical studies, but rather psychological approaches to intervention. This indicates that the topic is vastly under-researched, thus supporting the justification for this dissertation. There is, however, a great deal of research on the impact of childhood sexual trauma on subsequent parenting behaviors, and the negative impacts and vulnerabilities in parents created through childhood sexual trauma that is not resolved.

As with transgenerational trauma transmission experienced by Holocaust survivors, transgenerational transmission of sexual trauma occurs through the

mechanisms of secrecy, silence, and shame (Gardner, 1999). While transgenerational sexual trauma can mean that there is a cycle of sexual violation experienced by each subsequent generation (Levine, 1997), transgenerational sexual trauma can also be experienced by children of parents with sexual trauma, re-experiencing and exhibiting the parental symptoms (Gardner, 1999).

Devroede and Schutzenberger (2005) wrote about the somatic impact of unprocessed sexual abuse. They stated:

The body remembers sexual abuse and keeping family secrets causes illness. Unwittingly and unwillingly, our parents and grandparents and ancestors often leave us the legacy of their unfinished mourning, their “undigested” traumas, and the hidden shame of their secret family history. Sexual abuse and other traumas experienced in the family’s past create insurmountable or unresolved emotional wounds that leave their mark on future generations. (p. 22).

Also notable is that the symptoms that a child experiences from child sexual abuse (CSA) can often be found presenting alongside the untreated CSA symptoms belonging to a caregiver (Wekerle, Wall, Leung, & Trocmé, 2007). Additionally, the research shows that many perpetrators of sexual abuse have themselves been victims of sexual abuse (Goodwin, McCarthy, & Di Vastro, 1981). However, the cycle of transgenerational sexual trauma can be interrupted through learning appropriate boundaries (Levine, 1997).

Healing transgenerational sexual trauma. Treatment methods and interventions depend in part on when the sexual trauma is addressed. Techniques appropriate for a child who is a victim of sexual abuse who receives immediate treatment differ from those

offered to adult victims of sexual violence, or adults who are only now addressing CSA (Frazier et al., 2009).

While therapeutic treatment methods may be similar to those interventions employed with victims of sexual violence that is not considered to be transgenerational, one important distinction is that in treating children, clinicians must investigate whether the primary caregiver is also a victim of CSA. Because healing from CSA in children depends on the successful support of their caregivers, caregivers who have unresolved sexual trauma need appropriate therapeutic support for their own trauma, so that they can help and not hinder their child's recovery.

Many CSA survivors are unaware of how their past trauma experiences may influence later generations. Their families may therefore be at greater risk of repeating the past. However, the risk can be decreased with educational programs that promote awareness of this vulnerability. (Frazier et al., 2009, p. 30)

Having a framework to conceptualize transgenerational trauma is helpful in treatment. As Jungian analyst, Dr. Sandra Easter (2016) wrote:

Without a worldview that incorporates the role of ancestors . . . we remain inattentive to their presence, ascribing our symptoms . . . to those things that fit within our known frameworks of understanding . . . For years, my understanding of my personal trauma was limited to my personal family history. However, the ancestral trauma, unconscious for so many generations, was “remembered” and was being acted out in the relationship with my family. (p. 145)

This concludes the section of the literature review investigating transgenerational sexual trauma. To review, this section began with a definition of transgenerational

trauma, followed by brief biographies of important voices in the field. It then investigates the mechanisms of how transgenerational trauma is transmitted, through silence, traumatized parents, and epigenetics. The literature review continued with an exploration of healing transgenerational trauma, including the use of ritual. The field of transgenerational trauma is the one significant field of inquiry in this literature review in which controversy was found, and this section next spoke to that controversy in the field. Problems in the research were named, and this section concluded with a discussion of transgenerational sexual trauma, and an investigation of healing for transgenerational sexual trauma.

Ancestors

The field of academic research concerning ancestors and ancestral reverence as related to healing is quite small; most scholars have studied cultures in Africa such as the Zulu and the Naguni, with some scholars addressing China, Japan, and the indigenous cultures of North America (Bogopa, 2010; Edwards, 2011). Therefore, this literature review also surveys non-academic literature on this topic, including contemporary Western ancestor practices (McCabe, 2008). Most of the literature in this field addresses either traditional or neo-pagan relationships with ancestors (Bojuwoye, 2013; Grimassi, 2016). Because of the limited amount of academic research available, no conclusions can be drawn. However, taken as a whole, the research and non-academic literature does tend to indicate that there is a positive relationship between ancestral relationships and healing, for people who practice ancestral reverence (Bogopa, 2010; Edwards, 2011; Honwana, 2007; McCabe, 2008).

This section of the literature review investigates ancestors. Beginning by investigating a series of questions, “What are ancestors?” and “How does one become an ancestor?” and “Are ancestors real?” this section then continues by presenting the information on types of ancestors, differentiating between the well and unwell dead. Next, it explores the impact ancestors have on the living in ancestor-venerating cultures, the universality of ancestors and cross-cultural tenets of ancestor reverence. The role of memory is examined, as well as the reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead, and communication with ancestors. Next, the literature review investigates cross-cultural ancestral reverence practices, including ritual and ceremony, altars, offerings, and the observation of dreams and portents. Several examples of culturally specific practices are given. The literature review then turns toward healing, what healing is considered to be in cultures that practice ancestral reverence, the role of the ancestors in health and healing, and modalities like shamanism and Family Constellations that use ancestral relating for healing. Finally, the works of Dr. Daniel Foor (2017) and *Ancestral Lineage Healing* are presented.

What Are Ancestors?

To discuss “what ancestors are” means to investigate the premise that something of the living remains after death. All cultures that practice ancestor reverence that were researched for this dissertation held the belief that after death, some part of the dead continues to exist, although non-visible (Foor, 2017, p. 22). Gumede (1990) explained ancestral spirits as the spirits of dead family and community members, while neo-pagan author Raven Grimassi (2016) referred to ancestral spirits as the collective consciousness of one’s forebears. Edwards (2011), in his paper about Zulu ancestral beliefs stated:

From a local African perspective, ancestors are regarded as custodians of the lives of future generations. They occupy a position of dignity and awe among their descendants. From time to time through certain ritualistic procedures that differ from group to group, they are celebrated and consulted for guidance. As they are the living-dead, ancestors are believed to know more than anyone alive, to have extraordinary powers and to be at any place at any time. It is believed that they can bring good luck and bad luck equally if they are pleased or angered respectively. (p. 5)

How Does One Become an Ancestor? The Ancestralization Process

In some cultures, all those who have died are revered as ancestors, while other cultures believe the dead must undergo an ancestralization process (Royce, 2014). For example, the Tz'utujil people, one of the 21 Maya ethnic groups that dwell in Guatemala who are noted for their continuing adherence to traditional ancestral practices, believe that the soul of a deceased person must undertake a great journey. They move on a canoe fueled by the grief and tears of the living. They travel to the land of the ancestors, which is the beach of stars, where they are welcomed by their last happy ancestor. They then undergo the ancestralization process, which lasts 400 days (Prechtel, 2015, p. 66).

Are Ancestors Real?

When considering the unseen realm of the dead, the question of the verifiable realness of ancestors is often asked (Cohen, 2012). There were no empirical studies found for the sake of this literature review that evaluated the quantifiable existence of ancestors, and it would be very difficult to prove either the existence or non-existence of ancestors. Many researchers, following the academic tradition of cultural relativism, avoid

addressing this question by framing their research in the context of what a particular culture believes. For example, anthropologists are faced with the dilemma of how to understand a different culture without the lens of bias an observer inevitably brings to an observation. Twentieth-century Western researchers were challenged to apply cultural relativism to the cultures they researched, including research into ancestor worshipping cultures (Steadman et al, 1996). The exception to this is the discussion within the Family Constellations modality (see below discussion of ancestral healing modalities) regarding the beliefs of practitioners of the modality around the realness of ancestors. There is disagreement within that modality, with some practitioners believing that ancestors truly exist, and some practitioners believing that the ancestors are akin to Jungian archetypes (Cohen, 2006).

Francesca M. Boring (2012) is a Shoshone medicine woman and Family Constellation practitioner whose brief biography may be found above in the list of practitioners in *Voices in the field of Transgenerational Trauma*. In her view: “The Ancestors are real. Unlike the interpretation of constructivist constellations which may relegate Ancestors to allegory or metaphor, the Ancestors are viewed simply as ancestors” (Boring, 2012, p. 67).

Ancestor worship is found in indigenous cultures around the world, and as evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould believed, adaptive behaviors can be passed culturally. He concluded that it may be impossible to determine objectively whether the ancestors are real, and what is more important is if we do choose to believe in ancestors, how that belief supports our integration. “Each of us has to have a personal metaphysics. There are questions that are formally unanswerable on which nonetheless every

individual must take a position in order to integrate various pieces of his life” (Gould, as cited in Kayzer, 1999, p. 226).

While the quantifiable realness of ancestors is not the subject of this dissertation, for the sake of disclosure and transparency and naming personal bias, it is important to say that the personal beliefs of this researcher are that ancestors are real, that they continue to impact the living, and that there is reciprocal relationship between us and them. However, as this dissertation research was based entirely in the interviews with research interviewees, this researcher’s own position on whether ancestors are or are not real empirically is not relevant to the outcome of the research. Also, whether or not ancestors are verifiably real is not important to this research, because the questions it explores consider the impact of ancestral practices on sexual wellness, rather than whether some form of existence continues after death.

Types of Ancestors

Throughout the cross-cultural literature, various types of ancestors are explained, including ancestors of blood, non-blood ancestors, and ancestors of lineage, of craft or of thought (Oshun, 2010; Foor, 2017). Ancestors of blood are the dead in one’s direct family lineages, to whom one is related through procreative sex (Foor, 2017, p. 32). Non-blood ancestors “are often people, non-related to you by blood, who have passed into the land of the Ancestors and who played a significant role in your life. Or there may be others whose qualities and talents you admire” (Oshun, 2010, p. 9). Ancestors of lineage of craft or thought are those to whom one is not related by blood, but to whom one pays homage and/or acknowledgment. For example, “an ancestor could also be a craftsman, during lifetime, with creative power or skills and might have built crafts, statues and

monuments which are seen as repositories of community knowledge and histories” (Bojuwoye, 2013, p. 790). The literature shows no clear distinction between the treatment of the different types of ancestors described above.

Differentiating Between Well Ancestors and the Unwell Dead

In addition to different types of ancestors, cultures practicing ancestral reverence often differentiate between the deceased and the ancestors, with the ancestors being those with greater spiritual power to affect the living. In Taoism for example, the dead must be properly and auspiciously buried, and then honored, to prevent the creation of “hungry ghosts” (Oldstone-Moore, 2003). The differentiation between the well ancestors, and the unwell ghosts is an important one in the study of ancestral reverence as it relates to healing. For example, Honwana (1999) wrote:

In Mozambique and Angola there are local ways of understanding war trauma. In both countries people believe that war-related psychological trauma is directly linked with the anger of the spirits of those killed during the war. In southern Mozambique these spirits are called Mipfhukwa - spirits of those who did not have a proper burial to place them in their proper positions in the world of the ancestors. They are believed to be unsettled and bitter spirits who can cause harm to their killers or to passers-by. In Angola this is also a common phenomenon. All over the country people mentioned that the spirits of people killed during the war had to be appeased to ensure peace. (p. 3)

Level of Impact of Ancestors

Presenting the idea of the universality of ancestor worship in his seminal work in the field *The Birth of the Gods*, Guy Swanson (1964) attempted to classify the various

levels of involvement that ancestors have in 50 different cultures. He states that there are four different categories of ancestor involvement. The first category is “inactive” where cultures that acknowledge the existence of ancestors, but do not believe that the ancestors have impact on descendants’ lives. The second category is “active” in which ancestors may play pranks or bring misfortune. The third implies a moralistic quality: ancestors will “aid or punish” descendants much as parents or grandparents would behave toward children. The level of impact increases in each category, and the living members of cultures with this third level of ancestor intervention have more agency and responsibility in relating with their ancestors. The final, fourth category that Swanson (1964) named is for ancestral reverence cultures who “invoke” their benevolent ancestors and ask them to intercede for the individual’s benefit in the spirit realm.

Swanson’s (1964) original four categorizations were expanded to include seven different categories by anthropologists Tatje and Hsu (1969) in their work on the relationship between kinship bonds and beliefs about ancestral reverence. They coded the various cultures they examined with one of the seven categories defining the level of impact that culture believed the ancestors created. The seven categories are: absence; neutral, undifferentiated; malicious; capricious; punishing; reward-punish; benevolent; rewarding (Tatje & Hsu, 1969).

Universality of Ancestral Reverence and Cross-Cultural Tenets

Many cultures worldwide practice ancestor reverence.

Ancestral reverence refers to ways of living and worshiping that recognize and honor the human dead as one important type of person or force in the larger web of relations. Traditions of ancestor reverence are especially prevalent in animist,

shamanistic, and indigenous communities. Religions such as Christianity and Buddhism also communicate respect to the spirits of the deceased, even if these groups do not always identify themselves as practitioners of ancestor reverence per se. (Foor, 2017, p. 56)

The universality of ancestor worship is somewhat debated in anthropology.

Lehmann and Myers (1985) stated: “Although the worship of ancestors is not universal, a belief in the immortality of the dead occurs in all cultures” (p. 63) while anthropologists Steadman, Palmer, and Tilley (1996) slightly disagree: “That is, even if ancestor worship is not universal (which may be true if ancestor worship is defined in its most restrictive sense) all religions may have more in common than the mere assertion of the immortality of the dead” (p. 67).

In reviewing the literature about cultures that practice ancestral reverence, some key, cross-cultural tenets emerged, including: the role of memory; reciprocal relationship; and communication between the living and the ancestors.

Role of Memory

In every culture surveyed for this literature review that practices ancestral reverence, memory is an important tenet of that reverence. Remembering the dead, including their names, deeds, and accomplishments, is a central component of ancestor worship. Memory is practiced differently in different cultures, including the study of genealogy, grave markers, ancestral tablets, storytelling, and preservation of heirlooms, among many others (Addison, 1925; Bojuwoye, 2013; Chiakwa, 1999; Lehmann & Myers 1985).

Zerubavel (2012) stated:

It is basically common ancestors, therefore, that provide the sense of kinship. Like the keystone of an arch that helps lock all its other parts in place, they are the social cement holding their descendants together long after they die. If they are ever forgotten, those descendants might no longer feel related to one another! Ancestor worship, in short, thus helps foster the relations not only between the living and the dead but also among the living. (p. 34)

However, it is not just the living who must remember. The ancestors too have their responsibility of memory. Pratt (2007) wrote:

In indigenous cultures it is the responsibility of the ancestor to hold the memories and wisdom gained from the past back to the dawn of humankind. It is the responsibility of the living to heal the past, to learn from the ancestors' mistakes and create change. (p. 14)

Reciprocal Relationship Between the Living and the Dead

The concept of reciprocity between the living and the ancestors was widely found across the literature, in living cultures practicing ancestral reverence. For example, ancestors are thought to have the ability to bestow prosperity, good health, and good life on descendants (Buhrman, 1989). "According to traditional Zulu culture, there is a continuous relationship between the living and the 'living-dead' (abaphansi)" and "respect is mutual and should be reciprocated" (Edwards, 2011, p. 6). Among the Samoyed people of Siberia, ancestors are claimed to influence, and be influenced by, the living (Steadman, Palmer, & Tilley, 1996); Bojuwoye and Edwards (2011) wrote, "Ancestral consciousness is believed to involve reciprocal interactions with the ancestors being affected by the living descendants" (p.376).

Communication with Ancestors

An important premise of ancestor reverence is the belief that there is continuous communication between the dead and the living (Edwards, Makunga, Thwala, & Mbele, 2009). Communication happens through dreams, divination, signs and synchronicities. “Such phenomena are fully experienced in African extended family kinship ties, through ongoing communication with the world of the recently deceased and older living dead ancestors, all of whom continue to be freshly experienced as responsible for shaping the lives of contemporary humanity” (Edwards, 2011, p. 391). Communication takes the form of dreams, signs and portents, as well as embodied knowing, meaning an understanding one has that comes from within the body (Buhrmann, 1989).

Universal Ancestral Reverence Practices

Ancestral reverence is practiced in a diversity of approaches worldwide (Tatje & Hsu, 1969). Although this literature review does not attempt to comprehensively explore the ancestral reverence practices of every culture, some similar themes of practice were found in all of the examined literature. The literature examined a variety of cultures and religions, including many sub-Saharan African cultures, ancestral reverence practices in China, Australia, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Mexico, First Nations people of Canada, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, various Native American cultures in the United States, and reconstructed Pagan traditions. Similar practices cross-culturally include ritual and ceremony, creation and tending of altars, making of offerings to ancestors, and observing dreams and portents.

Ritual and ceremony. Ancestor rituals are practices that attempt to bring the living and the dead into mutual contact and awareness (Foor, 2017). Various types of

ancestral ritual are practiced, depending on the culture and the intent of the ritual. For example, ritual intentions can include assisting the living in life transition moments such as birth, rites of passage to adult and then elderhood, marriage, and death. Other rituals are performed to support the dead in becoming benevolent ancestors or assisting the troubled dead. Other rituals can be performed to appease the ancestors, seeking their guidance and blessing (Oshun, 2010; Davies & Matthews, 2015; Foor, 2017). Rituals can happen on a cyclical, seasonal schedule, on a daily level, or on an as-needed basis (Oshun, 2010).

The necessity and efficacy of ritual is obvious to those practicing and is communally practiced by cultures such as the Zulu, although often considered suspect by the Western scientific world (Edwards, 2011). Ancestral ritual has deep significance for kinship bonds among the living. Anthropologists Paul Bohannon, Mari Womack, and Karen Saenz (1999) concluded that “rituals associated with ancestor reverence reinforce the solidarity of the lineage and bind lineage members to the land” (p. 26).

Altars. Ancestral altars are specific physical spaces designated for communion with the dead. There are various types of altars, and different practices that occur utilizing altars, but the ritual designation of such spaces is confirmed across cultures and across the literature. Altars and shrines have been a part of the worship of many religions for thousands of years (Gutiérrez, Beezley, Salvo, & Scalora, 1997). They have traditionally served as sites of interaction between sacred and secular; “a place where humans and deities established, negotiated and maintained their relationships” (Gutiérrez et al., 1997, p. 93). Altars and shrines can be individual, such as a small household altar to a departed relative, or commemorate the dead on a grander scale, such as the Vietnam War

Memorial in Washington DC. Gravestones and markers are a particular type of shrine commemorating the dead (Foor, 2017).

Altars everywhere are sites of ritual communication with heaven, ancestors and spirits, marking the boundary between the ordinary world and the world of the spirits (Fatunmbi, 2005; Thompson, 1995). Altars communicate to the dead that the living remember and welcome them, and wish to be in communication (Foor, 2017). A common practice is for offerings to the ancestors to be placed on ancestral altars. Oshun (2010) wrote, “We honor them with altars, music, and prayer. They in turn offer us guidance, protection, and prosperity” (p. 7). Altars and shrines vary from culture to culture in construction, aesthetic, usage and culturally appropriate ritual items. Many differences are noted, including the placement of photographs on the altar, and placement of the altar itself (Oshun, 2010; Foor, 2017; Gutiérrez et al., 1997).

Offerings. All cultures surveyed in the literature practice some form of making offerings to the ancestors. The intention behind offerings is remembrance, appeasement, and acknowledgment of reciprocity (Oshun, 2010; Foor, 2017). Tangible offerings include food, pouring of libations such as water or alcohol, creations of beauty, sacrifice, lighting candles, burning incense, burning images of items the deceased may enjoy, and special objects known to be favorites of the dead, among many others. Less tangible offerings include verbal praise, through prayer, speech, poetry, reciting the names of the dead and song, drumming and dancing, and expressions of grief (Oshun, 2010; Berg, 2003; Foor, 2017; Starhawk & NightMare, 1997).

Types of offerings, and beliefs around offerings, vary from culture to culture, with significant variation. For example, Mexican, Chinese, Vietnamese, and West African

Traditional Religion (Ifa) beliefs around food as offering are quite divergent. Brandes (2007) recalled an incident in Tzintzuntan, Mexico while sitting with a family at their Dia de los Muertos altar:

As a natural gesture of hospitality, the wife offered me some fruit that was sitting on a simple sideboard. When I raised my arm to reach for a banana, the woman instantaneously extended her hand to prevent me from reaching for the fruit set out on the altar. “Not from there,” she said with nervous laughter. “That one is for the deceased.” Then, pointing to the sideboard, she said “Help yourself to a banana from over there.” To eat fruit from the altar is equivalent to stealing fruit from the deceased. It would in fact contribute an act of sacrilege. (p. 20)

Mexican practice varies distinctly from Chinese ancestral practice, in which families eat alongside their departed relatives. Tand-Duffy (2007) wrote about Chinese practice, saying:

According to the principles of Chinese thought and belief, as previously described, sharing of a meal with the deceased establishes family ties to them. A pleasurable and harmonious meal ensures that the spirit will not be angered nor will it suffer from hunger. The family ensures the deceased’s safe journey and final entry into heaven through the selection of proper foods. As a result, the departing spirit will be benevolent toward, and protective of, the family on Earth. (p. 10)

Vietnamese ancestral practice includes ancestral feasting, in which the dead are served first, and only once they have eaten (once half the incense on the altar has been burned) are the living allowed to consume what the dead have left (Avieli, 2009). West

African Traditional Religion (Ifa) suggests that after the construction of an ancestral shrine, a practitioner cook a meal for their ancestors by preparing foods that the particular ancestors enjoyed, but refrain from using salt, which hampers the ancestors from being fully present. The practitioner is not to eat the food, but occasionally may share a meal with them (Oshun, 2010, p. 11).

Observing dreams and portents. The literature documenting ancestral reverence practices agrees cross-culturally on the role of dreams in receiving messages from the ancestors (Berg, 2003). Dreams are believed to be used by ancestors as a way to communicate vital information, such as warnings, guidance, and healing information (Edwards, 2011; Thwala, Pillay, & Sargent, 2000). When things are not going well for an individual, or sometimes even when they are, the ancestors may make their presence known through dreams or somatic sensations (Buhrmann, 1989).

With specific reference to the South African context, dreams are regarded seriously as communication from the ancestors. Their significance is never in doubt. Once the dream message has been made clear and indicates what is required of the individual, the family or the clan, it must be acted on to prevent serious illness or misfortune. (Edwards, 2011)

After receiving such a dream, a ritual may then be necessary to re-establish the connection between the individual and their ancestors (Berg, 2003).

Different cultures have different means of dream interpretation. For example, among the Nguni people of Southern Africa, dreams often warn against misfortune. In the case of receiving such a dream, the dreamer will consult with a dream interpreter to understand the dream more fully. Elders and grandparents sometimes serve in this role

(Edwards et al., 2009). Even in the west, Jungian psychology also considers that our unconscious manifests dreams influenced by the dead which have important meaning for our lives, and can be analyzed (Jung, 1961).

Examples of culturally specific practices. Attitudes and practices about the dead vary greatly among indigenous cultures. Evans-Pritchard (1940) reported that among the Nuer people of Sudan, burial location of the dead is unimportant, whereas Firth (1936) reporting on the Tikopia people of Polynesia bury their dead beneath their living rooms. Likewise, ancestral reverence has countless derivations in practice. For example, the practice of sacrifice is one way of making offerings to ancestors. Sacrifice is considered holy and necessary in some cultures and profane in others (Jensen, 2001).

While the tenets of memory and communication remain intact throughout ancestrally-reverent cultures, the praxis is vastly different. For example, in modern pagan reconstructed religion, reciting the names of the beloved dead aloud during the holiday of Samhain (October 31) is important, (Magliocco, 2004; Starhawk & NightMare, 1997) while in Chinese ancestral reverence practices, the name of each dead relative is commemorated on an ancestral wooden tablet that is installed during ritual on the family ancestral altar (Aijmer, 1968).

What is Healing Within Cultures That Practice Ancestral Reverence?

Most cultures that practice ancestral reverence are indigenous. For the purposes of this literature review, the definition of indigenous comes from the International Labour Organization (ILO) convention in 1989, which defines such people as indigenous “whose ancestors have lived in the area before the settlement or the formation of the modern state borders” (Sarivaara, Maatta, & Uusiautti, 2013, p. 368).

Healing is a process of restoring or developing wellness where there has been injury, illness, or trauma. Indigenous healing includes physical, social, emotional, and spiritual levels, affecting individuals, groups, the surrounding environment, and the Earth. “Healing is an integrating and enhancing force, far more fundamental than simple curing or the application of medicine” (Edwards, 2011, p. 342).

McCabe (2008) noted that traditional indigenous healing, in the framework of Native traditional spirituality, is a process that incorporates many things. It is both complex and simple. It is a layered process and is, at the same time, a singular experience . . . Traditional Aboriginal healing is very much the telling of story. (p. 146)

Berg (2003) examines how indigenous healing is not done in isolation, but as part of a communal process. Communal healing processes can involve ritual, movement, rhythm, music, singing, dancing, prayer, and ritual (Edwards, 2011).

What is the Role of the Ancestors in Healing and Health?

Traditional cultures practicing ancestral reverence strongly link the role of the ancestors to both healing and illness. Edwards (2011) stated, “Spiritual healing through ancestors provides a sense of security, anchoring and confirming their descendants’ identity, sense of belonging and purpose in life.” Conversely, “Some illnesses are believed to be related to ancestral displeasure (abaphansi basifulathele)” (p. 342).

Tswana theologian and poet Gabriel M. Setiloane speaks for many Africans:

Ah, . . . yes . . . it is true. They are very present with us, The dead are not dead; they are ever near us; Approving and disapproving all our actions, They chide us when we go wrong, Bless us and sustain us for good deeds done, For kindness

shown, and strangers made to feel at home. They increase our store and punish our pride. (Fasholé-Luke, 1978, p. 407)

The concept that the ancestors can be appeased through communication is found in the literature. For example, for the Tumbuka people of South Africa, talking with ancestors is a standard practice.

Once misfortunes including illnesses caused by ancestors are known, the Tumbuka believe that traditional as well as western medicines are unnecessary. “Medication” consists of talking to the ancestors using established systems and addressing the reasons why the ancestors caused the misfortunes. (Munthali, 2006, p. 87)

The idea of illness as being caused by ancestors dissatisfied with their descendants’ actions is found across the literature, as well as the belief that ancestors possess the power to bestow and maintain health and wellness. (Edwards, 2011; Honwana, 1999; Munthali, 2006).

Ancestors can also be called on to support healing practices (Morgan & Reid, 2003). In the case of children who have witnessed or participated in acts of war in Angola, Botswana and Malawi, ancestral intervention is required in order to welcome child soldier’s home, before ritual purification, a necessary step before the family member’s reintegration into the community can occur (Honwana, 1999).

The performance of these rituals and the politics that precede them transcend the particular individual(s) concerned and involve the collective body. The family and friends are involved and the ancestral spirits are also implicated in mediating for a good outcome. The cases presented . . . show how the living have to acknowledge

the dead (the past) - both the ancestors and the dead of the war in order to carry on with their lives. The rituals are aimed at asking for forgiveness, appeasing the souls of the dead and preventing any future afflictions (retaliations) from the spirits of the dead, severing in this way the links with that “bad” past. (Honwana, 1999, p. 4)

Modalities That Utilize Ancestral Relating for Healing

Ancestral healing is becoming more prevalent in Western approaches to healing. Although many of the modalities that include ancestors as part of the healing process are still far outside the paradigm of Western medicine, they are growing in number and popularity as indicated by the hundreds of results in a web search for “ancestral healing.”

Shamanism. Shamanism is an ancient form of indigenous healing arising from Siberia and North Asia (Jakobsen, 1999). Historically, the definition of shamanism has been widely debated by scholars, but contemporary scholars agree that a shaman is a person of any gender who is in a role of community healer in traditional indigenous community, this person

has mastered spirits, who at will can introduce these spirits into themselves and use their power over the spirits in their own interests, particularly in helping other people, who suffer from the spirits; in such a capacity they may possess a complex of special methods for dealing with the spirits. (Širokogorov, 1999, p. 269)

Contemporary shamanism emphasizes that the relationship with spirits is not so much one of mastery or power over the spirits, but of collaboration (Jakobsen, 1999). Because of the nature of working with spirits and deities for the sake of healing,

shamanism inherently depends on relationships with ancestors (Gaillard, 2016). Martin Duffy (2017), director of the Irish Centre for Shamanic Studies, stated, “In shamanic traditions, it is very important that the patient is not just understood as an individual, they are connected to a network in their society as well as connected to their family lineage” (p. 8). This reflects what Berg (2003) writes about the communal nature of healing, saying that healing happens not just to individuals, but within the context of a community.

Shamanistic intervention can support the healing of transgenerational trauma (Gaillard, 2012, p. 11). Myron Eshowsky, shamanic practitioner and author was cited by Gaillard (2012) as saying:

A shamanic worldview informs us that the unhealed stories of the ancestral past which exist in the spiritual realms are very much alive as agents of illness and conflict with the community. Shamanic mediation of these unhealed traumas offers the living--and the dead-- an opportunity to shift these inherited legacies through ritual and healing on a communal scale. (p. 80)

Shamanism has been widely adopted by Western practitioners (Harner, 1999).

Family constellations. The Family Constellations work of Bert Hellinger is one method developed in the west through which embodied ancestral healing is practiced. Although Family Constellations practitioner Dan Booth Cohen (2009a) stated: “The approach explicitly diverges from much of mainstream cognitive, behavioral, and psychodynamic psychology, peer reviewed empirical studies confirm the efficacy of this method of healing with ancestors” (p. 226).

Family Constellations evolved out of the work of Moreno’s *Psychodrama* (Tourame, 1975), Boszormenyi-Nagy’s *Invisible Loyalties* (Parad, 1976), and Satir’s *Family Sculptures* (Banman, 1986). In Family Constellations, a client presents an issue within their family to the family constellation facilitator in an intake session. The family constellation is a single-session event to which others are invited, either known or unknown to the client.

Initially, other participants at the family constellation session are chosen by the facilitator to be representatives of family members involved with this client in this situation. Chosen representatives are unaware of the role they are representing. Representatives can be both living and deceased family members, as well as influences on the family system, such as “immigration.” Representatives are asked to choose a place to stand, in relation to the representative of the client. The facilitator of the process may wait in silence or begin to slowly work with the representatives by asking them to express what they are feeling or noticing.

Cohen (2006) wrote:

At other times, the facilitator behaves more like a leader, intervening to move representatives, suggesting sentences to be spoken aloud, and offering insights

and guidance. By working in this manner, a “healing movement” is generally reached, and the roles of the representatives are made known to all. (p.42)

Family Constellations utilized a simple set of principles: belonging, order, and balance. According to the method, all family members, even those who were forgotten, excommunicated, not discussed, aborted, murdered etc. belong to the family system, and must be acknowledged for wellness to be restored. Order of birth is very important and also must be acknowledged. Lastly, balance must be restored for healing to occur; including acknowledgment between victim and perpetrator of what happened. Bert Hellinger writes that there is reciprocal healing between the living and the deceased: “When we do a Constellation . . . there is also an effect on the dead. They can more easily find their peace” (Hellinger, 2003 p. 147). Per Family Constellator Leslie Nimis (n.d.), “The formerly unpeaceful dead find peace through the work of the constellation, this isn’t just a story—now these dead ones know peace” (p. 1).

Although empirically supported (Weinhold et al., 2013), there is great controversy both within and without the *Family Constellation* modality. On his website “The Skeptic’s Dictionary” where he systematically debunks fake science, Robert Todd Carroll (2015) questioned the efficacy of *Family Constellations*, saying,

Since the ancestor is long dead and the beliefs impossible to verify, it’s obvious that truth is irrelevant to successful therapy. What matters is not what actually happened to anyone, but what the client agrees to believe happened and what the client agrees to believe is now the best way to think and feel about it. (para 20)

Within the practitioner community, a schism happened in 2004, with many practitioners signing a declaration officially separating themselves from Bert Hellinger,

due to the increasingly controversial nature of some of his assertions and methodology (Nimis, 2005). They felt he had distanced himself from systemic therapy (another name for *Family Constellations*), would not clarify concerns in plain language, and had made dubious statements about the nature of incest and the entanglement created between the victim and perpetrator. At this time, there were also enough practitioners of the modality that students felt they had other, better role models to follow (Nimis, 2005).

In conclusion, *Family Constellations* is one modality that utilizes connecting with ancestors in service to healing. The evidence on the efficacy is mixed, and there is controversy within the *Family Constellations* community about the integrity of the founder.

An Important Voice in the Field of Ancestral Healing

While shamanism and *Family Constellations* are perhaps the best-known modalities to engage ancestors for the sake of healing, there are also countless practitioners of varying systems, religions, training, and background who utilize ancestors as a resource to support their clients in healing (Easter 2016; Foor, 2017; Gaillard, 2012; Wolynn, 2017). Of note, the Ancestral Lineage Healing work of Dr. Daniel Foor (2017) in the United States is an approach to connecting with ancestors for the sake of healing transgenerational trauma. The method relies on meditative trance to create an internal connection with one's well and bright ancestors and work transpersonally with ancestral guides to bring healing down through blood lineages (Foor, 2017). There is no clinical research as of yet about the efficacy of this approach.

This concludes the literature review section relating to ancestors and ancestral healing. In summary, this section began by investigating a series of questions, "What are

ancestors?” and “How does one become an ancestor?” and “Are ancestors real?” It then continued by presenting the information on types of ancestors, differentiating between the well and unwell dead. Next, it explored the level of impact of ancestors, the universality of ancestors and cross-cultural tenets of ancestor reverence. The role of memory was examined, as well as the reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead, and communication with ancestors. Next, the literature review investigated cross-cultural ancestral reverence practices, including ritual and ceremony, altars, offerings, and the observation of dreams and portents. Several examples of culturally specific practices were given. The literature review then turned toward healing, and what it is in cultures that practice ancestral reverence, the role of the ancestors in health and healing, and modalities like shamanism and Family Constellations that use ancestral relating for healing. Finally, the work of Dr. Daniel Foor (2017) and Ancestral Lineage Healing was presented.

Sexual Wellness

This section of the literature review investigates sexual wellness. Beginning with a definition of sexual health, it continues by investigating the research on sexual satisfaction, and the impact of sexual satisfaction on overall well-being.

There is a distinction between sex, sexual health, and sexuality (WHO, n.d., p. 1). According to the current working definition, sexual health is:

a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual

experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled. (WHO, n.d., p. 1)

Some research indicates a relationship between good sexual functioning and high sexual satisfaction (Henderson et al., 2009), while other research indicates sexual satisfaction is only partially explained by sexual function (Dundon & Rellini, 2010).

Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual satisfaction is a vital part of sexual health, and sexual health is considered a right by the WHO (Higgins, Mullinax, Trussell, Davidson, & Moore, 2011; Pascoal, Narciso, & Pereira, 2014; World Association for Sexual Health, 2014; WHO, n.d.). Sexual satisfaction is considered by relationship researchers as a “barometer for the quality of a relationship” (Sprecher & Cate, 2004, p. 241). The study of sexual satisfaction is quite new and still developing (McClelland, 2010; Rosen & Bachman, 2008) so a definitive field-wide academic working definition is still being debated.

There are several definitions of sexual satisfaction. Lawrance and Byers (1995) proposed one of the more accepted definitions of sexual satisfaction as, “an affective response arising from one’s subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one’s sexual relationship” (p. 268). Sexual satisfaction is also defined as the last stage of the human sexual response cycle (Basson, 2001). The human sexual response cycle is theorized by William Masters and Virginia Johnson (2010) in their book, which was originally published in 1966, *Human Sexual Response*. The model they propose is a four-stage model of physiological response to sexual stimulation. The stages,

in order, are excitement phase, plateau phase, orgasmic phase, and resolution phase. In this model, sexual satisfaction occurs in the resolution phase.

In their “Systemic Review of Sexual Satisfaction” researchers Sánchez-Fuentes, Santos-Iglesias, and Sierra (2014) reviewed the main findings of 197 scientific papers published between 1979 and 2012 in which sexual satisfaction was the dependent variable. Their review of literature demonstrated both the importance and intricacies of sexual satisfaction, finding that it is a crucial component for one’s sexual health and overall well-being. They also discern a lack of theoretical models that combine the elements in order to define sexual satisfaction (Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2014).

Research undertaken by psychology and sexuality researchers Pascoal et al. (2014) provided a thematic analysis of lay people’s definitions of sexual satisfaction. In their qualitative study analyzing the responses of 449 women and 311 men to the question “How would you define sexual satisfaction?” they found two main themes that define sexual satisfaction: personal sexual well-being and dyadic processes. Personal sexual well-being included themes of pleasure, positive feelings, desire, orgasm, sexual openness and arousal. Dyadic processes included themes of expression of feelings, romance, mutuality, creativity, acting out desires, and frequency. Their findings indicate that, “The vast majority of the current participants’ sexual satisfaction definitions focused on the positive aspects of sexuality (e.g., pleasure, well-being); in other words, they focused on rewards rather than on the absence of negative aspects or sexual costs” (Pascoal et al., 2013, p. 6).

Taking into account the recent interest in the field of sexual satisfaction and wellness, the research indicates that sexual satisfaction is a key factor supporting an individual's overall well-being and quality of life (Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2014).

Impact of Sexual Satisfaction on Overall Well-Being

Many studies have associated sexual satisfaction with greater states of wellness. For example, Dundon and Rellini (2010) found greater sense of overall well-being associated with sexual satisfaction. Scott, Sandberg, Harper, and Miller (2012) found better state of physical and psychological health and researchers Davison, Bell, LaChina, Holden, and Davis (2009) found a higher quality of life associated with high sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction, including pleasure, was found to be strongly associated with general health, relationships, and other aspects of wellbeing (Coveney & Bunton, 2003; Dean et al., 2013, McClelland, 2010). Evidence is emerging supporting the beneficial effects women's sexual satisfaction have on well-being and interpersonal relationships (Laumann et al., 2006; Lindau et al., 2007).

Planned Parenthood and the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality (2003) published "The Health Benefits of Sexual Expression." This overview of almost 100 of studies and ranging from 1976-2005 examined some of the published findings suggesting positive benefits of sexual expression on emotional and physical health. Their overview clearly associated and enumerated potential benefits, while also drawing attention to the need for more extensive rigorous inquiry. Because of the breadth of this study and the weight of the sheer quantity of the research reviewed, the benefits highlighted by the review are listed here. Some of the physical benefits the paper includes are longevity, prevention of heart disease, stroke, Type-2 diabetes, breast cancer, prostate cancer, and

immunity. In terms of general well-being; sleep, youthfulness, and fitness and exercise are highlighted. In terms of benefits to sexual and reproductive health; endometriosis, effects on fertility, menstrual cycle regularity, relief of menstrual cramps, prolonged sexual life, and prevention of age-related sexual dysfunction are included. In terms of pain management and relaxation, some research indicates sexual expression is helpful with migraines and muscle relaxation. In terms of psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual health, growing research suggests benefit to quality of life, depression, psychiatric illness, suicidal ideation, violence, stress, self-esteem, intimacy, social health, and spirituality (Planned Parenthood, 2007). This far reaching review clearly shows the importance of sexual wellness on overall human well-being.

This concludes the section of the literature review exploring sexual wellness. In summary, this section began with a definition of sexual health, and continued by examining the research on sexual satisfaction, and the impact of sexual satisfaction on overall well-being.

This concludes the literature review. In summary, this literature review has thoroughly examined the relevant literature relating to the research questions informing this dissertation: Can ancestral relating support the development of sexual wellness? If so, what are effective principles for doing so?

As part of the research of this dissertation project, the academic and non-academic research in the fields of trauma, transgenerational trauma, sexual violence, healing from sexual trauma, ancestors, and sexual wellness have been examined. Important voices in the field have been noted. Controversies in the respective fields have been considered, and problems in the research have been also noted.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Approach

The structure of this research relied upon semi-structured in-depth interviews, conducted over a period of six months. The research explored ancestral reverence practices and the development of sexual wellness, and what relationship, if any, exists between the two. Furthermore, the research asked present-day people about their ancestral practices and what effects those practices had on their sexuality. The methodology was qualitative and exploratory, using a Grounded Theory approach.

As an exploratory method, grounded theory is particularly well suited for investigating social processes that have attracted little prior research attention, where the previous research is lacking in breadth and/or depth, or where a new point of view on familiar topics appears promising. (Milliken, 2010, pp. 549–554)

Qualitative research, specifically interviews, were chosen as the method of research, primarily because of the lack of expository references on this topic, the purpose of the research being to determine what the effective principles are, as opposed to testing existing principles (Bowen, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because there is not an existing body of research about this topic, it meant that each subject would reflect on the topic with unique language specific to their experience, and the fullness of their experience would be better captured in an interview as opposed to a survey or questionnaire (Call-Cummings, 2016). In Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) guide to the craft of qualitative research interviewing, they stated "Within education and the health

sciences, qualitative interviews have been a common research method for decades . . . throughout the history of psychology have been a key method for producing scientific and professional knowledge” (p. 9).

There are many examples of qualitative interview as an effective method of significantly adding to psychological knowledge. Freud’s (1963) psychoanalytic theory was founded in large part upon interviewing his patients. The theory of child development of Jean Piaget (1930) is based upon his research interviewing children in natural settings. Early marketing researcher Dichter (1960) conducted more than 100 interviews in 1939 to explore psychological motivations for purchasing a car. He found that consumers were interested in more than just the technical considerations of a car. This research finding is a basic tenet of current marketing principles (Dichter, 1960).

In addition to the lack of research on this topic, another important consideration was to approach subjects with great care. In researching the development of sexual wellness, there is an implication that sexual wellness needs to be developed. Often, subjects who met the criteria for interviewees had a background of personal sexual trauma, or a familial history of sexual trauma. In order to approach the interview with the intent to do no harm, the creation of a trauma-informed approach to research methodology was necessary. Non-standardized interviewing techniques were utilized. This means that there were a series of seed questions, and the researcher used their professional capacity as a trauma-informed practitioner to make decisions in the moment about which questions to pursue, that were likely to access salient information without inducing trauma states.

Maxine Harris and Roger Fallot (2001) describe trauma-informed services as a “system whose primary mission is altered by virtue of knowledge about trauma and the impact it has on the lives of consumers receiving services” (p. 6) The principles developed for trauma-informed interview-based inquiry research methods are based on principles for trauma-informed care developed by Guarino, Soares Konnath, Clevril, and Bassuk (2009). The trauma-informed principles utilized in the interviewing process are: understanding trauma and its impact, promoting safety, supporting interviewee choice, and holding awareness of power dynamics in the interview process (Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center, n.d.).

Qualitative research using interviews has been used for other studies examining spirituality (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006). Previous studies examining a relationship between ancestors and wellness have also relied on interview as a research methodology (Bogopa, 2010). Initially, the thought was to develop a set of principles and then test them for efficacy, but after speaking with dissertation advisor Dr. Foor, the conclusion was reached that the research would be better served by listening deeply to people who already had practices that connected them with their ancestors and supported their sexual wellness. By using in-depth interviews as the data collection tool, this researcher was able to approach the research with an open mind about what might work, instead of testing personally developed material, which would create bias as a researcher.

There was some initial difficulty encountered with interview as a method of data collection. Skill as an interviewer increased over time, as this researcher learned to follow salient threads of information. This meant that in earlier interviews the technique was less developed, and important threads of conversation may not have been pursued with

follow-up questions. Also, decisions within the interview about which threads to pursue influenced the information collected.

Overall, the decision to collect data via personal interviews as opposed to survey or written form generated data that was rich and culturally specific to the interviewee. Topics could emerge in conversation that would not have been asked about in other research methods and proved to be valuable to the research (Olesen, 2007). The various ways each participant interpreted the questions meant that the information they contributed was particular to their own understanding of the question and varied widely.

Research Design

The research was designed to do two things. First, the research sought to explore if a connection between practices of ancestral reverence and the development of personal sexual wellness exists for some people. Second, if it was determined that there was a correlation, to determine a cross-cultural, non-dogmatic set of effective principles that could support the development of sexual wellness. The impetus for these questions arose from this researcher's clinical practice of somatic sex therapy, as well as personal development of sexual wellness and healing from sexual trauma.

In clinical practice, this researcher works effectively with clients with extensive sexual trauma. In some cases, a pattern emerged. Recovery from sexual trauma seemed impeded in certain clients, and the common thread was that those clients came from families in which there was repeated sexual trauma. Clients would speak about their mother's sexual trauma, and their grandmother's. Although those clients would achieve a certain level of recovery and even sexual wellness, it was noticed that they often made

choices that recreated sexual trauma, or that they felt uncomfortable with developing too much sexual wellness, because it violated their loyalty to their family.

Personally, this researcher has explored a connection between the sexual trauma in the family of origin and personal sexual trauma. It seems that the family of this researcher is an example of intergenerational trauma transmission. As a clinician, this researcher became interested in developing tools that could address intergenerational sexual trauma, as none were initially found in attempted research. Motivation for this research was the creation of transpersonal tools, which somatic practitioners could use to support their clients in healing from sexual trauma, and help families heal from intergenerational trauma, ultimately supporting sexual wellness in the world at large. This researcher had a sense that to go forward the answers might be in the past, in more indigenous and earth-based practices of ancestral relationship.

The research involved a designing a study to interview subjects who self-identified as having ancestral relationships as well as having worked to develop their own sexual wellness, and who identified a relationship between the two. Out of interest, it was important to interview subjects from different cultures and religious traditions to investigate if there were cross-cultural tenets that could be established.

The interview questions were designed as guides, with the desire being to create a supported, trauma-informed interview space that allowed subjects to explore the ideas presented in the questions, perhaps for the first time out loud. The intent was to interview subjects who had wisdom to share on this topic, which translated to most interview subjects being over age 45. Because of the sensitive nature of the questions, it was important to approach the interviews with cultural sensitivity, and an attitude of humility.

In the role as the interviewer, this researcher sought both to present as a non-biased presence, as well as to cultivate the environmental tone of sitting at the feet of the elders, as they generously shared what they had learned.

The interview questions were also designed to be an iterative process; they would evolve as the interview series progressed. The process was designed with the awareness that necessary interview skills would be developed throughout the process; deep listening and attentive reflection and follow up, artful questioning, and discernment in the moment about where to go and what threads to follow. Also, it is important to acknowledge that as a therapist, this is a skill set this researcher already implements in the professional therapy setting. While there was a clear distinction made between the roles of therapist and interviewer, some of the above-mentioned skills were transferable, and likely influenced the collection of data.

Because the research was designed to be an iterative process, through the course of the interviews, it became clear that some subjects possessed both personal experience about the interview topics, as well as professional and/or clinical opinion and thought. Therefore, when relevant, this researcher pursued interview comments that also came from the subject's professional area of expertise.

In-depth interviews were conducted in person, or via video conferencing technology. They were video recorded when they were conducted via conferencing technology, and audio recorded on two devices while in person. Interviews were generally one- to two-hours long. Interviews were conducted between October 2016 and May 2017. Interviews were transcribed, and then transcripts were double-checked for

accuracy. After the interviews were complete, the transcriptions were analyzed for themes.

Research Hypothesis

The research questions informing this project are: Can ancestral reverence practices support the development of sexual wellness? And, if so, what are effective principles for working with ancestors that support the development of sexual wellness?

Subjects

The sample was purposive/purposeful and carefully selected based on the knowledge being sought (Creswell, 1998, p. 62). Therefore, a profile of the ideal candidate to interview was initially developed, as follows:

- Are connected with their ancestors (biological or lineage)
- Identifies as someone who works/or has worked to recover from sexual wounding, and to develop sexual wellness
- Has experienced a connection between their ancestor relating and their sexual wellness
- Or has worked to interrupt and/or resolve sexual trauma in their lineage
- Can articulate what has worked for them, in terms of ancestor relationships supporting sexual wellness
- Understands their experience through a somatic lens

A set of screening questions was then developed, that was included in the introductory email.

- Do you or have you worked to recover from sexual wounding?
- Do you or have you worked to develop your sexual wellness?

- Are you connected with your ancestors?
- Is your work with your ancestors connected to your sexual wellness practices in any way?

The subjects in this study were chosen because they met the four criteria for participation. One, they self-identified as already having some sort of connection with their ancestors. Two, they self-identified as having done work to develop personal sexual wellness. Three, they self-identified as having experienced sexual wounding of some sort. And four, they believed that there was a correlation between their ancestral connections and their development of sexual wellness.

Because of the sensitive nature of this research study, a list of potential candidates who might be qualified candidates was brainstormed with the support of the dissertation advisors. From that list, individual subjects were approached. The common demographic of this population was age: all subjects were above age 33; most were above age 50. Subjects were from a wide variety of religious and spiritual backgrounds and practices. Subjects were somewhat geographically diverse; most subjects were in the United States, and several were in the United Kingdom. Subjects were also from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Regarding the number of participants, Kvale (1996) counseled the obvious: “Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know” (p. 101). Merriam (2001) likewise stated, “What is needed is an adequate number of participants, sites, or activities to answer the question posed at the beginning of the study” (p. 64). For the purposes of this research study, 16 full-length interviews were conducted, and an anonymous written survey (described below) was conducted that collected seven results.

The amount of data gathered from this number of participants was appropriate to address the research questions.

Instrumentation

For this research, the interview protocol (see Appendix B) was the main tool used. Because there were no existing test or other assessment techniques, the research warranted the creation of interview questions. The interview protocol was designed to be iterative in design. As the interviews progressed, it became clearer how to frame each question to elicit deep and meaningful results. For example, initially there was a question that asked, “Would you give an overview of the development of your sexual wellness?” and early on it became obvious that the information the research was seeking to elicit was found in questions that integrated ancestral practices. That question evolved into “Can you tell me about a time your ancestors supported your sexual wellness?” The initial question “Are there specific practices that you have found helpful?” evolved into “What are effective practices that you would suggest to someone who wanted to work with ancestors to support sexual healing?” After several subjects spontaneously offered cautionary notes, it became apparent that the question “Any dangers or taboos?” was important to include in every interview.

Data Collection

Data was first collected from research participants through interviews. After the completion of 16 full-length interviews, further data was collected in a separate written survey consisting of anonymous participants. The reason for collecting data using two different methodologies was to “triangulate” the data. “Methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative methods to study the program.

For example, results from surveys, focus groups, and interviews could be compared to see if similar results are being found. If the conclusions from each of the methods are the same, then validity is established” (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011, p. 2).

The interview process began with potential research participants first contacted with an email (see Appendix C) describing the nature of the intended research and what participation would entail. If a potential subject responded with interest, any questions they may have had were answered, and a time for the interview was scheduled, either via the online video conferencing platform, or in-person at a location of the subject’s choosing. Subjects were then sent an email confirming the interview date and time, with the informed consent form attached, and asked to read this and reply with any questions. If they were willing to proceed, there were asked to email the signed consent form to the researcher.

Interviews were semi-structured, roughly following the interview protocol (see Appendix D). Interviews lasted between one and hours each. All of the interviews were audiotaped and/or videotaped on two separate devices, with the consent of participants. Interviews were then transcribed for analysis. At the beginning of each interview, the purpose of the research was reviewed with the subject, the informed consent policy was looked over and permission for recording was confirmed. Participants were also encouraged to ask questions about the research. During the interviews, choices had to be made about which lines of inquiry to pursue. The decision-making process was generally informed by the specific expertise and cultural background of the subject. In some cases, family history stories seemed relevant and yielded salient information, and in other cases, there was gentle redirection to the interview topic at hand.

At the end of each interview, participants were thanked, and asked “Is there anyone else you think I should speak with?” which several times led to an introduction and subsequent interview with someone not on my original list. Participants received a follow up with a thank you email in the next several days, in which they were reminded that they would receive an email copy of their interview transcript for their review in the next few weeks. After transcription of the interview was complete, research participants were emailed the transcript of their interview and asked to check it for correctness. Any changes were noted and returned and incorporated in the body of data.

After the completion of the interview process, it was important to assess if the data would be similar if collected in a different form than the in-person interviews. The online survey was created. An abbreviated version of the questions used in interviews were employed in the online survey. The questions were:

1. What connection do you or have you experienced between ancestors and sexual wellness? Or in other words, how have the ancestors supported you in recovering from harm/developing sexual wellness?
2. Please describe any erotic experiences you have had that include ancestral consciousness or ancestors in some way?
3. Do you have any practices/techniques in working with ancestors around sexuality? Or, do you have any erotic practices in working with your ancestors?
4. What about the ancestors is helpful sexually?
5. Anything else I should know about sex and ancestors, or anything you would like to share?

Participants for the survey were solicited through a post on several Facebook groups that discuss ancestors. In the post, the nature of the research was explained, and a link was given to an online survey. On the survey form itself was another description of the research and information on how to contact me if necessary. Survey participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary, and they were free to answer or not answer any questions. They were also told their identity would be protected. Surveys were conducted over the period of one-month from May 2017 to June 2017 and relied on electronic form submission.

Data Analysis

The purpose of a qualitative method is understanding and interpreting what people's experiences mean. Grounded theory was the methodology chosen to analyze and interpret the research data. Grounded theory produces a model which is derived inductively, after systematically examining the data findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The data analysis consisted of several phases. There was a pre-analysis phase, which consisted of an initial reading of all transcripts and survey data, during which highlighting was done on the original printed transcripts of any points of interest or note. This was conducted to give an overview of the research data.

Phase two of the data analysis consisted of uploading all of the interview transcripts into NVivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Nvivo was chosen as the data analysis software because of its reputation in effectively assisting grounded theory methodology.

NVivo can work well with most research designs and analytical approaches . . .

NVivo has little or no influence on the design of the research . . . the presence of

nodes in NVivo makes it more compatible with grounded theory and thematic analysis approaches. Moreover, the nodes provide a simple to work with structure for creating codes and discovering themes. (Zamawe, 2015, p. 14)

There is a researcher learning curve in using Nvivo effectively to analyze data. In order to learn to use Nvivo, this researcher participated in a week-long online training offered through Nvivo, during which a sample data analysis project was completed. This training was completed prior to using Nvivo to analyze the research data.

Nvivo utilizes the term “nodes” to distinguish analysis categories. Prior to analyzing the interview data using Nvivo, several very general initial nodes were established, including Ancestors, Trauma, and Sexual Wellness. These general themes were considered the Descriptive Categories. These descriptive categories were formulated from the research questions, as well as the pre-analysis reading of each interview.

During this phase of the data analysis, each interview was then analyzed individually. Iterative codification was performed individually on each interview. “To code, data are broken down, compared, and then placed in a category. Similar data are placed in similar categories, and different data creates new categories” (Walker & Myrick, 2006). This made possible the creation of categories and subcategories, which were derived from the interview content. This phase established the conceptual categories. Initially, categories were created based on themes and topics that related to the interview questions and research questions. However, it became necessary to also code data that did not directly respond to these questions, based on the repetition of that data across more than one interview. For example, some of the conceptual categories

under the descriptive category of ancestors included: ancestral consciousness, ancestral practices, and what are ancestors.

In the third phase of the data analysis, the categories, and subcategories that had been created during the coding were considered, and themselves sorted and reorganized to best address the research questions. Through this phase of the analysis, selective coding reordered the categories from the perspective of the core phenomena participants reported in response to the questions, thereby establishing theoretical categories. For example, these included: connection between sexuality and ancestors, choosing to heal sexuality with ancestors, and effective principles for healing sexuality with ancestors. Through this systematic procedure, the data were then interpreted into findings (this is what people said), and the findings interpreted into results (this is what is meant, based on what people said).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Summary

This chapter presents the findings of this research. In short, the research data strongly indicates two main findings. First, research subjects experienced a connection between their own sexuality and that of their ancestors', in both positive and negative impacts. Second, research participants experienced ancestral relating as a resource that helped them develop personal sexual wellness. A presentation of the practices and precautions gathered from the data is included as part of the findings.

Subjects

For the purposes of this research, data was gathered from live interviews and from anonymous written surveys. 16 subjects were interviewed, and seven subjects participated in a written, online anonymous survey. Subjects who participated in the interview part of the study came from a wide variety of demographic backgrounds. Of the 16 interview subjects, all but one resided in North America at the time of the interview. Nine identify as female, four as male, and three as gender non-conforming. The range of ages was between 33 and 75 years. Demographic information was not collected from online survey participants.

A wide range of religious and spiritual traditions were represented, including Jewish, Taoist, Pagan, Traditional West African Religion (Ifa), and shamanistic. Subjects from a wide variety of ancestral backgrounds participated as well, including European-American, African-American, Chinese-American, and French. Two participants were

immigrants to the United States. Two participants had grown up in families that practice ancestral reverence as a spiritual tradition.

Because the parameters for research interview participants clearly indicated the criteria for participation, all participants in the research study identified as having done work to develop sexual wellness after sexual wounding. All participants identified as having a relationship of some sort with their ancestors. All interview participants also felt there was a connection between the development of sexual wellness and their ancestral relations. Because the written survey participants were anonymous, it is impossible to verify if they met the criteria that were set for the live interview participants. However, the data gathered from the anonymous survey closely corroborated the data gathered from the research interviews.

Hypothesis/Questions

The research questions informing this project were:

Can ancestral relating support the resolution of sexual trauma and the development of sexual wellness? At the heart of this query is this question: Can ancestral relating be a support in the healing of transgenerational sexual trauma?

Results

The research was conducted to explore the intersection of ancestral reverence and sexual wounding and wellness. In order to contextualize these connections, an exploration of each research participant's individual practices of ancestral reverence was initially conducted. From these practices emerged the more specific data regarding ancestral reverence and sexuality. It was important to contextualize the understanding of how ancestral reverence practices and healing with ancestors is part of participants'

experience in general, before delving into the findings concerning ancestors and the erotic. It is important to name that the findings enumerated here are culled from both the interviews and written surveys completed in the data collection process. The data from both is woven throughout this section. There were no significant differences found in the data between the interviews and the survey. The findings of each add credence to each other.

Ancestral Relating

The initial question of each interview was the same: “How do you relate to your ancestors?” Participants’ responses varied based on their spiritual tradition, ancestral background, amount of practice, and worldview or cosmology.

One important factor was the spiritual tradition of the interview subject. Because the spiritual backgrounds were different amongst the research subjects, their answers were obviously filtered through their specific belief systems.

For example, one Pagan respondent said,

I came to a relationship with my ancestors through my practice of witchcraft and understanding that the power is in the blood. That I am an extension of my ancestors in the world . . . That spiritual connection is strong just for that reason and because I’m their continuation in the world, they have a vested interest in my well-being. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Whereas another participant discussed ancestors through a Jewish lens. She reported,

So, I came home to Judaism because people I love really were like “stop connecting with ancestors that aren’t your own, and start connecting with your own ancestors.” And I was so fucking resistant to that. I had no desire to be

working within the tradition of my roots . . . I feel like as I worked through my healing in relation to ancestor and tradition, I also worked through aversion and frustration and challenge with Jews. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Certain spiritual traditions have certain times of year when ancestral reverence is more important. For example, Samhain is the name for the secular holiday of Halloween on October 31, and it is considered by many pagans as a time of year when ancestral communication is more possible. For example, one participant conveyed,

Well, I have a fair amount of ancestor veneration practice in my life. We have an ancestor altar in the house. We just got done putting it back in its usual place because at Samhain the ancestors come out and take over the living room. I have a cabinet that was made by my great-grandaunt, which is one of those stories I've always been curious about like, how is she a woodworker? This is beautiful cabinet in my living room and it has all of my skull tchotchkes, and so we make this giant altar and put all the photos there, and we make spirit plates and feed the ancestors and give them coffee. (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016)

This contrasts with the time of year important for Chinese ancestral reverence practice. One of the research participants of Chinese ancestry remarked,

I'm going to Hong Kong and China in a week. I wanted to go visit my dad's ancestral home, and my ancestor's tombs. And my mom was like "You can't do that. You can't just go, the time to go is in April." During Ching Ming, which is

called the time when you go and sweep the tombs. (Research participant #7, interview, September 16, 2016)

Another factor that influenced how subjects relate with their ancestors is the amount of time they reported as having practiced. For example, one participant who had been practicing ancestral reverence for many years described how her practice has changed over time. She explained,

I've been doing this ancestral work for 30 years now. It's varied over time. There are times when they've been very present, they felt like they were really right there, but I needed a lot of hand-holding, that I needed a lot of help. At this point, I just know they're with me. It's not something I have to really work to engage with all that much, just I'm not separate from them so much. (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017)

With practice over time, some participants reported a change in their understanding of ancestors. For example, another participant with a very regular ancestral reverence practice shared,

I will say my definition of ancestors is evolving. Where I started with it was ancestors are all of those who caused there to be us. Blood lineage and also the people who shaped us culturally, artistically, spiritually: our spiritual predecessors. My sense is evolving now to understand that I see ancestor as an archetypal role that is part of an intact human community. That a community that does not include the ancestors in some form isn't complete. (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016)

Embodied Ancestral Knowing

Universally, research participants spoke to how they experienced their ancestors through their senses, as is encompassed by this report from one participant, “I do hear them, and I see them and feel them.” The research data indicated that participants connect through their senses with ancestors in a variety of ways, including seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing or internal felt sense. The majority of subjects reported feeling (meaning internal somatic experiences) as a primary modality for experiencing ancestors. An abundance of research subjects’ own words included in this section, for the sake of accurately representing the wide range of experiences reported.

When asked about how people can experience their own ancestors, one priestess of Ifa expressed,

For each person, it’s an individual thing what they feel, and I think and feel that when spirit comes to you or comes close to you, it’s a different process. It’s a different process when the ancestors come for me as opposed to when spirit comes through one of the orations. It’s different. It’s a different energy. I don’t know exactly how to put that into words. It’s just different, and you can feel it and you see differently. You may even hear things differently because of their presence. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Blood and Ancestors in Me

The importance of recognizing blood as a physical tie to ancestors was discussed by research participants. The concept that the ancestors exist inside of the descendant was shared by every research subject in some way. Feeling the connection to the ancestors, either through attention to the physical blood or a more metaphorical understanding of

blood and the existence of ancestors in one's body was important to research subjects, often for the sake of their healing. For example, one subject communicated, "It can be healing to feel that visceral blood connection back to people that have been living on the earth for a long time" (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017).

The power of blood bestowing a sense of belonging to a lineage that wants wellness to be established was shared by a research subject who identifies as a witch and has strong personal beliefs about the power of blood. He recounted,

I came to a relationship with my ancestors through my practice of witchcraft and understanding that the power is in the blood. That I am an extension of my ancestors in the world. Magical traditions all over the world, blood is a very powerful link. Someone's blood is a very powerful to their being. Blood ancestors are beings who are spirits in the other world that the actual blood connection allows. That spiritual connection is strong just for that reason and because I'm their continuation in the world, they have a vested interest in my well-being.

(Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Knowing the ancestors through feeling them inside was shared by one research subject who said, "We've absorbed it. It's inside of us. These people are inside of us. And even if we don't know details, we have a felt sense" (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017).

Awareness of ancestors as an intimate, internal part of the healing experience was named by one participant who remembered, "When I first started [doing healing work] I thought it was just me and my interests. But not anymore. I am carrying my ancestors in

me. They have imprinted themselves on me” (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

Feeling

Many participants discussed feeling the presence of their ancestors. There were direct somatic reports, as well as descriptions of when the ancestors were felt more strongly. One participant discussed her experience of taking part in an ancestor ritual, where she had the palpable experience of feeling the ancestors arrive.

You can be somewhere, and you know that the ancestors are there, and you can feel it. As a spiritual person, who can be in contact with the spiritual side, you can feel them, and they can come and just be there. Okay? One of the things that was amazing to me, I went to an ancestor celebration where the facilitator has an ancestor that comes and speaks to her, and it came down on her and it spoke through her, and when I watched it, I knew it was real because it was a different energy in the space. I sat there, and the hairs on my arms stood up and everything and I said, “Oh, this is real.” You can feel it on the inside. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

The ways research subjects describe feeling the presence of their ancestors were often quite explicit. One participant offered,

There’s like a tingly sensation on my skin. There is an energetic burst often like originating in the solar plexus that comes up through. There’s often like a shift in temperature for me, usually a warmer temperature. Or I just feel like everything feels connected. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Another participant who works somatically discussed his experiences of emotions combined with felt sense,

I feel a fluttering in my heart. Because I'm a somatic person and a body worker, I have to go where my body tells me to go. It makes me teary. It makes me emotional to think about my ancestors, and how I carry that with me, and how they are a part of me. In spirit, and in messages, and in knowing. I am who I am as a result of how I've lived my 365 days a year for 58 years, but more than that, I came into this world a baby, filled with energy from my ancestors. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

The felt sense of knowing ancestors was named by a participant as happening when artistic inspiration was present. He shared,

I think one whole realm of where I use the language of the ancestors, but I don't really know what's happening, is a sense of feeling something between fate or forces that seem generated not just by me or my community or something I can witness. Where power or force or inspiration seem generated externally or internally in ways that seem less obvious, I often think is connected to ancestors. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Hearing

Several interview subjects reported hearing their ancestors, albeit not with their physical ears. For example, one participant discussed an experience she had while on pilgrimage in her ancestral homeland:

How I could feel their presence? I could hear them singing at some point. There is a hill that I climbed up and I could hear them calling the cattle. There are

moments where I can really sense and feel that they were with me . . . when I'm open to that kind of experience, I can feel them going through. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Hearing was clearly in the perception of the person reporting the experience, and participants who reported hearing their ancestors were clear that others could not hear what they were hearing while it happened. One participant explained, "When I am particularly open, I hear the voices – and when I say 'hear voices' I am not audiosentient. I don't actually hear them, but the words are there. I hear them, I perceive them" (Research participant #14, interview, April 21, 2017).

Seeing

Several participants mentioned seeing ancestors. During one interview, the research participant was asked a question, and wished to consult with her own ancestors about the answer. She asked for a moment to close her eyes, and explained, "I'm trying to tap in and see what they have to say" (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017).

Seeing ancestors was similar in participant descriptions to hearing ancestors. The research did not reflect instances of subjects seeing ancestors in their proximity with their physical eyes. Seeing seemed to refer to an internal experience of perhaps seeing in the mind's eye, or perhaps with the heart. When queried on seeing ancestors, one participant responded, "There's the eyes of the heart that have to be opened" Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016).

It is worthwhile to note that some participants focused in on one particular sense, while others had experiences with various senses. While the research data is of a small

sample size and no absolute conclusions can be drawn, the research did display a greater propensity of participants to experience their ancestors through feeling.

Specific Ancestral Reverence Practices

When participants talked about their practices, there were several time and sequence observations noted. For the sake of presenting a comprehensive explanation in an ordered manner, the practices have been delineated into two categories evident in subject interviews. Practices that occurred before actual ancestral connection or “Pre-connection practices,” and ancestral reverence connection practices themselves.

Subjects commonly reported several practices that they find important prior to establishing connection with ancestors, including important safety protocols and understandings that must frame ancestral relating. Wherever possible, practices will be reported using the subjects’ own words. It is important that the practices described here have been compiled from the research reports and organized for ease of understanding by the reader, the research participants did not each report completing each practice or all the practices.

Grounding practice. Many research participants noted the importance they feel about grounding as a foundational practice to connecting with ancestors. For the sake of defining the practice, meditation teacher Julia Rymut (2016), wrote, “Grounding is a metaphoric term for calming your mind and becoming aware of the present moment. It can be divided into two broad categories--connecting yourself to the earth and connecting yourself with your body” (para. 9).

For example, one participant explained during the interview,

My feet get me very grounded, and when I get off the interview with you, even though it's snowing out, I'm going to go outside in the backyard and get my feet . . . squish around and get really connected to the earth. Or go for a walk or something, but I need to be really connected to the Earth right now. I'm feeling a need to get grounded. (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

A research participant who teaches ancestral connection practices at the university level described how she helps her students learn grounding practice. She said,

One of the things I have my students do is spend 15 minutes a day outside . . . They are just supposed to go outside, get to know where they are. One place, it's their soul spot. Then introduce themselves, and don't talk all the time, try listening. I have them do that, and for some people, that is really where they end up being held. They need to find that sense of being connected, belonging. It is important if they can get that from the Earth. (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017)

Having a connection with ancestors themselves, especially in a marginalized community, provides grounding to one interview subject who identifies as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) communities. They expressed, "My involvement with the LGBTIQ community allowed me to access my LGBTIQ ancestors. Their spirits, struggles, suffering, and successes provided me, and continue to, with strength and grounding" (Survey participant #2).

The research data indicates that grounding is clearly important to many participants. The quoted statements show that participants do grounding practices in slightly different ways, and also talk about grounding practice in slightly different ways.

Establishing the proper space practice. The concept of space came up in many interviews. Participants used words such as “sacred space,” “ritual space,” and “container” to describe a process of delineating mundane activities from spiritual activities. Many subjects discussed a process of establishing a space that was the properly prepared environment for ancestral reverence practice. The concept of preparation of space referred to both a physical location, and/or a special time set aside for connecting with ancestors. For example, one participant spoke about a workshop he created during the AIDS epidemic for gay men to experience sexuality in a holy and communal manner. “We did talk about how we’re creating the space and the day. And, there were invocations to ancestors” (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

The intentional creation of space was an important element of ancestral reverence. For example, one participant said, “It’s just going into ritual space for me is really important” and another explicated the process in further detail:

Whilst I use sacred and safe spaces for holy days, my channeling of ancestral spirit is almost always a constant. But the act of showering and preparing of the body, cleaning and cleansing my home, and preparing the space provides me with a level of comfort and energy. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

According to participants, at certain times they experienced the ancestors as helping to create the space; “I could literally feel the ancestors not only holding my space while I was in labor but running their energy through me and supporting me.” At other times, participants’ creation of space was to support their own personal well-being, as they connected with ancestors. For example,

I often use salt as a purifying element to create the circle around me. I think that setting the intention of this is something to contain what space I'm doing and where I am, helps me to be clear with my own personal boundaries, my energetic boundaries, by having a physical boundary around me. (Survey participant #3)

Altar practice. Creating sacred space was also discussed in terms of building altars to honor and communicate with ancestors. Almost all of the research participants maintain ancestral altars, though they have different protocols for the types of practice that occur there. Altar placement, direction, and included items depend on the spiritual tradition. Some altars were permanent installations. Some were created for an event or celebration. An interview subject who is an artist stated, "I started getting the idea that we should do a Day of the Dead thing. That there needed to be an altar with their pictures and we needed to say their names and we needed to have their favorite foods" (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016).

Ancestor altars were inside and outside and facing all directions for various spiritual purposes of the practitioner. The items found on the altar were also tradition or culture specific. For example, one subject reported that, "most Chinese homes have a family altar, and you pray to your ancestors there. There may be Buddha, Quan Yin, and other gods, and there would be a place for your ancestors as well" (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016).

Altar creation can also be combined with intention setting practices, for the sake of healing results. When asked what a good way would be to begin working with ancestors, one Pagan practitioner suggested,

Build an altar with the intention that this is going to be my space of healing for that particular ancestor or ancestral line. Then the altar would include maybe images of the people, things that they appreciated or liked. Maybe a certain cigar, wine, flowers, something that connects you to them. Then it set the intention that this is what I want to do. I want to heal this particular aspect of my ancestry line and then get into a meditative space.

Call forth and ask the energy to come forward that wants to be healed, have- I guess for lack of a better word- a conversation as to what would help that person heal. Then try to execute what they asked for. Intention and reverence go a long way for the ancestors. Them knowing that we're willing to do acts of service for them makes everybody feel better. That would be my course of action. Build an altar, set the intention, create a meditative practice. It would probably take several sessions. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Intention practice. As indicated in the last quote, a practice that emerged through the research is intention setting: Who is a practitioner intending to work with, and what work are they intending to attempt? Many participants discussed the importance of having clear intent when preparing to connect with ancestors. One participant, an initiate in the Ifa tradition, spoke about intention. She noted,

It's very important, you just can't go and do anything just because you can do anything, and you want to prove that you powerful enough to do. That ain't it. You got to be clear about the work that you're doing, and who it's going to affect and how it's going to work, and yeah you have to be clean on it. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Participants were also clear on creating clear intention for who they are intending to connect with. Some participants were more trusting of the needed ancestors showing up than others. For example, on the more trusting end of the spectrum, a participant said,

It seems like when I put the intention out that this is what I need or what I think I need and then I ask for what I want or what kind of interaction I want, I have to trust that it's going to happen. That the right entity is going to come forward.

(Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Other participants expressed the importance of intention setting like this:

I would say, particularly if it's ancestors of blood, it's about being clear about your intention, and asking them for their support, and not assuming they're going to give you support. And just being really clear about . . . there is this issue, can you help me with it? Also, being really clear about shielding yourself. I think it's always essential that you be really clear about what it is that you're inviting in.

(Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016)

Safety, discernment, mentorship, and protection practices. Working safely with the dead was a theme that was present in many interviews, in direct answer to the interview questions: “Any dangers or taboos?” and “Do you distinguish between well and unwell dead?” Interview participants had a lot to say on the topic of safety and having an understanding of safety protocols prior to attempting to work with ancestors. Across the interviews, discernment of who to work with was pointedly discussed. The general consensus is that not all of the dead are equally well.

In the data, participants were clear that one should work only with trusted ancestors, and that even within that paradigm, there is etiquette on both the sides of the

living and the dead regarding relating. Participants suggested the importance of fluency in the dual and complementary skills of discernment and protection when working with the unseen realms. Three different types of safety suggestions were clear in the research: work within an established tradition with well-practiced ritual protocols, work with a trained spiritual elder who can guide one's process and have the skills to personally shield and protect oneself while working with the dead.

Some traditions, as noted by this Chinese participant, highly value ritual form as a safety protocol. She said,

My family wants me to go into this very carefully. There is a lot of safety built into the way Chinese people practice: safety/superstition! So, they were like you can't just be making things up, because it's dangerous. When you go into trance, you have a good person with you to make sure the bad spirits don't come and get you, because you don't know what's out there. You have to stay in your body, where it is safer. The ritual forms can be protective. (Research participant #7 interview, September 23, 2016)

Some traditions, like Ifa, highly recommend working with a spiritual elder to hone the skill of discernment. The importance of knowing what spirit you are working with, and why that spirit wants to work with you was highlighted by a participant who explained,

Well, you try to find out as much as you can, beginning with why they want to work with you. I have known folks who had to deal with ancestors who had crossed over like someone who committed suicide, who was an ancestor who committed suicide. And they could only work with them under the guidance of an

elder priest. They had to be clear about the work, that they were doing, and why they were doing it, so forth and so on. It can become a big thing like I said, you've got to be careful. But you need to have somebody who is an authority for a while, so you can get to that place, so you can even discern. Somebody that you really can trust and if you can't trust them, don't go to them. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Another research participant spoke to the value of having established relationships with spirit guides, who can help in a similar way as living spiritual elders.

It's not the sneaky spirits of the other world are plotting to trick you and drag you down or anything like that. At the same time, there's things out there that there are just living their own lives and some of them are predatory and so have a good tour guide, connect with someone reliable and have them introduce you to people that are reliable and who wish you well I'd heavily encourage people to find mentorship and to be vigorous in finding good quality mentorship. Then, you know, just to do that we'd have to follow your own knowing and intuition. Just to find good teachers, you'd have that same discernment that you would with the spirit, right? If it's someone who's good for me, who can help me, who I can rely upon -- we do that with human beings, you have to follow your heart. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Both quoted participants did mention the need for the development of personal discernment skills, whether to discern who an appropriate spiritual mentor might be, or who an appropriate spirit guide might be. Both also said that a good mentor can help one develop one's discernment skills. One practitioner responded,

There's a process of discernment and there's a process of actually learning to check our senses. People who have been taught to mistrust themselves and to trust outside authorities in a way that's really pernicious but in order to connect to the spiritual realm, we have to be able to trust our own directed spirits. There's the eyes of the heart that have to be opened and there's a sense in which we have to trust ourselves directly in the same way that animals do. Animals respond to the visceral input of the environment. They don't stop and question like, "Wait, is this valid and real?" They're just responding directly to their perception. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Participants named that ultimately, personal safety during this work is the responsibility of the practitioner. For example,

I think just in all situations, in any kind of work like this, that you should be prepared to shield yourself. Particularly when you think it's coming as a compliment and it turns out it's not. When you think they're being really helpful, and it turns out it's not. (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

Lastly, it was important to many subjects that they correctly discern ancestral spirits that are benevolent in nature. For example, one subject reported, "I work in connection with ancestral allies who are sound, whole and healthy, and who wished good things for their descendants" (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016). Many participants named that there are various wellness levels among the dead, and some felt that working with more elevated ancestors is a safer protocol.

Taboos and dangers. Two subjects mentioned cultural and religious taboo around direct communication with ancestors. While the practices of prayer, ritual, and

making offerings are acceptable and desirable in both Jewish and Chinese ancestral reverence practices, dialoguing with ancestors is considered unsafe. One participant said, “So, just to be clear, there’s these lines in Judaism . . . so ancestor reverence, yes please. Ancestor communication, no, that’s not safe” (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Another participant of Chinese descent said,

You don’t know who you are connecting to, you have to study it, you can’t just do it. You can be praying and offering things to your ancestors, but as soon as you start engaging in dialogue, it can get dangerous because you don’t necessarily know who is sending that information. How can you be totally sure that it is your ancestors that are talking to you? It’s easier for me to have this connection to my father, because I had a relationship with my father when he was alive. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Neither subject chose to elucidate on the nature of the danger, just that it was present.

Because of the aforementioned principle that some dead are more well-in-spirit than others, a cosmology many participants shared is that there can be spirits who are not benevolent in nature. For example, one participant said,

I’d say it’s pretty cross-cultural that there are scary dead too. Frequently there’s a sense like something’s not happening or they get stuck here. There’s a sense that they need to move on and in the moving on they can become whole and then mysteriously like present again, and very present. If there’s a stuckness, if there’s not moving on then they can become a ghost figure. That’s destructive because

it's not becoming like "an ancestor" but is a remnant or a revenant here.

(Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Other concerns that research participants mentioned include the danger of giving too much weight to ancestral messages or receiving messages from ancestors that the practitioner may need more support to integrate. For example, one subject expressed,

What gets nuts is if people just gives over to the ancestor, the ancestor becomes like the catholic church or the Mormon church or god, "Oh god says I should go out and shoot people," then you get into this fundamentalism. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Negotiation and setting boundaries with the dead practice. The practice of discernment led several participants to speak about the processes of negotiating and setting boundaries with the dead. Said one research subject in regard to her ancestors, "You know, they are, they are bossy. They want things. They want you to do things and they don't like to be ignored or disrespected." Several subjects mentioned the theme of retaining personal autonomy when relating with ancestors, meaning that their practice had to be in alignment with their personal values. Just because an ancestor made a request, the practitioner did not feel obligated to fulfill it.

Recounted one participant, "If you haven't done what they think you need to be doing or you should be doing, yes, they can come and be like any human. "What about dah, dah, dah?" And you be like, "Okay, get a grip" (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Negotiations reflect the individual practitioner's resources and values. For example, one pagan participant recounted:

I mean it depends on what they are asking for. I have personal boundaries. I'm not going to hurt anybody. I'm not going to kill anybody. I'm not going to steal for the ancestors. Breaking laws is not what I do. I live by the Wiccan Rede. Do as you will and harm none. There has to be that boundary of I'm not going to hurt anybody else in order to help somebody. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Invocation practice. Respondents typically reported that once these pre-connection understandings and practices were in place, ancestral reverence connection practices could commence. A fairly common method of beginning the transpersonal dialogue with ancestors is the practice of invocation.

Invocation is the art of asking spirit, energies, deity to come, and support a specific piece of spiritual work. Respondents mentioned many ways to invoke spirits, including through song, dance, music, drumming, sex, prayer, chanting, and incantation. Several participants discussed their invocations in their public healing events. For example, one subject stated, "When I do my erotic breathwork workshops, I always start with an invocation. I ask people to call on their ancestors," and I say, "ancestors who have helped you to be here," and then I will say something like, "ancestors who have encouraged your sense of safety, ancestors who have encouraged your sense of adventure" (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017).

Several research participants discussed that the etiquette of invocation includes waiting for the called-upon being to arrive, as can be summarized in this quote from Iyanifa Fakayode (2009):

In my spiritual house in Oakland, when my Elders and fellow priests gifted with ofo ase (power of incantation) pray, recite, and create oriki, the changes in the atmosphere are palpable--the temperature shifts, a scent fills the room, the air becomes lighter or denser--as the called upon spirit or ancestor is invoked. (p. 21)

Connection Practices. The research indicates that there are numerous ways research participants connect with their ancestors. None of the participants mentioned all of these practices as a part of their individual ancestral reverence practice, but all participants did mention more than one way they practice connecting with their ancestors. The practices are listed in order of the frequency of mention across the research interviews, beginning with the most frequently mentioned practices.

Ritual practice. While types of rituals and ritual protocols varied from respondent to respondent, the theme that ritual is an important way to connect with ancestors pervaded the research. While expressing the practices of ritual in different terms, most respondents either directly mentioned or alluded to ritual as a process of setting an intention, and then doing certain ceremonial practices in a deliberate, mindful manner.

In some cases, respondents talked about their cultures, and how ritual provides a space to process intense experiences, including transgenerational trauma. For example, one participant described, “There are ghosts in the room. Japanese are more non-verbal and indirect, in terms of the expression of emotions. So, ceremony and ritual is an important way to express feelings” (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017).

Another subject of Chinese ancestry reported on the funerary rituals for helping her father become an ancestor:

I remember when my dad passed away, we mixed Chilean rituals, because he died in Chile, but my family and I stopped eating meat for a couple of weeks, trying to build up karma points for my father. To help his soul pass into the next stage. In Chile we weren't equipped to do all the rituals in the same way. Then we brought his ashes back to the States, and had another funeral here, where we buried him. Other Chinese rituals: we burn money for them, and food. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Ritual was also connected to the practice of establishing sacred space, and the capacity to connect with ancestors was deepened via ritual practices, with one participant stating, "Ritual is part of me and so when I go into a ritual space, I'm much more open" (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017). It is important to note that the types of rituals participants described often encompassed the following practices, including offerings, meditations, prayer, dance, singing, etc.

Offerings practice. Another clearly reported theme amongst research participants was the practice of making offerings to ancestors. Several interviewees reported they make offerings as a way to nourish their ancestors, as well as to receive the blessing of their ancestors. For example, one participant explained "I have a formal weekly practice that for a while it's daily, of making offerings to them, praying for the well-being of my ancestors and asking for their blessings upon me" (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016). Many different types of items are offered by participants. Offerings can be delineated by category of tangible and intangible.

Tangible offerings. Tangible offerings reported include cups of water, candles, incense, pouring of libations on the Earth, flowers, creations of art and beauty, special

ritual objects like jewelry, goblets, cloth, tobacco, feather fans, and food. It is worth noting that food offerings play a special role in the practice of making offerings. Some participants expressed a belief in the reciprocal nature of making offerings, meaning that offerings are made to the ancestors, and in return the living person receives blessings from the ancestors. For example, this exchange from a research interview:

Subject: “When we eat like especially at Shabbat or when we have community supper but sometimes when it’s just us in the house we make a plate before we start eating it. It has like a little bit of everything that’s on the table and we put it on the ancestor altar and ring the bell.”

Researcher: “What’s the intention of that?”

Subject: “To feed them.”

Researcher: “There’s a belief that by providing offerings that that feeds them.”

Subject: “Nourishes them, and then they help us” (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016).

Several interviewees mentioned that preparing foods that their ancestors like is an important part of the food-offering practice. For example, one participant discussed cooking for her ancestors. She explained,

Yes, I make offerings, I make food offerings to them, I give them food and stuff, I’ll cook stuff just for them, I’ll cook them stuff I don’t eat and give it to them because they ate it . . . I give them stuff, or I’ll cook for them, luckily they don’t ask me for pork often, they don’t do that, I’m so happy, but if they tell me that’s what they wanted, then I’ll go buy some, cook it and put it up here for them, because they asked for it. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Different traditions have different protocols in regard to what to do with offerings after they are made, with some traditions being clear that once offered to ancestors, food should not be eaten, and other traditions being fine with food offerings being consumed post-offering. For example, one participant stated, “You’d bring all this food and you’d offer it and we actually eat the food afterwards because Chinese people are very practical and pragmatic, and maybe were starving. So, you offer the food, and then you eat it” (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016).

Intangible offerings. The research data findings also indicate that practitioners of ancestral reverence make offerings to ancestors which are intangible in nature. Practices that research subjects noted including in particular the offering of singing and songs, and dance and movement.

Singing practice. Several research participants reported that part of their ancestral reverence practice includes singing, with one saying, “in my spiritual communities, singing is definitely how I connect with the ancestors” (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017). Both singing songs of reverence about ancestors, as well as singing songs as offerings to ancestors were mentioned as practices. When asked about her ancestral offerings practices, one participant noted, “We’re supposed to praise them and sing” (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016).

Dance and movement practice. Dance and movement were both practices that participants named as ways to connect with ancestors. At least one interviewee makes an offering of her dance, saying, “I get to dance, and I’m dancing for you, not just for me” (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017). Other research subjects discussed

the value of movement as part of connection with ancestors. One participant who is a performance artist and dancer spoke of his relationship and gratitude for the “dancestors” (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Drumming practice. Several participants mentioned drumming as a practice of connection. One participant responded, “I try to look for connections to go back as far as I need to go to try to find a connection with a spirit that is not broken. I can do that when I drum” (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016).

Breath practice. One participant in the interview research who herself practices ancestral reverence and also guides others in connecting with ancestors spoke to the practice of breath and breathing. The practice consists of paying attention to the breath, a common meditative practice, and then opening to connection with ancestors. Of her work with clients she said, “Doing the breath, in front of the ancestor altar, and then being still and see what they heard” (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

Meditation practice. Most respondents reported the practice of meditating as a way to connect with ancestors. They used different language to describe similar experiences of a shift in consciousness, including words like trance, journey, non-ordinary state of consciousness, deep listening, meditative state, and ecstatic state. These different states of consciousness provided access to connection with ancestors and ancestral wisdom, according to respondents.

For example, one participant remarked,

When I get into meditative space, I often imagine or feel a web of connection between myself and all beings, past, and present, future. I’m kind of in this

cosmic web of how do I fit in and where do I connect and how do I interact.

(Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Another stated, “When I meditate, they may come to me” (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016). Yet another participant reported, “There are ways of connecting with the ancestors . . . through dreams and through meditation, through journeying, through purge, all of that” (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

Prayer practice. Prayer was an ancestral connection practice mentioned by almost all research participants. Important principles about prayer included: praying out loud, praying for the wellness of the ancestors, praying in memory of ancestors, praying with ancestors who are well in spirit to support those not yet well in spirit, and praying to receive blessing and support from the ancestors.

The distinction between out-loud prayer and silent prayer was made by two participants. Praying out loud, either through organic speech or through the recitation of specific texts was important.

Researcher: “So when you’re praying, you’re praying out loud?”

Subject: “Yes.”

Researcher: “How do you pray for them? What kinds of things do you ask or do you say?”

Subject: “I just pray for them. I honor them. I try to keep it simple. I say ‘I honor this person’ or ‘I pray for this person.’ And then think about them” (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016).

In another interview, the case for praying aloud was clearly made.

Researcher: “Do you mean you pray out loud? Or do you mean talk in your head, or both?”

Subject: “We can just talk to them if we can . . . Yes, talk out loud. There’s probably circumstances where we can reach out with our hearts and our minds. I think talking out loud is good” (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016).

Another theme mentioned regarding prayer was the concept of praying for the wellness of the ancestors, as well as praying with the well-in-spirit ancestors. The reciprocity between the wellness of the ancestors and their descendant doing the praying was also noted. Offered one research subject,

In praying for the well-being of our ancestors is also praying for our own well-being because those types of spirits can be destructive, can become predatory, can become parasitic. Praying for the well-being of our ancestors and praying with our ancestors who are whole helps all of our other dead who are stuck. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Prayer in memory of ancestors was another theme that emerged from the research data. Several participants mentioned their practice of remembering the dead through prayer and connected this also with the photograph practice (explained below).

One participant, a survivor of the AIDS epidemic who lost many beloved friends to AIDS, explained his memory prayer practice using prayer beads that he made:

I have pagan prayer beads that I do every day . . . Prayer beads are a string of beads, and there’s no specific way to organize them. The first part is about me and the second part is about ancestors, and so I say a prayer about each of these

people. So, I think about them when I do my prayer beads in the morning. In some cases, somebody gave me the bead. So, it really is about not even going through the process of picturing them or whatever, it's this bead is a tool for them, and I pray for them. Each bead, in my psyche, is almost connected to them.

(Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

Making requests of ancestors was another aspect of prayer practice during ancestral connection. One interviewee noted, "Well, I pray to my ancestors for all kinds . . . it's just by praying. I make requests by praying and by putting the notes on the board and ringing the bell" (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016).

The reciprocal nature of prayer and blessing was noted by one subject who revealed, "in Chinese culture you are supposed to be praying to your ancestors. And in fact, when you pray to your ancestors, you will be blessed with more luck, a better life period" (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016).

Divination practice. Many participants mentioned the practice of divination as a way to communicate with ancestors. Practices varied according to tradition, but the basic premise from the research is that practitioners of ancestral reverence are in communication with ancestors and receive messages from them. Some practitioners use dreams, discussed below, as the primary method of communication, while others employ systems such as a pendulum, coin flipping, tarot, runes, and throwing bones.

One subject reported,

Daily divination is a way to work with the ancestors. And I actually just got this coin that's in my other pocket that says "yes" on one side and "no" on the other, and I'm going to dedicate it and use it for communication from the ancestors.

Like give them that channel and listen to them that way. If I was trying to make up my mind about whether to do something or not, some question that could be reduced to a yes/no, I would flip the coin and I would take that as the advice of the ancestors. (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016)

In discussing her ancestral reverence practice, one Pagan practitioner discussed her divination practice, and how the specific technique is less important than the practice of divining. She explained,

Now that I've learned to honor ancestors, and in particular, the lineage that comes to me, I listen. I ask for guidance and I listen. I use a pendulum. I'll speak to a particular ancestor and say "I think this is where I should come. I think you can give me guidance. What do I do? What should I do?" It doesn't matter . . . pendulum, meditation, dreaming, wind. (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

Dreaming practice. The research data from this study indicates that dreams are a special practice of ancestral connection that can be a method of divination, as well as a way to receive information from ancestors. Many participants took the information they receive in their dreams from their ancestors to heart. For example, one participant expressed, "Sometimes in dreams I literally get printed messages or instructions. And when I am really open enough, there is no way you would not obey those instructions" (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

One participant reported the experience of deliberately attempting to work with ancestors in dreams, "I am currently trying to call in my ancestors to guide me through dream work and grounding and meditation" (Survey participant #5).

Photograph practice. The practice of connecting with ancestors through photographs was one that several research subjects shared.

One participant, whose parents survived Auschwitz but whose entire extended family was murdered during the Holocaust, responded,

How do I experience them? Well, I think I have a photograph of my mother's family. So, I have a special connection with these people, because I have an image of them. I don't have a feeling sense, though. . . . With my mother's family, because we have photographs, I have a connection. I can feel it. My father's family without photographs, they're just a bunch of dead people lying in a pit . . . A picture of my grandfather has been an inspiration. A picture of my grandfather felt like the essence. (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

Other respondents mentioned the practice of having photographs of deceased relatives, as well as ancestors of other-than-blood on their altars, as a method of connection. For example, one participant said, "My bedroom altar has images of historic gay, lesbian, and trans ancestors" (Survey participant #2). Another described her family altar, "You'll have a picture of your grandfather, when you are praying to him, you are supposed to be living the life that he wanted you to live, in the way he wanted you to live" (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016).

Forgiveness practice. Some participants spoke to forgiveness as a practice that helps them be closer with their ancestors. This was mentioned in the context of ancestors who had done harm while they were alive, and the living person practicing forgiveness.

One participant conveyed,

There is a three-part forgiveness practice that has helped me: awareness, acceptance and action. The action is doing the writing, doing the therapy, doing whatever it is that releases me, allows me to be free. In that freedom as well, I find the courage to forgive. I'm not changing that story, it's just that my life isn't limited by that anymore. (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017)

Ancestral Sexual Legacies

An emergent question that developed through the research is: What are the ancestral sexual legacies participants experience? During the interviews, research subjects consistently reported a connection between their experience of their own sexuality, and what they experience as a result of their ancestors' sexuality. When asked "How have your ancestors supported or impeded your sexual wellness?" many respondents spontaneously talked about their ancestor's sexuality and its impact on their own. To explicate this point, when asked this question, one participant responded "Mostly that inherited trauma from my family system, mostly through known blood family members, negatively affects my ability to be present in my body, generally. This has extended to my sexuality" (Survey participant #4).

The research data on ancestral sexual influences can be divided into two categories. The negative impact where ancestral burdens impeded participants' experience of their sexuality. The positive impact where ancestral blessings supported participants' sexual well-being. Participants spoke so much to this question, that the research is balanced in terms of frequency of mention, so the next sections are not in order of frequency nor significance.

Ancestral burdens. Ancestral burdens are the conceptual category for those experiences research participants reported of how they feel their ancestors' sexuality has negatively impacted their own. These include shame, transgenerational sexual trauma, sexual abuse, embodied ancestral sexual trauma, interpersonal violence, pregnancy and getting kicked out, fear of sex, sexual repression in family of origin, silence and secrecy, perpetrators in the ancestral lineage, and cultural and historical negative influences.

Shame. One impact of ancestral sexuality that was continually mentioned throughout the research data was the experience of shame around sexuality, connected to their ancestors that research subjects reported. It was clear from the ways participants spoke that shame has a negative impact on their sexuality. One research subject offered, "I knew that my ancestors had probably experienced some of that too. And that their shame around that was instilled into me" (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016).

To give some context for the dramatic negative impact of shame, as well as a definition, in his book *Healing the Shame that Binds You*, author John Bradshaw (1988) wrote:

The shame that binds you, is experienced as the all-pervasive sense that I am flawed and defective as a human being. Toxic shame is no longer an emotion that signals our limits, it is a state of being, a core identity. Toxic shame gives you a sense of worthlessness, a sense of failing and falling short as a human being.

Toxic shame is a rupture of the self within the self. (p. 10)

Research subjects spoke to the level of shame that they were aware their ancestors carried. One participant spoke of her grandmother, saying, "My other grandmother was

shamed by her sexuality but had it, had it and couldn't own it" (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017).

Participants mostly noted the impact of ancestral shame on their individual sexuality. They spoke to the experience of knowing that they carried shame bequeathed by their ancestors and spoke also to the impact they experience because of the carried shame. One participant responded, "I'm aware of the ways that shame, like recent dead of my family, or the shame that they carry, really impacted my own sexual experiences" (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Subjects also noted the phenomenon of being shamed for their own sexuality by their ancestors, and in the case of one subject, that shaming leading into physical abuse. One respondent noted,

I had two experiences. One was the shame, and the grandmother that didn't like my sexuality slapped me when I was in my teens because I had a boyfriend and she knew that I was making out with him. So, she called me a whore and slapped me. (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

Several participants noted the impact of shame on a collective level, especially as it impacts gay and queer community. According to one participant, having an understanding of the impact of shame at the collective level offers the chance to end shame:

One of the larger mechanisms of queer oppression is shame . . . One of the things that having understanding, some that is embodied and sensing, some from being in gay and queer cultures, and some from reading and history, helps eradicate and even banish shame. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

The concept of recognizing ancestral shame as a stepping stone toward healing sexuality was offered by several participants as well. For example, one respondent iterated, “I feel that some of my shame and anger come from experiences my ancestors have experienced. In connecting with them I can break patterns and create a new relationship with my sexuality” (Survey participant #7).

Another participant reflected on how learning new practices and beliefs about sexuality had lessened her own sense of shame, and perhaps offered healing to her ancestors. She articulated,

So, learning to include those kinds of permission-giving, expansive ideas and thoughts, and ways of living has relieved me of a sense of blame and shame, and also given me a sense of permission to go where my ancestors wanted to but probably couldn't. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Transgenerational sexual trauma. Research participants were keenly aware of the transgenerational transmission of sexual trauma. In general, research subjects were able to be quite articulate when speaking about transgenerational sexual trauma. While some subjects had greater exposure to the concept in general of transgenerational trauma than others, almost all of the participants spoke to the phenomenon, regardless of the language they used to connote the experience. Remarkd one participant, “That happens in an ancestral way because we’ve received the wounds of our ancestors as well. The tide of life has revealed what was hidden around that and ultimately heal it and bring about wholeness and reconciliation” (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016).

Participants discussed various types of transgenerational sexual trauma, including sexual abuse, sexual trauma resulting from war, interpersonal partner violence, pregnancy

and getting kicked out of the family home because of it, fear of sex as an inherited legacy, and the repression of sexuality due to religion or conservative family values, including the cultural and historical impact of homophobia and HIV, and misogyny.

Interviews included the main points of transgenerational trauma theory, including repetition of trauma, the role of shame, and transmission through silence, learned beliefs and behaviors, and epigenetics. Said one participant who is a child of Holocaust survivors, “I do think that there is a repetition compulsion, and that kind of trauma is passed from generation to generation” (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017).

Many participants reflected the understanding that healing is a multi-generational process. Reflected one participant who is a parent,

I can see the manifestation of things in my children that I recognize as wounds from my parents. I don't think it's one generation and one and done thing. You've got to work through it in multiple levels and multiple generations. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Sexual abuse. Research participants who reported the experience of transgenerational incest, sexual abuse or molestation were clear on the negative impacts they personally experienced. There was significant impact whether the abuse happened to them or was present in their family line. One participant who was not the victim of sexual abuse discussed the impact on her developing sexuality of her father being sexually abused by his father. She recounted, “I know that my father and his siblings were abused by their father. I know that for me, sexuality as a child going into adolescence was

something that was on the verge of horrifying” (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017).

One subject who teaches graduate students about ancestral connection reflected on the impact of sexual abuse as an impediment to connecting with ancestors. She explained, “Some students, the wound is their father molested them and they can’t go any further back than that. I mean, they’re just blocked on the paternal line” (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

A common report was of the need to heal from the abuse, in order to have an experience of sexual wellness. One research subject described part of her healing from incest by her grandfather and said, “I sat there for hours for several days, crying and talking to him . . . shared what my journey had been like. My sister had been molested too” (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

As noted by the prior quote, participants shared an experience of confronting abuse within their family lineages. One subject disclosed part of her process of reckoning with her abuse, saying,

That means of connecting to that family line . . . I think forgiving and also being open to realizing that some of these things happen for some of us at least our mothers, our aunts, they had none of the resources we do now, they had none of the awareness that we do now. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

The need for ritual healing after sexual abuse was noted by two participants. One discussed a published article she had written about healing metaphysically from childhood sexual abuse. She remarked,

I have a ritual in there that folks can go through and do to help change stuff in them and to help with stuff. It involves the person who has experienced that sexual abuse and someone who steps into the role of spiritual elder. Then, there are other folks who helped as well. It's a bath and stuff to clean off the bull hockey and the stuff in this work that needs to be done. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Embodied ancestral sexual trauma. Some participants spoke to the experience of feeling the impact of the unresolved sexual trauma of their ancestors as it lives in their own bodies, even if they never experienced sexual trauma. One subject, who himself has suffered from Crohn's disease said as a young adult he couldn't control his bowel movements. He shared his story of realizing that the Crohn's was an impact of ancestral trauma men in his family had experienced. After viewing a tender movie about gay male sexuality called *Call Me by Your Name* in which he felt like his ancestors were present and watching with him, he had the following experience. Because of respect for the depth and intimacy of the sharing, the quote here is presented in its entirety:

I found myself in a state of the body doing what the body does and the mind just following the body. I ended up on my knees, my ass in the air, my face on the ground, and that was the moment where it was like, "Yes, my poor hurt ancestors. You poor boys, you poor men, I am willing now. You can reveal yourself." For the next few moments, I could feel every thrust. I could feel it in my body. It was not a thought, it was not an imagination. It was not a dream. It was my actual body remembering sexual rape and penetration from specific other men in times of war, in times of whatever. All the fucking ways it ever happened both casually,

non-consensually. I felt it in the pit of my bowels. I felt in the complete contraction of all the muscles around my sacrum. I felt it inside my sacrum. I felt it inside my low belly. I could feel the flinching that had been there from before birth that causes me to continually have to manage chronic pain. I felt it all and I understood.

It's a super fucking intense experience to have memories in my body that are not mine, especially something as intense as rape . . . One of the memories is this fucking rage. This rage of the powerless boy being raped, that shatters their ability to trust anyone else in their life.

How that behavior -- because they couldn't talk about it, they couldn't feel safe enough to release that trauma with any of their people at that time in history, it becomes a behavioral pattern. Then they look at their young boys with disgust . . . Those kids inherit something that they don't quite understand, and they give it to their kids.

It goes on down the line until it becomes something like internalized homophobia. Something like, "That person's just angry all the time." Something like my father who becomes a prison guard. Something like me . . . Those memories of powerlessness, rage, hatred, shame, disgust, violation, I know what that is. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Sexual trauma resulting from war. One interview subject was of Chinese ancestry and spoke to the phenomenon of sexual violence being used as a weapon of war, as in the rape of Nanking in 1937, where the Japanese systematically raped and killed

Chinese women. She discussed the transgenerational sexual trauma present in her family, saying,

It's interesting, there is a lot of trauma in my family. My father and mother's fathers died when my parents were really young. My mother didn't even really know my father. My father's two sisters were raped and killed. The way Chinese people make things sound more polite . . . they will never go into the awful details . . . I don't know if you've read some of the things Japanese people did? They would put bayonets up women's pussies. Awful, monstrous, horrific things. I don't know, but they (subject's aunts) were young. It's not like they died of old age. Maybe they weren't even dead, maybe they were kidnapped. I would love to know. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Interpersonal partner violence. One participant in particular was clear about the impact of her ancestors' interpersonal partner violence (IPV) on her current capacity to be in intimate relationships. She discussed the challenges she has had to be in partnered relationship and framed it within the context of the modeling that she received from her mother, grandmother, and aunts. She discussed in detail the witnessing the abuse her female family members endured had on her.

She was also emphatic about the necessity of working to heal transgenerational interpersonal partner violence through a transgenerational and societal context, saying,

When working with survivors of IPV, we know that the survivor's learned behavior and learned sense of value, of self-worth is changed. When you have generations and generations of interpersonal partner violence, that some of it has to do with the current survivor believing that that's what relationships looks like,

and that they have no right to deserve anything different. So, I think when that is not addressed as a bead on a string, then I feel like the person is more likely to take it as there's something wrong with them . . . a personal thing and not a generational thing. Because it is a generational thing. It's a generational thing and it's a societal thing.

So, I think working on it transgenerationally and in that has to be some understanding of, and it doesn't matter what language you use, but there has to be a means of understanding violence as upholding and perpetrating patriarchy. I don't think it's ethical or true, if someone comes from generations of IPV, to not set it in a social context. (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

Another respondent reported the impact of witnessing abuse in her grandparents' relationship. She contrasted her grandparents' generation with her parent's generation:

My grandfather remarried, my grandmother, remarried both under unhappy relationships. On my mother's side, my mother's mother was married three times. One was an extremely abusive relationship . . . and [my parents] made conscious choices that they were going to not do those things . . . Me witnessing what their parents were like, as they aged and how messy their lives became compared to how stable and committed and loving my parent's relationship was, like, oh that feels good to me. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Pregnancy and getting kicked out. Several research subjects included stories about women in their family lines who had gotten pregnant and had been kicked out of the family home. Often the pregnancies were the result of incest or rape, and in all cases, the reports indicate that the mothers were deeply shamed and shunned because of their

pregnancies and births. Participants were explicit in the impact these pregnancies and shunnings had had on their own development of sexuality.

One subject reported the story of her grandmother, saying,

My dad's mom, Grandma Sarah, was the matriarch of my family, and such an immense light and love. She was my favorite person in the world and pretty much everyone who knew her, their favorite person in the world. It was learned to my family after she died, and to me after I became an adult, that she had been when she was 13 raped by her step-brother, half-brother, I always forget which one, and became pregnant, and was kicked out of the house. She lived on the subway, until later going to a home for young mothers giving birth. So much of the story that I feel around sexual wounding and healing, also sacred sex work, feels like it's connected to her story. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Another interviewee spoke to the fear she experienced as a young woman in her sexual development because of the pregnancy of her grandmother at a young age, and the subsequent exclusion from the family home, saying,

I think there was a definitely great fear of being pregnant at a young age which came from my mother's side. My mother's mother got pregnant with my mom when she was 15 and her father kicked her out of the house because it was not something to be done in rural Arkansas, to be pregnant and unmarried . . . The fear of getting pregnant was very present from that line. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Fear of sex. Fear of sex as an ancestral burden of sexuality was present as a theme in many of the research interviews. Fear kept research subjects from developing

appropriate sexuality as adolescents and teenagers. Fear was experienced as an embodied sensation, preventing normal sexual exploration. One participant reported that,

as a teenager when I should have been experimenting, exploring, and being interested in sexuality, I was like, “No closed off, don’t touch me. No, you can hug me, hugging is okay, but I don’t want to.” That fear and it was like a visceral fear tightening in my chest, that sex was going to be a hurtful experience.

(Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

A respondent who is also a parent spoke to her own experiences with fear of sex, as well as her desire to interrupt the transgenerational transmission of fear around sex to her children. She said,

The first few years of sexuality were periods of exploration but there was a lot of fear there. There was a very deep longing for connection that never resonated with them on my father’s line. I definitely need to do more healing because I don’t want my kids to have that kind of fear around sexuality. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Repression in family of origin. Participants spoke to the impact of sexual repression in their upbringing. Participants noted that the messaging they received about sexuality and gender came from their blood family, as well as other social organizations. One participant who is gender non-conforming and lives as a gay male explained, “I grew up in the Midwest in a situation where, it was repressive, not just in the community, but in the school and the home and the church” (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016). Another subject spoke directly to the connection between sexual repression and religion in her blood lines, saying “That [blood] line came from a line of

sexual repression, they're all Quakers" (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017).

Developing a healthy sexuality without parental or familial support was mentioned by one participant as an especial challenge. The lack of support caused her experience of being sexual as a teenager to be confusing"

No one gave me a place to have it without being the bad one. My father would blame me for being overtly sexual. My mother didn't like that I was overtly sexual, because she was a prude. For me, growing up, my sexuality was quite confusing. (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

One experience mentioned in the data is some participants had the experience of their ancestors actively disliking or repressing the respondent's sexuality, due to the sexual repression the ancestor had faced. For example, one older female subject spoke of her grandmother, saying,

The reason she didn't like me was because of her sexuality. She was a very sexual being, and she knew I was, and she didn't like that because it was against her era. I was okay, I was in the 50s and 60s, but she didn't have that freedom. (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016)

Lack of access to important information about sex was an experience several subjects reported as an impact resulting from sexual repression in their family of origin. Offered one participant, "I wasn't aware of any sexuality of those ancestors. My upbringing was very non-sexual to anti-sexual. I got no education about sexuality in my home at all, or in school. I had to wait until college to get the basics" (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016).

The ancestral burden of receiving negative messages about sexuality was also mentioned, as by this subject who said, “There’s so many negative messages about sexuality that have been passed down by cultures and ancestors. That sex is nasty and evil, that you can go to hell” (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017).

One subject who works professionally with clients around healing sexuality spoke to the negative impact of repressive religious messaging, especially on people who exist outside of dominant gender and sexuality expressions. She recounted,

And if they were Roman Catholic, they had gotten all these messages that it was not okay to be sexual . . . Most of this trauma either was about having a non-mainstream choice in our society, or a non-mainstream preference or sexual expression, or belonging to some kind of religion that absolutely forbade sex or sexual expression. Or allowed sexual expression in very prescribed ways.

(Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016)

Silence and secrecy. When speaking of ancestral burdens in regard to sexuality, many research subjects mentioned the mechanism of silence and of secrecy. Even without direct communication about sexual difficulties such as hidden pregnancies, abortions, incest, rape, sexual abuse, many participants mentioned an intuitive knowing of the existence of these histories. When asked about the impact of her ancestor’s sexuality on her own, one subject responded, “My intuition is that there’s some kind of sexual violence in my mom’s history. That’s the piece of the story that we don’t know, that’s the secret” (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016). She went on to talk about a dynamic that had existed between her and her mother while her mother

was alive, in which the subject had always felt responsible for healing her mother's unspoken grief.

One participant spoke to the lack of frank conversation about sexuality in his family. "I can say that my relationship with my grandparents and my parents is not such that we've had a lot of conversations like, 'Tell me about your sexual well-being and your sexual wounds'." (Survey participant #4). For this participant the impact of this silence was that he did not feel able to ask for support from his family while working with his own sexual wounding.

Several participants named the experience of finding out that a woman in their family (mother or grandmother) had had a baby, often at a young age, and that baby was kept secret and given up for adoption. Participants noted tremendous impact of discovering this information had on their own lives. One research subject found out she had a brother at age 40. She revealed,

One of the things that I found, that I learned from my mother is that she had a baby before me. I grew up thinking I was her first-born, but she got pregnant when she was 16, she dropped out of high school and she gave the baby up for adoption, and it was a boy. I found out about this on my 40th birthday . . . I have an older brother. My whole station and place in the world of thinking I was the first born was not correct. And when I learned that there was this shift in my universe that I can't even describe, but it was very significant. (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016)

Research subjects mentioned what sexual stories were told in their families, and what stories were absent. A subject who had found out through a dream about a hidden

pregnancy and birth of her mother offered, “When I asked my mom, ‘Did you ever have a baby before me?’ she said, ‘If you hadn’t asked me, I wouldn’t have told you’.”

(Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016).

One participant shared the story of her grandmother’s rape and feeling the impact of the silence and the absence of other, more positive sexual stories. She recounted,

There’s the story of my grandma, my dad’s mom who was raped when she was 13 and then had the baby. What I’m aware of is that I only know this story of her sex life; it had been hidden for a long time, it was only told because it’s a story of sexual violence . . . she had a baby, she was raped. That story. But it’s not like I would know so much about her sex life . . . these are the stories we get. Same with the biblical characters. Like Dinah, who was raped. It’s like that’s what we know of her sex life. The stories of sexual pleasure and positive sex in both my tradition and my family [are absent], what we know of that is the baby was born or the baby died, but as I feel into it, the big silence around sexual stories. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Perpetrators. Working with ancestors to develop sexual wellness can be a complex process. Many research participants were challenged by what to do with ancestors who had caused sexual harm. Although many participants had perpetrators in their family lineage (this is known because they discussed being the victims of incest,) it was mostly the interview subjects who work professionally with clients around healing trauma who spoke more in depth about perpetrators.

One finding in this area of the research is that after surviving abuse, victims often find that a part of their perpetrator lives on in them, even after death. A participant in the

research who works widely with both victims and perpetrators of violence described discerning between the external and internalized perpetrators. He said,

There's the relationship with the perpetrator in real life. And then there's the perpetrator that lives within you. Those are separate. When you're working with adults, it's not the father that exists now, it's the father that's within you that you need to do the work with and about. (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

One research subject who had been sexually molested by her grandfather talked about how she had worked with the perpetrator she had internalized through her abuse.

In no way that means that my grandfather's behavior was in any way acceptable. It is totally not acceptable. What happened to me and to my first cousin should never have happened and there's a way that my heart will never be opened to him. Ever. And the way I've worked with it, is with my grandfather. I had to confront that grandfather that lived inside me that I carried, I had to confront him and move him out of me. (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017)

This concept of reckoning with abusers in the family lines was common. One respondent described her discomfort with embracing ancestral connection as a sexual abuse survivor. She reported, "That means that connecting to that family line means I'm going to have to become that, they are abusers." Her following comments made it clear that she did not mean she was going to have to become a person who sexually abused children, but rather accept that this legacy of abuse is part of who she is. Another subject shared, "If we're talking about ancestral memory, then we also have ancestors who did the raping" (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Cultural and historical influences. Several topics that arose from the research interviews were interwoven in the ways that participants spoke about them. For the sake of ease of reading, they are grouped here under the subject heading Cultural and Historical Influences. The language subjects used to describe these burdens impacting their sexuality included the queer or gay wound, homophobia, misogyny, and AIDS. Participants acknowledged the influence of the cultural time, as well as the ways that different oppressions are often interconnected.

Several research participants, all of whom identify as gay or queer, expressed the concept that there is a wound around non-normative sexuality that is connected to other systematic and historical forms of hegemony. One gay male participant conveyed,

When we figure out what the gay wound is, what the gay wounds are, well we have to bring in this whole project of misogyny, we have to look at how colonialism, capitalism, slavery create another whole set. We have to look at colonial and slavery practices and what we end up with as permissible sexuality for us. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

In another interview, a subject also spoke to the connection between the wound of gayness, and the connection with misogyny, saying “Also I think it’s a complex wound. There’s a whole, obviously, that’s deeply intertwined with what misogyny is” (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016).

The idea that there is a transgenerational cultural wound around sexuality was also mentioned, along with a curiosity about how to heal it, as shared by one participant who remarked,

You have this sort of – there's the “too much” sexual wound, and then there's the absolute denial, to not acknowledge that people exist as sexual beings creates this wounding, and then there's all kinds of alienation, and other kinds of imbalance.

Once we name that wound, and then you start to realize we carry it generationally and intergenerationally, transgenerationally, then what's a healing practice?

(Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

AIDS is mentioned as a factor in regard to wounding gay males have experienced around sexuality, and in particular how the AIDS epidemic was handled and the lack of information available. One older gay male research subject shared,

When in the 80s, it was a difficult time to live because we were just getting snippets of information about what AIDS was, and how it was caused, and we knew that it was sexually transmitted, you know gay men were one of the groups that were suffering the most. (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

The acknowledgment of the influence of cultural institutions like the government on queer sexual wellness was also present in the research data, with one subject discussing the impact the legalization of gay marriage had on him, and his thoughts on the wider impact for younger queer people facing repressive sexual situations. He said,

I was very moved when President Obama said he supported gay marriage, which was a couple years ago, and to think about how significant that was for any kid who was queer, particularly in the Midwest, but anywhere in a repressive kind of situation, where you have little control about what's going on in your life.

(Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

In conclusion, research subjects spoke at length about the negative impact of the ancestors' sexuality on their own sexuality, as indicated in this section on ancestral sexual burdens. These burdens included: shame, transgenerational sexual trauma, sexual abuse, embodied ancestral sexual trauma, interpersonal violence, pregnancy and getting kicked out, fear of sex, sexual repression in family of origin, silence and secrecy, perpetrators in the ancestral lineage, and cultural and historical negative influences.

Ancestral blessings. When asked the interview question, "How have your ancestors supported or impeded your sexual wellness?" research subjects also spoke to the blessings and sexual wellness they have received through their ancestors. The research is balanced in terms of frequency of mention, therefore there is no significance to ordering of the next sections, other than to provide the reader with a flow and ease of reading experience.

The themes that emerged are: support for sexual wellness, role models, modeling changing sexuality across a lifespan, ancestral role models validating current sexual self, capacity for committed relationships, nurturing developing sexuality, permission, sexual freedom, sexual self-esteem, capacity for pleasure, connection with spirituality, and connection with queer ancestors.

Support for sexual wellness. Several research participants spoke to their sense that their ancestors provide support for sexual wellness. One subject reflected on her experience of two ancestors in particular, with whom she has a regular practice of ancestral connection. She conveyed, "I just feel like they want so much good sex for everyone, and so much sacredness in sex for everyone. They're blessing [me] up, and we all feel their blessings. It's amazing" (Research participant #12, interview, March 8,

2017). The idea that the ancestors want descendants to have good sex was reported in several research interviews.

Support for gender expression and sexual orientation was also noted, especially when these were outside of the dominant paradigm. One genderfluid queer subject who was mentioned earlier speaking to repression in the community they grew up in, spoke to the sexual wellness experience of familial support around gender and sexual orientation. He remembered,

Of course, I was developing a sexuality in high school, but I was so oblivious. So, the connection between them [parents and grandparents] and my sexuality felt like it didn't exist except that they let me be who I was. Which is more about gender conformity than being sexual. There's not a clean line between that, obviously, but I think for me they let me be girly, and they encouraged me to be who I was. In that way, they were being supportive. (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

Role models. A common theme that arose during the interviews was of research participants experiencing ancestors as sexual role models. One subject spoke of her grandmother as having a positive impact as a role model on the subject's sexuality. She described,

My grandmother was a very sexual being. . . . I think of her riding her horse, coming over a hill, coming over a crest, with her red hair flying behind her, and being free on the back of a horse. She was an artist. She was a bohemian. She traveled a lot. (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

Positive regard in affect and in tone was present as subjects recounted stories about ancestors they had known who they felt contributed in a positive manner to their sexuality. Another subject spoke of her grandmother, saying,

She went to the German part of New York City . . . and she partied and slept around, was known to sleep around. I remember her getting dressed up to go out, and wearing red lipstick and a red coat, and kinda fixing her hair, and we knew Nana was going out, you know what I mean? She loved her sexuality . . . She was beautiful. I know she was sexual, she had numbers of lovers. (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

The presence of positive role models was important to subjects. One interviewee recounted about her parents' relationship, and how their modeling created a sense of comfort and acceptance for her, as well as the benefits of passing these traits on to future generations. She said,

My parents were very loving and comfortable with each other. They were hugging and kissing normally around us that was a normal everyday occurrence that we saw that loving behavior . . . feeling comfortable and accepting yourself, loving yourself and your partners is an attitude that can be passed onto future generations. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Modeling changing sexuality across a lifespan. A distinct part of the ancestral blessing of role model that participants mentioned is getting to observe a parent or grandparent's sexuality as it changed across their lifespan, which for at least one participant continued beyond death. This subject spoke about the change in her grandparents as they experienced dementia, and the role of nudity. She also speaks to the

experience of feeling her grandfather's vital erotic energy, even after he had died. She remembered,

I think of my mom's dad, my grandpa, who was very in his body growing up, and was also very in his head, and bounded in his adult life and then he had dementia for several years before he died, and he would just show up naked on the steps, regularly. It was so healing for me to begin to recognize, and my grandma too, with her dementia I often was in her presence fully naked. That was the first time in my life that I experienced my grandparents naked or had exposure to their genitals directly, and it was so – that in itself was so healing and humanizing to me to remember the vitality and sexualness of my grandparents, and so they were alive then, during the stories that I'm telling, and I feel like I have some more context of them, they're ancestors now. My grandpa, I feel his vitality and erotic vitality. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

One research participant, who discussed having done a lot of healing work on his own sexuality, noted that while his father's secrecy about his own sexuality was initially harmful to the participant, that he has been able to realize the ancestral blessing as he ages. He said,

I am also aware, as my very elderly dad approaches his early stages of dying, that I see in myself a strong quality of his with regard to sexualities and much more in life, the quality of privacy and containment. This is a positive thing in my life, although early on it manifested harmfully as shame, secrecy, lying and hiding. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Ancestral role models validating current sexual self. Research subjects discussed the importance of ancestral role models as validation for the living individual's sexual orientation and gender identity. One research participant spoke to the experience of ancestral connection supporting his current sexual and gender identities. He told the story of a transpersonal connection with an unknown ancestor, who he named "Oakflower."

He discussed his meditation experience, saying:

Who I will be speaking about [is in] my fathers father's line. The bright ancestor I met there . . . presents as a pansexual, genderqueer, ecosexual being born with a male body. As a reflection of my own sexual and gender journey this character is both a projection of myself and vice versa. Meeting this figure affirmed that my internal identity was not made up, nor a reaction to current cultural oppression, but instead an inherited appetite that is both mine and not-only-mine. (Survey participant #7)

Another research subject spoke to this theme in a slightly different way, "My LGBTI ancestor link provides a strength in engaging with the sex and gender binary" (Survey participant #3). Further comments elucidated that this participant felt the support of his LGBTI ancestors when facing oppressive and repressive conditioning around sex and gender.

Role models as supporting capacity for committed relationships. Both the positive and negative impact of ancestral relationships was present in the research. As a blessing, participants spoke to witnessing their parents' and grandparents' relationships,

and the impact those relationships had on their own capacity to be in committed relationship. Said one married research subject,

I think one of the blessings that I received directly from my parents was the willingness of commitment. I don't think that humans are necessarily meant to be monogamous. I don't think we're meant to have- we don't have to have those individual experiences, but I think one of the direct results in my parent's relationship that I saw the value and having a deep committed loving relationship. I think I'm creating that with my husband at this point of deep trust and deep understanding . . . a blessing that's really helped, guide my life through difficult times knowing that there's at least one other person in the world who would be as committed and as devoted to what we need to do together. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Nurturing developing sexuality. Some research participants reported the experience of having their parents or grandparents who have now passed away be a supportive, loving presence as the subject was in the process of developing their own sexuality. It is noted that when participants reflected on this experience, they spoke with an especial tenderness. One participant shared,

The other grandmother who was more sexual outwardly just kinda snuggled in with me, and she didn't shame me. She loved me. There was support from her for anything and everything of who I was. Yeah. And she supported my sexuality. She understood it my sexual being was really alive, and no one except my Nana really nurtured it. But I had it. I had mine. And my Nana loved me through all of it. It was amazing. (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

One research subject who teaches erotic classes professionally and who has a strong ancestral reverence practice discussed the importance of ancestral help in areas outside of sexuality to support the development of a healthy sexuality. She explained,

When I'm teaching, I don't necessarily invite students to invoke ancestors who have encouraged your sexual development, because not all of us were lucky enough to have that in our lives, but there might be someone we can point to in our lives who helped us to trust our instincts, helped us to be curious about things, helped us to follow that curiosity. All of those things are things that help to have a healthy erotic life, a healthy sex life. So, I think if you can't pinpoint an ancestor and say, "Oh this ancestor taught me about the birds and the bees" and use correct anatomy or something, or this ancestor gave me my first vibrator. Very few people will be able to say that. But I think you can figure out who helped you with different things that you want to bring in to your erotic life, that can be one way to work with the ancestors. (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

Permission. One positive impact some research participants reported was that of receiving permission for their own sexuality and in some cases permission to work professionally with sexuality, based on their perceptions of their ancestor's sexuality. When respondents reported a positive ancestral connection around the concept of permission, there was a general agreement that research subjects shared, that their ancestors wanted for them to be free and expressed. For example, one participant share, "There is a permission from the ancestors to exist in your natural state regardless of contemporary views or pressures" (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2017)

One research subject who has been a sex worker discussed how stories of her grandmother's sexuality inspired her:

My own sexual life and patterning and trauma is really rooted in my paternal grandmother. So much of the story that I feel around sexual wounding and healing, also sacred sex work, feels like it's connected to her story. Before I knew what had happened with her, there was a thing that I sensed, but it was secret and so I didn't know what I sensed, and I thought that she was a prostitute, and somehow, I held that mantle for me. This is my grandma, and I hold some version of this. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

One subject who works professionally as a sex coach and who came from a sexually repressive background spoke to how her ancestors had supported her becoming who she is and doing the work that she does. She said,

They have supported me, because I am who I am because of them. For example, my grandmother she supposedly was widowed young, 28, with four kids. It was a tough time. Apparently, she worked cooking, or doing housekeeping in this place that people could go and have drinks, and I imagine sex, with women. My grandmother was closely connected to sex work in some way . . . I work in the field of sexuality . . . I'm comfortable there, but really, I work in helping people be okay with who they are, helping them feel okay getting the things they really want, and live the life they want to live. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Ancestral support for someone to give themselves permission for enjoyment of sexuality and sensuality was also mentioned. One respondent works therapeutically

through a psychodrama lens with clients. In that work, he discussed how he assigns the role of grandparents and parents when working with clients as they give themselves permission. During the interview, he made the connection that this process was ancestral in nature. He reported,

I believe in sexual pleasure, and that people have a right to express themselves sexually in any way that they want or need to . . . I have worked with people where they developed. They gave themselves permission to enjoy sex, to be sensual, to be . . . where they had so many injunctions against it. I haven't really thought about it in terms of permission from ancestors. It would have to be.

(Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

Receiving permission for sexual pleasure through receiving sex toys from ancestors was another thread present in the research data. One participant discussed receiving permission for masturbation because she found her mother's vibrator. She remembered, "Although I first discovered vibrators because of my mother. I found one in her drawer, actually. Yes, my ancestor did give me a vibrator, actually" (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

Sexual freedom. Sexual freedom as a positive impact of ancestral sexuality was a theme mentioned in the data. Some research subjects explained that they experience sexual freedom as a result of considering both the ways their ancestors were sexually repressed, and the ways their ancestors were sexually liberated.

One participant discussed how she holds the sexual repression of her ancestors as a way to be mindful about the privilege and freedom she experiences in her sexuality and in general in her life. She said,

Mostly I feel that connection because I am very aware of the fact that I am very privileged, and I live my life in a way that probably few people in my family alive or dead, experience. I realize I have choices and freedoms and I get to have experiences that most of my family do not or have not, whether they are alive or passed.

The other way I think of my ancestors is I'm really aware of the fact that I probably just didn't, the way the I am just didn't happen. I'm sure that there were lots of people like me, who were kind of wild, or curious, or strong and they probably didn't get to explore or live that in the same way. I reflect often on the blessings and on my privilege. On the privilege of my life and how I get to live my life. It's easy to do, if I just compare it to my parents. They didn't have the same freedom. They definitely didn't do all of the work I get to do. And if I just extrapolate back, I know the freedoms and the choices get smaller and smaller.

(Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Working with ancestral guides in support of sexual freedom was a slightly different aspect that was also discussed in the data. For example, a respondent who has worked to heal his sexuality by connecting with ancestors offered, "[Ancestral] guides within my awareness have supported me in shedding 'locks' of greater sexual openness and freedom" (Survey participant #5). By locks, this participant was referring to prohibitions he experienced to freely expressing his sexuality. Through "shedding locks," he was able to experience more erotic liberation.

Acknowledging ancestral sexuality as a way to give permission for queer sexuality was mentioned in the research interviews. One participant who had hosted

erotic rituals stated, “We acknowledged that we had male ancestors who were being sexual and definitely being sexual with men” (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016) The context of this reflection was that through acknowledging the non-heteronormative sex of his ancestors who were also having queer sex, the subject was able to step more fully into his identity as a queer man.

Sexual self-esteem. One ancestral blessing on sexuality that was mentioned is sexual esteem, through the lens of feeling one's value and attractiveness as a sexual partner. For example, one participant described the experience of receiving validation about his level of attractiveness and sexual wellness through his mother, and through her, from his grandfather. He remarked,

Attractiveness, not just sexual attraction, but I have a certain charisma. Or some sort of special gift, or something. I got from my mother, it felt appropriate, it didn't cross the boundary. She felt I was attractive, and she connected it with her father. So that was a connection. If we're looking for some kind of sexual wellness, you know a certain kind of feeling 'I'm a valuable person.' (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

Pleasure. The research data indicates that pleasure was viewed by some participants as an ancestral blessing on their sexuality. One respondent shared, “This [ancestral connection] may allow for more sexual opening, pleasure, and possibility.” Considering the impact of his ancestors' erotic pleasure was important to one research participant. He conveyed,

I think for myself, and for other people, it's probably a good idea to actually consider the fact that some of your ancestors may have had really good sex and

may have really liked it. And they may not have told anybody, and they may not have told you or anybody else, but it's entirely possible that they did. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Although he may never know about the pleasure his ancestors experienced, he explained that thinking about their pleasure made it possible for him to experience more pleasure.

Research participants also expressed the experience of being guided in their own pleasure by their ancestors, including one subject who discussed receiving support from Biblical figures, as well as from her ancestors in regard to her pleasure. She said, 'I feel like Sarah [Old Testament biblical character] and some other ones [ancestors] really come as spirits and guides in the realm of Eros and pleasure' (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017).

Connection with ancestors' erotic energy through the veil. According to the data in the research interviews, some participants experienced a sense of feeling connected to their ancestor's erotic energy and experienced that connection as an erotic blessing for themselves. For these subjects, the positive impact of a loved one's sexual energy could still be experienced even after that person had died.

One research subject reflected on the gratitude she has for the blessings of erotic energy she experiences from two ancestors, saying,

I feel so grateful to have these two ancestors who were in my spiritual family, who are in my spiritual family, that are so well and have so much active energy to bless those here, and were in life, and are still in death so juicy and erotically alive. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Connection with queer ancestors. One blessing research participants reported as a positive impact of ancestral sexuality is connection with queer ancestors. The perceived blessing of being in connection with gay, lesbian, queer, and transgender ancestors was present in numerous interviews. Participants reported feeling greater sense of permission, sexual freedom, and support for sexual wellness as a result of these experienced connections, as well as more strength and grounding. For example, as previously noted in relation to the practice of grounding, one subject shared, “My involvement with the LGBTIQ community allowed me to access my LGBTIQ ancestors. Their spirits, struggles, suffering and successes provided me, and continue to, with strength and grounding” (Survey participant #2).

While ascertaining the sexual orientation of research participants was not part of the research process, it is presumed, based on contextual information and in some cases on explicit statements, that research subjects who experienced connection with queer ancestors as a positive impact share these identities. In this section, sexual orientation is presented to contextualize the following quotations, when sexual orientation was explicitly stated by research participants during the course of the interview.

When talking about the oppression he has experienced as a queer male, one research subject linked having ancestral connection with gay and queer ancestors to his own sexual wellness. He said,

Nope, that [homophobia] doesn't have power in the face of some of our grand histories. And knowing that, like I say, it also happens when you're around people and they carry a certain pride and righteousness. That's one place that having a sense of ancestors, and specifically gay and queer ancestors . . . it's crucial to my

sexual pleasure, which is connected to my sexual wellness. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Another research subject spoke to the connection with queer male ancestors in the context of certain sexual encounters he had had, and how it felt appropriate to do so. In the context of the interview, he responded,

Subject: And, there were invocations to ancestors. We talked about our male ancestors' lineage kind of thing.

Researcher: So, you would invite ancestors into a sexualized space.

Subject: Right.

Researcher: For what purpose?

Subject: I think just acknowledging . . . That was in the context of what we were doing, that seemed like an appropriate thing to do, to talk about lineage in that way. (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

In summary, participants described a number of ancestral blessings that they experience as a positive impact of their ancestors' sexuality. The ancestral blessings subjects discussed included in these above findings include: support for sexual wellness, role models, modeling changing sexuality across a lifespan, ancestral role models validating current sexual self, capacity for committed relationships, nurturing developing sexuality, permission, sexual freedom, sexual self-esteem, capacity for pleasure, connection with spirituality, and connection with queer ancestors.

Findings on Sexuality and Ancestors

Part of the interview was a series of questions relating to erotic and sexual practices. Interview questions included the following:

- Has your experience of your ancestors ever taken an erotic turn?
- Or have your erotic experiences ever taken an ancestral turn? Have you ever connected with your ancestors while having sex?
- How can you work with ancestors to develop sexual wellness, or to heal sexual trauma?
- What about the ancestors is sexually helpful?
- What are effective practices that you would suggest to someone who wanted to work with ancestors to support sexual healing?
- Are there erotic practices we can offer our ancestors for their well-being?
Is this okay? How?
- Any dangers or taboos?

The findings of these questions are divided into three categories: principles relating to sexuality and ancestors, erotic experiences involving ancestors, and erotic practices related to ancestors.

Principles and concepts relating to sexuality and ancestors. Principles that relate to sexuality and ancestors that emerged from the research data include: discernment around ancestors and the erotic, dangers and taboos, sacred reciprocity, and connection of sex and death.

Discernment around ancestors and the erotic. As was reported by research participants when questioned about ancestor reverence practices in general, the necessity of discernment as an important principle was again repeatedly invoked when connecting ancestors and the erotic in practice. The emergent themes included discerning personal boundaries and discerning the wellness of the ancestor involved.

On the theme of discerning personal boundaries, research participants mentioned paying attention to one's own sense of what is appropriate. One subject discussed how she initially had her ancestor altar in her bedroom, but quickly moved it out, based on her own sense that it was not right for her. She said,

One more thing I would say on the tip of cautions or things to watch out for, there is a sense of appropriate boundaries with your ancestors and sexuality. I had my ancestor altar in my bedroom for a very short time. They wanted to be in there, they were like, "Hey, let us come in here," and I had them in there and I was like, "Oh, this is not right." It's just not right, it's not becoming, it's not seemly, it's not sweet. (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016)

Another participant discussed his process around discernment, saying "I am honest and forthright and trust myself and them [ancestors], including my real boundaries about what I do not choose to share with them" (Survey participant #4).

Discerning the degree of wellness of a particular ancestor before proceeding with erotic connection was strongly indicated by the research data. Research subjects typically spoke in emphatic fashion when addressing this point. One subject, who discussed having an erotic connection with an ancestor of her spiritual lineage (not a blood ancestor) spoke of her discernment process, saying,

I would only do it with an incredibly well ancestor. I would have no interest in this, the person I'm speaking of, I would consider, and many people would consider an ascended master. He's like, high. And so, that feels exciting to me. I wouldn't – if he was not. The first thing is that it's not a thing to negotiate unless

you really know the wellness of the person. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Methodically ascertaining ancestral wholeness as well as discerning an appropriate reason for connecting erotically with an ancestor was also noted. One subject who does have an erotic connection at times with particular ancestors expressed,

I feel like I need to check in line-by-line and find out “who’s available, who’s not, who’s whole, what's not?” I don’t feel like there’s a generic, “Yeah, I wanna have sex with my ancestors!” or even share my pleasure sexually with my ancestors any more than there would be with a living person. (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

This theme was echoed by another research subject, who felt there could potentially be a healing benefit from erotic connection with ancestors. He said, “I think it’s really, really a case-by-case basis, and what it is the person is working with, and what's going on in that person’s life, and how they feel like its connected to the ancestors” (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

Questioning the motives of the ancestor involved was also mentioned. One elder participant with a life-long ancestral reverence practice was concerned about why an ancestor would be interested in creating erotic connection. She said,

You really have to be careful, the thing about it is you don’t know anything about that ancestor, you don’t know whether you hooking up with a pedophile or who. You don’t know as far as I’m concerned . . . you don’t know what’s in their past okay, and why do they want to do, that anyway? (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Dangers and taboos. When asked about dangers and taboos that might inform connecting the erotic with ancestral reverence, participant reports were mixed, varying from there being no taboos or dangers at all, to the other end of the spectrum that any erotic connection involving ancestors is completely dangerous and/or taboo.

Several research participants expressed that either they know of no taboos or dangers, or are not concerned by taboos and dangers, or feel that they take proper cautionary procedures when connecting the erotic and ancestors. One subject shared, “I don’t know that there are taboos. I think there’s a tenderness and an honoring that this is in us” (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Another participant spoke to the safety of connecting ancestors and the erotic, and suggested having an ancestral guide who one trusts, who could help facilitate the process. He explained,

Don’t believe anyone who says it’s safe. But what’s safe? Crossing the street isn’t safe. It’s useful to connect with an ancestor who is well as early as possible to have some sense of a being who is bright and full. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

One Jewish respondent questioned the concept of taboo in general. She spoke the plethora of taboo around sexuality in general, with any taboo around ancestors and sexuality being included. She felt that while there was often initially good wisdom that went into creating taboo, that taboos about sexuality needed to be questioned. She said,

In normative Judaism, any sex that isn’t married heterosexual sex that’s happening on a Friday night under covers is taboo. There’s so many taboos in the Torah and in the Bible related to sex practices and boundaries So I feel like a lot

of what's taboo is overlaid with patriarchy, and there is some kind of good wisdom in some of the boundaries that are set up, but plenty that's not. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Connecting ancestors and sexuality triggered the incest taboo for several participants. One revealed, "Personally I can't imagine, like just thinking about trying to do some kind of ritual around my sex life, where I'm calling on my mother's energy, feels squicky to me" (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017).

Interesting to note that two participants who are both elders spoke to the absence of the practice of connecting ancestors and the erotic, or at least their lack of knowledge about ever hearing of this practice. One Pagan elder reported, "I've never done that. I've never read about indigenous people doing that. I'm not saying they don't. That's not something I'm familiar with" (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016).

Another elder who practices Ifa discussed never having heard about that, and if indeed that practice exists in her spiritual lineage, there would be a taboo against speaking of it. She remarked,

I have never heard of anybody doing anything like that and if it is, I don't know about it and it might be something we have [in my spiritual tradition]. We have an ancestor society, within the society that I belong to, we've never done anything like that. I don't know what other people have done, but I don't know anything about that and if anything like that went on, that probably does not get talked about because things that are done a lot of times you got to be like an initiated priests or you're initiated in that society and you can't talk about it outside the society. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Sacred reciprocity. The principle of sacred reciprocity was one that was mentioned in regard to connecting ancestors and sexuality. The concept seemingly shared by respondents who mentioned it is that one doesn't receive something without giving in return, nor give something without receiving in return. Actions are motivated by love. One respondent who is a shamanic practitioner offered, "The basic spiritual principle is sacred reciprocity. So, whenever I'm giving or receiving, it's all being reciprocated" (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016).

Subjects expressed this principle as relating to sex as an offering, as well as their own development of sexual wellness as sacred reciprocity. For example, one participant discussed sex as a sacred offering to the ancestors and as an affirmation of life, whether the sexual participants are conscious of it or not.

Researcher: You mention sacred reciprocity. With sex, is that ever a way of giving back, or making offering to the ancestors?

Subject: Yeah. I think some people make that conscious, and some people are not conscious of it. You don't have to be conscious of it to be connected. I can't imagine my beloved Olly making love without doing a whole smoky ritual before, during, and after. But there's also the animal sex done in offering to the ancestors. To life, it's an affirmation of life . . . I know horny 15-year-olds going at it in the backseat of a car, there's a lot of sacred reciprocity. They're totally not conscious of or thinking about ancestors or spirituality. (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016)

The other way research subjects explained the principle of sacred reciprocity was by connecting their own sexual healing as a benefit to their ancestors.

Researcher: I think I hear you saying that your development of sexual wellness, your personal healing, is of benefit to your ancestors. Is that right?

Subject: It's a two-way street. It's a benefit to them. I'm almost a repository. And the person that's been able to . . . the spirit that's been able to move this forward, and make this okay, for all of us. (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Another participant echoed this sentiment, saying,

If I'm healing myself, aren't I healing them if they are in me? If I am healing myself, and their blood runs through me, and I am the healthiest, most joyful most expressed version of myself, aren't I giving them that opportunity as well?

(Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Personal healing being instigated by and pleasing to one's ancestors was a concept shared by a subject who said, "Any healing being done by a descendant is the wish of the ancestors. So, if your life improves from the work that you done, you're done around this issue, then your ancestors are happy" (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017).

Connection between sex and death. A concept that many research respondents named was the connection between sexuality and death. One research participant who practices as well as teaches both sexuality and death practices discussed his own process of connecting death and sex. He said,

It's interesting because I was thinking about one of the places where I guide others into thinking through ancestors is doing work around death and dying practices. Which are practices that I began at the same time as I learned sexual

wellness, sexual healing practices. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

An interview subject who is a spiritual leader in community spoke to the connection between sex and death that she observed as two of her community members died, and she was in direct proximity. She expressed,

With both Aylah and Yulia, sex was such an active part of their dying, which I was very close to. I was the person, outside of their immediate family, that was called to be with them. There was just so much sex energy in the time leading up to their deaths and then their deaths. It feels relevant. I was reading, I guess it was Barbara Carrellas' book *Urban Tantra* where she was talking about bringing vibrators into ICUs and cancer wards and things for people. I started talking to Yulia about the importance of giving herself pleasure, even amidst the intense pain that she was in, and she really liked that. Then I said something about . . . death as the ultimate orgasm. And she loved that so much. It's what she kept rooting in when she found despair, and she would write me or call me and be like "This is what my death is going to be". That was really so impactful, to see her again and again orienting toward that, cultivating that when everything else was going to shit in her body. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

As indicated in the research data, the above are the principles that relate to sexuality and ancestors. These include discernment around ancestors and the erotic, dangers and taboos, sacred reciprocity, and connection of sex and death.

Erotic experiences with ancestors. About half of the research subjects interviewed reported some kind of erotic experience with ancestors. These experiences

varied including erotic dreams, consciously created rituals, remembering actual sex with those who had died and are now considered ancestors, transpersonal experiences during sex, masturbatory sessions invoking ancestors, and sexy aesthetics inspired by ancestral memory.

The experience of having erotic dreams involving ancestors was reported in the research data. One participant recounted her experience of dreams that involved her ancestor having sex with people through her body, saying, “I had so many sex dreams where I felt like he was having sex with people through me” (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017).

Another way some research participants reported having erotic experiences with ancestors was through consciously creating erotic rituals that invoked the ancestors. Two subjects spoke to erotic rituals they created involving ancestors during the AIDS epidemic, as a way to counter the fear and grief of that time. One man disclosed his experience of creating such a ritual, saying, “I’m going to do this ritual, so men can be sexual together, and maybe everybody’s going to be sexual. Let’s experience that together and do that intentionally . . . some of those ancestors did that” (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016).

Because of the AIDS epidemic, when these two research participants discussed having erotic experiences with ancestors, part of what was included in the meaning was that they had actually had sex with people who then later died of AIDS, and who they now consider ancestors. One man reported, “In terms of talking about these ancestors of spirit, I actually had sex with several of them” (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016).

Transpersonal experiences of connecting with ancestors during sex was mentioned in the interviews. During her interview, one research participant shared a pertinent quote from her own dissertation research interviewing people on transpersonal sexual experiences. She read,

My girlfriend and I had gone to my aunt and uncle's cabin for the weekend. We had been making love and I saw a vision of my uncle's sister. She was the original owner of this cabin. She and her husband. The sense that I got when I saw them is that they were very happy that there was so much love in the place where they spent time together. In the course of that, they kind of transformed into my girlfriend's parents. I knew when I saw them who they were. I had the same sense with them, that they were very happy. The whole experience was very moving. I don't normally see people who have passed away. They were people from our past who were pleased with what we share. It was like it brought in, I don't know, people from the outside of the relationship into our life. (Research participant #13, interview, April 27, 2017)

The research subject discussed this particular interviewee's transpersonal sexual experience in terms of an erotic and ancestral framework. Although this is direct quotation from the subject's dissertation research, the source is not cited here to protect confidentiality.

Including ancestors in masturbatory practice was mentioned as a form of erotic experiences with ancestors. One participant spoke freely about her masturbation practice,

I feel like I have sex with Aylah [her spiritual ancestor] all the time. From beyond. So, this is helpful. When I get outside my family line and think about

having sex with ancestors, this is good. I feel like the boundaries between he and I sexually really changed when he entered, when he died. I feel like he was sexually much more available. There were certain boundaries we hadn't embodied with each other and once he became a spirit, he was much more open and, it is really playful and happy to engage with me in that way if I want that. He doesn't want that or need it but sometimes . . . it feels supportive to me. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

When asked about any erotic experiences she had had with ancestors, one research subject mentioned her love of black lace as an ancestral erotic practice, saying, "One thing I do notice comes up in my aesthetic and magical practice is black lace. I really love black lace. I have a sense of having worn that fabric for a long time" (Survey participant #7). In the context of the interview it was clear that the participant drew a connection between her erotic black lace experiences and her ancestors.

In summary, the erotic experiences that research participants spoke to included erotic dreams, consciously created rituals, remembering actual sex with those who had died and are now considered ancestors, transpersonal experiences during sex, masturbatory sessions invoking ancestors, and sexy aesthetics inspired by ancestral memory.

Erotic experiences with other-than-human ancestors. A finding present in the interview data is research subjects' reporting of the experience of erotic experiences with other-than-human ancestors. This was not a specific inquiry of the interview process and emerged organically. Participants mentioned erotic experiences that had an ancestral tone or consciousness, but the ancestors involved were different species than human.

One research participant spoke of connecting through sex and her body with the evolutionary story of humans. She shared,

I connect with my more-than-human ancestors. Sex is a way that can be animal shape-shifty for me, that helps me remember the ancestors in my body that are not human, and that are more than human. Sex is one of the primary ways that I access those more-than-human ancestors in my own body. Sometimes I feel like sex can take me into memories of being a different kind of creature in my body . . . It roots me . . . it almost takes me to a place of being a different place of being a different kind of creature. And that feels ancestral. It doesn't feel like, "oh I'm becoming a horse in the future," it's like I'm remembering the evolutionary story in my body. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Another research subject spoke of the intensity that his sexual experiences can have when he connects them with ancestors, saying that sometimes it is

the direct experience of god and yourself and the other. Having erotic experiences with other beings, whether they were spirit animals or god or whatever was out there – trees. And the sense of love and altruism connected with indescribably intense physical stimulation. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

About half of research participants spoke to erotic experiences they had had that involved ancestors or ancestral connection. Several spoke to experiences with other-than-human ancestors.

Erotic healing of or with ancestors. Erotic healing with ancestors or erotic healing of ancestors is a set of findings present within the data. Many research

participants shared about how they had either healed with the help of their ancestors, or they had helped their ancestors to heal. The question that elicited this information was, “How can you work with ancestors to develop sexual wellness, or heal sexual trauma?”

One research participant told a story about how she had been doing an ancestral healing session with a practitioner. During that session, she felt that she “slipped with this guide, and multiple times after that, into such ecstatic erotic union with the guide on my dad’s dad’s line” (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017). By guide she meant the well ancestor she was working with in meditation to bring healing to the line. She continued, and discussed what happened, saying,

It was a great gift for itself, but also because it, suddenly, it made so much more sense of the struggles I’ve had . . . There’s the erotic charge that always has been and is my dad. Suddenly it had a place, and it was tenable, and held, and okay, and not fraught. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

In her opinion, connecting erotically with an ancestor created healing in regard to the sexual tension between her and her father.

Another subject described a particular sexual encounter that she had had, that she felt was healing for all of her female ancestors. During the encounter, she had a sense of becoming her ancestors, and that her sex was important for them. She said about that experience, “I felt like I was all the women in my family, or all the women who gave birth to me, going back over generations. And something about the way I was having sex was healing for all of them” (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016).

Erotic practices. One line of questioning in the research interviews explored the specific erotic practices that research participants do in connection with their ancestors.

Practices participants mentioned included invoking their ancestors into sexual spaces, using scent that a dead lover had enjoyed, making offerings of erotic energy to ancestors, sex as prayer, masturbation, intense physical stimulation including genitals, pleasure and orgasm, grave practice, and communicating about sexuality with ancestors' practice, art practice, and forgiveness practice. Because practices were widely varied in the data, the order of the practices here is not indicative of frequency of mention in the data. Also included in this section of erotic practices is a case study of how one participant connects erotically with ancestors. It is included here with commentary because of the specificity with which the subject articulated the detailed data about the methods and technologies she uses to connect erotically with ancestors.

Invocation practice. Invoking ancestors into sexual moments is an erotic practice mentioned in the research data. When participants discussed inviting ancestors, the shared meaning was to welcome them into those experiences, not necessarily to engage erotically with them. Participants spoke to erotic states being times when they felt they could be more open to receiving information from their ancestors. One participant answered,

I create space, by calling them in. And physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, put myself in a place where I'm open to their energies. In times when I'm particularly open, those times can be sexual, they can be spiritual, or feeling very close to the earth. (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016)

Use of scent practice. A participant who described having ongoing erotic encounters with a lover who had died talked about her practice of using scent as a way to

invite that ancestor in. She discussed her practice of putting scented essential oils on her body prior to erotic sessions with this ancestor, saying,

I add things I know he loves. He's a scent freak, so smelling good. . . . I'll use what I know about him in body [when he was alive.] I feel that scent has a particular way of communicating with ancestors. I feel that scent practices are good medicines to support connection. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Making erotic offerings to ancestors' practice. One of the research questions participants were asked was, "Are there erotic practices you offer to your ancestors? Is this okay? How?"

Responses to this question were varied, with some participants feeling that making erotic offerings to ancestors is not okay. For example,

Researcher: "Do you think it's okay to make erotic offerings to one's ancestors?"

Subject: "I don't know. I think for me personally, that triggers a lot of my taboos around incest." (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

Some subjects did not have a practice of making erotic offerings but were intrigued by the idea when presented with the question. One participant said in response, "I would like to work with this, I would like to work with pleasure dedications to them" (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016).

Although the idea of making erotic offerings was appealing to some participants who did not have this as a practice, one participant discussed her discomfort with the idea of receiving pleasure from her ancestors, saying "I think I can imagine offering gifts back

to them, but have a harder time imagining receiving gifts of pleasure, for its own sake or in service to healing, from them” (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017).

Other participants had regular or semi-regular practices of making erotic offerings to their ancestors, including one man who discussed how several times each year he makes erotic offerings during ritual to his ancestors. He expressed, “I would say a few times a year, maybe three, I have sex experiences outdoors. Usually by myself, but not always, and those are the ones where I’m really clear about the idea of a sex offering”. (Research participant #8, interview, December 26, 2016). Some participants had a clear practice of making erotic offerings. Said one, “I have dedicated my orgasms to my ancestors with self-pleasuring” (Survey participant #1).

One subject discussed his logic around sharing his pleasure with his ancestors: “I tend to think about my healing going forwards and it makes so much sense to me to offer both my healing and my pleasure” (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017). His further comments explained that he experiences sharing his erotic pleasure as a benefit to his own healing.

One concept that was mentioned in the interviews is making offerings of orgasms for ancestors. One participant discussed her practice of giving orgasms to her grandmother, who she thought may not have had them. She described her practice as holy, saying,

Giving prayer upon orgasm to one of my grandmothers, who may well have never experienced one. Offering the past--mine, hers, ours--whatever healing could come from the orgasm. I did this once during solo sex after she had died and once

in partnered sex before she died. (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

The concept of discernment again appeared when responding the question about making erotic offerings to ancestors. One participant described how she felt in general when considering the question but was open to using her discernment to decide when it was indeed appropriate to offer ancestors erotic offerings. She said,

I feel daunted when I think of having sex with the ancestors or offering my pleasure to the ancestors when I haven't connected directly with, but it makes so much sense to me to take it on a case by case basis. (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

Sex as prayer practice. Another erotic practice that emerged from the research data is that of sex as prayer. Participants shared experiences of having sexual encounters, either solo or partnered, in which they felt they were making an offering of prayer to the ancestors. It is noted that the research participants who mentioned sex as prayer as an erotic practice also mentioned prayer as a practice in general as a way to connect with ancestors.

One older self-identified gay man discussed how sex as prayer practice for him was also about creating consciousness of descendants as well as the ancestors. He expressed,

Yeah, sex as prayer practice. I don't share that very much with my boyfriend on any articulate level, although I think every now and then when we're in a really strong, this is really happening, I allow my gratitude or wow to include the history of this moment and the future of this moment, and the space that we create for

future faggots by fucking. By fucking without shame, by fucking without being young, by fucking without shaving. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Another participant reflected on her own erotic practice as prayer. She said, “My erotic practices are reverence-based practices that are prayer for me. For me, self-pleasure is prayer, partner sex is prayer, orgasm is definitely something that is in the merit of something” (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016). From the context of her other comments, the “something” she spoke of referenced ancestors.

Masturbation practice. One erotic practice research participant’s connected with ancestral reverence was masturbation. It was clear from subject accounts that masturbation connected to ancestors was a practice that sometimes occurs, but that it does not occur every time participants masturbated. Many participants spoke to this practice, and within the practice of masturbation, the nuanced specifics of what subjects described differed.

The idea that this practice was well-received from the ancestors was discussed. For example, one participant shared, “I definitely think that that’s a form of pleasure and I think they [the ancestors] really like it” (Research participant #11, interview, May 2, 2017). Another discussed an experience she had had masturbating in a group setting under a tree, and her feeling that it pleased the ancestors. She said,

I haven’t done a lot of sex magic but one time we had a sacred circle jerk under grandmother maple tree and where we put our heads together and our feet out and we just all pleased ourselves. I definitely felt like the ancestors were all over

that and were super into it. (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016)

Connecting with the larger ancestral web rather than individual ancestors through masturbation was another theme in the research data

One research subject spoke to his frequent masturbatory experiences that widen his perspective, saying, “I often self-pleasure while connecting with nature and feeling that pleasure as a gift from a deeper well of lineage and as a piece of the larger fabric of matter” (Research participant #8, interview, December 26, 2016).

The concept of transpersonal connection exists both externally, in the natural world, and internally for some participants. One reported,

For me, there is a way of connecting . . . both connecting to something bigger than myself, and also recognizing that that thing that’s bigger than myself is also inside myself, through sex. Or it doesn’t even have to be through sex, through masturbation. Through stimulation of my genitals and erotic cells. (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

Genitals, intense stimulation, pleasure, and orgasm. Although they are not erotic practices per se, but genitals, intense stimulation and orgasm were themes mentioned in enough interviews that they are important to note. Research subjects’ concept of the erotic was wider than just genitals, pleasure, and orgasm. One participant shared her perspective on the erotic, saying, “I think of Eros, I think of stuff that’s beyond the genital pleasure and orgasm . . . Eros and erotic energy are not being specifically or extensively genital” (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017).

Genitals, intense stimulation, pleasure, and orgasm were viewed by some participants as “portals” that can connect humans to spirit. Said one subject, “We have this physical container, and the soul is inside of it, and the genitalia . . . the portals” (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016).

The concept of traveling into the body through portals or otherwise to connect with ancestors, wise ones, ancestral guides was repeated in several interviews. Participants drew out the connection between the erotic and the soul, saying for example, “And when I’m talking about the erotic, I’m talking about the soul. But I think the erogenous zones and genitals and orgasms and pleasure is the quickest route to the soul.” Another participant talked about these concepts as her ancestors, saying of her journey to sexual wellness, “Orgasm, intense physical stimulation, wild falling in love were my wise ones, my ancestors, in a sense. They were my guides” (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016).

Grave practice. An erotic practice that presented in one interview is that of laying on the grave of a dead lover. The subject described her practice, saying:

I just go there and lay on the ground with him, next to him, and it’s such an erotic experience. Physical. I lay on the Earth where his body is. I don’t know in that moment if I’m having sex with him but yeah. Spirit sex can be good sex.

(Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Breathing practice. One research participant discussed the breathing practices she has taught to her clients as a way to connect with the body, and then connect with the ancestors.

I talk about how to use erotic breath work as stilling themselves so that they could be open to hearing what these ancestors had to say. I had them do the anal breath in front of the ancestor altar. With a hand on the heart and a hand on the genitals . . . then being still and see what they heard [from their ancestors]. Going into a meditative state. But distinctively, going into the meditative state through intentionally evoking erotic energy. (Research participant #14, interview, March 23, 2017)

This subject spoke further about the anal breath practice, indicating that the practice is about deliberately paying attention to filling the body with breath as one inhales, all the way down to one's anus.

Art practice. Several research participants spoke to art as a practice that either connects them with their ancestors, or comes as a blessing of a lineage, or as a way to effect healing in a lineage. One gay male elder discussed how his art practice was influenced by his ancestors who had died of AIDS, and also how the art and workshop that emerged from his own sexual healing created sexual healing for other gay men during the time of the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco. He said,

I did an altar for a friend of mine who's a performance artist . . . I crochet penises. Someone came up to me and said, "Your penises are amazing, what if you did a workshop and just showed men how to do that." Some of these people [men who had died of AIDS] did this work ahead of time, so it led to us doing this workshop, which led to me being more comfortable with my sexuality. We got gay men and queer men together. I would make penises in the morning, and my friend would do the performance movement thing in the afternoon. That was very

healing for me, and for a lot of men who came to the workshops, because that was in the 1980s and 1990s. (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

Another research participant spoke to feeling the influence of ancestors on his art making practice. He described,

Intuitive art making can feel like “I just pulled that out of nowhere, I have no idea how that happened.” Sometimes I can feel the lineage of an action, and that happens in art making, it happens in a protest, it happens in ritual. I feel some sense of the hand or the blessing or sometimes it’s just the gaze of the ancestors. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Healing ancestral trauma through art practice was another theme that emerged in the interviews. Remembered one participant,

I was writing a sacred performance history of Hebrew harlots and healers. It was a very explicit piece of sexual trauma connected to the Holocaust and many thousands of years of Jewish misogyny and violence before that, and I told the story of my ancestresses being sexually violated and then wove it into a blessing for sexual wholeness. It was really pivotal for me, the creation of this piece, and my own healing in relation to sexual violence and Jewish tradition, Jewish lines. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Erotic trance and meditation practice. Several participants spoke of trance and meditation practices involving ancestors and the erotic. One research subject discussed her trance work and shapeshifting of consciousness practices. She spoke of two ancestors in particular with who she interacts during these practices. She explained, “I interact with both of these ancestors around sex, they are healthy, natural, and noble, and good. There

is an eroticism to Life itself when I am in that space and hold it in consciousness”

(Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016).

Another participant described her erotic meditations with ancestors, describing the embodied sensations she experiences, and the way in which this practice helps her feel connected to all of life. She shared,

Generally, there’s like a tingly sensation on my skin. There is an energetic burst often like originating in the solar plexus that comes up through. There’s often like a shift in temperature for me, usually a warmer temperature. Or I just feel like everything feels connected. When I get into meditative space, I often imagine or feel a web of connection between myself and all beings, past, and present, future.

(Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

The connection between ancestor reverence, meditation, and the erotic are practiced by one research participant. She said, “I go into a meditative state. But distinctively, going into the meditative state through intentionally evoking erotic energy” (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017).

Another research participant, a therapist herself, discussed the value of invoking a meditative state in therapy similar to one that can be encountered during sex as a resource for healing. She remarked,

There’s a lot you can do energetically with [working with ancestors.] It doesn’t have to happen during sex, though I think it can happen. You can create a state in a therapy session that will suggest that, where you can bring those ancestors forward for people in some kind of a trance state, and ask [the ancestors] what they need, or talk to them about what they need. And give it to them intentionally

with energy, with heart, with emotion. (Research participant #13, interview, April 21, 2017)

How one subject connects erotically with ancestors: A case study of practice.

One research subject shared a long discussion on her experience and technology of connecting erotically with one particular ancestor of spiritual lineage. Her words are reported here in entirety, for the sake of sharing the depth of erotic practice with ancestors that people can experience. She communicated,

I want to first make a distinction. It's not . . . it doesn't feel like a fantasy. Usually what happens for me is first, just seeking to connect with him. It's not like "hey, let's have a sex date," it's entering into connection with him.

I do this by calling my attention in his direction. He's always there, if I pretend not to notice him, he's closer than he was before. It's not like I ask him to come be with me, it's not like that, because he is with me. It's turning my attention to him, so, it's less like in my heart, and more like a devotion of attention toward him. And then from that place of attention, just seeing what connection wants to arise, so sometimes it might be joking or asking for guidance, and sometimes it might be putting myself on his body in a particular way, and by the way, the sex that I experience having with him in this way, isn't . . . there are particular sexes that he would have or wouldn't have been open to [while he was] in body, and I feel that they're the same out of body.

I'm aware of really checking in with him a lot around consent, because in body I was more drawn to him than . . . we were like, there's not an easy category for what we were to each other. We were beloved in spirit and . . . he held a pretty

clear boundary in body that was shifting slightly in the months before he died. He didn't know he was dying. But before, even during, with him because I have so much desire to respect his boundaries, one of our roles for each other, in life, and still, is how to tend both our fierce protectors for each other. I'm always like "Is this okay? Do you want this?" and he's very clear on what he wants and what he doesn't want, and what he's available for. And the sex he's available for, I feel like he's, we're having fun. He finds pleasure in it. I feel more that it's a gift that he's offering me than something he needs. More that he senses it's a way and a connection or anchor.

I turn my attention. I ask for enthusiastic consent, and then I just listen, the same way I would listen to any lover. Okay, what is wanted in the connection between us? Where does my body naturally go on your body? Where am I drawn to be? And where are you calling me to be? What's the pace . . . what's different in the ancestral realm for me, is that it can be very boom-boom, it doesn't need a lot of context. It's time-less, it can just happen and not happen; there can be mode-shifts very rapidly.

I think it is, particularly because there's a lot you can do energetically with this. It doesn't have to happen during sex, I think it can happen: that you can create a state in a therapy session that will suggest that, where you can bring those ancestors forward for people in some kind of a trance state, and ask them what they need, or talk to them about what they need. And give it to them intentionally with energy, with heart, with emotion. Probably energetically with body scans, you can invite that person's body into your client's body and do some healing in

that way. With them energetically. And bring the former trauma to a resolution or help the person release it. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Communicating about sexuality with ancestors' practice. The practice of communicating about sexuality with ancestors arose in the interviews. Participants shared experiences of consulting with their ancestors about matters of sexuality. The common assumption was that communication did in fact occur.

One participant offered her thoughts that one can ask the ancestors questions regarding sexuality and expect an answer. She said,

Well, in doing the work and connection with the ancestors you can talk to them about things that are going on with you. That's why there is this thing about relating to them mind, body, and spirit, as well as community. Because they can come and tell you, "You need to go to this," "You need to do this with your body," "You need to . . ." They can come and tell you different things to do, and so forth. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Another participant discussed his experience of asking his ancestor's advice about his sex life, saying, "I have created an [ancestor] shrine and called them [the ancestors] in to guide me before having a sexual relationship with someone" (Survey participant #6).

In summary, research interview participants described many varied erotic practices they do that connect them to their ancestors. While opinions and beliefs on various practices differed and there was not consensus, each subject who reported on practices had found practices that worked for them. Practices include: invoking ancestors into sexual spaces, use of scent, making offerings of erotic energy to ancestors, sex as prayer, masturbation, intense physical stimulation including genitals, pleasure, orgasm,

grave practice, communicating about sexuality with ancestors, art practice, and trance and meditation practice.

Developing Sexual Wellness: Healing Sexuality with Ancestors

Healing sexuality after sexual violence or sexual trauma was a subset of questions interview participants explored. Interview questions included:

- Does your personal sexual healing benefit your ancestors? How?
- Have you tended sexual wounding in your family ancestry? What have you done?
- How can we heal sexual trauma in our family lines through the lens of ancestral consciousness? How can we work with ancestors to heal sexual trauma?
- What are effective practices that you would suggest to someone who wanted to work with ancestors to support sexual healing?

The findings that emerged through the interview process have been categorized into the following themes: sexual healing; obligation to heal ancestral lineage; choosing to heal with ancestors; support for healing; connection between personal and lineage healing and reciprocity; elders, intergenerational relations and the necessity of community for healing; understanding your ancestors and valuing living mentors; interruption; second track of memory; integration; spiritual aspects of healing; erotic as important to social justice healing work; sexual healers; directional healing; degrees of healing, transgenerational healing, and ripple effect; time and holding descendant consciousness; and connecting with queer ancestors as a source of strength.

Sexual healing. Interview participants on the whole agreed that sexual healing is both specific to sexuality, as well as part of healing in general after trauma. One participant said simply, “I see sexual healing as part of an overall healing process” (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017) All participants identified as individuals who had done some degree of sexual healing during their lives. Sometimes this was a part of recovery from overt sexual violence and trauma, and sometimes it was a response to oppressive social conditioning.

Among participants there was a shared experience of moving from sexual wounding toward sexual wellness, through deliberately undertaking healing work. Almost all of research participants indicated that they had sought the help of professionals while on their healing journeys. These professionals took many forms, including therapists, trauma counsellors, somatic healers, bodyworkers, and sexological bodyworkers. The healing practices, described by participants, involved many modalities like breathwork, dance, sexuality practices, ritual and ceremony, conscious masturbation, and community support. Participants indicated that professional support was desirable and useful to support their healing.

A research subject talked about how for her, healing had been a multi-faceted process. Inside her commitment to freedom from her traumatic past, she was willing to take many healing actions to obtain her liberation. She said, “The action is doing the writing, doing the therapy, doing whatever it is that releases me, allows me to be free” (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

Overall, participants reported a sense of satisfaction with the types of sexual healing work they had done. There was a general agreement that through the effort of

developing sexual wellness, sexuality became a richer and more meaningful experience.

One participant described part of his sexual wellness journey saying,

By thinking through things like ancestors and ritual and history, sex becomes a thicker experience. If your sex practices are ones that are not accepted by the mainstream, or carry certain legacies of shame or even trauma, or violence, then you have this other kind of strength and empowerment through this contact with lineage, with legacy, with history, with the embodied practices of people who are righteous. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

While participants did express the experience of sometimes feeling overwhelmed by the amount of healing necessary, without fail participants were willing to engage in this work, with many expressing gratitude for the process. The concept that a state of wellness is what is wanted by life was mentioned by one participant. Replied one subject,

Ultimately, we all have the same ancestors if you think about it far enough and the ancestors of all life. Because all of the forces that came together to generate us go back to before the earth. We're all part of the same family. I think there's a family. There's a family of developing consciousness. We're all a family of consciousness as well and I think within the wholeness of life, there's a desire or well, to be sound, whole and healthy. The life force is always working to reveal things that are hidden. I think all of our scars and our wounds eventually get bubbled up to the surface, so they can heal. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Research subjects reported that while sexual healing can happen, it is a process that happens by degree, and that pleasure is important in healing areas damaged by sexual

trauma. One participant, who had done a lot of work to heal his sexuality after experiencing ancestral sexual trauma in his body, offered,

Subject: Healing this is a process . . . you have to first clear away some poison because you have to make room in the place in the body and the soul where this damage has occurred. Then, it's not over yet. You have to actively regain and reclaim pleasure in the place that was wounded.

Researcher: The pleasure is the medicine.

Subject: The pleasure can't fit if it's filled with poison. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Obligation to heal ancestral lineages. One theme that research participants disagreed on was whether or not there is an obligation to heal ancestral lineages of sexual trauma, or ancestral burdens. For some participants, once the awareness of transgenerational trauma was present, they felt a duty to address it rather than pass it on. Expressed one research subject,

It's not necessarily an obligation in a negative sense but once someone has become awoken to the idea and the feel of the ancestors running through you, it then becomes- obligation is a word but I'm not sure if it's the right word- responsibility to do the work. Once you're aware of it, you have to do it. You're responsible then, you can choose to ignore it but if you choose to ignore it then you're just going to have it continue down the line. Why would you put that work on somebody else when you're aware and you know how to do it? I don't know. I feel it's the duty, responsibility, obligation. They all have a negative heaviness to

them and I don't feel it's a negative heaviness. It's more of, "Oh, I can do this and so I should." (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017)

Other participants disagreed with this stance and felt that consent and choice were necessary when working ancestrally to heal sexual wounding. This was especially true if there had been violations of consent within the bloodlines. Said one participant with instances of interpersonal violence and sexual trauma in her ancestry, "I would be really careful about 'You should work on this in your current life because you also gotta heal your ancestors. That seems like an unfair burden. That should be a choice'" (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017).

Choosing to heal with ancestors. Making the choice to heal with ancestors or making the choice to attempt healing in ancestral bloodlines was highlighted in the research as important. Research participants who had made the choice to do healing work with or for ancestors mentioned a sense of empowerment, as well as access to more of themselves and their sexuality through the making of that choice.

Described one interviewee,

I feel like my opening a space for my ancestors to be present in my current life, and to be open . . . this is what gives me more access to all of myself. The spiritual part of me cannot be whole if I'm not allowing space for my ancestors and healing my connections with my ancestors. If my spiritual self is not whole, I don't feel like I will have complete access to Eros. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

For one participant who was choosing not to have children, the choice to heal felt very present. He expressed, "It feels both audacious and weighty of me, like if I am going

to be the completion of this blood line then I better get to work” (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016).

One research participant spoke about choice regarding interrupting and not repeating patterns of sexual violence within ancestral lineages. She offered,

Everything is a choice. Even though that blood is in you too, that doesn't have to be your choice. You have consciousness so that doesn't have to be your choice. It won't be your choice and things will be different because of you and your family. Because there's a consciousness that is alive now that wasn't alive back then . . . That's what you need to always remember, your consciousness, your choices will make it different to whatever has come down the family line. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Getting to do healing work with ancestors around sexuality was experienced as a joy for one participant, whose professional work is informed by the sexual trauma in her ancestry. She shared, “My father's sisters, my mom's sister, also sexually violated when she was young . . . so now it's clear to me, that maybe part of my work is to transmute, transform or heal that in some way” (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

Whether or not ancestors are real was unimportant to one participant, who works professionally with transgenerational, trans-national conflict resolution and healing. In this subject's opinion, what is important is whether choosing to heal by engaging with ancestors gets the desired result of healing. She reported,

So, you know you go back in time, you reclaim parts of yourself. Energetically you can go back in the past and confront the perpetrators. I don't think of it in literal terms. I think that we've absorbed it. It's inside of us. These people are

inside of us. And even if we don't know details, we have a felt sense. I see a lot of psychodramas as going back to rescue yourself. And sometimes it's important to engage with an ancestor. But really that ancestor is not a real – I don't think that they've channeled them. I think that they live within us. I don't think that we're actually engaging with a literal ancestor. I don't have that belief. But as a way of understanding and reprogramming ourselves, I think it's a useful idea. You take this ancestor from within you, and you externalize them, and then you re-internalize them in a different way. All of the energy fields that people tap into doing ancestral work can seem and feel very real. And really it doesn't matter whether they're real or not. If it's healing for the person, then it's important.

(Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

Discernment about choosing to heal with ancestors was also mentioned by one participant, who was clear about the possibility, but did not feel obligated to make this choice necessarily. She discussed her discernment process, saying,

I feel like my opening a space for my ancestors to be present in my current life, and to be open – not saying, hey y'all it's not an invitation – completely open and willing to work out their shit for them but acknowledging that that is a possibility and saying that can be happening. (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017)

One participant felt that whether or not one makes the choice to do the healing work with ancestors, the work is present. She noted, "That's the thing about doing ancestral work. You can try to skip it but you're living with those stories in your body.

They're in us. Either work with them or not, but they're there anyway" (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

Support for healing. Research participants who chose to do work to develop sexual wellness that included their ancestors in some way reported feeling a sense of support from their ancestors for their healing work. Ancestors were regarded as a positive resource for addressing sexual trauma in these cases. Emphasized one participant, "Ancestors have really affected how I move and be around sex" (Research participant #16, interview, April 18, 2017). One subject who is a survivor of sexual abuse talked about feeling the support of her mother, her aunt, and a grandmother, all dead, while she was actively recovering from the sexual trauma. She reported,

I feel the support of my mother and my aunt. I just feel the ongoing support for me doing the work that I do. I felt the support of a grandmother that I never knew during that process too. I don't feel really her presence that much anymore. At the time when I was really doing healing work around the sexual abuse. It was the time when I felt her presence, a lot. I found her in trees. She often showed up in trees. (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016)

Another participant spoke to the support she experienced from her ancestors using Dr. Daniel Foor's Ancestral Lineage Healing method, and the impact it has had on her developing sexual wellness. She shared,

I have found the ancestral lineage repair work and working directly with ancestors to heal up the line, so deeply impactful of sexual trauma in a specific bloodline, and I felt that the healing of that trauma in that bloodline so impactful for my well-being sexually. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

Connection between personal and lineage healing and reciprocity. The theme of connection between one's personal healing and the healing of the lineage as a principle of reciprocity ran through all of the research interviews in various ways. The concept that one's personal healing is beneficial to one's ancestors or ancestral lineages was widely present in the data. Many research participants expressed feeling that their own personal healing was helpful to healing transgenerational trauma, including sexual trauma. This finding aligns with the principle of sacred reciprocity mentioned earlier. Research subjects also drew a connection between helping to heal ancestral trauma and their own healing. One offered, "I feel that my healing will also come from trying to help heal my ancestors' trauma" (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017).

The principle of reciprocity, of personal healing benefiting ancestors and creating healing in an ancestral lineage that benefits the person doing the healing work was illustrated by one participant.

Subject: Well, first of all, they're honoring their ancestors, if their ancestors say they'll help them and do their work then it's helping their ancestors. We have our work that we do on this side, but they got their work to do too. It's the honoring of them to do the work and you're setting a new vibration into the lineage in which you were born. It sets a new vibration that can vibrate back through time and possibly bring a healing to those who came before you who have experienced that, as well as honoring those ancestors in the past who told you to do the work. It's double fold. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

When asked if personal healing benefits lineage healing, one research subject who is herself a researcher of sexual wellness explained,

Some people say, “Absolutely it does and you can.” There’s no way to verify that. You have the person’s subjective folklore. And oftentimes, to what extent is it their felt sense because they resolved their trauma? If they resolve their trauma, in theory it means that the transfer of intergenerational crap stops there. I’m not going to pass on whatever my bad stuff was because now I’m healed, and I will treat my offspring in a different way. (Research participant #13, interview, April 21, 2017)

Another research subject shared how she feels her healing benefits her ancestors. She explained,

I am connected to my ancestors, and so I believe that when I am healing myself, I am healing my ancestors through that connection. I don’t know how that works exactly, but I know that connection is there. We are connected by blood. When my grandmother passed away, my teacher said, “You know, your grandmother’s blood runs through you, she is always with you.” Literally she is in me. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

In one interview, the subject discussed the principle of healing reciprocity, saying,

We’ve received the wounds of our ancestors. That’s part of the reason why our ancestors are interested in us is because our well-being is tied in with their well-being. Their well-being is tied in with our well-being. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Elders, intergenerational relations, and the necessity of community for healing. Research participants commented that healing does not happen in isolation, but rather with the support of community, including therapists, friends and other loved ones,

accepting partners, and community elders. The concept of community was often understood by research participants as meaning a group of people who share values, care and interests. One participant offered her thoughts on this theme, saying, “That’s part of the community part, and it’s part of the elder part. See, of having elders around you who understand what’s happening with you and what you need” (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017).

Responding to a reflection that summarized her thoughts, this respondent agreed that relationships with living elders help end the secrecy and shame that prevent sexual healing.

Researcher: You’re saying part of the spiritual healing of it isn’t just relationships with the ancestor elders, but it’s also relationships with the living community elders.

Subject: Yes.

Researcher: To break the silence, break the secrecy, break the shame.

Subject: Yes. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

The concept that community is necessary for healing was shared by many research participants, as well as communally helping each other heal. Reported one participant who was working to heal sexual trauma in their own life,

Only with the support of other people would I be able to deal with this without losing my fucking mind because the rage that’s stored inside those body tissues and inside the ancestral body is more than any one individual can deal with. It’s just too much. It’s been packed away too long . . . There’s something here about how we, as people doing this work, can actively be doing it and actively tend to a

container that helps other people also do it. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Many research subjects discussed the role that elders had played in their own healing, and the importance of being witnessed and guided in healing. Remarked one participant about a relationship she developed with an elder and spiritual mentor,

I was very lucky that Leigh came in my life. Even before, I was working on healing and had done a number of things. All of it wasn't spiritual before I got to Leigh, but I was . . . I felt lucky after getting to Leigh because I was able to incorporate part that I didn't even know I needed to be healing. You see? Because she could see my life. She was, "Okay, you got to work on this and you got to work on that, and you definitely got to work on this right over here." (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

One subject spoke about his experience of becoming an elder in his spiritual community as his elders died of AIDS, and he needed to step into leadership to fill the role they left behind. He also draws the connection between becoming an elder and then transitioning into being an ancestor. He recounted,

Related to that, is the term elder. I work with Radical Faeries, I was part of Nominus, the organization that bought the land at Wolf Creek. I was brought into Nominus to be the treasurer because I was willing to do it. But there were other people who were movers and shakers and doing things, and I was just keeping track of the checkbook. I was the person who wrote the check to pay for the land every month. I did that for a couple of years. But during that time, a lot of people who had put the work into acquiring the land, died. I found myself as an elder

because I was one of the people who had experience, but I wasn't the person who was in the leadership role, but then I had no choice. I had to step up to say "Here's how we do it, this is how we do it, these are the reasons why we do it, these are the reasons we did the work before we got here" to then be in some kind of leadership role. So, people who were elders became my ancestors and I had to become an elder. At least in terms of the Radical Faeries and Nominus. So those two things are kind of related for me, going from an elder to an ancestor, and "Oh, I guess I have to be an elder now." (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

Research subjects discussed the concept that "elder" is becoming a more important and recognized cultural identity. One participant recounted,

We're in such an amazing time, because there were very few people in the 1970s who had a sense of their ancestors. There was this notion of the break between generations . . . Now, whether it's faggots, or hip hop, or trans people, or trans hip hop faggots, there's really a different attention paid to elders. In the spoken word world, people give props, not just to their parents, but to the people who struggled before them, to the people who created the spaces. (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

Another participant shared her thoughts on the importance of learning to depend on community, rather than self-reliance. She explained,

I think as we get older when we move out of our teens, out of our twenties, even out of our thirties, we get into, "I need to do it and I need to do it alone," and it isn't that. It's a time to be embracing the help of other people and possibly asking

for the help of other people from our spiritual community, more than likely so that we can get all the information we need to get to do the right thing at that time in our lives. (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016)

The concept of feeling worthy to receive support from community was mentioned by one elder, who expressed deep gratitude for the teachers she had had in her life. She said,

Oh, the teachers. And other people who came in my life and helped me and they made me feel whole and good and worthy because I think that that's an important element that can get lost as we do work around our healing. It's important that we feel worthy of receiving the help that we're getting from others in our community, in our families. Because of what we've gone through, we don't. (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016)

One specific aspect of community that can promote healing is having a person, either a therapist, a group of like-minded individuals, a friend or a partner, who can witness and validate and offer acceptance for the healing process. A research subject who conducted doctoral research on healing sexuality shared how an accepting sexual partner could offer healing and promote the development of sexual wellness. She expressed,

Most of these people were reporting some kind of a sexual adventure with an accepting partner, so there was something about sex that made them feel good about themselves. Oftentimes there was something liberating or perhaps self-affirming in the fundamentals of whatever the sexual encounter was. (Research participant #13, interview, April 21, 2017)

In one research interview, the subject spoke to the acceptance his husband offers him, and how he reciprocates as a partner in healing. He spoke metaphorically about breathing, as a way to offer acceptance and support to each other. He said,

In the moments where I can't breathe, my husband can breathe for me. He can hold me and say, "It'll be okay." In the moments when he can't breathe and can't move forward, it's like, "Okay, I'm here. I'll breathe with you and for you until you can start back up." (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

Another research participant discussed how she has experienced her ancestors' acceptance offering comfort and healing to her sexual partners. She conveyed, "I've had partners that are inexperienced or ashamed or scared of 'unusual' desires, I feel the power of ancestral acceptance of difference and 'deviance' flow through me and provide comfort to my partners" (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017).

The importance of group support, acceptance and validation was also mentioned as necessary for healing. One participant described how she has experienced acceptance and healing around sexuality from the kink community. She shared, "The kink community describes what I'm trying to describe better. A sense of clarity and purpose, certainly a sense of worship and awe, and a sense of acceptance of whoever or whatever is coming in" (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016).

Overall, research participants agreed that healing does not happen in isolation, and that the presence of elders and community provides witnessing, support, guidance and acceptance for the healing process.

Understand your ancestors and value living mentors. Understanding one's ancestors and the historical context that they lived in was mentioned in the research as a way to promote healing. One participant reported,

The more we can understand about our ancestors and what happened, the more we can understand how it's playing out in our life, in our families and in our family dynamics, and the more we can have compassion and understanding and forgiveness and healing around that. The more we understand, the more healing we can get around something. (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

Another research participant spoke to the value of understanding the resistance the ancestors held during their lives, no matter how insignificant it may seem to the living. She recounted, "One of the things that can be important when we talk about trans-generational wounding is to help folks pinpoint and recognize the small acts of resistance and defiance that their ancestors did do" (Research participant #14, interview, April 23, 2017). The point this subject further explained is that reframing the ancestors' efforts helps the living understand and place their ancestors into an appropriate time context.

The concept of understanding an ancestor in their appropriate time context created forgiveness for one participant. She shared about her grandmother,

Even though she was wild on that horse, and I know that was sexual for her. And she had lovers. And I know that her beautiful figure and her bustiness and her hair . . . I mean I just know what that was for her. And yet she was horrible to me. I think blaming her, now, has lifted. I don't blame, I listen. I listen to her, I listen to my ancestors, I listen to her almost saying to me "I didn't know. I was doing the

best I could do.” And in that generation, think about it, you get caught with your pants down, and it’s a lot different than it is today. So, trying to understand where she was, and integrating that her anger toward me really wasn’t about my sexuality, it was about hers. (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

Part of understanding one’s ancestors is holding the complexity of a single person being many different things and having many different aspects. One research participant spoke of how creating understanding through developing the capacity to be with complexity can support healing with ancestors. He shared,

There’s the alcoholic father, and there’s a sober father. When father was sober, he was there, he was funny, he was alive. And then the alcoholic and drunk father . . . There can be a lot of complexity. Otherwise I have to completely cut off my father. At the same time, father was an asshole. At the same time, he gave a love of art, or imparted music, or imparted something. It’s the ability to hold both of these fathers. And to be angry. People get stuck because they’re holding both, and they can’t resolve this. You can embrace this father and be glad for this father. And be enraged at this father that made choices and did hurtful things. That’s a useful construct. (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

Interruption. One aspect of healing that was mentioned in the research interviews is that interruption of harmful patterns is an important first step. Many participants agreed that interruption requires one to acknowledge a harmful pattern and make a conscious choice to not repeat that pattern. Said one participant who has experienced first-hand transgenerational transmission of trauma,

I do think that there is a repetition compulsion, and that trauma is passed from generation to generation. It can be stopped by someone in the current generation who becomes aware of it, and changes the narrative, and creates boundaries and models healthy response to the trauma to their children. The trauma stops here; I will not transmit the trauma. (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

Several research participants were quite aware of the potential impact of their own trauma on their children. They articulated the idea that healing their own trauma would be a protection for their children. Said one, “Working with that and healing that trauma; I need to work on that and heal that trauma so that my kids don’t have that” (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017).

Another concept that emerged in the data was that interruption of harm must happen first, and then any pain experienced needs to be acknowledged before healing can happen. One participant emphasized, “We have to interrupt, and the pain has to be acknowledged, those are the things we need for healing to happen” (Research participant #16, interview, April 18, 2017)

Laying a second track in memory. One avenue to healing that research subjects discussed is laying down a second track in human memory, by creating different stories. Through the creation of new and different memories, choice emerges, and provides an outlet to the automated trigger responses trauma survivors often face. Participants discussed this as a healing practice that is often done consciously, through creating embodied experiences that give a different outcome to a previously experienced traumatic situation.

One research subject shared,

Human beings have a need to create a story, to make things make sense. We can change the story. The usefulness of psychodrama and action methods. A new embodied experience reprograms the brain, so that when the trauma survivor is triggered, instead of going to the story of the trauma, it creates a new memory. There's a choice. You can choose to go to the new memory. The brain can be rewired through story, because that's how human beings create meaning.

(Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

The idea of rewriting the past through ancestor work was also present in the research data. Said one subject, "We actually have to reshape the past, that's one of the things when we're working with ancestors. We're not just rewriting the future, we're actually rewriting the past" (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

Integration. Integrating pieces of the self, or memories, or identities that fractured off during sexual trauma was mentioned in the interviews as an important piece of the work of healing. One subject, who discussed doing a lot of deep psychological work to understand family patterns and to integrate trauma experienced in his family of origin, discussed how integration and healing connect for him. He described,

Once we can be in a softer place, we have a chance to start affecting the situation that is happening, the totality of the experience starts to change. It's not spiritual bypassing. We still get to have all the rage and anger about the things that didn't work out, and that is part of the medicine of that experience. It drives me to do the work around the situation. It's important to do the understanding not to bypass, but to have a more complete picture, and to have a more integrated experience.

(Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

The degree of to which an individual is able to integrate alone was of concern to one participant, who studied transcendent experiences and their integration. She said,

When you're deliberately doing something therapeutic, as far as what the subconscious reveals, something you've split off, or repressed, or denied, or somehow has not been integrated for you. The transcendent experience offers an opportunity to recognize that. The degree of skill to integrate it, because those things don't happen in a therapeutic setting, is often just left up to the individual. Some people are able to integrate it fairly successfully or to get help integrating it, and other people don't. (Research participant #13, interview, April 21, 2017)

Spiritual aspects of healing. Research participants commented that healing can have a spiritual component. One subject spoke to her sexual healing, saying, "In times when I'm particularly open, those times can be sexual, they can be spiritual, or feeling very close to the Earth" (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016). A research subject who works with victims of sexual trauma spoke to her belief that healing work needs to include or be complemented by spiritual work as well. She remarked,

Therapy is good and hopefully the person that you go to may be able to deal with the spiritual part. I think that is important. That when you get therapy, because I'm looking at some of the therapy I had. They may not even be conscious of doing there in the therapy of doing spiritual work. The work is spiritual to me. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

The erotic as important to social justice healing work. One participant spoke to the value and importance of the erotic as a means to sustain social justice healing work.

Ancestral erotic healing work is social justice work. Her belief is that erotic energy can nourish social organizing for change. She said,

An acknowledgment of the importance of the erotic and the sexual in our social justice circles, specifically those who are working around transformative justice and family violence. For a lot of folks, it's so far down in the list of importance, and having access to the erotic is one of the things that makes social justice work sustainable. When we are plotting strategy, we need to be plotting it through a filter of the importance of the erotic. At the very least, if not actually including; are y'all getting laid tonight? Folks doing the strategizing have to be anchored in their own erotic power. Not just, "we have the value the erotic in our vision of this society." It's not just theoretical, it's embodied and in practice. It's not just we value the erotic! No, we value in our bodies the erotic because of the resource and access to knowing that it gives us. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Sexual healers, sexual wellness professionals, and holistic therapeutic healers.

Several of the research participants work professionally in varying capacities as self-identified sexual healers. The idea that there are trained professionals who can assist the healing and development of sexual wellness was present in the research interviews. Seeking professional support to heal sexuality was recommended as a possible healing intervention for sexual trauma.

One participant described her work as a sexual healer. Earlier in the interview, she had mentioned how she felt that the work she does is supported by her ancestors, because they are in her, and they want her to be doing this work. She said,

I work in the field of sexuality, because that is a place no one wants to go, and I'm comfortable there, but really I work in helping people be okay with who they are, helping them feel okay getting the things they really want, that it's okay for them to be who they are, and live the life they want to live. Sexuality is just the gateway to that. If I can help them find their way to their core erotic theme, and be okay with that . . . with what gives them joy . . . I help people be okay with themselves. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Another participant spoke to her work as a sexual healer, and how she feels it is in service to her ancestral spiritual tradition. She remembered,

I began identifying as a Kedoshah, a sexual healer of Jewish tradition, and I was quite public about that, really also quite bizarrely, I didn't realize how radical what I was doing was. The vision at that time was to integrate the role of the sexual healer into the rabbinate, the rabbinic service. For me a lot of my focus around sex and the ancestor work has really been sexual healing for my ancestral spiritual tradition. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Directional healing. Although not directly queried, directionality of healing was a theme that emerged in the interview process. Research participants had varying opinions on healing and directionality. Subjects discussed healing as moving forward, moving backward, moving in a spiral direction, move toward one's own life, and starting in the middle and spreading throughout. Directionality and time were often spoken of together.

One participant pondered the movement of healing, discussing how she is still in the question, saying, "I'm not sure if we went back to the original and the first person that

was wounded, we could heal it all the way forward. Or if we would have to start from the last generation to the generation before that and work back” (Research participant #16, interview, April 18, 2017). One participant said wellness “could start somewhere in the middle and spread the healing throughout” (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017). Another subject said, “My practice is for me to communicate forgiveness back [to the ancestors]” (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016). This concept of healing moving from the living backwards to the dead was shared by another participant, who shared his beliefs of his own sexual healing flowing back to benefit his ancestors,

The idea of celebrating our erotic energy, rather than being shamed about it, will actually accelerate the ancestral karma for them [the ancestors.] When we live it, this energy that’s been handed down to us, it becomes part of the positive energy of the Universe. And it only serves to flow backwards as well and help them [the ancestors] in whatever places their eroticism, whatever places they’re in can be just even more glorious. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Yet another participant spoke to spirals of healing in the workshops that he leads, saying,

Movement is an important part of it – when we move, we move sunwise, so that by the time we end, whether it’s a weekend or a day, our practices; we have created a spiral of energy, and the spiral, as I understand it, is the geometry of how the universe formed. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Healing beginning with oneself or healing beginning with one’s ancestors were held in equal value by one research subject. She said,

You could go in either direction. Ask for ancestral support, and have them help you, or just start right now with your life. Do whatever you need to do, and as I do this work for myself, I am going to be healing my line. You can always just start with yourself, and keep in your mind and in your heart, that you have this line. That's what I did, I started with myself. Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017)

One participant spoke in detail about the healing moving in multiple directions. He explained,

I'm careful about directional terms with ritual, deity, magic, religion. To not control or create up-down axes, and to allow peripheral axes and spiral pathways to happen. The way I've trained as a dancer and ritualist and sex healer; the energies come through, in and out; in multiple ways . . . In dance we sometimes talk about the backspace, because people bring everything through the front. That's another direction that's happening that's not vertical, it's from the back to the front. A very obvious sense is that the history is behind you and the future is in front of you. The ancestors are behind me, and also beneath, above, and in front of, like I say. But in terms of time . . . I'm no longer just where I came from, I'm now going forward, I'm not tracking constantly "Are they [the ancestors] with me?" It's a turning to my own life. And they're there, at your back, and they literally have your back. You're now going forward. You have those practices behind you. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Also, several participants discussed how their own healing flows forwards to their own descendants. One participant said, “I tend to think about my healing going forwards” (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017).

Degrees of healing, transgenerational healing, and ripple effect. Some participants spoke to the concept just as trauma can be passed transgenerationally, healing can also happen transgenerationally. The language subjects used to denote this concept was the “ripple effect” (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017) or “degrees of healing” (Research participant #16, interview, April 18, 2017). Part of transgenerational healing means identifying an intensely harmful pattern in a family line and realizing it can take several generations to heal it. For example, one participant remarked, “I can see the manifestation of things and my children that I recognize as wounds from my parents. I don’t think it’s one generation and one and done thing. You’ve got to work through it in multiple levels and multiple generations” (Research participant #2, interview, April 6, 2017).

Another participant spoke to her own situation with watching the impact of her own healing and the impact of the ritual healing she did with her own mother after her mother had died on her daughter and grandchildren. She reported,

Well, I can speak personally to it, and I think this happened when my daughter was born 49 years ago, I suddenly realized “Oh my God, I have to get my act together, or this kid is toast!” What I see now is, I have two grandchildren, each of them more golden than the last, in terms of how they have landed in this world. Not necessarily great parental circumstances, but they are the shining ones. And I don’t directly say, “Yeah, my doing ceremony to my mother in the year 2000

makes my grandchildren off the charts,” but it’s all related. (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016)

Several participants spoke to the ripple effect of changing culture. One expressed, “We heal one person, or the person heals themselves, and that has a ripple effect, right? It takes generations to change culture” (Research participant #16, interview, April 18, 2017). Another subject offered,

I think it has to be that for each person that heals themselves, there’s a group of people that, there’s a ripple effect in their communities. People are attracted to people who are working their healing, even if they don’t know it. And I think it has a ripple effect on, if they’re doing it while they’re raising children, or if their children are grown and they’re in communication with them, it will have a ripple effect on what the children, or the descendants believe they deserve. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

When asked what can be done about healing sexual wounding in family lines, one research subject recounted a personal story from witnessing transgenerational healing in her own family:

I have a younger brother who has three teenage daughters. The things that parents have to encounter, and that kids have to encounter now. It was difficult when I was a kid, but I think it’s just so much more complicated now. And at the same time, I also know that kids in junior high and high school are dealing with sex and gender in a whole different way. They communicate with each other. They’re very accepting in general. My nieces have friends who are lesbian, who are gay, who are trans, who are polyamorous. When I talk with them, I just say, ‘That’s

very impressive, I'm very impressed." I have heard a couple conversations my brother and sister-in-law had with their daughters about how you get through junior high as a girl, very frank conversations about slut shaming. Like, whoa. This is important. They've also had the conversation. So, are you interested in boys or are you interested in girls? What's happening for you right now? That kind of conversation and openness is mind-blowing for me, that never happened for me. And it's the way it should be. It's kind of hard to bend my mind around, not only is it happening, but it's happening with people I know, people in my family. If I had to, I could be a good parent, but it's challenging to have those conversations and be honest. Have honest conversations about sexuality with your kids. I think it's essential. (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

Research subjects also spoke to the concept of healing coming toward the living from their descendants. Several participants mentioned worldviews that hold the continuity of the living and the dead. For example, one subject discussed how the wounds of the ancestors can be healed through the living.

Researcher: It sounds like you're saying that there's a continuation, things that were wounding for our ancestors can be healed through us. Then does that also mean that wounds we have can be healed through our descendants?

Subject: Yes. Also, our ancestors and our descendants may very well be our ancestors. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Subjects discussed not only personal healing as being a multi-generational process, but also mentioned holding an awareness of the timescale necessary for cultural healing. For example, one subject who is a politicized performance artist reflected,

We're in a political crisis, but a lot of the kinds of work that we do in ritual and in studio, we're actually working on scales of 20, 30, and 50 years' time. We're doing some work that helps immediate organizing, but also, it's a much longer view. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Time and holding descendant consciousness. Time as a theme repeatedly emerged in the research data, most frequently in relation to healing, relationship with ancestors in particular as they are not just the past but the also the future and holding consciousness around descendants when doing healing work. The sense that research subjects overwhelmingly reported is that holding those who come after in mind is an impetus for their own healing. Research subjects do not want to pass along trauma to descendants, and seek instead to interrupt the transmission, and heal the trauma within themselves.

When subjects discussed healing, they often held a multigenerational perspective as mentioned above, and also discussed the difference in the perceived time it takes for healing to happen. Research participants shared that healing can happen both quickly and slowly, depending on the perspective one is holding regarding personal, ancestral, collective or cultural healing. One subject conveyed,

If we look at our lives, we can see ways we've grown. There's a sense in which change can happen very quickly here in the world, when we have physical bodies. Also, change happens slowly. If we're talking in terms of us and our relationships

to our ancestors going back infinitely, we're dealing with a big swath of time and some big issues in our family lines. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Because some participants considered their ancestors to also be their descendants (through holding a cosmology that this is possible) and through acknowledging that they are made of their ancestors, some subjects articulated the importance of holding descendants in their consciousness as part of their healing. One subject shared, "You don't have one story, not at all. There are deep parts of myself that are ancestral to myself. There's a sense that some of my parts may literally be my ancestor in various senses of that term" (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017).

Another participant echoed these sentiments and extended the concept to include the possibility that ancestors are also the future. He communicated,

Ancestors are not only those that have come before us and been the teachers or the birthers or the wounders . . . They're also the future. The ancestors live in the same realm as the future . . . What we see as the material world and what we might call the present or the "now" is in this relationship to ancestors which is not only the past but also the future in a less differentiated space where time is more elastic already. In the way that we understand even a little bit of ritual time or even orgasmic time, any brief glimpse that we get of a time that seems like outside of clock time. If you expand that notion into multiple dimensions beyond comprehension, it seems like ancestors can't just be the past. Ancestors are a more dynamic and elastic concept than just "the great dead." . . . I'm trying to allow it to be the great unborn also . . . Since consciousness circulates in these

maps, ancestors are not an object outside of us, and neither is the future.

Ancestors are available, not just because we called them from some place, but cellularly, psychologically, energetically in us. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

One research subject discussed the connection between time, sexuality, and trauma. She explained,

There's a lot written about how time gets disrupted during trauma. One of the things that happens with traumatic experience is shifting perceptions of time. Traumatic memory is not a linear, integrated sequence. Things get fragmented, whether through sexual trauma or any kind. People with traumatic experiences can't necessarily express a cohesive narrative of those experiences, and some of the work of repair is helping that happen. In sex, there can be a sense of time moving differently. The time rules that we conventionally agree to don't necessarily apply. States of early trauma can get unconsciously replicated and then played out and that might be someone's transcendental sex experience. Sex time and trauma time might be the same, somewhere in the body, although we experience them differently. (Research participant #13, interview, April 21, 2017)

Other participants held time and descendant consciousness in pragmatic action-based principles. For example, one subject shared,

Part of our role as adults who live in some places like San Francisco who can be openly queer, is that we need to not only keep doing what we're doing, but we need to do more of it. Particularly for the kids that can't. It's like what Harvey Milk said, "It's really important for people to come out." Because it inspires the

kid from Peoria to know that they could do this at some point. I come from a small town that's not too far from Peoria. That's kind of my inspiration about – okay, so I had ancestors, this is some of the work we've done. We can't go back. Not only can't we go back, we have to keep on doing more of what we're doing. As resistance. So that some of that will be seen by kids who then think okay, I could possibly do something like this in the future, if I can't do it right now.

(Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

The sense that research subjects overwhelmingly reported is that holding those who come after in mind is an impetus for their own healing. Not wanting to pass along trauma by interrupting it in themselves is held to be important.

Connecting with queer ancestors as a source of strength. Although some of the following quotes have been included at other points in the findings, it is deemed relevant to group them here under this subheading, for the sake of presenting a cohesive report on the theme that emerged from the interviews: connecting with queer ancestors as a source of support for healing and wellness. As one research participant succinctly noted, “Having a sense of ancestor, and specifically gay and queer ancestors, I think it's crucial to my sexual pleasure, which is connected to my sexual wellness” (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017).

Queer ancestors as a source of support was a concept shared by many subjects. For example, one person discussed the importance of knowing the struggles and successes of ancestors as a resource for their own life. They said,

I identify as a queer person. There is a disconnect from the concept of biological family for me. However, my involvement with the LGBTIQ community allowed

me to access my LGBTIQ ancestors. Their spirits, struggles, suffering, and successes provided me, and continue to, with strength and grounding. (Survey participant #2)

This theme of feeling strength through the history of queer ancestors' struggles was also found in queer sexuality, as was voiced by a participant who offered,

There is power which is accessible at sacred sites of our struggles. As a queer man traditional sites of dissident sex (sex on premise venues, beats, parks) hold a sexual power charge. Using these sites at spring equinox provides a mind space and collective soul access which provides a level of communion with my ancestors. (Survey participant #6)

In conclusion, this section has presented findings on healing sexuality with ancestors. Themes included: sexual healing; obligation to heal ancestral lineage; choosing to heal with ancestors; support for healing; important tenets of healing; connection between personal and lineage healing and reciprocity; elders, intergenerational relations and the necessity of community for healing; understanding your ancestors and valuing living mentors; interruption; integration; spiritual aspects of healing; erotic as important to social justice healing work; sexual healers; second track of memory; discernment; directional; degrees of healing, transgenerational healing, and ripple effect; time and holding descendant consciousness; and connecting with queer ancestors as a source of strength.

Results People Get from Healing Sexuality Connected with Ancestors

The research interviews indicate that subjects experienced many beneficial results from healing sexuality with ancestors. Results include: survival; releasing; resilience;

forgiveness; embodiment; belonging; connection to land; pleasure and sexual wholeness; permission; and great sex.

Survival. One result research subject reported understanding through a lens of ancestral awareness is survival, either personal or lineage. One participant spoke to the impact of healing of sexual trauma saying, “It’s got that strong emotional charge for survival purposes” (Research participant #16, interview, April 18, 2017).

The concept that the ancestors want the lineage to survive was presented by one subject who shared about their personal experience. She said,

We’re dealing with traumas and strategies around survival to be honest. I think that families on a basic want to pass on some belief that you want the kids to survive. I get that from my ancestors sometimes; years ago I was in college my ancestors came to me and they were like, “Eat more food and have babies.”

(Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Another participant echoed, “I had all these ancestors who were survivors and some of them were healthy and wanted to do things for their descendants and wanted them to live in a good world and to thrive and to be able to perceive and drink in support” (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016).

Survival was complicated for one research subject who discussed her experience of surviving an accident that her family did not survive. She acknowledged the impact of her survival and guilt around that on her sexual wellness, saying,

There’s a lot going on between me and my ancestors and my survivor’s guilt . . . I actually survived in circumstances where they didn’t. I wasn’t really sure that it had anything to do with my sexual wellness or my erotic life until I realized that I

kept falling for these really hot alcoholics. (Research participant #5, interview, March 9, 2017)

Releasing and forgiveness. One result research participant reported from healing sexuality with ancestors was releasing factors that inhibited sexual wellness. Said one participant,

I see patterns, beliefs, and stories that have been held around what is appropriate or right or wrong sexually and see how these have contributed to my upbringing and ways of living. I also have seen layers of shielding or blockage fall away, layers that were basically obstacles to my more authentic experience. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Another subject who is a survivor of incest discussed how releasing anger has been part of healing her sexuality, especially in regard to her grandfather who was her perpetrator. She expressed, “I don’t have the rage I did. I released that. The forgiveness has become the releasing of the deep anger and betrayal. It is what it is and forgiveness is I’m not holding on to this” (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017).

Another result interview that subjects held in common from healing sexuality with ancestors is forgiveness. Forgiveness was used in a variety of meanings, including forgiveness for perpetrators, forgiveness for ancestors, forgiveness for oneself. A concept that emerged from the data is that healing can be supported through forgiveness. For one participant, her willingness to forgive and hold compassion for her female relatives allowed greater healing to occur. She expressed,

Forgiving and realizing that some of these things happened to us also happened at least to our mothers, our aunts, and they had none of the resources we do now,

they had none of the awareness that we do now. There can be some forgiveness.

They supported us in ways they knew how to support us, and they supported us in how they'd been supported. To expect them to have been able to do what we could do now is just going to distance us from them and not allow that healing to happen. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Living well as a gift of forgiveness to her ancestors was described by one participant who as a young woman had had her sexuality shamed by her grandmother. She enumerated the benefits of forgiveness, saying,

More and more, as I learn the art of generational experiences, and as I understand and forgive . . . so there has to be forgiveness for me, to understand why I was treated in a negative way by my grandmother . . . with me being able to say, I forgive you for slapping me because you thought I was a whore because I was kissing my boyfriend. I forgive you for not understanding your own issues, and how sad that was for you, to have been blamed as a child yourself, and to have been marginalized, and to have to come to that self-shame. And that it's okay and look at me! I get to dance, and I'm dancing for you, not just for me. I get to be celebrating in the rights, and I get to be going out in my hot tub naked even though the laws say I shouldn't. I get to do this because you couldn't, and bravo for you for giving me this, and bravo for me for being able to say, "Yeah, we're all doing it." (Research participant #4, interview, January 7, 2017)

Resilience and wellness. Through healing sexuality with ancestors, research participants shared their awareness of their own resilience. Reported one participant, "My direct line ancestors offer patterns of resilience as much as they do trauma. That weaves

into developing my sexual wellness deeply.” One subject articulated her experience of her creation of wellness. She shared, “It’s self-healing, but it’s much more than self-healing. And it’s my story, and there are many, many particularities that are my story and/or my mother’s story, but it just feels entirely expansive” (Research participant #11, interview, December 14, 2016).

Resilience and wellness as principles of life was shared by one participant who remarked, “The tide of life is working . . . to bring about wholeness and reconciliation . . . that’s the process of life working for wholeness and connection and healing” (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016). Another subject shared,

The principle being that everything has life, that you are not in charge, that there is a power greater than you, and that, to the extent to which you can create a relationship with that power greater than you, your life, your sex, your healing, your relationships, your whatever it is, are going to be in line with universal principles. Universal wellness. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Embodiment. Embodiment was discussed as a result that research participants experienced from healing sexuality with ancestors. Said one interview subject,

There is a tangible experience of eroticism to the magic I feel just conversing, through time and space in my imagination, with my two well ancestors. I experience that as a fullness in my heart region and ribcage, a solidity, a faith in my embodiment and its rightness and goodness that supports me in relaxing and being present in my body, to include, if indirectly, experiences of sexual arousal. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

Feeling into the pelvic region is an embodied result that one participant experienced from healing his own and his ancestors' sexual trauma. He shared,

As I'm releasing these layers of trauma, I'm now able to do a few new things with my soma. Anal exercises like clenching and Mula Bandha . . . They feel a lot better. They don't feel so weird to do anymore. I actually want to do them and when I do them, I feel, "Yes, that's my anus. That's my PC muscle. Okay, cool. I got stuff going on down there. I can put blood flow back in that place." (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Finding center lower in his body is another result this subject experienced. He explained,

The other thing is a way of being. I have this meditation where I say "I want to be in my center. The center of my center of my center." It really helps me. My center [used to be] my heart center. It wasn't my low belly center. That was very interesting to me because I know enough about anatomy and somatics that I wondered, "Okay, why isn't my center down there?" It's because [unresolved ancestral sexual trauma] was down there. Taking up the space that my center actually need to be clear from. Now as healing is happening, my center is getting lower and lower into my sacrum. Now I experience making action from that center. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Belonging. Finding a sense of belonging within blood ancestry as well as community lineage was a result many research subjects mentioned as a benefit they experience from healing with ancestors. Typical comments included statements like this

one from a subject, “Ancestral healing has definitely given me a sense of roots, that I don’t come from nowhere” (Survey participant #3).

Participants articulate the impact that finding belonging with ancestors had on the development of sexual wellness. Said one interview subject,

My distant, well ancestors on one side of my family are folks with whom I have connected and who remain to me strong, present, supportive relationships. Both of these beings lived very close to the Earth and nature and have positively influenced my own healing path, for instance with me feeling safer to be in my body and a strong sense of belonging that I have never felt with my known, living or dead relatives. Having a sense of belonging to a family-group provides me a safety net and a foundation for trusting myself and showing up in my sexuality and sexual interactions as a gay man/faggot with greater authenticity. (Research participant #8, interview, January 26, 2017)

Another transgender participant described the impact belonging has had on her sexual wellness and embodiment. She reported that connecting with ancestors gives her, a clear confidence that I am not alone, I am not abnormal for owning and exploring and cultivating my sexuality and experiencing my embodiment. My family of origin was the opposite: shame-based, secret, lots of harmful practices stemming from their own body dysphoria and dissociation, etc. By contrast, with awareness of my two healthy Ancestors, I feel confident that I am healthy and “normal” and that I can trust myself. (Research participant #12, interview, March 2, 2017)

Coming to realize that his healing is deeply connected with his ancestors has created a sense of belonging in one research subject who stated,

There's ways in which doing some of my own personal work has been helped immeasurably and realizing, "It's not just my own personal work at all, it's an extension of the life of my ancestors and our experience together . . . that the things I feel, I'm not just me." (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

Connection to land. A result reported by research participants is a feeling of connection between their sexuality and Earth, land, or the universe. One subject who has done significant work to develop her sexual wellness named how for her, her healing is evident when she draws her attention to the quality of connections she is able to experience. She discussed those feelings, saying that they happen, "In times when I'm particularly open, those times can be sexual, they can be spiritual, or feeling very close to the Earth" (Research participant #30, interview, December 27, 2016).

Feeling connected to the cosmic roots of existence was a result one participant named of working with ancestors to heal sexuality. He offered,

The roots of generation extend infinitely back to the beginnings of earth, to beyond the beginnings of earth, to the explosion of the first stars. Spilling out of the vastness of space to the womb of creation. Connecting with the mother of all things. Connecting with the part of myself is the source of myself through my blood which has an immediate and direct connection with all of my blood and blood ancestors. (Research participant #10, interview, December 22, 2016)

For one participant, connection with the creatures of the land was an important part of her sexual healing. She talked about relations with her human ancestors feeling “tricky” and discussed that her embodiment comes in some part from recognizing the embodiment of other non-human beings. She reported,

I feel connection with non-human ancestors and their presence in my life regularly and easily. Animals, plants, fungus, etc. Through observing, being with, studying and imagining the embodiment of other living beings, I feel my own body more deeply. Some of my childhood experience includes trusting animals more than humans, so certainly there is a connection. (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017)

A research subject connected her own healing of sexuality to the healing of colonization. She spoke to the land as giving her a sense of belonging and connection. She explained,

I was raised on the land of the Lakota and the Cheyenne. Images from the land, images of certain periods in history will just evoke thoughts of my ancestors. I knew I needed to heal and to some larger story than just me and my immediate family, that there was a bigger story here and that included colonization, it included land, it included slavery, it included all of it. There are many ways to work with ancestral. There's the land. I go outside, get to know where I am. I need to find that sense of being connected, belonging. It is important I can get that from the Earth. I feel a connection to the land. (Research participant #9, interview, March 2, 2017)

Pleasure, sexual wholeness, and well-being. Greater capacity for pleasure, sexual wholeness and well-being are results that some research participants experience from working through an ancestral lens to develop their sexual wellness. Reported one woman, “There’s an ease in my being that just is now, from the ancestor work, that has me more sexually whole” (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017). By utilizing the ancestral modality of Family Constellations to address sexual trauma in his blood lineage, one research subject shared, “When I have done Family Constellation workshops, I have had ‘domino’ effect throughout my life and including in my sexuality and sexual healing” (Survey participant #4).

Addressing sexual trauma through working with ancestors has increased one participant’s capacity for pleasure and her overall sexual wellness. She said, “There’s a way in which simply the soothing of the trauma in the lines has dramatically impacted all of my well-being, which includes my sexual well-being, in terms of presence and capacity for pleasure” (Research participant #12, interview, March 8, 2017). One participant described her experience of developing sexual wellness through ancestral healing. She expressed,

Having a vital flowing and pleasure. Experiencing pleasure. Having experiences of pleasure in my body on a regular basis. I think of Eros and erotic energy as not being specifically or extensively genital, so sexual healing to me is pleasure healing. It is having the capacity to experience ecstasy, ecstatic, blissful, pleasurable states. (Survey participant #4)

A research subject who has done work to heal ancestral sexual trauma that he was embodying discussed positive results he has experienced. These include pleasure and peacefulness and developing the capacity to just be. He described,

I've seen the benefits of what is possible when we embark upon this really terrifying journey of healing ancestral trauma as it lives in the body. Very quickly after these moments of feeling the rape and the shame and the disgust, very quickly after, I'm feeling what might be possible on the other side of that, which is actually pleasure from that part of my body. Pleasure not just sexually, but pleasure as in being. Just presence and neutrality is a kind of pleasure.

Peacefulness in that part of the body that is relearning what that means. (Research participant #15, interview, May 2, 2017)

Permission. Some research participants expressed that working with ancestors to develop their sexual wellness has resulted in a sense of permission. For one interview subject, understanding her sexuality led to greater understanding of her ancestors. She expressed that from what she knew of her living relatives, sexuality was very much repressed. However, she drew a connection between sexuality, ancestors and permission. She shared,

When I started to understand my sexuality, I was able to receive more information from my ancestors because I could understand their language. I didn't have a skill set of knowing. I was living out of fear. And when one lives out of fear . . . what the one thing you do, in your sexuality practice? What's the one thing most people need? Permission. Just to be. (Research participant #7, interview, September 23, 2016)

One research subject who works with clients experiencing transgenerational trauma expressed his belief that ultimately, the ancestors want their descendants to have permission to be sexual, even if that was not the message they gave while alive. He said,

The ancestors . . . I have worked with people where they gave themselves permission to enjoy sex, to be sensual, to be . . . where they had so many injunctions against it. There is the parent who gave the shaming message. But underneath, in their heart of hearts, what do they really want for their child or grandchild? (Research participant #1, interview, March 15, 2017)

A subject who had experienced repressive sexual upbringing discussed how giving himself permission for his full sexuality was a gift to his ancestors as well. He explained,

Learning to include those kinds of permission-giving, expansive ideas and thoughts and ways of living has relieved me of a sense of blame and shame, and also given me a sense of permission to go where my ancestors wanted to but probably couldn't. (Research participant #6, interview, December 26, 2016)

Great sex. Results interview subjects report from developing sexual wellness by working with ancestors are great sex and ecstatic sexual experiences. One interview participant described her experience of her own sexuality after doing healing work with ancestors to resolve trauma. She experiences sexual ecstasy as an expansive state that connects her to a divine presence. She emphasized, "I'm talking about orgasm, pleasure, and ecstasy, and the whole notion of ecstatic one-ness . . . ecstasy as openness, being able to see more, connection. The direct experience of God and yourself and the other" (Research participant #3, interview, December 27, 2016).

Another research subject described an experience of sex that can seem timeless and offers profound connection. He described his well sexuality, saying,

Surrender, yeah. Light, luminescent, synchronicity, and timelessness, I'm back and forth in time. I mean I've had these – I can't call them visions because that feels too much like Joan of Arc – but the sense of being in time, in history. Being timeless. Certainly, going into other lifetimes, whatever that means. Going to other parts of this country, or other places in the world and putting my feet on the ground. The connection that I perceive, let's call it sexual ecstasy. Not any old sex, but real, real good sex. Sexual ecstasy. (Research participant #15, interview, March 2, 2017)

In summary, the interview data indicates that subjects experienced many beneficial results from healing sexuality with ancestors. Survival; releasing; resilience; forgiveness; embodiment; belonging; connection to land; pleasure and sexual wholeness; permission; and great sex.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Problem

This dissertation investigation responds to the primary question of whether relating with ancestors can be a support in the development of sexual wellness after sexual wounding, and if so, what are the effective strategies for doing so. This question emerged from a clinician's quandary; while sexual trauma could be treated effectively using specific healing modalities, often transgenerational sexual trauma remained untreated and untreatable. Turning toward the literature, there were no peer-reviewed studies or academic work seeking to answer the question of how a clinician might treat transgenerational sexual trauma.

Method

A rigorous review of literature in the fields of trauma, sexual trauma, transgenerational trauma, trauma healing modalities, somatic sexuality, ancestral reverence, ancestral healing modalities and sexual wellness was conducted. The literature review provided in-depth resources on each of these topics individually, however, there was no literature found that addressed transgenerational sexual trauma, and effective methodology for the healing of it. This gap in the literature provides justification for the necessity of this study.

This study was conceived to explore the question of how individuals who have developed sexual wellness after sexual wounding were addressing and resolving the

transgenerational trauma they embody. The research explored ancestral reverence practices and the development of sexual wellness, and what relationship, if any, exists between the two. Furthermore, the research sought to investigate what ancestral practices and techniques are used by contemporary people, and what effect they have. What are people doing on their own to help heal sexual trauma not only in their own personal lives, but for their lineage, ancestors, and descendants? To envision a world free of sexual trauma is to be curious about how that world might eventually come into being, and the intentional development of sexual wellness is a part of that vision.

The research was designed to do two things. First, the research sought to explore if a connection between practices of ancestral reverence and the development of personal sexual wellness exists for some people. Second, if it was determined that there was a correlation, to determine a cross-cultural, non-dogmatic set of effective principles that could support the development of sexual wellness.

For the purposes of this research, data was gathered from live interviews, and from anonymous written surveys. The research study ultimately engaged 16 research subjects in live, semi structured in-depth interviews, and seven subjects in anonymous, online written surveys. The interviews and surveys were conducted over a period of six months. Interviews were audio recorded, and, with the exception of three conducted in person, were all conducted over the internet using video call technology. Interviews were transcribed and double-checked with interview subjects for accuracy. Interview data was then verified in a written survey of anonymous participants. Because the written survey participants were anonymous, it is impossible to verify if they met the criteria that were set for selection of the live interview participants. However, the data gathered from the

anonymous survey closely corroborated the data gathered from the research interviews. The same interview questions were utilized for both processes. Subjects who participated in the interview part of the study came from a wide variety of demographic backgrounds. Of the 16 interview subjects, all but one resided in North America at the time of the interview. The range of ages was between 33-75 years.

Interview questions (see Appendix D) inquired into practices of ancestral reverence and connection, experiences between the erotic and ancestors, erotic practices connected with ancestors, dangers and taboos, and results people get from working with ancestors to develop sexual wellness.

Purposive methodology was utilized to discern appropriate research subjects. Research subjects were chosen based on their self-reported adherence to four criteria. One, they self-identified as already having some sort of connection with their ancestors. Two, they self-identified as having done work to develop personal sexual wellness. Three, they self-identified as having experienced sexual wounding of some sort. And four, they believed that there was a correlation between ancestral connection and the development of sexual wellness. A list of appropriate interview subjects was created and discussed with the dissertation mentor. Interview research subjects were hand-chosen and invited via email to participate in the dissertation research project. Interviews typically lasted approximately two hours. Interviews were transcribed and double-checked for accuracy by the researcher as well as the interview subjects.

Following the interviews, an anonymous survey was conducted using slightly abbreviated versions of the same interview questions. The survey was conducted to verify the data that was collected through the interviews. In absence of the researcher

conducting the interviews, would the data collected still discuss the same things? Indeed, the data collected did reflect very closely the data collected via the interviews.

Transcribed interview texts and survey data were engaged first by a thorough reading, followed by a second reading highlighting information that seemed relevant to the project. Transcribed interviews and survey data were then coded using NVivo software. The codification process supported the creation of categories and subcategories, which were all inductively derived from the content of the interviews (Thomas, 2006). Several categories were initially created to classify interview information. These were the descriptive categories, and included: ancestors, trauma, healing, and the erotic. These top-level categories were further developed through an iterative process of data analysis (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

Each interview was coded in turn. After the completion of all interview coding, the categories and subcategories themselves were then sorted according to affinity into conceptual categories. Those that did not fit into one of the top-level categories remained uncategorized. After the completion of the data coding process, the findings were collated according to the categories derived during data analysis, and this created the theoretical categories.

Results/Findings

Research findings were collated into six main categories: relating with ancestors; ancestral reverence practices; ancestral sexual legacies; ancestors and the erotic; healing sex with ancestors; and results obtained from developing sexual wellness through relating with ancestors. The following is a summary of the research findings, with a brief textual description of major subcategories. While this is a small, purposive sampling of research

subjects and therefore cannot be conclusive, the following findings were strongly indicated in the research data.

Relating with ancestors. Research participants described that they experience their ancestors through embodied ancestral knowing, including paying attention to their own physical blood. There is a shared concept that the ancestors exist within the body of the living. Ancestors can be experienced through feeling them, hearing them, and seeing them. Ancestral dreams are another way people experience their ancestors.

Relating to ancestors is done through specific practices. Some practices are foundational and set the proper environment for ancestral connection to occur. Grounding is a practice that connects research subjects to the Earth and helps them feel present for connecting. Establishing the proper space for ancestral connection is important and can include an ancestral altar. Creating a strong intention for what particular ancestor or type of ancestor helps practitioners to feel safe. Discerning the level of wellness of the dead engaged is an important safety protocol. Having solid mentorship from elders can make ancestral reverence safer and more effective. There are certain dangers in connecting with the dead, as well as taboos. Dangers include not knowing exactly who one is connecting with, and the spirit's level of wellness. There are culturally-specific taboos about when and how to relate with the dead, as well as protocols around offerings and ritual. The dead are not to be treated as gods and can be negotiated with as humans. Creating layers of psychic protection is a technique many practitioners use when preparing to relate with the dead. Once these foundational practices are established, ancestral reverence practitioners connect more deeply with the dead through specific connection practices.

Ancestral reverence practices. Ritual is a technology that is used by ancestral practitioners to create a container for working with the dead. It clearly delineates the beginning and end of ancestral connection time. Ancestors are invoked through verbal or non-verbal invitation. Offerings can be made to ancestors, and frequently have specific protocols of what to offer, who to offer to, and what to do with offerings after they are offered. Offerings can be tangible like food, ritual objects, or other things a practitioner believes the dead would enjoy. Offerings can also be intangible, such a prayer, song, dance, drumming, movement, and breath. Specific techniques used to connect with ancestors include meditation, trance, prayer, and divination. Another way to connect is through paying attention to dreams. Some practitioners connect through photographs of their dead. Some practitioners have specific practices they do around forgiveness.

Ancestral sexual legacies. An emergent theme in the research results is the impact research participants experience from the sexuality of their ancestors. These impacts could be positive or negative, or sometimes both. They have been delineated in the findings as “burdens” and “blessings” of ancestral sexuality. Burdens of ancestral sexuality could weigh heavily on participants. Many spoke to feeling shame around their own sexuality as a result of the influence of their family. Others named unresolved transgenerational sexual trauma that they embody from their ancestors. Sexual abuse, including incest and rape, were burdens present in family lineages. Sexual trauma as a result of war crimes in generations past was a source of pain. Interpersonal partner violence (IPV) was tracked as a legacy of traumatic relating some participants had been exposed to or experienced themselves after witnessing in their families. Stories of ancestors’ early pregnancy and getting kicked out of the family home were present for

many participants. Fear of sex was a result that many participants named as an ancestral sexual burden. Repression of sexuality in the family of origin led to shame, especially around marginalized sexual orientations, for some participants. Silence and secrecy were named as ways research participants knew about problematic sexual past experiences of ancestors, even without access to the full information. Having perpetrators of sexual violence as ancestors was a painful experience for research subjects. Cultural and historical influences that repress the free expression of sexuality were also seen as ancestral sexual burdens.

Ancestral blessings research participants felt they enjoy as a result of ancestral sexuality were bountiful. Some subjects experience their ancestors as a source of support for sexual wellness. Others named ancestors as erotic role models, who had given them an example of sexuality across the lifespan, that validate the current sexual self, and that provide examples for the capacity for committed relationships. Some participants recounted stories of ancestors who had nurtured their developing sexuality, by giving the participant permission to be who they are. Participants experienced ancestral support for sexual freedom and sexual self-esteem. Ancestral connection supporting capacity for pleasure was a blessing some subjects experience. Connecting with ancestors erotically can be useful. The power of queer and gender non-conforming ancestors was experienced as a source of strength.

Ancestors and the erotic. An inquiry the interview questions explored is the theme of the connection between ancestors and the erotic. The research findings initially indicated that there were three principles research participants named when discussing this connection: discernment, dangers and taboos, and sacred reciprocity. First,

discernment was a strong finding of ancestral reverence in general. Practitioner had to evaluate who to relate with and who not to relate with, and how to decipher authentic ancestral connection from make-believe or other spirit encounters. Next, participants felt that there are cultural taboos and sanctions in place to help make working with ancestors safer. Lastly, participants trend toward the belief in the principle of sacred reciprocity; that their own healing supports healing of ancestral trauma, and that ancestors can support their personal healing.

Research participants spoke in detail about their erotic experiences with ancestors, both human and other-than-human, the connection between sex and death, and their experiences of erotic healing. The specific erotic practices research participants use to connect ancestors and the erotic were explored. The practices included invocation, use of scent, making erotic offerings, sex as prayer, masturbation, intense erotic stimulation and orgasm, breath work, making art, erotic trance and meditation, and communicating with ancestors about sex.

Healing sex with ancestors. Developing sexual wellness by working with ancestors was explored in depth through the research interviews and surveys, in answer to questions like: How have you tended sexual wounding in your family ancestry? How can you work with ancestors to heal sexual trauma?

The findings that emerged through the interview process were categorized into the major themes. Sexual healing was experienced by participants as part of an overall healing process. While some participants felt an obligation to heal ancestral lineage, others felt strongly that healing ancestral trauma should be a personal choice. Some discussed their choice to heal with ancestors. One experience some subjects reported was

receiving support for sexual healing from their ancestors. Most research participants drew a connection between their own personal healing and the healing of their ancestral lineages. The necessity of elders, intergenerational relations, and community for healing was made explicit, and the value of understanding one's ancestors and valuing living mentors was experienced as placing healing into a larger context. An important tenet of healing that participants spoke to was the necessity of interrupting sexual trauma, so it would not be transmitted generationally.

Integration as a move toward wholeness was named as one part of the healing process. Respondents typically experienced spiritual aspects of healing. The data indicates that part of a larger cultural healing around sex is the inclusion of the erotic in social justice work. Sexual healers are viewed as a resource for support. Some subjects were of the opinion that as part of a healing process, one could have corrective experiences that would then lay down a second track of memory, allowing for more choice, rather than automatic traumatic response to unpleasant sexual stimuli.

Participants spoke here again to the importance of discernment in one's healing process, to know the next correct step, and to discern what is best for oneself. When speaking of the healing process, some participants mentioned that they feel healing moves in a certain direction, either forward in time, back in time, or from the present outwards. Healing is also held as a process that occurs by degree, both personally and culturally, and that transgenerational healing has a ripple effect through lineages as well as through society. The connection between time discrepancies experienced both during trauma and during erotic experiences was discussed by some participants. Subjects

tended to hold a consciousness of their descendants, even if they had no children of their own. Again, queer ancestors are experienced as a source of strength.

Results. The results research participants experienced from healing sexuality with ancestors were unmistakable. Through the research they describe experiences of survival, release, resilience, forgiveness, embodiment, belonging, connection with the land, pleasure and sexual wellness, permission, and great sex.

Discussion

There is A Connection Between Ancestors and the Erotic

This research finds that in answer to the primary research questions, research participants do in fact experience a connection between ancestors and the erotic. Not only is there a connection present for the 25 respondents, this research also finds that the research subjects are keenly aware of all they have inherited from their ancestors in regard to sexuality and the erotic. Given the chance to turn their attention toward this topic, participants were articulate, curious, emotional, passionate and creative in exploring the impact they experience as a result of being descended from their personal ancestors. Some of what is received may be helpful blessings, like a commitment to sexual freedom or a capacity for pleasure, and some may be burdens like shame or sexual repression, sexual violence (perpetrator or victim) or residual sexual trauma.

Even without necessarily holding a conceptual framework of transgenerational trauma, research participants were acutely aware of the experience of holding an ancestor's sexual trauma in their own body. In their narratives, research participants also described all the ways that trauma is transmitted transgenerationally: silence, traumatic reenactment by parents and observed by children, direct abuse and/or neglect by a

traumatized parent toward their child, the impact of attachment wounds on children, the identification of children with the suffering of their parents, and the biologically-determined epigenetics.

Just as humans inherit many features and traits from our ancestors, we also embody many beliefs and behaviors about sexuality from our families and our upbringings. Considered this way, our ancestors bequeath our sexuality to us. As with any inheritance, there are blessings and burdens we receive as a result of this ancestral sexual legacy. Because participants were both able to name and explicate the impact of their ancestors' sexuality on their own as well as express the mechanisms by which trauma is transmitted across generations, this research clearly shows, in this small research group, that there is a strong connection between ancestral sexuality and one's personal sexuality. This makes sense because humans exist because their ancestors had sex or at least, with the event of in vitro fertilization (IVF) and other medical fertility interventions, sexual reproduction. Sexual reproduction in and of itself establishes the connection between sex and progenitors. While the incest taboo culturally prohibits much thought and discussion of the sex our ancestors had, the strong tie between the two is indisputable. We have ancestors because of sex. We exist as descendants thanks to the sex which our ancestors had.

The results of this albeit small study point toward not only the connection between ancestors and the erotic, but that ancestors are in fact part of some erotic experiences. About half of the research subjects interviewed reported some kind of erotic experience with ancestors. Experiences included erotic dreams, deliberate rituals, remembering actual sex a subject had had with someone who had died and whom they

now considered ancestors, transpersonal experiences during sex, masturbatory sessions invoking ancestors, and developing erotic aesthetics inspired by ancestral memory.

Results: Choosing to Heal Sexuality with Ancestors Supports Sexual Wellness

The findings of this research indicate that choosing to heal sexuality by working with ancestors does produce the healing of sexual wounding and development of sexual wellness. In contrast to the absence of research about actually healing from personal and transgenerational sexual trauma in the literature (to be discussed more below), research participants spoke of healing from sexual trauma related to ancestral relating practices, both personal and transgenerational, and also spoke of the methods and impact of healing on their lives.

Research subjects were also concerned about the impact and benefit their personal healing has on their ancestors, as well as their descendants. Interruption of legacies of sexual harm was an important consideration for many of the research subjects who are parents: they felt that their own healing was important so as to not pass along sexual trauma to their children. As results of their ancestral relating practices, research subjects also report experiencing greater sexual pleasure, well-being, permission for sexual expression, sexual wholeness, and having great sex, as results of their engagement with ancestors. They also shared the benefits of releasing trauma, finding forgiveness for past harms, and deepening their embodiment.

The data shows that, for participants in this research, there was almost always an intentional choice to heal. Participants reported that they felt increased benefits through deliberately choosing to heal. They also discussed the costs of denying healing: many had found that ignoring the sexual wounding did not make it go away, and in fact there came

a point in their lives where the cost of not healing outweighed the cost of working to heal. For some, this moment in their lives happened after the birth of a child, for others, as they began to notice the impact their sexual wounding had on their capacity to be in intimate relationships in the way they wished. Others had the experience of ancestors or spiritual mentors insisting that they do their healing work, which led them into choosing to do it. It is important to note that others who may have had the same experience may have not made the choice to heal, or they may have made other choices. Those interviewed were necessarily those who made the choice to do the healing work.

Ambivalence about healing was often noted; some subjects felt resistant to doing healing work around transgenerational trauma, feeling that while they could do it, they were not excited about feeling obligated to do it. Others picked up the work quite willingly. There was not enough data collected to indicate whether the degree of willingness impacted the degree of healing, but it was clear in the research that even those subjects who displayed ambivalence about healing sexuality with ancestors were able to articulate results from their personal healing.

Although this wasn't a research question, interview subjects spontaneously spoke about other benefits and effects of healing with ancestors. These benefits include survival, resilience, belonging, and connection to land. These make sense because they speak to primary needs of homo sapiens. In the professional landscape of sexual healing and sexual wellness, based on the findings of this study, it is this researcher's opinion that promoting ancestral relating as a modality to address transgenerational sexual trauma is useful and efficacious. Developing sexual wellness through the deliberate and skillful ancestral reverence practice including prayer, ritual, offerings, dreamwork and other

ancestor practices leads to positive outcomes for those suffering from personal and transgenerational sexual wounding. As with any non-medical intervention, it is both difficult and necessary to try and isolate the precise correlation between the intervention and result, when holistic wellness is the goal.

Choosing to heal with ancestors is clearly a quite personal choice, dependent on worldview, personal cosmology and cultural support for ancestral reverence and individual experiences. Because it is such a personal choice, it does not make sense for clinicians to prescribe ancestral healing practices per se. However, for clinicians working with a client base suffering from transgenerational sexual trauma, it may be helpful to consider the impact, positive and negative, that the legacy of ancestral sexuality may be having on a client. It may also be helpful to elicit from the client their own beliefs around ancestors and see if this is a frame of reference the client has or feels comfortable exploring, based on their personal cosmological beliefs. It may also be helpful to promote an understanding of transgenerational trauma, and to help clients explore if working with ancestors might be an avenue of potential healing interest. Especially if a client reports a history of family sexual trauma or expresses a feeling of carrying trauma that is not theirs, ancestral healing may be a beneficial modality to be explored.

Effective Principles for Those Wishing to Work Personally with Ancestors to Develop Sexual Wellness

Based on the findings of this research and the professional opinion of this researcher, the following are the distilled principles from the research data for working effectively with ancestors to heal sexual wounding, both personal and transgenerational, and to develop sexual wellness. These principles were all presented in the research data

by multiple subjects, albeit not in the same language this researcher would use as a professional.

Have safety protocols in place, including quality spiritual mentorship. It is of the utmost importance to work in a safe, slow, and supported manner when employing transpersonal tools for effective healing. There is a need to develop high-level discernment skills on which ancestors to work with, as well as developing protective tools. It can be helpful to work within an established tradition with well-defined ritual protocols and skills. Because most Western practitioners do not live in a cultural atmosphere that teaches and supports the necessary skills for working with the unseen realms, spiritual mentorship is crucial. A quality spiritual mentor can assist the ancestral reverence practitioner in learning all of the pertinent base-level skills for relating safely and effectively with the unseen, including grounding, shielding, energetic hygiene. Such a mentor can also gently move the work forward and troubleshoot any difficulties that arise.

Work with a trained, trauma-informed somatic sexuality professional or somatic therapist who can skillfully support your intention to heal trauma and develop sexual wellness. Ancestral healing is a helpful adjunct to other healing work and does not take the place of working with a professional to develop sexual wellness, renegotiate trauma and correct attachment wounds. Ancestral healing is part of holistic wellness. Trained professionals help support your intention, adding their skill, guidance, and compassionate witnessing. The professional can also support the creating of healthy attachment (Bowlby, 2005). In these types of therapeutic relationships, work can be done to develop embodiment as well as intimacy skills. It is helpful if the professional you

work with can also support the spiritual aspects of healing. **Establish ancestral reverence practices and relationships.** Ancestral reverence practices are culturally specific, and yet many practices are cross-cultural. If you have a specific cultural background that practices ancestral reverence, it is best to learn those traditions to inform your workings. Discernment is the key skill: this includes the choice of what practices to take on, and which ancestors to work with. With respect to beliefs participants expressed that the dead vary in their degree of wellness, it is important to develop relationships with ancestral guides who are supremely well in spirit. This is especially important when working to heal sexual wounding in ancestral lineages, so as not to inadvertently work with spirits that do not wish you well, or who are not well enough yet themselves to be a source of support. Initially, ancestral reverence practices should be non-erotic in nature. Because the building of trust over time is an important safeguard in living relationships, the same is true with the dead. Ancestral reverence practices build relationship with ancestors. Over time, trust and consent can be established, and a decision can be made about the wisdom of engaging erotically with a particular ancestor or lineage.

Make the intentional choice to work with ancestors to heal sexuality. Clear intention produces more efficacious results, as well as establishing a condition by which to assess results. For the sake of what are you doing this? Choosing to work with ancestors to develop sexual wellness and heal sexual wounding and trauma is a specific choice. It is not an obligation. Creating an intention to work with ancestors to develop sexual wellness can help focus attention on specific practices. Having an intention means you know where you intend to go in your healing. This creates a better chance of getting there, according to research participants.

Interrupt any current patterns of harm. Before healing can occur, harm must stop. If you are currently experiencing, witnessing or causing intimate harm, help it conclude before proceeding. This principle was evident in research interviews, as well as found in the researcher's professional training and background. Research participants often discussed the timeline and directional qualities of their healing paths, and it was evident that harm and healing don't co-exist in the same moment in time and space.

Learn about your ancestors of blood and lineage, know the history and context in which they lived. While ancestral devotion, reverence and ritual are important for working with ancestors, so is having a context of the historical factors faced by your ancestors. Knowing not just their names and dates, but their stories, the historical events they faced, and the specific cultural identities they held can deepen and enrich ancestral reverence. Knowing history, in terms of marginalized and oppressed identities such as queer and transgender, also supports being able to reproduce liberatory technology in social movements. Knowing on whose shoulders our own work rests helps us belong to a lineage of activists. Research participants were articulate in their homage to specific ancestors and lineages, and the benefit they obtain therein.

Make a concerted effort to understand the ancestral sexual legacies you embody and how they live in you. Understanding both the sexual burdens and blessings you have inherited from your ancestors offers consciousness and choice about how you continue to embody or change these traits and behaviors. Without this understanding, it is possible to unconsciously replicate unhelpful patterns of behavior. Some research participants made the decision to heal with ancestors precisely because of understanding the sexual legacies they have inherited from their ancestors. They expressed wanting to

be intentional about what they bequeathed to their descendants, as well as what they want to embody in their own lives.

Discern who to work with: Develop relationship with ancestral guides who are well. Choosing to work only with ancestral guides who are supremely well in spirit adds a layer of safety and protection necessary for effective ancestral healing. In particular when working in the erotic realm, working with trusted energies is paramount. Research participants developed working relationships over time with their ancestral guides.

Obtain consent. Because so many sexual wounds included lack of consent, developing skill around consent in erotic encounters can be corrective. Just as one must obtain consent when working with the living, it follows suit that receiving permission is equally important when working with the dead. Consent was an important principle to many research participants who discussed their erotic experiences with the dead.

Do ancestral reverence practices (including ritual) that are erotic in nature or are specifically dedicated to developing sexual wellness, based on your relationship with your ancestors. Erotic practices such as masturbation, offering of orgasm, invoking ancestors during sex can promote ritualized healing of both personal and transgenerational sexual wounds. Research participants offered a wide variety of erotic ancestral reverence practices. Some expressed boundaries about practices of this nature, and many expressed experiencing healing from such practices. This principle is an invitation to discern what is right for you and your ancestors, not a prescription.

Check and double-check any information you receive. Information you receive from ancestors can and should always be double-checked if you have any doubt of

validity, source, or that you may be making it up. Information that is valid will persist. You may check in with your well, bright ancestral guides, consult through any divination practices in which you have fluency, check in with your own body wisdom, and consult with a trusted friend or spiritual mentor. Usually wait a day or so and check again.

Assess the process and make changes based on the results you experience. As with any practice, efficacy is based in obtaining the desired results. If you have set a clear intention and know why you are doing what you are doing (conditions of satisfaction) you will be able to clearly see the level of impact of your practice over time. It may be that you need to adjust particular practices, do different rituals, or evolve your understanding. Ancestor reverence can be an iterative process, responsive to changing needs.

For Professionals

If you are a healing professional who wishes to guide work for clients wanting to heal transgenerational sexual trauma and develop sexual wellness through working with ancestors, here are some important considerations:

There are some contraindications for working through an ancestral lens. Active psychosis and untreated PTSD can interfere with the work (Foor, personal communication, March 2, 2018). Having somatic training in trauma healing is essential. This helps clients process what is present on a body level, even when the trauma did not originate in their personal lived experience.

Transgenerational trauma can be quite confusing to clients, as they experience symptoms yet have no obvious stimulus or lived historical event that caused the trauma. It is therefore helpful to be able to skillfully guide clients to develop an understanding of

transgenerational trauma, the various methods of transmission, and have a skill set that helps clients successfully move through it.

Additionally, it is advised for professionals wishing to work ancestrally with clients that they have training in the necessary skills to work trans-personally. These include their own well-thought out cosmology. It is important also that they know what to do if clients become destabilized by the work, have strong skills around boundary setting with the unseen realms, and can facilitate effective ancestral ritual. It is also advisable to have a personal ancestor practice, as well as professional supervision.

Relationship Between the Research Findings and The Current Literature

The literature and the research findings were both similar and different, and similarities and differences will be discussed in turn.

Similarities. Many of the themes found in the literature and the research findings were reflective of one another, including ancestral beliefs and practices, understandings of the principles and concepts of transgenerational trauma and sexual trauma and transgenerational sexual trauma, understanding of how to address and heal transgenerational trauma, sexual trauma and transgenerational sexual trauma, and the implications of the development of sexual wellness.

Ancestral beliefs and practices. The following concepts relating to ancestral beliefs and practices were demonstrated in both the literature and the research results.

The relative “realness” of ancestors is not a factor in determining healing benefit (Cohen, 2006) and the research findings both indicate that quantifiable realness of ancestors is both not provable, and indeed not necessary for healing benefit to be derived from ancestral reverence practice.

Practitioners of ancestral reverence delineate between various types of ancestors. Types of ancestors include blood ancestors, ancestors of spiritual, artistic, magical, philosophical or career lineage, ancestors of thought or of affinity or of shared identity. Both Foor (2017) and Oshun (2009) describe different types of ancestors that were also described by research participants.

Oldstone-Moore (2003) and Honwana (1999) describe the difference between the well and the unwell dead, promoting the cultural concept that not all who die become ancestors. This sentiment was echoed in the research data by many participants, notably as they discussed their processes around discernment, and deciding which ancestors are personally helpful for the participants to work with for the sake of healing. There was agreement between the literature and the research findings that people believe that harmful spirits exist. (Edwards, 2011).

The concept of a reciprocal relationship with the dead, in which the dead support the lives of the living and the living in turn pay homage to the dead is found in the ethnographic work of Edwards (2011) and Buhrman (1989) as they investigated Zulu and Nguni ancestral beliefs. The theme of reciprocity and reciprocal relationship with the dead was repeatedly found in the research data as well. Research participants often strongly believed that they could support their ancestors and receive support from their ancestors.

Part of reciprocal relationship is the belief in two-way communication. Edwards et al. (2009) presented the concept of ancestral dreams and ancestors communication with the living through nighttime visitations. Paying attention to dreams as a means of

ancestral communication was explicitly mentioned by a number of research interviewees when asked what their particular ancestral reverence practices are.

Edwards (2011) also states that cultures practicing ancestral reverence strongly link the role of the ancestors to healing. This is also true amongst practitioners of ancestral reverence interviewed for this study; they often feel the ancestors can support their healing. A slight difference is that in the literature, the idea that ancestors can also promote illness was found (Edwards 2011) and that concept was not present in the research data.

The literature noted several modalities that work with ancestors for the sake of healing, including Family Constellations, Ancestral lineage healing, and, more generally, shamanistic practices (Berg, 2003; Bogopa, 2010; Bojuwoye, 2013; Bojuwoye & Edwards, 2011; Boring, 2012; Chiakwa, 1999; Coulter et al., 2008; Duffy, 2017; Foor, 2017; Stobie, 2011). These modalities were also reflected in the some of the reflections of research participants as modalities they do or have engaged with as part of their practice of ancestral reverence for the sake of healing.

Ancestral reverence practices noted in the literature include the construction of ancestor altars, the making of offerings to the ancestors, and the conducting of ritual or ceremony for and/or with the ancestors. These practices, plus many more, were explicated by research participants as they spoke about their practice of ancestral reverence.

Transgenerational trauma and healing. The literature (Clezy, 2017; Davidson & Mellor, 2001; de Mendelssohn 2008; Doucet & Rovers, 2010; Motta et al., 1997) demonstrates that transgenerational transmission of trauma has an impact on secondary

and tertiary generations of offspring of survivors of trauma such as the Holocaust, starvation, war atrocity and genocide. The literature also promotes that having a framework of transgenerational transmission of trauma as a quantifiable human experience is helpful for those experiencing it to recognize the impact it has (Easter, 2016). Every participant in the research study clearly named impact they experience as a result of ancestral trauma. Those with the framework for transgenerational trauma could more easily name the experience, but even without, participants described the experience. Easter (2016) stated, “That which is unhealed will be passed on” (p. 64) and unequivocally, research participants echoed this statement in their own ways.

According to the literature, transgenerational trauma is transmitted through silence, secrecy, shame, traumatized parents, and epigenetics (Bowers & Yehuda, 2016; Clezy, 2017; Danieli, 1998; Metzger-Brown, 1998). Subjects named all of the methods of transgenerational transmission of trauma addressed in the literature review, even in the absence of understanding of the framework of transgenerational trauma. According to researcher Salberg (2015b) an impact of transgenerational trauma is resulting attachment issues. This is also identified by research participants as an impact some of them experience in the wake of trauma their parents or grandparents experienced. All research participants articulated the existence and impact of transgenerational trauma, even if they did not have the words for the concept. Also striking was that every participant could articulate the particular personal impacts their ancestors’ trauma had on their own sexuality.

Famularo et al. (1992) document the intergenerational tendency toward trauma repetition, and this was also named by research participants as an experience that some of

them are aware of in their own lives. A compensatory strategy called defensive caretaking in which a child focuses on meeting their parent's needs in order to manage their own experience of unnamed trauma (Metzger-Brown, 1998) was mentioned in several of the research interviews as a strategy those participants had used as children when faced with silent and unspoken transgenerational trauma.

Being able to articulate the impact of ancestral trauma on their lives is something many research participants are able to do, discussing in detail the embodied sense of the trauma, or the implications in their lives. This felt impact is also mentioned in the literature (Clezy 2017; de Mendelson 2008).

The research findings indicate that some participants feel a responsibility to heal their ancestors' trauma, and this responsibility is reflected in the literature. Facilitator of international healing processes, tending transgenerational conflict, Eshowsky (2016) stated, "transgenerational trauma is viewed as the responsibility of all of us to heal so the ancestors may be freed from that which was left unresolved at the time of their deaths" (p. 80).

There is agreement between the research findings and the literature that the first step in the healing of transgenerational trauma is to interrupt patterns of harm. Dr. Peter Levine (2007) stated that the cycle of transgenerational sexual trauma can be interrupted. In the research findings, subjects clearly speak to the decision to interrupt harmful behaviors they have inherited, and work to heal them. Findings indicate that participants believe they have choice in whether or not they perpetuate problematic behaviors.

One healing technology indicated in both the literature and the research findings is the use of ritual to support the healing of transgenerational trauma. Because so often

historically marginalized people are left to their own devices when it comes to healing from trauma, ritualizing healing serves an important role.

While most of the research on transgenerational trauma focuses on the existence of it and methods of transmission, clinician in the field Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (1998) is one of the few experimenting with and documenting methodologies that indicate healing transgenerational trauma is possible. In her small study with Lakota people, she found that education about historical trauma and sharing grief in traditional ritualized context produced positive healing results (Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1998).

Much of the literature (Eshowsky, 2016; Foor, 2017; Honwana, 1999) speaks to ritual and ceremony as a method to resolve trauma personally and in community. In the research findings, almost all participants experience ritual as a helpful tool. Closely related to ritual, drama therapy is also considered helpful in the healing of transgenerational trauma (Kellermann & Hudgins, 2000) and was mentioned both in the literature and as a technique that research participants utilize.

Transgenerational sexual trauma and healing. The literature on transgenerational sexual trauma, of which there is notably very little, indicates that children can experience the traumatic symptoms of their ancestors' unresolved sexual trauma (Devroede & Schutzenberger, 2005; Gardner, 1999). In the research findings of this study regarding embodied ancestral trauma, a research participant gives a detailed report of how he experiences the sexual trauma his ancestors experienced. Other research participants detailed the negative ancestral sexual legacies that they experience, including sexual abuse and incest. The literature and the research findings agree that healing sexual trauma is a process, that sexual healers can help (Price, 2005), and that as a result,

sexuality and quality of overall well-being improve (Ventegodt et al., 2009; Ventegodt, Kandel, Neikrug, & Merric, 2005).

Differences between the research findings and the literature. Significant difference was found between the literature and the research findings. Predominantly, information was present in the research findings that was not documented in the literature. As mentioned, there are significant gaps in the research literature, especially concerning the development of sexual wellness after sexual trauma. That findings indicated by the research data of this study are not found in the literature may be accounted for by these gaps.

The literature on ancestors mainly addressed culturally-specific practices from an ethnographical standpoint. The literature unilaterally did not address the subjective experiences of how individuals know and experience their ancestors. When discussing their ancestors, every research participant made some reference that indicated their belief that their ancestors are “in” them, that they consist of their ancestors. This concept was not found in the review of literature. The research findings offer many specific practices of ancestral reverence and connection that were not documented in the literature, such as the photograph practice, the grave practice, the breathing practice, etc.

While the literature made numerous references to the concept of the ancestors actively harming the living if not properly honored or appeased, there was no mention made of this in the dissertation research project. Research participants did mention experiencing harm from their ancestors, but it was never classified as coming from angry, retaliatory ancestors. Throughout many of the research interviews, the themes of discernment, safety, and negotiation when working with the dead were mentioned.

Participants strongly distinguished between the unwell and the well dead. These themes are also not mentioned in the literature.

The research findings strongly indicate that participants believe their personal healing is of benefit to their ancestral lineage, for the sake of healing transgenerational trauma. This concept was held in common by almost all participants and is not found in the literature. The research findings also demonstrate the struggle individuals experience when faced with having perpetrators of sexual violence in their blood lineage. Some research participants utilize forgiveness practices with their ancestors to deal with their struggles. This was not mentioned in the literature, and in fact, there are no models in the literature for how to explore this historical cultural wounding.

In the literature, there was also no mention found of the sexual legacies the living experience as an inheritance from their ancestors. Research subjects were aware of and articulate about the impact of these ancestral sexual legacies, both harmful and beneficial. The literature suggests that having a framework of transgenerational trauma is helpful for purposes of healing. Without fail, all of the research participants were articulate about transgenerational trauma and its impacts, regardless of having the framework of transgenerational trauma or the language to name it, which appears to contradict this suggestion. In summary, there were significant similarities and differences between the literature and the research findings.

Discussion of issues that were discovered during the course of the dissertation. Over the course of the dissertation, several issues were discovered. First, where there is research about the specific healing of transgenerational trauma, it comes from practitioners, not researchers. While there is a lot of research in the field of

transgenerational trauma, there is very little about actual healing modalities. This is a tremendous gap between what practitioners are focusing on and what researchers are investigating.

Second, to date, most research of transgenerational trauma has studied through the lens of transgenerational trauma as a pathological response. However, what if it is actually a brilliant response to healing trauma? Calling transmission of trauma brilliant sounds counter-intuitive. But through the course of writing this dissertation this is what this researcher is coming to believe: Some wounds take more than one lifetime to heal. If we hold a multi-generational perspective on developing sexual wellness, it becomes possible to reframe some of the ancestral burdens we carry as blessings.

Transgenerational trauma is viewed negatively, a legacy of suffering, passed down the generations: something to be rid of. But what if passing trauma transgenerationally is a savvy and beautiful evolutionary adaptation? Consider the migration of the monarch butterflies, who take up to five generations to travel from Mexico to North America. Facing a dilemma of not living long enough to complete the trek, they figured out a somatic transgenerational approach to survival. Wounds love to heal, and humans are smart enough to figure out how healing can ultimately happen for us, too.

This story, of healing as it moves throughout generations, is untold. We can reframe transgenerational trauma to point to the inherent somatic wisdom of giving our traumas abundant time to heal, over the course of generations. This gives us hope that wounds that seem unhealable can, in fact, and with time, heal.

Lastly, this understanding can also be applied to the healing of transgenerational sexual trauma, on which there is no research to date, prior to this dissertation research. The academic field of sexual wellness is almost non-existent, and almost all of the research focused on sexuality is pathology-based. The approach of viewing responses to stimulus as pathological is rampant, and perhaps ill-considered. If it is a human response to a stimulus, chances are it is an organism attempting to meet basic needs such as safety, belonging, and dignity (Haines, 2007).

Richard Strozzi-Heckler (2016), teacher of Strozzi Somatics, wrote:

Belonging is to participate and contribute to a place and a community. When we question our belonging we are not able to fully participate in a community, which in turn, influences our capacity to take action in the world. We are social beings whose ancestral concern for community lives as a reaching in our sinews, a heat in our organs, and an ardor for contact in our nervous system. (p. 2)

We must consider that transgenerational trauma is our best evolutionary adaptation to date to make sure the wounds of the past are acknowledged and tended, and that everyone, alive or dead, feels that they belong.

Recommendations

With the completion of this research, there are several important next steps to further the work presented in this dissertation. Recommendations follow for researchers and for professionals working with transgenerational sexual trauma. These recommendations are based on the overall research findings, the professional expertise of this researcher in this field, as well as research data collated from several of the interview subjects who are themselves professional sexuality and trauma clinicians.

Recommendations for Research

Close investigation of transgenerational trauma as an adaptive rather than pathologic response is suggested. One question to ask might be: What becomes possible in healing if the innate survival responses are considered valuable, even if they have outlived their usefulness? A primary premise of somatic work is that all behaviors are attempting to take care of a need, and when the behavior is forced to change without compassionate exploration, resistance often occurs, and the no-longer-helpful behaviors become even more neurologically entrenched (Strozzi-Heckler, 2014).

There were so many gaps in the academic research. The research on sexual wellness and how to develop it after sexual wounding is profoundly absent from the discourse. Therefore, another recommendation is for researchers to endeavor to understand not only what sexual wellness is, in a way that honors its importance and centrality to human experience, but also to explore what modalities are clinically proven to support sexual healing. Following this research, the integration of the findings of how to create and nurture sexual wellness into traditional sex education curriculum would be a dramatic, radical, and inspirational shift in the current paradigm.

This researcher recommends funding research investigating the work of somatic sexual healers such as Sexological Bodyworkers and also traditional healers who have supported victims of war rape in sexual healing. These are two promising directions of healing, based on research and subjective reports of efficacy by practitioners and clients alike.

Recommendations for Clinicians

In addition to recommendation for researchers, the following are recommendations for clinicians working with clients who have the experience of transgenerational sexual trauma. Firstly, it is to determine assessment protocols for ascertaining (note: not “diagnosing”) the presence of transgenerational sexual trauma. While some clinicians are of course aware of the possibility, many do not explore the complications of trauma passed through family lineages.

An additional and complementary recommendation is for the development of professional training programs for sex therapists in transgenerational trauma and healing, held through a somatic and ancestral lens. This is perhaps the next step of this researcher. It feels important to introduce a quote here from a research subject who themselves is a mental health professional working in the field of sexuality and trauma. She said,

I think ancestral work takes a certain amount of wisdom. I’m not saying that ancestral work is woo woo. I’m saying that not every clinician is going to understand. To give it credence . . . you need research on it, and documentation, and dissertations, and published papers, and studies. What happens when you start to introduce this kind of work? And what are the results when you do it?

When it becomes more mainstream – and you’re doing it now, you’re pushing this, using it will become a magnificent option. It will open the floodgates for people. It will give permission for things that they never understood. It’s just this thing that’s there, in them. In our clients.

That’s why even with all the CBT in the world – cognitive behavioral therapy – it isn’t going to help people who have a trauma background. A lot of

symbolic forms of therapy really work much better for them. You've got to talk to that part of the brain in the language that it knows, which is not words. It's not linear, it's not logical.

Another important recommendation is to help clinicians to develop conceptual frameworks and appropriate language to inform clients about transgenerational trauma and its implications, as well as introduce supportive interventions. This includes introducing the idea that transgenerational trauma is healable over time.

There are many other directions this work could go. Ancestral healing work with sex offenders comes to mind, as in continuing the work begun by Dan Booth Cohen (2009a), Family Constellator and facilitator of the work in prisons.

Lastly, because ancestral reverence creates such a sense of belonging, and especially because disenfranchised people often feel disbelonging, and loss of ancestral homelands creates a colonizer conundrum, can ancestral reverence have a more mainstream yet nuanced place in the professional conversation about trauma healing? This is an important avenue of exploration in the field of transgenerational trauma. It is this researcher's hope that in the years to come, these questions will be explored in with exuberant interest. Let methods be developed that successfully treat sexual trauma and transgenerational sexual trauma. May appropriate methods supporting the development of radiant erotic wellness be practiced widely, and with great gusto!

This concludes this dissertation research project. May it be of service to all who read it, may it honor their ancestors, and may it bless their descendants.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

SEXUAL VIOLENCE: CONSEQUENCES

Sexual violence can have harmful and lasting consequences for victims, families, and communities (CDC, 2018). The following list describes some of those consequences.

Physical

- More than 32,000 pregnancies result from rape every year with the highest rates of rape-related pregnancy reported by women in abusive relationships
- Some long-term consequences of sexual violence include:
 - Chronic pain
 - Gastrointestinal disorders
 - Gynecological complications
 - Migraines and other frequent headaches
 - Sexually transmitted infections
 - Cervical cancer
 - Genital injuries

Psychological

Victims of sexual violence face both immediate and chronic psychological consequences.

Immediate psychological consequences include the following:

- Shock
- Denial
- Fear
- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Withdrawal
- Shame or guilt
- Nervousness
- Distrust of others
- Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder
- Emotional detachment
- Sleep disturbances
- Flashbacks
- Mental replay of assault

Chronic psychological consequences include the following:

- Depression
- Generalized anxiety
- Attempted or completed suicide
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Diminished interest/avoidance of sex

- Low self-esteem/self-blame

Social

Sexual violence also has social impacts on its victims, such as the following:

- Strained relationships with family, friends, and intimate partners
- Less emotional support from friends and family
- Less frequent contact with friends and relatives
- Lower likelihood of marriage
- Isolation or ostracism from family or community

Health Risk Behaviors

Sexual violence victimization is associated with several health risk behaviors.

Some researchers view the following health behaviors as both consequences of sexual violence and factors that increase a person's likelihood to being victimized again in the future.

- Engaging in high-risk sexual behavior
- Unprotected sex
- Early sexual initiation
- Choosing unhealthy sexual partners
- Having multiple sex partners
- Trading sex for food, money, or other items
- Using harmful substances
- Smoking cigarettes

- Drinking alcohol
- Drinking alcohol and driving
- Taking drugs
- Unhealthy diet-related behaviors
- Fasting
- Vomiting
- Abusing diet pills
- Overeating
- Delinquency and criminal behavior
- Failure to engage in healthy behaviors, such as motor vehicle seat belt use

APPENDIX B
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Dissertation Title: Tending the bones: Exploring the connection between ancestral reverence and sexual wellness

Name of Participant:

Name of Mentor: Joseph Kramer at 510-428-9063

Description: The purpose of this research is to explore the connection between sexual wellness and ancestral reverence. Through full-length recorded interviews, the research seeks to understand how ancestral reverence practices may promote sexual wellness, especially after sexual trauma.

Time Commitment: Interviews are approximately 1.5 hours in length.

Payment: There is no compensation for the interview.

Risks: I do not anticipate any risk to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day to day life.

Benefits: unknown, but may include a sense of being heard and witnessed in your human experiences.

Disclosure: There are no additional treatments that can be recommended.

Confidentiality: Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Interview data will be coded using assigned subject codes rather than names to protect subject identity. There is no plan for this information to be released to other entities.

Questions and Contact Information Explain whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of any negative effects or research-related injury to the subject.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

This research proposal has been reviewed and approved by The Academic Committee of IUPS and it has been determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by University policies.

Participant Signature: My signature below formally acknowledges that I have read this document and understand the information contained herein. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher. I have been informed about the purpose of this study and the potential risks and benefits associated with my participation. I have been assured that all this information will be handled in a completely confidential manner. I understand and am satisfied that the following safeguards have been taken to protect against the loss of confidentiality:

1. My name will not be associated with my answers in any private or public report on the results without my written explicit consent.
2. My name will be kept separate from any project records, recordings, transcripts, or discussion of data.
3. All identifying information will be deleted when direct quotes are used in the dissertation, unless explicit consent is given for particular quotes.
4. All confidential materials will be coded and identified by pseudonyms only.
5. Pseudonyms (agreed upon fictitious names) will be used instead of real names on all project records, recordings, transcripts.
6. All confidential materials will be accessible only by the primary researcher.

I know that my participation is completely voluntary and that I will not be compensated for my time. I also know that I may refuse to answer any questions without risk or penalty. Pavini Moray will be available to discuss questions or concerns that may arise and will provide a referral for professional support, if necessary.

If I have any questions or concerns about this research and my rights as participant, or if I feel that I have been placed at risk, I know I can contact the principal investigator Pavini Moray at 510-333-2098 or Pavini's supervisor, Joseph Kramer at 510-428-9063.

Furthermore, I may directly or anonymously write to:

International University of Professional Studies

P.O. Box 236

Makawao, Maui, HI 96768

Telephone: (800) 806-0317

Fax: (413) 641-3272

inquiry@iups.edu

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX C
INVITATION LETTER

Dear _____

I am a doctoral student of somatic psychology at the International University of Professional Studies. I am so drawn to your work: (why)

I am currently conducting my doctoral research, exploring how relating with our well, bright ancestors can support recovery from sexual wounding as well as the development of sexual wellness. I wonder if you might be interested in participating as an interviewee? The interview takes approximately 1.5 hours, and is conducted in person or via zoom, and is recorded. Your identity is protected.

This research inquiry stems from both my personal life and my work as a somatic sex therapist. Personally, I've worked with ancestors to interrupt and change patterns of sexual wounding in myself and my family. Professionally, I notice that my clients who are attempting to recover from sexual harm are often part of a multigenerational family system of wounding. Epigenetics show that trauma can be passed through our DNA. Although there is not yet much research specific to sexual trauma, my clients, while working to develop sexual wellness, often find they are navigating the burden of their parents' and grandparents' sexual trauma as well.

I am curious to find effective techniques that interrupt cycles of harm, heal trauma in the living and in family lineages.

Because of your work with _____ I believe you have experience and wisdom to offer. The people I am interviewing agree with the following sentences:

- You are working or have worked to recover from sexual wounding.
- You are working or have worked to develop your sexual wellness.
- You are connected with your ancestors.
- You experience a connection between your ancestral relationships and your sexual wellness.

If you are willing to consider participating, I would appreciate the chance to speak with you and answer any questions you may have about this research. Many thanks for the work you do!

Sincerely,

Pavini Moray

Ph.D Candidate at the International University of Professional Studies

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

What are ancestors?

Tell me about how you relate to your ancestors. How do you hear them, feel them, know them, communicate with them?

What triggers ancestral consciousness for you?

In what ways is there a connection between your experience of your ancestors and your sexual wellness?

Is this a connection you've reflected on? If so, when did you first realize it? Have you had any teachings about this?

What are your practices?

What results do you get?

Can you tell me about a time your ancestors supported your sexual wellness?

How has relating with your ancestors help you develop sexual Wellness

Have your ancestors impeded your sexual healing?

Has your experience of your ancestors ever taken an erotic turn? Or have your erotic experiences ever taken an ancestral turn? Have you ever connected with your ancestors while having sex?

Have you considered ancestors of lineage/craft in terms of sex?

Does your personal sexual healing benefit your ancestors? How?

Have you tended sexual wounding in your family ancestry? What have you done?
How can we heal sexual trauma in our family lines through the lens of ancestral consciousness? How can we work with ancestors to heal sexual trauma?

What about the ancestors is sexually helpful?

What are effective practices that you would suggest to someone who wanted to work with ancestors to support sexual healing?

Are there erotic practices we can offer our ancestors for their well-being? Is this okay? How?

Any dangers or taboos?

Do you distinguish between well and unwell dead? If so, how is this important in terms of sexuality?

Anything else I should know?

How has it been to talk about this? Have you made any new connections?

Any resources or folks to talk with?

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Pavini Moray (pronoun: Pe) received a Bachelor's degree in English critical theory from Syracuse University in 1993. Pavini received a Master's degree in Montessori Education from Endicott College in 2004. A former Montessori elementary educator, Educational Therapist, National Park Service ranger, and Peace Corps volunteer, Pavini currently works as a somatic sex therapist and ancestral lineage healing practitioner in private practice in San Francisco, CA. Pavini works mainly with queer and trans clients who have experienced sexual trauma, helping them feel more and live more fully in their intimate lives.

Pavini is a Certified Sexological Bodyworker, and a Certified Ancestral Lineage Healing practitioner and teacher. Pavini also has training in conflict resolution.

Pavini hosts a podcast called "Bespoken Bones: Ancestors at the crossroads of sex, magick, and science" inspired by pe's dissertation interview research. The podcast is released every new and full moon and addresses topics of transgenerational trauma, erotic wellness, and ancestral support. Pavini also teaches a variety of public workshops and classes relating to these same topics.

Pavini has maintained a frequent blog from 2012 - present at www.emancipatingsexuality.com. Pavini is published in the recent Queer Magick anthology, and is the author of "Putting the Edge in Education: An anarchist cookbook for teachers" and "Free Your Sex: Your toolkit for erotic liberation." Pavini also wrote and produced a short erotic film called "Holy MILF: A queer, eco-sexual ritual film" that headlined at the San Francisco Sex Worker Art and Film Festival in 2015.

Pavini lives with their partner Ari and their two teenagers in a big queer and trans glittery family in San Francisco.