RECLAIMING THE FEMININE:
A CO-OPERATIVE INQUIRY ON THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE OF THE DIVINE FEMININE IN SOCIAL PRACTICE

Dheepa Nedungat

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ABSTRACT

This research represents the testimony of six women's understanding of the divine feminine, including myself as co-researcher. Through a co-operative inquiry, we explored how our understanding influences us as social practitioners. Co-operative inquiry offered us an experiential and participative process to engage with the topic, by using a radical approach to research, in which the traditional role of researcher was replaced by a team of co-researchers all in equal positions. In this way, the research outcomes were generated based on a group effort.

This study is important because an inquiry into the divine feminine demonstrates the challenges we face as social justice advocates particularly in terms of our personal identity as women and our personal experiences of power. The research suggests if we are truly to engage in practices that are emancipatory, empowering and transformative, we need to address those challenges and review our relationship to power. The results of this research demonstrate how the process of inquiry into the divine feminine calls for:

- having a balanced view, particularly in activism
- reclaiming our power in our relationship to our womanhood and femininity
- reclaiming our relationship to our body, our feeling self and to nature

We were each touched, moved and inspired by the inquiry process. The inward reflection not only honed our self-reflective skills, it also created a bridge to a deeper understanding of who we are. We learnt through group dynamics, how to collaborate and authentically engage in reflection and meaning-making, despite our differences and beliefs. We uncovered, through transformation of our being, the qualities of the divine feminine. What we discovered, was not a list of qualities to aspire to, rather the transformative aspect of the divine feminine was in the process of inquiry. It was in this process of inquiring what the divine feminine means, that each of us came into relationship with ourselves in a new transformative way.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Those animated by the Goddess, in her many forms, are concerned with all world problems: economy; justice; racial, sexual and species equality; education; ecological balance and many other concerns. To acknowledge the Goddess is to open up immediately to issues which threaten our total existence. For we cannot deny our common heritage of life which the Goddess safeguards (Matthews, 1991, p. 343).

1. Overview

This research is an investigation into a way of being that is expressed from a deep and collaborative inquiry into the divine feminine. The exploration includes an engagement with the meaning of the divine feminine in terms of how it shapes who we are, who we are being, and particularly how to be in service to humanity. It is a journey that straddles spirituality, feminism, transpersonal psychology and activism and challenges our personal views on how we advocate for justice.

The literature suggests that the understanding and the embodied experience of the divine feminine offers humanity a totally new and unrecognised perspective and way of life, and that its application in society today has a place as a ‘transformative agency’ in the field of social practice (Baring, 2013a; Barnes, 2006; Fernandes, 2003; Hartmann, 2004; Woodman, 1987). These contemporary perspectives suggest that if movements for social justice are to be fully transformative, then an explicit engagement with spiritual qualities based on the divine feminine as a way of practice, and not just an abstract ideal, is necessary (Fox, 2012; Franz, 1980; Harvey, 2009; Symington, 1994).

My interest in undertaking this study stems from just such social justice initiatives. In particular, how does the divine feminine influence how we advocate for justice and how do we incorporate these ideas into practice? Descriptions and definitions that aim to investigate what or who the divine feminine represents can be found in various literatures based on religious discourses, mythology, feminist spirituality and the like (Baring, 2013a; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Campbell & Moyers, 1988; McDermott & Kripal, 2003; Rowland,
This research, however, focuses on how our personal relationship to the divine feminine influences how we advocate for justice on a day to day basis.

The central premise for this research is based on the assertion that the challenge for justice is an inner one, and that only after becoming aware of and addressing our own internal struggles, can we then turn to address changes in society (Doetsch-Kidder, 2012). It is in this context of self-reflection that this research is based.

1.1 Aims

The research questions were:

- What does the divine feminine mean to us (the participants of the inquiry)?
- How does our understanding of the divine feminine shape and influence our external relationships (for example our relationships with our partners, children, family, friends, colleagues, clients, community)?

The research aimed to investigate how everyday practice is shaped and influenced by these qualities and consequently how it affects the outcomes.

1.2 Method of Research

This research employed a Co-operative inquiry methodology. The Co-operative inquiry offered a platform for a group of participants to jointly inquire into a way of being based on the divine feminine. It was based on a paradigm that validates the participants’ contributions and encourages their participation through sharing of their knowledge, and joint sense-making skills, contrary to those valued in traditional research. In this inquiry, we were all researchers and subjects simultaneously. Collaboratively, and by way of action and reflection cycling, we came to understand how the divine feminine influences our actions and our practice. By validating our personal experiences of the embodied meaning of the divine feminine, we jointly acknowledged and valued our subjective and intersubjective experiential knowing, as an additional source of information.

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1 John Heron pioneered the creation of co-operative inquiry. In his capacity as external consultant, John provided me with guidance on some issues arising during the inquiry process, and gave me helpful feedback on an early and a later draft of my thesis.
Fundamentally, the outcome of a co-operative inquiry is about transformation of being through engagement with the focus and the process of the inquiry (Heron, 1996, p. 37). Through a circle of sharing, and observing our actions, we were able to access our deep knowing which helped us uncover the depth and transformative element of the divine feminine, ultimately addressing the aims of this research.

1.3 Context: The Role of the Divine Feminine

The emerging awareness of the transformational qualities of the divine feminine (Fox, 2012; Neumann, 1986; Reid-Bowen, 2007; Ryan, 2000; Washburn, 1994; Woodman & Dickson, 1997) is often associated with eco-spirituality that connects humanity and planetary well-being by advocating for environmental justice (Coates, Gray, & Hetherington, 2006; Gray & Coates, 2013; Keller, 2007; Ryan, 2000). Additionally, it has become increasingly common to find references to the role that the feminine plays in the global shift toward new consciousness, or as a way to address the ‘apocalyptic’ outlook that climate change and population overload presents to humanity and the planet (Baring, 2013a; Brown, 2005; Bucko & Fox, 2013; Elgin, 2009; Gilding, 2012; Hartmann, 2004; Harvey, 2009). These papers suggest that the influence of the divine feminine is responsible for the growth of environmental justice movements.

Additionally, movements for the empowerment of women and increasing calls to end the use of weapons through the promotion of non-violence and peaceful methods, have also been attributed to the influence of spirituality based on the feminine (Fernandes, 2003). One such movement is the Occupy Movement, which aims to build an alternative system to the existing one built on structural violence (Bucko & Fox, 2013). Additionally, Avaaz, an online activism network that focuses on addressing social issues raised by everyday people, to bring awareness and social change, has also been cited as a movement built on collaboration and non-violent methods (Baring, 2013a). Transition Towns (TT), initially formed to address humanity’s over-dependence on oil, promotes a way of living based on respect for the environment and local community-oriented support systems, instead of an over reliance on commodities, governments or global economies (Hopkins, 2011). The philosophical basis for TT may not have been derived explicitly from references to the divine feminine per se, however, its spiritual foundations are implicitly grounded in ideas
of earth wisdom, human psychology and transformation of consciousness (Hopkins, 2011), which are associated with the divine feminine (Flinders, 2002).

These organisations are showing a new way to live our lives in place of the status quo by which we “live our lives in servitude to the power principle and the institutions which embody it” (Baring, n.d., para. 11). Avaaz, TT and the Occupy Movement demonstrate that actions based on the principles of the divine feminine, i.e. collaboration and love, grounded in eco-spirituality, call for a different relationship with life and our consciousness.

Based on this context, the inquiry aimed to uncover how the role of the divine feminine influenced us as individuals and as social justice advocates, as we move toward this new way of service.

1.4 Divine Feminine: Definitions and Terminologies

There are varied descriptions and definitions of the divine feminine which suggests the understanding of the divine feminine is applicable to any gender and spiritual orientation (Baring, 2013a; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Campbell & Moyers, 1988; McDermott & Kripal, 2003; Rowland, 2002; Ruether, 2005). For example, in transpersonal psychology, the divine feminine is represented as consciousness or a way of being. Alternatively, the divine feminine is also regarded as a Goddess, i.e. a living entity or an aspect of the divine world (Raff, 2003, p. 149).

Either way, it is through the process of getting to know the divine feminine, in whichever form we feel drawn to, where we come to know ourselves. It is in this realm of exploring what the divine feminine means that this research is based. Definitions and ideas about the multifaceted dimensions of the divine feminine are explored further in the literature review. This thesis however does not stake any claim to a specific definition of the divine feminine, as such an explanation would reduce the inquiry to a specific viewpoint thus losing the greater mystery and potential of the divine feminine (Crisp, 2008; Fox, 1979; Murchu, 1997; Raff, 2003).

I have also deliberately used the terms divine feminine, sacred feminine, feminine principle or the feminine interchangeably in this research. I believe the process of
exploring the meaning of what is divine and what is feminine depends on the inquirer and that those terms represent an aspect or way of being. I explore these terminologies further in the literature review. However, I am aware of the pitfalls of using the terms feminine and masculine in this research. Although the term divine feminine is not synonymous with female, the term carries connotations ingrained in our psyche which may or may not result in gender prejudice. This inquiry however is based on the belief that men and women both contain feminine and masculine energies, which are divine.

1.5 Limitations of the Research

An inquiry into the divine feminine can be considered a life long journey as it involves deep personal understanding of one’s sense of identity. Attempting to conduct this research within a three month time frame was a formidable task, and therefore the extent of our outcomes is restricted to what was possible within this timeframe. As such, there are no fixed answers to the research questions; the answers are themselves an on-going inquiry.

Another limitation of our research is that the inquiry did not attract any male participants. Being an all-women inquiry group meant that our scope of inquiry was mainly influenced by ideas of womanhood and feminism. These ideas were hugely beneficial and relevant for the inquirers however we were left wondering how men would have experienced the divine feminine and how the scope of inquiry may have been influenced as a result.

The term divine feminine is ambiguous and thus it was difficult to narrow the scope of this research to any one particular area. As such, the thesis attempts to represent a wide scope of understanding of the divine feminine, but at a high level and within the context of our inquiry. I also acknowledge that there may be many more views which may not be represented as the scope of our inquiry was completely based on the participants’ input and their chosen areas of exploration.

1.6 Structure of Thesis

This thesis documents the process of inquiring into the divine feminine. I have been deeply influenced by the inquiry and the transformative nature of the divine feminine which has prompted me to write from an embodied perspective and to honour the feminine. Part of the writing process involved my own struggle with needing to make this
thesis a clear and constructed set of ideas and results. However in doing so, I would have devalued the feminine, for there are no clear ideas or results, only prompts, process and altered awareness when expressing the feminine (Woodman & Dickson, 1997).

Conversely, without adequate form or structure, our inquiry process would be difficult to understand. So the challenge I faced was to represent this thesis as a balance between ‘feminine’ creativity and ‘masculine’ form. For that reason, rather than presenting a set of findings and analysis typically found in conventional research, I have structured this document using the co-operative inquiry methodology as a guide to representing the inquiry. The heart of a co-operative inquiry methodology is the transformation of being. Therefore, this thesis has been structured to explore how a group of six women grappled and delved into the nature of their relationship with the divine feminine and how that relationship was transformed as a result. It follows the reporting convention suggested in the co-operative inquiry literature, i.e. Heron (1996) which can be summarised as follows:

- The story of the inquiry process is a report on the inquiry describing how the group grappled with the intricacies of the topic of inquiry, and the process of meaning-making adopted by the group to arrive at the outcomes (as represented in Chapter Four)
- Information on the informative and transformative outcomes that relate to the focus of the inquiry (represented in Chapter Five)
- Information on the quality and validity of the inquiry (represented in Chapter Six)

These sections, albeit represented in different chapters, are closely interwoven – the journeying described in our story in Chapter Four is linked to the different types of outcomes outlined in Chapter Five.

Additionally, there is no data analysis nor is there any process of interpreting outside the inquiry process; the inquiry process itself represents a series of findings through the group’s actions and their reflections, refined further in subsequent cycles. In this way, the group, including myself, reflected on our actions and made sense of our conclusions. The outcomes were generated as part of the process of inquiring.
In summary, this thesis has been structured as follows. Following the Introduction is the literature review in Chapter Two. Here, I outline some of the propositional understanding of the divine feminine and its role in addressing social justice. I began the literature review by arguing the need for a new context in how we relate to nature and thus how we perceive the divine feminine. I then link the main themes from our inquiry findings to the key discussion threads in the literature review. In this way, literature that provides a deeper exploration of these themes, is explored and critiqued. In keeping with the principles of a co-operative inquiry, the literature review was researched and prepared after the completion of the inquiry. Therefore, as initiating facilitator, I did not influence the direction of our inquiry, based on any pre-existing understandings from a literature review. I will add a qualifier however that some of the definitions of the divine feminine included in the literature review were researched during the proposal stage of this research.

Chapter Three explains how co-operative inquiry as a methodology is suitable for this research and how it was applied. In particular, I explain how my role as researcher disappeared as all participants including myself, became co-researchers and co-subjects. I explain how the seamless relationship amongst the co-researchers was sustained and developed within a collaborative and fully participative model that encouraged and nurtured shared experiences and shared reflections. I also establish how it differs from conventional research methods as co-operative inquiry honours and validates the group-generated outcomes.

Chapters Four and Chapter Five outline the heart of the inquiry presenting the story of our inquiry and the nature of the outcomes that our process began to generate. I explain how our ideas emerged and our understanding evolved during the inquiry. I explain how our experiences were further deepened in the action stages of the inquiry resulting in informative and transformative outcomes. Typically, a critical analysis is carried out on the outcomes of the research. I describe in Chapter Five why critical analysis is counter-intuitive to a co-operative inquiry.

In Chapter Six, I review the quality and validity of our inquiry. In positivist based research, replication is used to strengthen validity claims (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005); replication is
impossible in a co-operative inquiry as each group will have different motivating factors and will reflect and act in its own way (Oates, 2002). Therefore, the quality of the outcomes rest upon the validity procedures used during the inquiry. This chapter is important as it validates the approach used in the inquiry and the relevance and authenticity of our findings, particularly as the methodology used is based on person-centred science.

Chapter Seven represents my personal conclusions from the inquiry and additional ideas regarding future research opportunities.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our real problem at the present time is that of overpopulation and not tensions with Arabs or the Russians. We are confronted with a hopeless situation. The saving principle is the feminine principle and this time it will not be Noah in the ark, but a woman, that is, a Goddess (Franz, 1980, pp. 62-63).

2. Chapter Overview

Joseph Campbell eloquently states:

People say that what we’re all seeking is a meaning for life. I don’t think that’s what we’re really seeking. I think that what we’re seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive (Campbell & Moyers, 1988, p. 3).

For me, Campbell’s statement forms the underlying foundation for this research which explores how the authentic expression of who we are is possible when we awaken to our true nature. It is that ‘true nature’ that the divine feminine is intrinsically a part of (Baring, 2013a; Matthews, 1991; Naraine, 2000). This was the purpose I outlined in my invitation to research participants, where I stated, “I long for a deeper connection to the sacred feminine and to my sense of purpose or meaning particularly in my vocation as a social practitioner”.

As our inquiry process further deepened our understanding of the divine feminine, new ideas and concepts began to unfold. The Literature Review discusses the foundation for these ideas and provides the contexts for the themes that emerged in this research.

2.1 The Changing Tide of Religion and Spirituality: Towards a New Cosmology

One of the mediums through which we can understand the role of the divine feminine is that of cosmology\(^2\) by which we understand religion and spirituality. Humans have tried to make sense of the universe through cosmological theories and the notion of a deity or

\(^2\) Cosmology is defined as a study of the universe and what goes on within it (Murchu, 1997, p. 89) Through the lens of classical science, the universe was defined through what was observable and deducible, which thereby determined what it was and what it wasn’t.
God is central in these theories (Halvorson & Kragh, 2011). For instance, the cosmology of monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism, assumes a transcendent God who created the universe and continually maintains its existence. However, the cosmology by which we understand spirituality and religion needs to change, as Baring explains:

Surely, after so many billion years of cosmic evolution, it is simply unacceptable that the beauty and marvel of the earth should be ravaged by us through the destructive power of our weapons, our insatiable greed and the misapplication of our science and technology. It is inconceivable that our extraordinary species, which has taken so many million years to evolve, should destroy itself and lay waste to the earth through ignorance of the divinity in which we dwell and which dwells in us (Baring, n.d., para. 12).

This relationship suggests we have lost the meaning of an immanent consciousness or divinity within. Tarnas’s description of cosmology as the relationship between humanity with a living Earth and the cosmos provides a good example of this immanent or participatory state of consciousness:

The primal human being perceives the surrounding natural world as permeated with meaning, meaning whose significance is at once human and cosmic. The primal world is en-souled [...] The human being is a microcosm within the macrocosm of the world, participating in its interior reality and united with the whole, in ways that are both tangible and invisible [...] Within this relatively undifferentiated state of consciousness, human beings perceive themselves as directly – emotionally, mystically consequentially – participating in and communicating with the interior life of the natural world and cosmos (Tarnas, 2006, pp. 16-17).

It is this participation in life and all its meaning which now needs to be resurrected. This understanding has existed in the human psyche as instinctive awareness longer than the dominant religions and science of our times which no longer recognise nature, which is intrinsically feminine, as sacred or alive (Baring, 2013a). Additionally, neither do the dominant cultural worldview or social theories through which we form our ideas.

The following discussion aims to explore some of these traditional ideas, which I refer to as traditional cosmology, that perpetuate the devaluing of nature, and thus the feminine, merely by our acquiescence to certain worldviews. I then explore the context for a new cosmology that acknowledges and reclaims the feminine.
Traditional Cosmology

Murchu (1997) and Berry (1988) refer to the time when humanity’s sense of wholeness and connection to a greater mystery, began to erode in the face of a more mechanistic worldview; a time marked as the beginning of modernity. This phase in time demonstrates how spiritual beliefs based on a great mystery were influenced by this social concept. Modernity essentially was influencing and shaping our cosmic understanding of the greater mystery of life. Western civilisation over time came to be dominated by the effects of modernity and still is (Hyslop, 2012).

Modernity was seen as “the confluence of science, as the harbinger of truth through reason, the rise of liberal democracy as a dominant political form, and the development of capitalism” (Hyslop, 2012, p. 406). Despite offering huge benefits to humankind, it came at a cost. In particular, the role of intuition and wisdom in the body and feeling self were diminished (Barnes, 2006; Ruether, 2005; Spretnak, 1997); modernity valued objectivity over subjectivity. Additionally, modernity was seen to provide order over chaos, where chaos was seen as “illogicality, irrationality, indecisiveness and ambivalence” (Spretnak, 1997, pp. 78-79). Interestingly, Spretnak argues that these are traits associated with women in patriarchal culture; so in a sense, modernity imposes order over nature and women. Here, a conclusion can be made that modernity resulted in the devaluing of feminine values, including the role of the body and feeling self.

This trend extended over time especially during the Industrial Revolution and it was then “the mythic, visionary, symbolic world with all its numinous qualities was lost” (Berry, 1988, p. 134). These qualities are associated with the divine feminine (Raff, 2003). Murchu (1997) laments that ultimately, this mechanistic or patriarchal worldview isolates a person or an entity as separate and discreet from its environment, thus undermining the greater vision and meaning offered by spirituality and religion. The Age of Enlightenment amplified this idea of alienation or separateness affecting humanity’s relationship with nature and with each other:

[...] the orthodox scientific worldview is the product of the Enlightenment and represents a liberating step for human society in releasing itself from the binds of superstition and Scholasticism, [alternatively] it is a movement to narrow our view of our world and to monopolise knowing in the hands of an elite few, and is
fuelled by patriarchy, alienation, and materialism; it is a product of a society committed to the domination of nature and of other peoples, of a society committed to a transcendental theology that sees man in the image of God and thus outside His creation (Reason, 1994c, p. 324).

Along with the benefits offered by the Enlightenment, the ideas of domination and control of nature eventually reinforced the separation between humans and nature.

So how did this shift influence religious and spiritual beliefs? Barfield (1988) explains that this separation was also represented in the shift from lunar consciousness to solar consciousness (soul to mind) in mythology, accompanied by a shift of emphasis from feminine to masculine deities; the implication of this shift was the resulting dominance of the monotheistic transcendent Father God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and the repressed imagery of the divine feminine (Barfield, 1988). The shift of language from Wisdom (centred in intuition, body, mind, spirit) to Word (centred in reason and rationality) was another indication as the tradition of the feminine was eclipsed by the masculinisation of texts (Ruether, 2005). It seems that the trend toward devaluing the feminine, then led to a diminished position of the feminine.

Further to this debate, with the advance of science and technology and the growing secular and materialist philosophy, the argument that there is no proven hypothesis for a God and that the concept of soul is irrelevant, became prevalent (Coates et al., 2006). Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA, claimed the joy of life could be attributed directly to the biological behaviour of cells and molecules, suggesting therefore that consciousness is merely a by-product of the brain (as cited in Blackmore, 2006). Baring (2013a) explains that although this sort of secular ideology had freed humanity from the clutches of religious zeal in the past, ironically it replaced it with another form of control. Any form not fitting with its convictions is disparaged, invalidated and relegated as quackery; the mystical sciences, homeopathy and acupuncture for instance (Baring, 2013a).

Another consequence of such reductionist thinking based on traditional cosmology is the impact on indigenous cultures; Franke Wilmer succinctly explains, “Indigenous people...are besieged precisely because the values underlying the moral foundation of their cultures are regarded as antithetical to the values pursued in accordance with the dominant modern world order” (Briskman, 2007, p. 69). In New Zealand, Māori were most impacted
due to the colonisation of land, which resulted in the disruption of their identity and selfhood which is intrinsically linked to the land (Connor, 2003). Richard Tarnas speaks of this loss of humanity’s relationship to nature as “a heroic ascent to autonomy but [a] tragic fall from unity” (Baring, 2013a, p. 130).

In addition to the repression of aboriginal communities, Ruether (2010) also argues that there is a direct correlation between how women are treated and how nature is cared for in what she refers to as eco-justice. She describes “how some of the religions have interconnected the domination of women and nature with the subjugation or marginalisation of ethnic communities, which the dominant culture seeks to either exploit or expel from its territory” (Ruether, 2010, p. 20). She provides examples including the untouchables in Hinduism, Palestinians in Jewish settler theology in Israel and pagans in Christianity.

So it seems that aspects of our spiritual or religious faith are construed in isolation within traditional cosmology. As Schneider claims, “The theology which undergirded our spirituality in the past cannot be resuscitated and intelligent people cannot live a spirituality which is theologically bootless” and therein lies the opportunity for a new cosmology to retrieve what was subverted in the past (as cited in Murchu, 1997, p. vii). Similarly, Joseph Campbell suggests, “The old gods are dead or dying and people everywhere are searching, asking: What is the new mythology to be, the mythology of this unified earth as of one harmonious being?” (Campbell, 2002, p. xix). This quote suggests that the traditional image of God has to die for a new experience to emerge and perhaps the new image is a feminine one.

**Toward a new cosmology**

From a philosophical and alchemical perspective, the transition from the traditional cosmology to the new, is succinctly explained by Barfield (1988) as the evolution of consciousness. He refers to three distinct phases; original participation, separation and final participation where humanity reclaims its relationship with nature which is intrinsically feminine (Barfield, 1988). Interestingly, Heron (2006) offers a different perspective on consciousness, which he says is changeless:
Consciousness is not experience. Experience is experience of being in a world; it’s a composite of consciousness and life. Experience is sentience, feeling being in a world. It is developing, changing, becoming. Life is the motive power of this becoming. Consciousness as such is changeless, the great attractor (Heron, 2006, p. 132).

In this way, it is our experience that we are looking to evolve such that it is felt and seen in our actions so as we look toward a new cosmology, we are looking for a new way of living and experiencing life. So in essence, to reclaim humanity’s relationship to nature, our actions would be very different from today regarding how we treat nature and the environment (diZerega, 2013). For example, there would be a shift from controlling nature as a profitable commodity, which has led to the current ecological devastation, toward acknowledging our reciprocal relationship to nature and the feminine (Tarnas, 1993).

Reason (1994b) argues that what is most crucial in addressing this ecological devastation, is to consider how we participate with earth and its living systems, as participation is an ecological imperative. Similarly, Spretnak (1997) explains how nature has been critically degraded and that the possibility that humanity is anchored in the meaning of nature, is cause for concern for many. Ironically this fear or concern explains “why the radical denial of meaning has found widespread appeal” (Aitchey, 1993, para.4). In other words, humanity would rather turn a blind eye to the true nature of our relationship to earth than face the reality of what our actions mean to our survival (Hartmann, 2004). To that effect, Spretnak (1997) suggests nothing short of a cosmological shift adopting what she refers to as ecological postmodernism. Fundamentally, ecological postmodernism does not aim to correct current systems but to transform them. In this way she diverges from environmentalism and the more typical use of the word ecology, which lacks the philosophical and political knowledge of the crises of modernity. She situates ecological postmodernism against other modern theories as a cosmological unfolding.

In Figure 1, I have compiled Barfield’s (1988) evolution of consciousness along with its attributes and linked it with Spretnak’s (1997) overview on modern theories to highlight the relationship between the two sets of concepts.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Barfield’s Three Phases of Evolution (Barfield, 1988)</th>
<th>Major Events (as adapted from Baring (2013))</th>
<th>Modern Theories (Spretnak, 1997, pp. 72-73)</th>
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<td>God, Earth seen as object</td>
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<td><strong>Final Participation</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Cosmology</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Experientialism</strong></td>
<td>Trust in the body</td>
</tr>
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Figure 1. Phases of Evolution as adapted from Barfield (1988) and Spretnak (1997, pp. 72-73)
Figure 1 shows that to truly begin to address the failures and impact of modernity and move toward a reciprocal relationship with the feminine, requires nothing short but a transformation in how humanity perceives itself in accordance to nature and earth.

Interestingly, what Baring (2013), Spretnak (1997) and Murchu (1997) refer to as the ‘new’ cosmology, has in fact always been a way of life for mystics and some indigenous cultures. As alluded to previously, for Māori the land is the source of their spirituality and at the heart of their culture (Connor, 2003). Connor (2003, p. 159) explains that the land is Papatuanuku, Mother Earth and “is a geographic space and an emotional space and identity formation for Māori is rooted in this home space [...]”. Furthermore, the relationship between Papatuanuku and her people is reciprocal, with accountability to the land expressed by the term kaitiakitanga (guardianship) (Connor, 2003). These ideas suggest there is an opportunity to learn from Māori cosmology as a way of being which is grounded in the divine feminine.

These ideas are also referred to as eco-spirituality, which is essentially a demonstration of the spiritual connection between nature and humans that incorporates an “intuitive and embodied awareness of all life and engages a relational view of person to planet, inner to outer landscape, and soul to soil” (Lincoln, 2000, p. 227).

Additionally, Ruether (2010) explains that it is through feminist theology that changes toward the treatment of women and nature can begin. She suggests:

On the one hand, [feminist theology] would seek to see how each of the world’s religious traditions is contributing to the problem with its traditional teachings of the subordination of women, of ethnic minorities and of nature. On the other hand, it would seek to lift up the positive traditions of each religious tradition that can contribute to justice between men and women, between ethnic groups and towards a sustainable relationship between humans and the rest of nature. It would seek to diffuse hostility and violence based on religious exclusivism and negation of other religions and to create an environment for ecumenical cooperation toward a peaceful, just and sustainable world (Ruether, 2010, p. 19)

Therefore the process of moving toward the new cosmology involves eco-spirituality and eco-justice. It is the transformation from a place of separateness towards relatedness, and centrally places God or a collective consciousness of relationships and participation (Brown, 2005; Elgin, 2009; Hunt, 2003; Murchu, 1997; Sheldrake, 2012; Spretnak, 1997,
2011). Additionally, as Jung (1989) indicates in his extensive review of alchemical processes, the process of soul transformation will nudge humanity closer to our understanding of our relationship to nature (Franz, 1978, 1980; Jung, 1989). Ultimately, the opportunity to reclaim our relationship to nature, calls for a shift from our grip on autonomy, toward the idea of participation in our unity, and as Tarnas (1993) suggests, reuniting with the great feminine:

The driving impulse of the West's masculine consciousness has been its quest not only to realise itself, to forge its own autonomy, but also, finally, to recover its connection with the whole, to come to terms with the great feminine principle in life, to differentiate from but then to rediscover and reunite with the feminine, with the mystery of life, of nature, of soul (p. 443).

But, what or who is the ‘feminine’ that Tarnas (1993) refers to and can humanity redeem itself and nature through ‘Her’?

2.2 Who Art Thou Divine Feminine?

References to the divine feminine are located in transpersonal psychology, feminist spirituality, esotericism, myths and religious discourses (Fox, 2012; Neumann, 1986; Reid-Bowen, 2007; Washburn, 1994; Woodman & Dickson, 1997). The divine feminine is presented and experienced in various ways; as a transcendent Goddess or an immanent divinity, a mythical Goddess or an archetypal energy, and even as an embodied feminine principle (i.e. a quality of ‘being’ or consciousness for men and women). Suffice to say, there is no single definition that clearly outlines what is meant by the divine feminine, as it is completely dependent on the perspective an individual is drawn to (Reid-Bowen, 2007). The lack of a single definition does not deny a truth about the divine feminine but it suggests that it is not a simple one (McDermott & Kripal, 2003).

There are also many terms used to represent the divine feminine, for example sacred feminine, feminine principle, feminine archetype and the Goddess. These definitions are linked by a vision of relatedness and transformation. The redemption of humanity from violence and destruction due to the mechanistic and patriarchal ideology is another thread linking the definitions. Some definitions focus on womanhood, particularly focusing on women’s pathways to reclaiming autonomy, and ideas of feminism or Goddess spirituality (Bolen, 2004; Flinders, 1998; Shematrix, n.d). In other definitions the terms are used
interchangeably and also make reference to a Goddess that transcends gender; “The sacred feminine is the [...] mysterious source of all life [...] beyond gender, the divine feminine is experienced uniquely by men and women” (Shematrix, n.d).

Baring (2013a) clearly precludes from her definition of the divine feminine female sexuality or attractiveness, nor does she include the qualities of caring or nurturing usually associated with women Finally she excludes the feminist agenda of empowering women in a man’s world. For her, the divine feminine stands for a new consciousness of the creation of a new civilisation, linking with the new cosmology, which suggests that outmoded views of a transcendent experience of God or Goddess, need to be challenged.

I now expand on the notion of transcendent and immanent experience as it alters the core of the understanding and experiential aspect of the divine feminine.

2.2.1 Transcendent or Immanent

The image of God as held by Christianity, Judaism and Islam is considered transcendent, i.e. separate and distinct from the created order resulting in ideas and beliefs that we are separate from God (Baring, 2013a). The transcendent Goddess is popular in Eastern discourses, for example the veneration of the Goddess Kali by the higher-castes and Brahmanic traditions. Kali is perceived as a “Goddess who encompasses and transcends the opposites of life” and known simultaneously as “bloodthirsty demon-slayer, an inflictor and curer of diseases, a deity of ritual possession, and an all-loving, compassionate Mother” (McDermott & Kripall, 2003, p.4). This suggests that the Goddess is an external or separate powerful entity that can inflict joy or suffering upon a devotee. From a transcendent perspective, “God becomes completely distant, watching us from afar. We read about his desires for us in sacred texts. This scriptural emphasis reinforces the boundary between the sacred and humanity” (diZerega, 2013, p. 210).

Conversely, immanence implies that there is meaning in everything, where there is no place where the sacred is absent (diZerega, 2013). So, everyday objects, symbols, occurrences have meaning and significance that is sacred. As McDermott and Kripal (2003) point out, the beliefs of those who experience Goddess Kali as an immanent figure, traditionally the non-elite in India, centre around “conflictual models of divinity,
immanent, embodied powers and a deep concern with death and sexuality [including] intense, engaged physical and emotional experience, rather than detachment and ordered ritual purification” (p.258). Here, the immanent is experienced as an embodiment of divinity through the body and feeling self rather than as an external deity that is worshipped. Similarly, according to Jungian theory on the feminine, in light of a return to the divine as a great mother, Rowland explains, “‘She’ infuses and makes sacred the natural world. ‘She’ is the divine within or immanent in the world, not apart and transcendent of it” (Rowland, 2002, p. 45). This view of immanence links in with the idea that there is sacredness in all things.

Either of these perspectives, transcendent or immanent may alter the experience of the meaning of the God or Goddess. However, Murchu (1997) argues that philosophical and spiritual texts that encourage these dualistic distinctions, i.e. between transcendence and immanence, create a disservice to the experience of a God/Goddess. Instead he suggests adopting our ancestors’ views whereby God was experienced as both immanent and transcendent.

Similarly, Ruether (1993) argues that the transcendence of God is not about an external-mind-masculine side, neither is immanence about the inside-bodily-feminine side. She explains how feminism’s view of immanence is an “understanding of divine as holistic, a God who is not seen as mind against body, spirit against matter, but who is the source of all life and reality in its fullness”. However, Ruether (1993) explains that to achieve such understanding, the dualism in identifying masculinity with the transcendent and femininity with the immanent sides of this polarity need to change.

Immanence and transcendence are also defined as reciprocal terms whereby the immanent quality of a deity is within the material world, and the transcendent quality is outside, yet the deity can have both qualities (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2010). Undoubtedly, these wide ranging ideas on immanence and transcendence indicate how diverse and intersectional these concepts are; suggesting that any one view is incomplete.

In my view, the divine feminine is immanent in that it is experienced through bodily wisdom and through participation and relational engagement – I meet and express my
divinity in my relationships and with life where all aspects of my life are inherently divine. But the divine feminine is also transcendent as the Great Goddess – my understanding and relationship with Her is only now beginning to take shape and this has particularly come about from this inquiry. The inquiry in itself provided the platform for me to begin to experience the difference between transcendence and immanence.

Further to this understanding, the definition of the divine feminine is also located within feminist spirituality. I explore this next.

2.2.2  Feminist Spirituality

In Western literature, discussion of the divine feminine is referred to as feminist spirituality (Barnes, 2006; Reid-Bowen, 2007; Ruether, 2005). Feminist-spirituality is often seen as women’s political entitlement to explore their own spiritual experiences within social, cultural, political and religious traditions, rooted in women’s experiences (Coholic, 2003). Finding expression in diverse movements such as the women’s spiritual movement, ecofeminism, feminist-thealogy³ and feminist-theology, there is consensus that they share a reverence for the earth and all creation, valuing women’s bodies, seeking connections with all life and emphasising ritual (Neu, 1995).

Central to some of these movements is the positioning of the Goddess, however, ideas regarding the origins and representation are contested and ensuing debates polarising amongst these different groups (Clack, 1999; Ruether, 2005). Conversely, some feminists do not feel the need for a Goddess-centred spirituality (Alice, 1992). For example, Ruether (2005, p. 301) argues, “Creating these Goddesses was the work of men and women of the royal and priestly classes, reflecting their interests and validating their roles”. Instead, Ruether’s (2005) main priority for feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women, and she argues that practices or beliefs that support patriarchy and domination, including the church, are not in accordance with the original revelation.

The debate extends to include feminine ‘theologists’, who are accused of replacing patriarchy with matriarchy. Conversely feminine theologists are criticised that “Christianity can never be ‘woman-friendly’ because of its basis in a patriarchal past”

³ Thealogy is considered the study of the Goddess (Clack, 1999)
(Clack, 1999, p. 25). In terms of historical origins, Ruether (2005) disputes the validity of a matriarchal time in history by disclaiming its basis as a historical-religion yet Clack cautions against underestimating “the power of realizing that there was a time ‘when God was a woman’” (1999, p. 24).

To add further complexity to the debate, Carol Christ writes that “binary oppositions of traditional theology, including transcendence-immanence, theism-pantheism, and monotheism-polytheism do not accurately describe the meaning of the Goddess” (as cited in Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 27). Reid-Bowen (2007) asserts the meaning of the Goddess at a metaphysical level when he characterises Goddess feminism as a concept of a deity whose nature is female, wherein nature is defined as “all that exists” (Reid-Bowen, 2007, p. 27). Although this metaphysical definition provides an alternative context, the absoluteness of its claim of the ‘femaleness of nature’ has been criticised by other scholars (Biezeveld, 2008). Juliette Wood explains, “The Goddess-model operates on the level of symbolic discourse [...] The periphery is metaphorical rather than historical”, suggesting that theology may have a creative future if it was not over-dependent on a contentious past (as cited in Clack, 1999, p. 25). The feminine, when defined as a metaphysical principal of gender, makes it available to both sexes (Rowland, 2002, p. 47). It is at this symbolic level where the myths and metaphors of the Goddess take shape.

In New Zealand, feminist spirituality became popular through collectives such as the Rape Crisis and Refuge Movements and also through Lea Holford and Juliet Batten’s workshops among others (Alice, 1992). However there was much debate regarding pursuing feminist spirituality as part of a political agenda. Alice (1992) states that some feminists were eager to remain within the nurturing circle of women’s groups yet for some, actively engaging in protests and marches was part of the political nature of feminist spirituality. Ruether argues that a community focus and social justice should be made the essence of feminist theology rather than an option for consideration (as cited in Higgins, 2009).

So whether feminist spirituality is located within Christian churches, or in a determined rejection of it, and whether it focuses on Goddesses as a healing and empowering effect, or whether it inspires social justice advocacy, remains open to debate.
Transpersonal psychology is another area of study where references to the divine feminine can be found. In this context, ideas of consciousness and understanding of psyche and self, begin to intersect with the concept of the feminine.

2.2.3 Transpersonal Psychology: Feminine Principle

Lajoie and Shapiro (1992) define transpersonal psychology as the study of humanity’s highest potential, with the recognition, understanding and realisation of unitive, spiritual and transcendent states of consciousness. In transpersonal psychology, ideas of the feminine and masculine are considered aspects of consciousness that exist in both men and women in varying states of equilibrium (Sullivan, 1989; Washburn, 1994). These ideas provide a means to understanding consciousness and ways of knowing, and play a vital role in times of transition in the evolution of consciousness (Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka, 2000). Examples of this are Winnicot’s “split off other” referred to as the feminine – not the specific gender distinction rather the ‘object relating’ of the feminine in both males and females which he calls the experience of being4 (1971, p.106).

Sleeman (2007) in her thesis, suggests that the experience of being that Winnicot alludes to, is a distant memory in us, yet the longing to reconnect to this part of our self, which she calls the ‘forgotten feminine’, exists in all of us (Sleeman, 2007, p. 31). Sullivan (1989) explains how feminine consciousness explores ideas and images which lead to it being expressed as a painting, poem or story, rather than a coherent, linear discussion.

Conversely, the dynamic masculine principle is expressed in ‘Doing’ (bearing in mind this is not in reference to gender) (Sullivan, 1989). Sullivan (1989) explains how the masculine principle “seeks objective analysis, linear and rational thought, causes and effects” (p.18), something both women and men are capable of. It is through the instrument of the mind, where the masculine seeks the splitting of the world into opposites so as to understand the components, rather than experiencing the whole (Woodman, 1985). This dualistic tendency adopts a rational, disciplined and logical approach to problem solving. Where

4 “I have looked at the artificially dissected male and female elements, and I have found that, for the time being, I associate impulse related to objects (also the passive voice of this) with the male element, whereas I find that the characteristic of the female element in the context of object-relating is identity, giving the child the basis for being, and then, later on, a basis for a sense of self. But I find that it is here, in the absolute dependence on maternal provision of that special quality by which the mother meets or fails to meet the earliest functioning of the female element, that we may seek the foundation for the experience of being.”
bridges are built, deserts irrigated and children inoculated the dynamic masculine principle in at work (Sullivan, 1989).

However, when there is a more dominating principle (not gender) in action, one will be compromised by the other. As Reason (1994a) explains, the feminine principle or feminine consciousness has been compromised as a result of generations of masculine-domination. He explains how this compromise has resulted in the devaluing of feminine qualities, which have been interpreted in the linear terms of the masculine. Other writers suggest that the feminine has been de-potentiated by its inferior positioning to the masculine (Baring & Cashford, 1991; Flinders, 1998; Fox, 1979; Hartmann, 2004). Sullivan (1989) states succinctly that as a result of this imbalance, “A soft, frilly pink doll has been left in the place of a vibrant, awesome Mother Goddess” (p.24).

In summary, our views and perception of the feminine have been negatively influenced, creating a construction that a feminine way of being is weaker. Although reshaping our ideas around feminine and masculine consciousness can bring forth the transformation called for by writers like Sullivan (1989), I propose that reasserting the feminine’s equal positioning in all aspects of our lives, also requires a conscious engagement with mythology.

2.2.4 Myth of the Goddess

In this section, I refer to the role that the myth of the Goddess plays in the understanding of the divine feminine. I explore an example of the myth of the Goddess, i.e. the Great Mother Goddess and how that myth can inform and transform our understanding of nature and of the divine feminine. I then expand on how the myth of the Goddess can be incorporated into daily life as a way of being or as a ‘potential’ within our psyche waiting to be accessed. I also consider some of the risks associated with the process of engaging with these myths. I then go on to give a fuller account of the meaning of myth and the relevance of mythology to this inquiry.

The myth of the Goddess can be likened to a map or a guide toward the understanding of the divine feminine, rather than a definitive truth. Houston (1996) explains how through mythology, humanity can apprehend their own being, through the images of their
Goddesses and gods. In this sense, myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of our lives and offer humanity the inner values for experiencing life.

One of the most common threads in the myths from diverse cultures is the Great Mother Goddess or Gaia as intrinsic to nature and all living beings, where the earth herself is undifferentiated from the Great Mother (Campbell & Moyers, 1988, p. 167). Colgrave associates the myth of the Great Mother as the evolution of consciousness, containing both yin-yang in an undifferentiated pattern and in an androgynous form; personified as feminine but also containing the seeds of the undeveloped masculine (as cited in Reason, 1994b, p. 21). Campbell and Moyers (1988) refer to the image of the Early Goddess (Figure 2) and explain how “When you have a Goddess as the creator, it’s her own body that is the universe. She is identical with the universe” (p. 164).

![Early Goddess](image)

Figure 2. Early Goddess (Campbell & Moyers, 1988, p. 164)

This metaphor can be associated with the Gaia hypothesis which was developed by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis; their theory “invites us to regard our home planet as a unified, living organism, with […] capacity to grow, develop and regenerate from its own resourcefulness” (Murchu, 1997, p. 87). Similarly, Getty (1990) refers to creation myths (and the Gaia hypothesis) that see the ‘Great Mother’ as the mother who bears and nurtures her children, and explains how when we can accept the planet as a living whole, we are forced to reconsider how we are intrinsically a part of it. The myth of the Great Mother offers humanity a new way of considering our relationship to earth.
In addition to the myth of the Great Mother, other Goddess myths can be integrated for use in daily life. Houston (1996) refers to the myth of Goddess Athena, who was particularly important in Houston’s life and maturation. She refers to a particular insight through which she felt connected to that part of her being associated to Goddess Athena:

…it’s very important for each person to find that ally, that archetype that is deeply appropriate to that person […] because the qualities between us were the same, in the larger reality where everything is interrelated, we were and part of the same family (Houston, 1996, p. 318).

Campbell (1993) also offers an explanation on the role of the feminine Goddess. He explains:

Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know. As he progresses in the slow initiation which is life, the form of the Goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters. And if he can match her import, the two, the knower and the known, will be released from every limitation (Campbell, 1993, p. 116).

I believe Campbell is describing the ‘potential’ waiting to be invoked and lived into, by either men or women, as feminine (as opposed to a woman per se).

Bolen (2004) explains when a person associates with a particular Goddess, she or he is likely to be drawn to working with the qualities personified by that Goddess. Seemingly she suggests, it offers a template to transcend the effects of gender stereotyping and social constructions that have de-potentiated women as an inferior gender. However, Gremillion (2011) cautions that an overemphasis on the role of archetypes such as the “all powerful Goddess/mother/creation construct of the feminine” to readdress the effects of patriarchy, only reinforces the gender divide and argues that “cultural feminist discourses miss the layered articulation of multiple positionings (e.g. gender, ethnicity/race, class, and sexuality) that constitute a range of subject positions, as well as room to manoeuvre between them” (Gremillion, 2011, p. 50). Yet, within the context of the divine feminine, it is understood that both men and women suffer in the socio-political battle ground as patriarchy is not about men, and that men are equally impacted by its mechanistic worldview, and that men are equally involved in the process of reclaiming the feminine
(Woodman & Mellick, 2000). As Naraine (2000) explains, the feminine principle does not differentiate between races, genders, sexuality nor does it seek to replace male chauvinism with female chauvinism.

There is also much risk and prejudice associated in the engendering of a gender-free entity and the anthropomorphism\(^5\) associated with the imagery. Māori were alerted to the potential exploitation of the symbolism of Papatuanuku through examples provided by eco-feminist Jodi Seager (as cited in Connor, 2003). She argues that sex-typing Mother-Earth, has encouraged irresponsible attitudes to deflect accountability, as demonstrated by the Exxon vice-president, who excused the blatant dumping of toxic material into waterways by claiming that “Mother Nature cleans up and does quite a cleaning job” (Connor, 2003, p. 163). In asserting the kaitiakitanga role Māori can invoke Papatuanuku as a feminine entity, thereby affirming humankind’s responsibility for nature; “Those who cast pollution onto the spirit of the river are casting it onto the spirit of my people” (as cited in Connor, 2003, p. 165).

Woodman and Dickson (1997) offer caution regarding how we come into relationship with the Goddess. They assert “[if] the ego container is not strong enough to relate to that numinous power without identifying with it, destruction lies ahead. To identify is to become the ‘God’ or ‘Goddess’” (p.6). Instead they suggest coming into relationship with the God or Goddess so that the ego-container becomes the medium through which the divine energy flows. They liken this relationship to Pavarotti, the opera singer who is able to get on stage and honour his divine gift and then become the plain Luciano who enjoys his pasta off-stage.

From my own personal exploration nine years ago, to my current understanding, the definition of the divine feminine for me has revealed the many layers involved and that ultimately there is no one way to define its meaning. The closest I could come to finding a representation of my own understanding, as it stands at the time of writing this thesis, is best described by the following definition by Caitlin Matthews on the Goddess Sophia;

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\(^5\) Anthropomorphism is defined as the attribution of human form to gods, animals, etc. (“Anthropomorphism,” 2014)
Sophia is not woman, but she very much represents the state of womanhood. In her post-patriarchal manifestation, Sophia often appears as the Goddess ‘tidied-up’ and regularised. Her wild, playful side has been denied so long that now she remains abstract, veiled, Blackened, subject to sudden disappearances, chastisements and victimisations. As more women and men meditate upon Sophia, they discover their own lost wisdom. It is a long process of stripping off the veils one by one. It is a journey of descent, of valorous fall in order to remember (Matthews, 1991, pp. 21-22).

Matthews (1991) definition represents the mystery of the paradox; that the Goddess is genderless yet, at the same time, feminine. Therefore, there appears to be a quality or dimension to femininity that is multi-faceted (Franz, 1980; Woodman, 1985) which is also referred to as the androgynous representation of the divine feminine found in many ancient paintings and historical sculptures (Baring & Cashford, 1991).

Matthews (1991) also explains how Sophia has been ‘tidied-up and her playful side denied’ and that it is only through a process of stripping the layers she suggests, that we find our lost wisdom. In this way, she is associating Sophia with an aspect of ourselves that is hidden or that we have forgotten. Similarly, she is suggesting that we take a deeper inward journey to strip the veils that hide the reality of our knowing.

These ideas are also shared with other writers who indicate that the feminine will be known to individuals through conscious awareness of self by engagement with the body, feeling-self and intuitive knowing (Kidd, 2002; Ryan, 2000; Woodman & Dickson, 1997). Thus, it is in this very process of stripping the layers I find meaning of the divine feminine as not separate from my sense of identity. In that way, an inquiry into the divine feminine is an inquiry into our own being.

These ideas suggests how engagement with the myth of the Great Goddess can give meaning to our relationship to the divine feminine and to shape the values and choices we live by. Furthermore, it brings a different dimension to our understanding of the divine feminine and it is in this dimension where the potential, that Campbell and Moyers (1988) allude to, is waiting to be tapped. To explore this potential, I now expand on the idea of myth as a meaning-making process and investigate the specific themes that unfolded in our inquiry, as part of our journey to reclaim the divine feminine.
2.3 Myth

Although our inquiry did not overtly engage with any particular mythological story, it certainly engaged with the themes and meanings that the ancient myths contain and convey. In this section, I expand on the meaning and relevance of myths as a process for psychological transformation to provide additional context regarding the themes in our inquiry. I begin by expanding on the meaning of myth and its transformative role. I also explore how myth has been misunderstood and misinterpreted and the impact of this.

2.3.1 Definition of Myth

Myth is referred to as “a symbolic depiction of a maturation process (initiation, rite of passage) rather than a strictly mimetic reflection of a concrete ‘reality.’” (S. Bray, Gavin, & Merchant, 2008, p. 1). Similarly, Campbell and Moyers (1988) define myth as follows:

No, mythology is not a lie, mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical. [It’s] the penultimate truth – penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words...Thinking in mythological terms [you] learn to recognise the positive values in what appears to be the negative moments and aspects of your life (p. 163).

In this way, myth is seen as a representation of life. Baring (2013a) describes how myths have the capacity to heal and transform. Additionally Houston (1996) explains that through conscious engagement with archetypes and accepting life as inherently mythic, i.e. as an “exploration into God”, one can advance along their evolutionary path. Based on these definitions, myth offers humanity a pathway to access ideas of our evolution and provides a template to assist us through the various stages of our growth.

Predictably scientific discoveries such as Newtonian laws have reduced the role of myth as a dimension of primitive consciousness, thus no longer operative in any significant way in western culture (Barnes, 2006; S. Bray et al., 2008; Houston, 1996). However scientists like Rupert Sheldrake (1987) have linked science with myth through the idea of morphogenetic fields. He directly associates these fields, with the collective unconscious that Jung refers to as the domain of myths and archetypes (Sheldrake, 1987). Sheldrake (1987) suggests that new forms are generated when we actively participate with these fields. Campbell and Moyers (1988) link morphogenetic fields to the Goddess explaining, “That’s who the Goddess is, the field that produces forms [...] which means to find what is the source of
your own life, and what is the relationship of your body, your physical form, to this energy that animates it” (p. 169). Unsurprisingly, Sheldrake’s theory on morphic resonance has been disputed by the scientific community as pseudo-science (Brown, 2005; Maddox, 1981) despite his efforts to demonstrate otherwise.

However, myths should not be taken literally (Campbell & Moyers, 1988). Their relevance lies in the recognition of their deeper meaning and values. The deeper meaning will be lost if myths are taken literally and can result in significant consequences. For instance, same-sex marriage as a legal entity was strongly disputed by Catholic bishops of New Zealand on the account of the creation story of Adam and Eve (in Mark 10:6-9) which outlines:

> From the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate (St Matthew in the City, 2012).

The literal interpretation used by the Catholic bishops suggests that the man and his wife are two separate individuals coming together in matrimony. This interpretation can be challenged using Campbell’s (1993) explanation of the creation myth, that describes the scene in Genesis where Adam gives forth Eve: “At the time of marriage, the Holy One, blessed be He, who knows all souls and spirits, unites them again constitute one body one soul, forming as it were the right and left of one individual” (p. 280). Campbell’s (1993) description of this myth is synonymous to the sacred marriage that occurs within an individual, rather than between two separate people. Similarly, Neumann (1986) also refers to this sacred marriage as a process that occurs within an individual. He uses an example of a Hindu disciple who holds both masculine-feminine aspects of divinity within his consciousness in a ‘sacred-marriage’:

> In the beginning this world was Soul (Atman) alone in the form of a person. Looking around, he saw nothing else than himself. He said first: ‘I am’ . . . He was, indeed, as large as a woman and a man closely embraced. He caused that self to fall (put) into two pieces. Therefrom arose a [husband and a wife] (Neumann, 1986, p. 9).
This mythical representation suggests that divine-feminine and divine-masculine are aspects of consciousness that reside in both men and women, forming a sacred union when in balance, rather than a literal marriage between Husband and Wife (in its typical form) between two people. According to mythology, the balance between feminine and masculine energies, known as the sacred marriage, is the ‘goal’ for either gender (McDermott & Kripal, 2003; Neumann, 1986; Woodman & Dickson, 1997). The danger in the literal translation of these myths can result, as Reverend Glyn Cardy argues, in the fixed position taken by the Catholic bishops of New Zealand regarding same-sex marriage by offering young New Zealanders misinformation and questionable teaching based on scripture (St Matthew in the City, 2012).

In addition to the misinterpretation of myths, the demythologisation of Western culture has also denied ‘participation mystique’, which includes the listener in the myth or the tale (Lane, 1989). Consequently, we miss the meaning and latency offered within the myth. For example, the story of the hero can be regarded as our own personal journey, as Campbell (1993) explains:

The mighty hero of extraordinary powers -- able to lift Mount Govardhan on a finger, and to fill himself with the terrible glory of the universe -- is each of us! [...] I am Telemachus, ever waiting for the lost father Odysseus to come home; I am Gilgamesh, longing to overcome the mystery of death. There is in me the blood-red hatred of Kali, who is consumed by his own rage; in me too is Demeter, the earth mother that loves and nurtures. I am Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi, the learner and the teacher, preparing for bold action. All these stories are my stories (p. 315).

By becoming an active participant or, in other words, becoming the hero or heroine in the mythological stories as outlined by Campbell (1993), we are able to find within ourselves the ability and courage to face life with meaning and rapture.

However, Lane (1989) argues that there is also danger in the oversimplification of mythology. He cautions that a focus on heroic roles can result in an over-indulged, individualistic perspective and “become more central than the transcendent mystery to

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6 Demythologise is defined as “Reinterpret (a subject) so that it is free of mythical elements ("Demythologise," 2014)

7 Kali is a Goddess and Campbell is trying to explain how the goddess lives in him too and is expressed in his rage. Therefore it is a way that Campbell is demonstrating his embodied goddess.
which it points” (Lane, 1989). Rowland (2002) criticises Robert Bly\(^8\), who she argues is guilty of such oversimplification. She argues that Bly has misrepresented Jungian mythological archetypes by turning them into reactionary gender stereotypes resulting in the role of myth in Jungian studies being regarded with unwarranted suspicion by feminists. Gremillion (2011) describes how the mythopoetic movement inspired by Bly, through the use of archetypes, has reinforced the binary constructions of gender, by declaring “the idealised position of women in industrialised social systems as domestic mother/creator. Masculinity is defined in opposition to this form of femininity” (2011, p. 48).

So it seems the role of myth can be misinterpreted and reinforce the very issues of gender it can eliminate when interpreted with caution and expertise. With these cautionary points in mind, I now explore the mythological journey to understand the divine feminine.

### 2.3.2 Mythical Journey to the Divine Feminine

The mythical journey to reclaim the feminine has been described by many writers as a process of psychological transformation (Baring, 2013a; Fox, 2012; Harvey, 2009; Murchu, 1997; Pererra, 1989; Woodman, 1987). I am particularly drawn to the Jungian literature, Woodman (1987) and Pererra (1989) for example, that links directly to the mythical journey to reclaim the experience of the feminine through a series of initiatory steps. Perera (1989) uses the myth of Inanna, the Sumerian Goddess of heaven and earth to explore the transformative processes of descent to the underworld, outlining the seven stages of disrobing to arrive at one’s essential nature (Pererra, 1989). Similarly, Campbell’s (1993) mono-myth in the hero or heroine’s journey follows the same pattern which includes a return to the origins, a confrontation, a death and rebirth and finally a restoration of the universe. These myths are represented as a guide in the process of searching for oneself through stages of unveiling layers which involves the death of the

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\(^8\) Robert Bly is inspirer of the mythopoetic movement which used Jungian archetypes to initiate men into an authentic ‘deep patriarchy’, urging them ‘to lift or show his sword’ in relations to women. Bly implies that the younger men in the group could not differentiate “between showing the sword and hurting someone” which Rowland feels is socially irresponsible writing, as he does not articulate the symbolic meaning of the sword which has nothing to do with violence nor with gender (Rowland, 2002, p. 79). The relevance of the sword can be found in alchemy and is outside the scope of this thesis.
ego (as an ongoing journey) and the birthing of a new sense of self, as one edges closer to meeting the feminine within.

In Māori cosmology and mythology, it was in the feminine that Tāne, who searched the world for the human element, found it, i.e. within his birthplace. This birthplace is the birthing-canal of his mother, known as Kurawaka, “the place of the sacred red soil that created a medium for human life to enter the world” (Te Ahukaramū, 2012, para. 2). This meaning is also depicted in Figure 3; the image a sub-set of the full image of Hine-ahu-one, which means ‘Woman formed of earth’, painted by Robyn Kahukiwa, (Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984).

![Figure 3. Hine-ahu-one (Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984, p. 69)](image)

The artist describes the myth behind the image: “Tane could only obtain the uha, or female element, from the fertile red soil on the pubic area of his mother, Papatuanuku. The ferns are part of the pubis of Papa.” (Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984, p. 69). Here the myths, implied by the fertile red soil, offer insight into the role of menstrual blood in connecting humankind to Papatuanuku. Murphy (2011) asserts in her thesis: “I think that menstruation is a powerful symbol that represents our ritual and ceremonial traditions, our matrilineal cosmology based knowledge, and our political responsibilities and autonomous power as the human counterpart of Papatūānuku” (p. 122). She explains
further, “The stories about Tāne riding out of the cosmogonic cycles of Te Po on the tides of his mother’s menstrual blood, discovering a new world and precipitating an evolutionary leap, illustrate the role of menstruation as a medium of expansion and transformation” (Murphy, 2011, p. 123).

These myths point to the powerful and creative role of menstrual blood in the making of woman and man which leads us to an experience of the feminine through a mythological journey. However, where the experience of the feminine has been suppressed, the myth of the shut-down feminine provides context and a pathway to examine what has been suppressed. I explore this next.

2.3.3 The Shut-Down Feminine

The shut-down feminine is also referred to as the repressed or the denied feminine (Flinders, 1998; Kidd, 2002) and in some literature as the separation of the feminine (Murdock, 1990). Within the context of our inquiry, the shut-down feminine relates to aspects of the feminine, which have been deeply denied within us. Linking with the earlier discussion regarding traditional cosmology, this impact can be seen in how we perceive our body and feelings.

Neumann (1986), Baring and Cashford (1991) and Hunt (2003) explain how the separation from the Great Mother resulted in the denial of the body and the emotional and feeling self. The body is relegated to conform to societal and cultural expectations of size, shape and beauty. The sacredness of the body and matter was lost, including “the reverence once accorded a menstruating woman, went underground along with the Goddess” (Murdock, 1990, p. 112). Murphy (2011) argues that menstruation, once seen as a powerful universal force, is now considered putrid or abhorrent due to Christian doctrine and colonialist patriarchal ideologies that were forced upon Māori. We have lost the wisdom of our body through an overdose of intellectual paradigms of thought:

The body is the lodge of spirit in this life, yet we have an immensely ambivalent relationship to it, often very concerned with the presentation of a "face", powerful or beautiful, to the outside world, yet being quite out of touch with our physical inner processes (Reason, 1998, p. 429).
Along with the body, the feeling self has also been seen as an aspect of oneself that needs to be controlled (Fraleigh, 2010; Spretnak, 1997). In fact, there are many religious and spiritual practices that encourage the mantra of ‘mind over matter’; the intention is to control the emotion or to suppress the feeling self in order to achieve control over the body (Canda & Smith, 2001). This sort of practice would normally result in unprocessed emotional distress.

Heron (2006) signals how unprocessed emotional distress distorts spiritual development by “denying parts of one's nature, or by making inflated claims in order to manipulate others” (2006, p. 1). Similarly, Symington (1994) links devaluing of emotions to malaise in modern culture. He asserts that emotional life is destitute and can change only if emotional life becomes permeated with religion’s core values (Symington, 1994, p. x). One of the most prevailing indications of the shutdown of emotions in today’s society is seen in medical science’s approach to depression, evidenced in prescription rates for antidepressants reaching epidemic proportions (Summerfield, 2006). One of the driving forces perpetuating the suppression rather than the release of depression, through hasty prescriptions of Prozac or other common drugs, is the devaluing of emotions (Woodman, 1985). The quicker a patient is made to feel ‘happy’, the more successful the result.

However, Franz (1980), in my view, offers a thought provoking idea about the role of emotions; she argues that emotion is the carrier of consciousness, and that we only understand a problem we are wrestling with by emotionally engaging with it. So the opportunity to truly address the root of the depression is lost when the role of emotion is devalued. Without emotion, there is no progress in consciousness (Franz, 1980).

The impact of the shut-down feminine also reinforces other traits. Murdock (1990) explains there is a greater tendency to become addicted to perfection to compensate the experience of an inferior feminine. She refers a life where one identifies more with masculine traits, is captured by the illusion of materialistic success and attaches oneself to the ivory tower.

However, despite the enormity of the impact of the shut-down feminine, the feminine is never really lost nor has it disappeared completely, as seen in Henry Moore’s 1945 painting (see Figure 4).
Figure 4. Henry Moore - 1945 Painting: People Looking at a Tied-up Object (Baring, 2013b)

His painting depicts a group of people looking at an enormous veiled feminine figure. Baring (2013b) suggests that the feminine shape in the painting is the emerging archetypal image of the numinous. She says: “[His drawings] take us back to the maternal womb hidden beneath the earth — the cave in which we sought shelter as bombs rained death upon our cities. [The painting] points to the awakening of the feminine archetype in the human soul.” (Baring, 2013b).

To me, the very notion of reclaiming what was lost would first entail the letting go of the old. The language and transformative process of reclaiming the feminine involves nothing less than the recreating and dying of self (Murdock, 1990).

2.3.4 Reclaiming the Feminine: A Birth and a Death

Woodman (1985) explains succinctly how “birth is the death of the life we have known; death is the birth of life we have yet to live” (p. 14). This deeply transformational and cathartic, yet profoundly challenging, process of self-transformation, requires deep personal reflection into aspects of oneself that are no longer in service to our true nature yet that which will transcend us as we journey deep into the mystery of the divine feminine (Woodman & Dickson, 1997). To reclaim one’s sense of true purpose so as to feel the rapture of being alive, involves death and rebirth as a process of self renewal. A process of threefold self-renewal is sometimes represented as enclosure, metamorphosis and emergence (Flinders, 1998). She outlines that for men, the initiation rites reflect separation, liminality and reincorporation.
I have found it is through the power of myth where this process of dying and rebirth can be best understood as a transformational process to reclaim the feminine. The myth of dying is often preceded by the descent to the underworld, identified sometimes as “the dark night of the soul, the belly of the whale, descent to the dark Goddess, or simply as depression”, often beginning when one experiences a major traumatic event in life such as the death of a child or loss of a job (Murdock, 1990, p. 88). Yet, as discussed in the previous section, the true source and value of depression is often missed. Murdock (1990) writes a little more about this descent and its relationship to depression:

I write with trepidation about descent because I have great respect for the process and do not want to trivialise [this sacred journey]. In our culture however, it is usually categorised as a depression which must be medicated and eliminated as quickly as possible […] If we chose however, to honour the descent as sacred and as a necessary aspect of the quest to fully know ourselves, fewer women would lose their way in depression, […] They could experience their feelings without shame, reveal their pain without apathy (Murdock, 1990, p. 90).

Pererra (1989) explains how through the myth of Geshtinanna, women on their journey to reclaiming their divine feminine, can refer to the myth as a model of the new feminine who is wise and in touch with her feelings. She explains how Geshtinanna is a “model of one who is willing to suffer humanly, personally, the full spectrum that is the Goddess and blames no one”(Pererra, 1989, p. 94). Seemingly, to reclaim our full feminine power, we need to open our hearts, take back the discarded feminine and move away from blaming others (Murdock, 1990; Woodman, 1985).

As well as the mythical descent to reclaim oneself, movement or using the body through dance, is another way through which the metamorphosis can occur. Fraleigh (2010) explains how change can be initiated through the dance form of ‘butoh’: “Metaphysically speaking, change is constant in butoh […] Through change, emotion can be magically, metaphysically diffused.” (p. 75).

In New Zealand, dancer Louise Potiki Bryant, in collaboration with a renowned Māori clay artist, Paerau Corneal, demonstrated through movement, how clay, as essence of earth, brings to life the essence of Hine-ahu-one. They describe their collaboration as the functioning and health of the body to that of the earth; “an indigenous perspective of the body and it’s processes, and the idea that Hine-ahu-one may have been an active
participant in her own creation” (Tempo, 2014). Figure 5 depicts Louise in movement with clay, as she is sculpted and moulded by the clay artist.

![Figure 5. Kiri by Louise Potiki Bryant and Paerau Corneal (Tempo, 2014)](image)

2.3.5 Ritual and Symbolism

The journey toward the understanding of the divine feminine is a process of initiation rites in which ritual plays a significant role. Ritual has many forms. It includes the more overt veneration of the Divine in the form of devotional or sacrificial rituals (Dalmiya, 2000; Nagarajan, 2001; Wozniak, 2012). It also includes the more symbolic role of ritual in the rites of passage (Flinders, 2002; Mahdi, Foster, & Little, 1987; Woodman, 1985). Batten (1988) suggests that we can learn to create our own rituals for healing and transformation which she suggests enrich and empower us. I find Campbell and Moyers (1988) definition particularly helpful; they suggest ritual ‘pitches you out’ into a new way or new life, not wrapping you in celebrating what you already know. Woodman (1985) stresses the critical role that rituals play:

> Unless cultural rituals support the leap from one level of consciousness to another [to assist in psychological transformation], there are no containing walls within which the process can happen. Without an understanding of myth or religion, without an understanding of the relationship between destruction and creation, death and rebirth, the individual suffers the meaning of life as meaningless (Woodman, 1985, p. 24).

This quote explains that through ritual people are supported in moving through difficult phases in their lives and to find meaning in it. I feel this explanation is very critical in terms of its relevance to the mythological journey to the feminine, particularly as this process involves deep psychological transformation. Additionally, as described in the previous
sections, the journey toward the understanding of the divine feminine is a process of rites of initiation in which ritual plays a significant role.

Symbolism is also important in the journey toward reclaiming the feminine. The symbolism of the moon is important in an inquiry into the divine feminine as the moon is commonly regarded in spirituality and alchemy as symbolic of the feminine principle (Baring & Cashford, 1991; De Coppet, 1992; Jacobi, 1978; Raff, 2003). The archetypal lunar myth, the story of Mary the Goddess of the Moon is drawn from ancient understanding of moon phases whereupon her destiny follows the cyclic patterns of the moon represented by the different rituals or celebrations (Baring & Cashford, 1991). In his book Myth and Ritual in Christianity, Alan Watts states:

In the cycle of the Christian year the rites of the Incarnation are governed by the solar calendar, since they are connected with the Birth of the Sun, and so fall upon fixed dates. On the other hand, the rites of the Atonement, of Christ’s Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, are governed by the lunar calendar, for there is a figure of Death and Resurrection in the waning and waxing of the moon (as cited by Baring & Cashford, 1991, p. 566).

Baring & Cashford (1991) explain the three days of darkness when the moon was gone (i.e. the new moon cycle) between crucifixion and resurrection as the time when Jesus descended to the underworld dimension “to release the life buried there”, which in lunar symbolism basically translates to a time of “awakening the dormant light of the returning crescent” (p. 565). This means a time of ‘ego-death which leads to a rebirth of self’ which allows a new understanding of self to emerge (Woodman, 1985). By engaging in ‘participation mystique’ as alluded to earlier, we can descend into the darkest depths within ourselves to ‘release the life buried there’ as Jesus demonstrated. Furthermore, by becoming aware of the phases of the moon, we can ‘work’ with the energy of the moon to support these deep psychological and transformational processes.

Conversely, some may argue that moon symbolism is superstitious belief based in fear, wonder, or dread (Harley, 2012; Mandell, Claypool, & Kay, 2005). Even more recently in New Zealand, much debate has ensued around the role of the full moon in causing earthquakes; such predictions have been seen as quackery and scientifically baseless by some (Fisher & Hueber, 2011). These ideas suggest that moon symbolism comes with its own share of controversy.
Nevertheless, the awareness of the cyclic nature and energy of the new moon led me to hold and engage with our inquiry meetings as one would a ritual for beginning a new venture – with anticipation for growth and potential.

2.4 Femininity and Womanhood as Identity

The experiences of womanhood and femininity are inextricably linked to a woman’s relationship with the divine feminine (Naraine, 2000; Woodman, 1985). As ours was a women’s group, ideas of identity and experiences of femininity were central to our inquiry and so in this section I cover some of the literature that explores these areas.

In positioning womanhood in the context of this inquiry, Andrea Dworkin, a radical American feminist, explains it succinctly:

> Woman is not born: she is made. In the making, her humanity is destroyed. She becomes symbol of this, symbol of that: mother of the earth, slut of the universe; but she never becomes herself because it is forbidden for her to do so (as cited in Raphael-Leff, 2010, p. 64).

So it seems that a woman’s identity has taken on meanings that deny her, her own meaning. So who is a woman when she is her authentic self? Fernandes (2003) unpacks this question by asking, “If you let go off all these structures and aspects of identity and location which supposedly define you — family, race, gender, sexuality, class and nationality — what would be left?” (Fernandes, 2003, p. 35). She argues that postmodern theories provide the tools to deconstruct identity toward a ‘dis-identified self’ but do not offer any alternative vision to work towards. She maintains that it is only through spirituality, which provides an understanding of the ‘essence of self’ as spirit, as well as matter and mind, and so the foundation for the ‘dis-identified’ self, that our vision of social transformation can be realised.

Young-Eisendrath (2012) suggests that it is through feminism, that women must claim legitimacy in their identity and experiences as ‘female’. She suggests that “a psychology of gender differences, grounded in cultural relativism, is both a therapeutic and a cultural antidote for the kind of sexism we all experience in ongoing everyday situations” (Young-Eisendrath, 2012, p. 98).
However, feminism has had much negative press and is variedly understood; the word itself vilified, the term associated with witches and women who hated men (Alice, 1992). As Pat Robertson asserts, “feminism makes women ‘leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians’” (Washington Post, 1992, para. 1).

Further, this negativity becomes inherent in how women themselves experience feminism. For example, when Bateson (1989) was criticised by a male president for her confrontational and tense approach as a dean at Amherst College, she was initially despondent and left despairing by that feedback. She then explains; “It took me a year to [finally] understand that he was simply accepting the semantics of senior men who expected a female dean to be easily disparaged and bullied” (Bateson, 1989, p. 54). Hence, before women can truly claim power in their femininity, they first need to come into a new relationship with the term.

Based on these ideas of feminism, we can move toward an appreciation of reciprocal valuing of gender difference through dialogue, but first, “we must learn about our repressed, dissociated and fantasied gender meanings” (Young-Eisendrath, 2012, p. 98). Ultimately, these ideas are calling for greater self-reflection to reclaim feminism in a more personal and contemporary way.

From contemporary feminism, I now explore sacred activism as a new way to advocate and what this form of activism entails.

2.5 Sacred Activism

Social transformation theories and activism speak of the growing urgency for advocacy approaches that respond to current economic and social crises from a new perspective or paradigm (Castles, 2001; Houston, 2004; Kaplan, 2000; Morley & Ife, 2002). The impending threat of climate change, humanity’s over-dependency on oil and the crisis of population overgrowth, require a profound shift in how we advocate for change (Baring, n.d.). Adopting traditional methods and approaches to address this impending global crisis will only perpetuate the problem (Hartmann, 2004). For instance, Gilding (2012) asserts that the earth’s resources cannot sustain the growing population no matter how much
money is invested in increasing output from crops. He explains how these sorts of short term initiatives drive food prices up, making it impossible for the masses to afford, neglecting to address the source of the issue which is overpopulation and unequal distribution of resources.

From a social justice perspective, adopting old forms of activism that are divisive, extremist and ultimately competitive, can no longer meet the demands for the social transformation that is being called for (Fernandes, 2003). Fernandes (2003) suggests that movements for social or political change can only challenge these structures of power and inequality if they rest on a form of spiritual transformation, beginning with the self. A spiritual perspective of social activism engenders such transformation that “demands a kind of practice that reaches from the smallest, most hidden aspects of ourselves and lives to the most visible systemic questions of power and inequality” (Fernandes, 2003, p. 120).

From this perspective, “the crisis of our times is not only an ecological and political crisis but a spiritual one” (Baring, n.d., para.10). These ideas suggest that it is only through spiritual transformation that begins with the self where the real work on power and inequality begins.

Furthermore, the solution we seek for this crisis cannot be addressed from a position of limited consciousness; it needs to come from an understanding of a union of heart and head (Baring, 2013a). In this way, Baring suggests we adopt a more holistic and integrated approach to activism. For example, Pancho Ramos-Stierle, a member of the Occupy Movement, explains this holistic approach as a marriage of activism and spirituality; he says:

Move from ‘me’ to ‘we’ […] We are looking for officers who can enforce the law of love […] intelligence balanced with the heart, entrepreneurs invested in the business of kindness and generosity, scientists organically supporting the magnificent web of life […] We are looking for lovers of life (as cited in Bucko & Fox, 2013, p. 221).

Additionally Harvey (2009) explains that a holistic approach melds the experience of love and activism so that peace and justice can be achieved. He refers to this approach as sacred activism:
A spirituality that is only private and self-absorbed, one devoid of an authentic political and social consciousness, does little to halt the suicidal juggernaut of history. On the other hand, an activism that is not purified by profound spiritual and psychological self-awareness and rooted in divine truth, wisdom, and compassion will only perpetuate the problem it is trying to solve, however righteous its intentions. When, however, the deepest and most grounded spiritual vision is married to a practical and pragmatic drive to transform all existing political, economic, and social institutions, a holy force – the power of wisdom and love in action – is born. This force I define as Sacred Activism (Harvey, 2013, para.1).

The power of wisdom and love which Harvey (2009) refers to as the force for Sacred Activism is the link to the divine feminine. This path is deeply self-reflective and transformative as it calls first for ‘spiritual and psychological self-awareness rooted in the divine’. It is this path of activism that Fernandes (2003) is calling for, it is imbued with spiritual qualities of compassion, humility and love, i.e. feminine qualities, as a form of practice - not as a feeling or idea – but action that embodies those qualities.

Similarly Hyslop (2012) submits that the crux for change lies in the act of practice that has the potential to humanise and give voice to the disenfranchised. There is a need to bring the idea of a love of humanity into practice based on a “critical postmodern agenda of emancipation from oppressive discourses” (Morley & Ife, 2002, p. 70). Morley and Ife (2002) refer to Freire’s idea of dialogue that cannot be learnt through methodology as it is “an act of love that results from human connection through words” (p.74). What Hyslop (2012) and Morley and Ife (2002) are suggesting is that despite the political environment we find ourselves in, the answer lies in practice that is based in love for humanity. Audrey Lorde refers to this practice as passionate politics integrating spirituality (as cited in Byrd, Cole, & Guy-Sheftall, 2009). She espouses that a spiritually integrated practice is both political and individual as it calls for a sacred understanding of one’s self and as part of a larger interconnected environment.

However the path to sacred activism is not an easy one. Baring (2013a) cautions that transforming entrenched belief systems and archaic behaviour rooted in greed, fear and desire for power, is not easily done. Furthermore what sacred activism is calling for can be seen as the antithesis of the modern culture we live in where masculine-qualities such as competitiveness, ownership and ambition are the driving motivators to succeed in this
world tipping the balance away from the feminine-values of inclusiveness, interconnectedness and mutuality (Flinders, 2002).

Despite the potential for transformation in activism based on a spiritual perspective, there is also danger for abuse as seen in the political landscape. On one hand, spiritual activists are advocating for revolution and transformation of corrupt systems; on the other hand they may be deepening structural inequality. For instance, the Muslim-Brotherhood in Egypt welcomed women’s participation in the revolution for change and reform, yet excluded these same women from participating in the ongoing dialogue for change (Bucko & Fox, 2013). It is this addiction to power within hierarchical structures that perpetuates oppression and prevents the kind of transformation that Fernandes (2003) is arguing for:

Such a transformation requires a complete dissociation from ego-based investments in control, recognition and superiority which are mistakenly identified as self-interest. It requires a brutally honest, inward process of self-examination to dispel the idealized self-images we carry around with us and provide the kind of radical humility required to really manifest social justice in this world (p. 44).

What Fernandes (2003) is suggesting here is to truly adopt sacred activism, we must begin with deep self-reflection regarding our own interest in power and control. It is only from our own internal healing around power and control that we can move toward activism imbued with love and power in wisdom (Doetsch-Kidder, 2012). Harvey (2009) suggests that it is in the experience of suffering and heartbreak we find that wisdom of self (Harvey, 2009). Where Joseph Campbell inspires us to ‘follow our bliss’, Harvey recommends we ‘follow our heartbreak’ as only once we have faced our personal issues, will the heartbreak lead us to bliss.

The common theme in the literature on the divine feminine is that self-reflection and personal healing is essential as we come into a new relationship with our understanding of the feminine. Accordingly, our inquiry into the divine feminine centred on a methodology that deepened this process of self-reflection. I discuss the methodology next.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in seeing with new eyes (Proust, 1934, p. 114).

3. Chapter Overview

This chapter has three parts. In the first part, I explain co-operative inquiry and I justify why it was chosen for this research. I also discuss one of the fundamental deviations from traditional academic requirements for a research project, which is in the area of data analysis. Here, I explain why no analysis was conducted by the ‘researcher’ on the data collected on the ‘subjects’ in a co-operative inquiry. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss ethics, recruitment and participant demographics. In the final part of this chapter, I discuss how co-operative inquiry was applied in designing this research, running the inquiry, generating the data and subsequently in reflecting on the meaning of the inquiry findings.

3.1 Researching the Divine Feminine Using Co-operative Inquiry

Rather than an analysis of conceptual data, I was looking for an embodied experience in my research into the divine feminine. For this reason, I chose co-operative inquiry, which is an experientially based, action-oriented and participative research methodology (Heron, 1996). Heron and Reason (2008) define co-operative inquiry as follows:

...a form of second person action research in which all participants work together in an inquiry group as co-researchers and as co-subjects. Everyone is engaged in the design and management of the inquiry; everyone gets into the experience and action that is being explored; everyone is involved in making sense and drawing conclusions; thus everyone involved can take initiative and exert influence on the process. This is not research on people or about people, but research with people (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 366).

Co-operative inquiry is considered an alternative to traditional positivist research approaches, in that it is located in a paradigm of participative knowing (Heron, 1996). It’s democratic participation ensures the participants’ human right to be involved in decisions about the research is upheld; it empowers them to flourish in their autonomy (Heron,
The enfranchising aspect was important for this inquiry because literature on the divine feminine suggests that women are more likely to live their lives for and through others, at the expense of their autonomy and identity (Bolen, 2004; Sullivan, 1989; Woodman, 1985). Additionally, from a feminist perspective, women’s stories develop into political issues when they are heard and understood within the experience of sharing, and not in the language of explaining (Treleaven, 1994). Furthermore, as our inquiry explored ideas that straddled spirituality, feminism and transpersonal psychology among others, it was important to generate a platform from which the participants were free to share and develop their stories relating to the research topic, in whichever way they felt drawn to. Therefore, it was important to use a methodology like co-operative inquiry, which validated the contribution and empowered the participants to offer their knowledge, including their meaning-making of the divine feminine.

Choudry (2013) argues that most qualitative based research in the field of activism and social justice, separates consciousness from the act of service, resulting in an absence of practical information which is lost ‘in the field’ of action. Drawing from his argument, I wanted a method that would have us ‘be’ in the experience of that consciousness, instead of being outside the research analysing people who may embody those qualities. The epistemic aspect of co-operative inquiry asserts that researchers can only study the human condition “through their own embodiment, in joint participation and dialogue with others who are similarly engaged” (Oates, 2002, p. 28). So, in this way, through co-operative inquiry, we were able to engage within a platform where knowledge and action were grounded in practical experience.

Rather than attempting to stand outside and observe the inquiry objectively, taking a participative view in this research meant that my personal beliefs of the divine feminine along with those of the others in the group were included in the subjective mix – this reality itself changed dynamically as our understandings changed. Each of our experiences counted in the subjective-objective reality we were engaging within and shaping as a result.

Another reason why I chose co-operative inquiry is its implicit link to spirituality. As White (2002) asserts, “a view of human life which reduces a complex individual or group to the
merely physical and material, is likely to deem questions about the human spirit irrelevant and evidence for such an entity non-existent” (p. 47). Co-operative inquiry, with its emphasis on the human experience (Heron, 1996), provided a method where we as inquirers were able to use our full range of sensibilities, from intuition to intellect, to understand and embody the meaning of the divine feminine. It offered a sympathetic approach that validated and recognised spiritual beliefs, values and stories as well as factual material. In this way, our personal understanding and experiences in our participation were seen as equally as important as objective or factual information. Scientific orthodoxy would disregard or lose sight of such aspects of human experience due to its overindulgence in the objective and the factual (Reason & Rowan, 1981). Therefore, due to the highly subjective nature of spirituality (Canda & Furman, 2009; Doetsch-Kidder, 2012; Gray & Lovat, 2008; Murchu, 1997) and the idiosyncratic understanding of the embodied divine feminine (Fox, 2012; Murdock, 1990; Woodman, 1987), a methodology based on person-centred science was most suitable for this inquiry.

Furthermore, co-operative inquiry offered a wide-ranging radical epistemology as an inquiry method which meant participants could articulate their understanding of their world through four ways of ‘knowing’⁹ (Heron, 1996). These ways of knowing go beyond the theoretical and propositional knowledge (J. N. Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000). In our inquiry, through our dialogue and collaborative sharing, we were inspired and triggered by each other’s stories (through experiential knowing), which organically unfolded new areas to explore. We allowed our intuitive knowing to guide us (experiential knowing) and explored insights from meditation and dreams (presentational knowing).

Some used artwork to deepen their understanding (presentational knowing) of an experience that was triggered through group sharing and then used the artwork to talk through that experience. For some, an experiential knowing resulted directly in a change in behaviour and practice (expressed through practical knowing). Others increased their propositional knowing by reading literature on the divine feminine or attending workshops. Hence we engaged in the process of research cycling through these forms of

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⁹ These include experiential knowing which uses sensory and extrasensory perception through meeting and encounter; presentational knowing through the use of expressive forms like art or movement; propositional knowing through conceptual statements; and practical knowing in the demonstration of skills (Heron, 1996, p. 52).
knowing, so that our understanding was enhanced and our critical subjectivity deepened. It was in moving between these four forms of knowing through research cycling, that we were able to conceptually and then experientially explore our meaning of the divine feminine; the methodology provided us with the structure to contain and develop our understanding.

Very closely aligned to co-operative inquiry is Participative Action Research (PAR), which can be considered a ‘cousin’ in the family of action research (Reason, 1994c). Generally, PAR is considered revolutionary because it departs from traditional research methodologies. For instance, PAR has been used to describe liberationist inquiry in underprivileged societies (Grant, Nelson, & Mitchell, 2008). As such, its focus is on empowering the disenfranchised (Lykes & Mallona, 2008). Also, it seeks to produce knowledge and action by acknowledging people as learners and seekers of knowledge (Fals Borda, 2013; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007; Swantz, 2008). It uses diverse methods, including collaborative processes that empower, motivate and raise self-esteem such as story-telling and art (Kindon et al., 2007; Reason, 1994c). In these ways co-operative inquiry is similar to PAR as it shares the same philosophical basis of transformation and liberation and emphasis on experiential knowledge.

However, I chose co-operative inquiry instead of PAR because of co-operative inquiry’s emphasis on the researcher as part of the community seeking transformation and/or liberation and thus the initiating researcher will be equally impacted by the inquiry outcomes (Heron, 1996). In PAR, the researcher is not necessarily directly impacted by the outcomes of the research (Grant et al., 2008). As explained earlier, a co-operative inquiry calls for a group of peers to come together and research a topic of mutual interest. It removes the traditional hierarchical positioning of the researcher and instead brings together a group of co-researchers and co-subjects simultaneously. I was part of the group of people being researched and my own beliefs were inextricably linked to the inquiry.
3.1.1 *Meaning-Making Without Data Analysis: Using Co-operative Inquiry as an Academic Research Method*

Unlike traditional research methods, in a co-operative inquiry all co-researchers are equally involved in making sense of the information generated during the action cycles. The validity of that experience is supported by the ontology, epistemology and axiology of co-operative inquiry (J. N. Bray et al., 2000). This was the case for our inquiry where our personal ideas and experiences of gender, womanhood, activism and spirituality formed our subjective-objective ontology. I did not specifically ‘analyse data’ from our findings nor did I interpret our findings. Instead, as each of us deepened our understanding of what the divine feminine meant, the epistemology offered a process of moving between our ways of knowing, which produced outcomes that were transformational. As each of us reflected on our experiences during the reflection meetings, we gave meaning to our experiences. The context within which the divine feminine is based is one which is experiential, and one which requires a methodology that can help make sense of that experience. From this perspective, data analysis would be counter-intuitive as the meaning is idiosyncratic and resides in the motivation behind the action which is known intimately by the inquirer.

Arguments for scientific research analysis also creates an expectation that a framework based on “hypothesis testing, strict sampling techniques and validated instruments are the only pathways to legitimate understanding [...] which does not then allow for a more discursive description of in-depth experience” (Fook, 2002, p. 2). The divine feminine is essentially a quality of the human spirit, of relationships and wholeness so there seemed to be little value, even if it were possible, to structure our understanding into samples, for hypothesis testing. Results obtained in this way would miss the essence and value of the nature of our inquiry into the divine feminine.

Similarly, Hollway (as cited in Treleaven, 1994, p. 139) argues for “a shift of focus from methodological conditions that will enable the discovery of truth to one of understanding the conditions which produce accounts that are themselves located within discourses, history and relations”. These ideas contribute to the hypothesis that there is a richness of meaning that is derived within the inquiry process that cannot be discerned objectively, yet can transform the very being of the inquirer; this transformation of being transcends
any analytical process. Co-operative inquiry as a method, offered a medium for us to validate our experiences and a way to present them without devaluing or diminishing the quality of the experience and the process involved in arriving there.

These ideas may prove challenging for a more scientifically based approach or rationale that seeks demonstration of concrete evidence, rather than the inner certainty from those who have experienced a deeper phenomenon as offer of evidence of their experience (Canda & Furman, 2009; Gray & Lovat, 2008). Within a positivist paradigm, a mechanistic and reductionist functioning is used to interpret and explain these experiences (Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gray & Lovat, 2008). However the very use of language within a positivist view can strip the meaning from the experience and subsequently distort it (Gray & Lovat, 2008; Heron, 1996, 1998; Treleaven, 1994). Exploring the divine feminine required a different way of perceiving, using intuitive knowing and allowing all our senses to inform us. Through spontaneous development of ideas and insights, dream analysis, and even engaging with ritual and myths, our inquiry generated ways of knowing that were deep and meaningful for each of us. After all, it is through tacit knowing, that a sense of mystery and wonder can be held and retained; both are vital in any discussion of spirituality (White, 2002).

For these reasons, and in keeping with the philosophy and methodology of a co-operative inquiry, I argue that the true outcome of the research lies in the transformation and the development of new competencies, rather than the affirmation of validity offered through theoretical data analysis. Each of our stories extends a deeper understanding of the divine feminine which in itself offers a rich tapestry of meaning and transformation in our beings.

3.1.2 Limitations of Experiential Research

Experiential research has many advantages yet valid inquiry cannot be automatically guaranteed or assumed. As Heron (1996) explains, the human inquiry process is inherently problematic, for two primary reasons. The first reason is the apparent inscrutability of phenomena and the second, holding on to the safety of what we know rather than being openly transparent and exposing ourselves to what we do not know.
I found that by bringing awareness of this limitation to the group, we could collaboratively address them as a group concern and so enhance the quality of our inquiry. I did this by engaging in a conversation with the group regarding critical subjectivity in our reasoning and ensuring that we challenged each other regarding any conclusions we arrived at. Additionally, the co-operative inquiry method includes an extensive validity enhancing process. In this way, our practice was improved by being clear about the standards we wanted to achieve and review our performance against (see Chapter Six).

3.1.3 *Brief Overview: Feminist Research and Co-operative Inquiry*

Despite the fact that the foundation for human inquiry and participative knowing have drawn extensively from the work of men like Heron and Reason (more so than women) (Treleaven, 1994), I would argue that co-operative inquiry has developed into a method that could ultimately heal the split that has resulted from decades of diminishing and devaluing women’s voices, through its shared ideas on epistemology and its political standpoint. In this section I discuss how co-operative inquiry relates to and shares similar principles to feminist research.

Feminist research is grounded in the political as it is concerned with studies which reveal what is going on in women’s and men’s lives, i.e. to fully understand women’s lives we need to also understand what men are thinking and experiencing and to undertake research in a way that is non-exploitative (Coleman, 2009; Letherby, 2007; Treleaven, 1994). A paradigm based on collaborative engagement that encourages autonomous participation will address this consideration as a matter of axiology.

Feminist researchers also stress the importance of giving women a voice, recognising that not all women are oppressed and have varied experiences around oppression (Alice, 1999; Oakley, 1998). Furthermore, as Millen (1997) explains, power is multi-layered and dynamic and therefore empowerment is also situational and fractured depending on status or privilege through ethnicity, economic positioning or sexuality. These factors suggest feminist research is complex and questioning feminist thought in this direction only perpetuates issues of power and equality further.
The complexities in feminist research can be addressed by shifting the debate to focus on epistemology (Millen, 1997). The ontology of subjective-objective reality in a co-operative inquiry that is shaped by the experiences of the co-researchers as co-subjects within the extended epistemology, ensure that not only are women’s voices heard but each of their experience matters. For these reasons, I draw a parallel between feminist research and co-operative inquiry.

3.2 Inquiry Participants

3.2.1 Ethical Considerations

Informed and Voluntary Consent

Ethics approval to proceed with this research was granted December 3, 2013 by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC). Informed consent was obtained from the participants at the end of the Introduction Meeting held March 1, 2014. This meeting was held to explain the nature and details of the research and the commitment required from the participants prior to their acceptance to participate.

The purpose of the Introduction Meeting was to provide potential participants with the opportunity to assess whether or not the inquiry topic and the methodology were appropriate for them. They were informed at this meeting that participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw within two weeks of engaging in the inquiry (see Appendices 1 and 2 for the Ethics Approval, Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form).

During the three hour meeting, I explained the nature of a co-operative inquiry and the scope and intention of the research and the ethical aspects of research. Participants were also informed of the time commitment required for this project. We negotiated the logistics of the meetings in terms of venue, dates and duration. Everyone felt they could commit to the jointly agreed time and dates for all inquiry meetings and that there was some leeway for rescheduling meetings. The intention was that by the end of the meeting, participants could decide if they wished to join the inquiry or not. It was also an opportunity to trial an inquiry session, a space for participants to explore and experience
the organic unfolding of dialogue to assess if they were comfortable with the sharing-culture. All five attendees signed up by way of contract to be part of the inquiry group.

Inquiries were initially transcribed verbatim and emailed to participants between inquiry meetings. Participants were invited to review and clarify any areas of changes required. They were reminded that the transcripts were only used for group reflection and meaning-making and relevant quotes would be used in the final thesis. Participants were also encouraged to read and provide feedback particularly to ensure their experiences were adequately represented in the inquiry and outcome chapters of the thesis. All participants, including myself, were given pseudonyms.

**Cultural and Spiritual Sensitivity**

As the meaning and relevance of the divine feminine differs between cultures, traditions and spiritual beliefs, it was important that these differences were cultivated and spoken to in the inquiry, in a safe and respectful way. Furthermore, ours was a multi-cultural group and so sensitivity around how we shared and what we shared was paramount. Whilst the structure of the methodology encourages the expression of different views and experiences based on the participant’s cultural background, there was risk that some participants may have felt uncomfortable discussing ideas relating to religion or spirituality.

However, by establishing a co-created inquiry, we ensured that everyone’s voice and concerns were heard prior to proceeding with any decisions or discussion themes. As it transpired, we did not encounter any conflict or distress caused by these discussions relating to religion and culture. The discussions were challenging at times, but the process we adopted ensured that everyone was heard.

**Treaty of Waitangi and Māori Participation**

The nature of cooperative inquiry is collaborative and inclusive with strong emphasis on co-facilitation where all participants are equally co-researchers and co-subjects. These values compliment Treaty partnership values.
Although involvement in the inquiry was completely voluntary and open to any practitioners who had an interest in exploring this area of spirituality, I intentionally shared the research idea with Māori acquaintances. I did this in the hope that the inquiry would have Māori representation, particularly as I saw Māori cosmology as an integral component of the research. Although this did not eventuate, I included references to Māori cosmology in the literature review to draw the links to the divine feminine. In this way, I hope to represent aspects of Māori culture which are pertinent to the topic of this thesis.

3.2.2 Recruitment

Through open invitation and voluntary involvement, the participants for this research were invited based on three selection criteria:

- Participants were from Auckland to ensure the logistics of regular meetings and venues were practical and manageable
- Participants were social practitioners; in this case, all participants were counsellors
- Participants were interested in exploring ideas of spirituality based on the qualities of the divine feminine

A one-page invitation was advertised on an acquaintance’s Facebook page (she had suggested I use her wide network of friends and practitioners). Unfortunately only four queries resulted from this Facebook invitation, none of which resulted in recruitment to the inquiry. I also personally emailed the invitation to other people who had initially shown an interest in the topic, or knew of people who may have an interest. None of these resulted in participation. The responses were mainly that people were unable to commit to the regular meetings.

I had attended a co-operative inquiry workshop held in October 2013 in Auckland. At this workshop, I described my research topic to other attendees, although I had not received approval to begin my project at this stage. When I officially received ethics approval in December 2013, I sent invitations to the women who had indicated they were interested in the topic, to attend the Introduction meeting I had organised and requested their
participation in the inquiry. All five of these women attended and subsequently agreed to be participants.

3.2.3 Participant Demographics

There were six women, including myself involved in this inquiry. Our age-group ranged from 40 to 60 years. I had hoped that the topic would also attract men yet I anticipated that the choice of wording in the invitation might only attract women. This outcome is consistent with the findings of a research using co-operative inquiry to investigate spirituality in palliative care. White (2002) observed that only women were interested and concluded that this was because women were more inclined and willing to share spiritual experiences than men.

All the women were counsellors (except for me) in full or part-time roles and four of us were part-time students. One was also a teacher. The group’s ethnic background was varied and included two New Zealand born Pakeha, two Southeast-Asians and two born in Europe. Our spiritual beliefs were also diverse; two members were atheist, one a Christian, one a Buddhist, one pagan and the other a Hindu.

Whilst working on this thesis, I was a part time student, stay-home mother and a volunteer in my community supporting mothers and women in transition through a peer support group.

3.3 The Application of Co-operative Inquiry

3.3.1 Establishing the Inquiry Strand

The inquiry strand ensures the group have a good grasp of the methodology and the different stages involved (Heron, 1996, pp. 65-66). This strand was important in our inquiry as it established the full and informed participation of all participants, i.e. by jointly understanding the methodology, all participants would be in an equal position as co-researchers.

I took on the role of a coach to introduce and facilitate the use of some of the key methodology concepts including convergence and divergence, research cycling and to plan our actions, during the Introduction meeting. I also handed out the co-operative inquiry
diagram used in the co-operative inquiry workshop facilitated by John Heron, (see Appendix 6) in the hope that the participants would take the method on board and express it in ways that suited them. Ideally I would have re-visited these concepts during the inquiry, however due to time restrictions, this was not possible.

3.3.2 Establishing the Collaboration Strand

Our group was a full-form co-operative where all of us had full participation in both decision making and designing the inquiry. To implement this autonomous, collaborative and participative process in our inquiry, the first step involved describing to the participants their roles as co-researchers and co-subjects. As the group was internally initiated, my role as co-researcher and co-subject, meant that I too fully participated and contributed to the process equally with the others in the group. For example, my personal definition of the divine feminine was also discussed and included in the inquiry findings, and I participated in all the action phases contributing to the ideas that had formed.

I was particularly mindful of how the group managed the potential differences in power considering my role as initiating researcher and master’s student. So, to ensure my contribution did not dominate or dictate the design and direction of our discussions, we shared the facilitation role (albeit only once each) to establish our equal positioning in the group and we took turns scribing. We adopted the approach of taking turns as time-keeper to ensure that everyone had a turn to share and that people shared their reflections equally. Decision making was a participative effort. Everyone’s views were heard although we kept this in perspective — although full consensus is ideal, it is rarely practical (Reason, 1994c).

Reason (1994c) offers a compromise and suggests that as a minimum participants give their free and informed assent to all decisions about process and outcome. We adopted this suggestion by agreeing that at times, not everyone’s requirement could be met and that we would go with the majority. Despite its challenges, we managed to establish a co-created process to run our inquiries. The validity and quality of our process is analysed in Chapter Six.
3.3.3 Establishing the Emotional Strand

There are different emotional climates for each inquiry stage. Some of these include establishing safety and inclusion, addressing difference and disagreement, and authentic collaboration between individuals (Heron, 1996). It did not take long for our group to build trust, to develop a sense of belonging and camaraderie and openness to sharing. This was evident in the feedback provided by some of the participants by the third reflection meeting. For instance, one of the participants reflected on her experience of the inquiry and participating in the group;

I am in a very excited and inspired head space and empowered just thankful for the process, and the work, you know in the short time we have met, has changed me in ways I never expected and it has so many effects, positive effects in such a quick time. I’m very thankful to all of you (personal communication, March 22, 2014).

I was also aware of adopting a mindful-facilitation style that encouraged different opinions to be freely expressed and for people to feel free to provide feedback to each other. As ours was a small group, one of the ways I accomplished this was by authentically declaring my own vulnerabilities as a facilitator and being transparent in my sharing. In this way, the group felt connected and the facilitation process seamless, as each person took on a self-directing role. We also used the ‘devil’s advocate process’ as a procedure to elicit feedback and engage group participation – in this way, we had permission to challenge each other’s findings in a safe and disciplined manner.

3.3.4 Facilitation Style

As facilitator I used a Dionysian approach to remain open, receptive and trusting of an evolving and unfolding inquiry that a co-operative process could bring forth. A Dionysian approach adopts a culture of responding to emerging ideas and allowing the idea to continue to evolve. It adopts a more spontaneous approach in the action and reflection phases as opposed to working towards an agreed plan. In contrast an Apollonian style adopts a systematic and planned approach in the action and reflection phase.

I read texts on facilitation skills to prepare myself for this form of facilitation, including Wadsworth (2011) and Heron (1999). I was particularly drawn toward a way of facilitating based on Heron (2006, p. 89) and his guiding definition of love and facilitation, i.e. “to
provide conditions within which people can in liberty determine their own true needs and interests in co-operation with others who are similarly engaged”. Heron (2006) explains how the definition points to the interdependence of autonomy and co-operation. I also attended a one day workshop on The Mindful Facilitator\(^{10}\) to prepare myself for a very different heart-centred style of facilitation to the one I used as an IT project manager in a corporate world that was more focused on facilitating towards outcomes. I was very aware of warming-up to a new way of being with group.

I will now explore the nature and culture of our group and then proceed to describe how the inquiry was run.

- **Mixed-role, Outside Inquiry**

Ours was a mixed-role inquiry where the participants, including myself, had varying roles within social practice but came together to explore an area of interest, in this case how divine feminine qualities could be expressed in our respective jobs and our daily lives. We conducted our action phase outside the group meetings, out in the world where we co-researchers lived. This meant that the dynamics of the action phase were different for each of us. An inside-inquiry would have meant our action phase happened during the group meetings amongst ourselves. The decision to making this an outside inquiry seemed appropriate as each of us was planning on investigating our idiosyncratic experiences of the divine feminine in our everyday life.

- **Dionysian Culture**

The nature of inquiring into the embodied spiritual experiences of the divine feminine lends itself to a more Dionysian style of inquiry rather than an Apollonian model. For example, despite adopting an Apollonian approach to identifying actions we wished to explore, we found that in reality, new actions would emerge spontaneously beyond what we had planned.

We began to recognise the importance of staying open and present to our intuitive knowing and responding to what was emerging rather than adhering to a pre-planned

\(^{10}\) Mindful Facilitator was a workshop run by a training organisation called COOPERACY. Please see [http://www.cooperacy.info/Training/training.php](http://www.cooperacy.info/Training/training.php) for details.
action strategy, suggesting we had moved into a more Dionysian culture. This approach meant that our plan to converge and to diverge on particular areas of interest, was constantly disrupted. In the end, we simply went with the flow and responded to what we were each drawn to explore further. For instance, despite one of the participant’s intended action to investigate a government initiative to intensify indoor dairy farming, she found that instead, she needed to reflect inwards into her own personal shame around her feminine-self; an action that spontaneously unfolded during the action phase. I analyse the impact of this approach on the validity of our inquiry in Chapter Six.

- Informative and Transformative Inquiry

The type of inquiry we engaged in was initially informative before it became transformative. In our inquiry, we each chose Goddess name by researching and reading about the different Goddesses and their qualities before reporting our choice to the group. As such we were beginning to engage with more self-reflective skills, including using presentational methods like artwork, dream analysis and meditation insights, to discern our preference of a Goddess. This process formed the informative part of the inquiry.

A transformative inquiry on the other hand seeks to explore practice within some domain and change it. Its primary outcomes are practical skills and the transformation it brings about (Heron, 1996, p. 48). In our group, as we each deepened our understanding of our chosen Goddess, we began to embody her qualities and demonstrate those qualities in practical ways, thus realising the transformative outcomes of the inquiry.

3.3.5 Co-operative Inquiry Phases

Co-operative inquiry can be seen as a process of cycling through four phases of reflection and action (Heron, 1996). For our research, group meetings were used as the platform to collect and collate experiences through a series of inquiry phases.

In Phase 1 of our research, the group participated in outlining the scope of inquiry. We explored the meaning of the divine feminine, planned our action strategy as well as agreeing what our data collection and recording methods would be. The deconstructed research question was used as an initial step to begin the inquiry, i.e. ‘What does the divine feminine mean to me?’ We agreed to undertake some action to contribute to this
exploration which I initially compiled into an Action Phase Strategy document (see Appendix 4 for a description of this plan).

In Phase 2, we became fully fledged co-subjects ‘out in the field of action’ where we engaged in the actions to deepen our understanding of the divine feminine. In this phase, we became more aware of the subtleties of our experience and observed how the divine feminine was expressed in our daily life through our encounters with others. We began to notice a difference in how we spoke to our employers, our partners, children and co-workers. As we began to develop a deeper understanding, we also started to try new actions and different ways of expressing our new understanding. For example, one of the participants who explored ideas around social justice, found herself exploring a different perspective to activism as she her experience of the divine feminine began to deepen.

In Phase 3, we were deeply immersed and engaged in the experience of our embodied understanding of the divine feminine. In this phase, the inquiry process deepened so that what was initially an idea or concept, paved the way toward a new way of understanding or a new way to practice. We found ourselves, in our everyday lives, relating in different ways as a result of our understanding, which was both liberating and confronting for some of us.

For instance, we began to challenge our ideas around motherhood. Based on our deepened understanding of the divine feminine, this new understanding paved the way for a new way of mothering. Heron (1996) describes this phase as the touchstone of the inquiry method, which differentiates it from conventional research because here, participants are deeply involved in their own experience of the research, through which new understandings or skills may evolve. So the separation between research and daily life was blurred; our inquiry became part and parcel of our everyday experiences as we held our own meaning of the divine feminine in our everyday awareness.

In Phase 4, we regrouped and focused on determining what actions we wanted to process in light of what we had come to understand. The cycle of reflection-action was then repeated while throughout our inquiry skills of critical awareness and self-reflection were honed.
3.3.6 Co-operative Inquiry Planning: Structure and Logistics of Meetings

This inquiry was conducted over a span of three months beginning March 1, 2014 and ending May 25, 2014. There were seven group meetings including the Introduction meeting, with six action phases in between. According the participants’ availability, the meetings were generally scheduled fortnightly on Sunday mornings from 11am to about 2pm in the Atamira learning space in the Unitec Mt Albert building, with short breaks which usually included a shared lunch. However, as a result of rescheduling three meetings to cater to a member who needed to attend family events, we did not get to keep to the planned meetings; instead, the time between meetings ranged from one to three and four weeks apart.

The large gaps were not always ideal as it could have affected our connection to the inquiry but as a group we all stayed in touch via email. The momentum of the inquiry was never lost. We also met as a group, albeit not with everyone present, for two invocation rituals which were identified during a reflection meeting as a theme that we wished to explore and bring into our lives. The group agreed that the time allowed for the reflection meetings was insufficient yet we were unable to reach a consensus to extend this period, except for Meeting Four which was for the devil’s advocate process. Ideally, we needed at least 5 hours per meeting but family-based activities or university assignments took priority. Due to time restrictions, the ratio of time spent sharing personal reflections to group collation of reflections was roughly 9:1.

As a result, I began working on the themes myself outside these meetings and shared these with the group for reflection and agreement. Figure 6 provides an overview of the meetings held and the action phases in between. It provides a description of the agenda of the meetings and focus of the action phases.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Key Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>3hrs</td>
<td>Individual definitions of divine feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Staying present to inquiry and noting and journaling any new thoughts, dreams, disturbances, views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>2.5 hrs</td>
<td>Brainstorming areas to explore further and develop an action plan strategy (see Appendix 4). Identifying action items and personal motivations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 1</td>
<td>March 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>Researching Goddess names and individual actions (see Appendix 4) Identifying information about the Goddess to compare with our individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>2.5 hrs</td>
<td>Reflecting on action week 2, reflect on Goddess names Exploring emerging themes on Shut-Down Feminine and Reclaiming the Feminine through Goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 2</td>
<td>March 22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Notice what is going on behind our behaviour - self-observation on body, feelings, power/autonomy, shame, vulnerability, motherhood/womanhood – compare with our past experiences Continue to compare our attitudes with our new experience of Goddess – where does this show up, how is it affecting relationships, communication, etc. Observe how our attitudes have shifted based on what we know of the Goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>2.5 hrs</td>
<td>Reflected on Shut-down Feminine Identified new Theme: Signals to reconnect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 3</td>
<td>March 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>Self-observation of visibility, shame with regards to body. Observe how we look after our body, how do we react to people’s comments, etc. Full moon ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>5 hrs</td>
<td>Devil’s advocate process to challenge ideas on Goddess and understanding of the divine feminine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 4</td>
<td>April 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Speak to other parties re collaboration around activism for #Bring-back-the-Girls campaign – put idea of Balance into action Sign petitions – note and observe how we feel, what we feel attracted to sign Self-observations around how power, autonomy, shame affects our activism – using moment to moment awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>3 hrs</td>
<td>Reflect on journey thus far – what does the divine feminine stand for Reflect on sub-themes: body, power, shame, visibility, activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 5</td>
<td>May 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Self-observation around how divine feminine is expressed and not expressed – bringing to action what it stands for in terms of our jobs and everyday life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>2 hrs</td>
<td>Celebration to commemorate ending of inquiry Compilation of all findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 6</td>
<td>May 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Action Phase and Reflection Meetings
3.3.7 Data Collection Method and Data Generation

Standard Methods

The group used journals for recording personal insights during the action phase. Two women had attended workshops/seminars regarding the feminine theme to deepen their ‘propositional knowing’ and shared their findings with group. All reflection meetings were audio-recorded. I transcribed the recordings and emailed the transcripts to the group before our next meeting; the intention being that the group would be involved in the ongoing planning and design of our meetings and the transcripts used to analyse and identify themes and interpret them accordingly. However, transcripts became a way for the group to stay engaged with the dialogue and jointly reflect on the meaning of our findings.

One of the participants created a private Facebook page where she linked articles and images that resonated with her in her exploration into the divine feminine. She used it as a repository of her evolving understanding of the divine feminine and included links to women who were positive role models for her, and articles on consciousness and sacred activism. Through her website she explored different concepts around the divine feminine and these concepts were presented as ‘propositional knowing’ to the group. The group also visited the site to explore her ideas, which interestingly, triggered new awareness and desire by the others to explore themes on consciousness. Figure 7 on the next page provides a snapshot of her Facebook page.
Figure 7. Facebook page created by participant to collect her emerging ideas on divine feminine

**Presentational Methods**

Presentational methods were also used in the action phase when participants were working through concepts, ideas or feelings that were not able to be articulated through words alone. Artwork or symbolism was used as a powerful form of reflection and therapeutic process, although more organically and in response to the depth of the inquiry rather than as a planned action. For instance, one of the participants developed a collage of images as per Figure 8 on the next page, which reminded her of her own experience of shame.
Dreams were also discussed, as a method of reflecting upon inner unconscious themes that the psyche was awakening awareness of in the dreamer (Franz, 1978). We did not attempt to analyse or interpret the dreams as a group; however we shared dreams and our own personal interpretation of them with the group. Meditation reflections were also discussed. For example, a participant described an insight she received during meditation as a way to reconnect with the divine feminine: “I feel something deep there. Maybe this inquiry, is like a reaching out or a reaching back or within for that essence” (personal communication, March 22, 2014).
Myths and metaphors were also used in this inquiry in describing experiences or as part of our reflection. In particular, expressions such as ‘dying and birthing of self’ and ‘reclaiming the divine feminine’ were significant metaphors which I will explore in the next chapter.

Radical Memory

Due to the nature of our inquiry topic, some of us were engaging with an experience of self, within a deeper context based on the divine feminine as a spiritual foundation (with or without the experience of a God/Goddess). These experiences were dependent on our idiosyncratic understandings of the divine feminine. For some, it related to the transpersonal realm that as Sullivan (1989) explains, begins in a place of not knowing, i.e. becoming very present to our personal understanding of the divine feminine moment-by-moment. This moment-to-moment awareness was a consistent theme in our action phase.

Additionally, Flinders (1998) describes this realm as lost knowledge in the sacred feminine. She describes this as a myth that is buried deep in the seed-memory, which exists as a latency, “a set of possibilities; a few seeds tied up in a pocket handkerchief and carried across the mountains […] without ever losing its potency” (p.143).

It is in this domain that we were trying to rediscover our lost wisdom, and seeking to rediscover the wisdom residing in our bodies. I found it useful to associate this wisdom that resides in our own bodies, with the body of Sophia, the Great Goddess Of Wisdom, as it linked to the idea of our bodies as sacred (Matthews, 1991).

Interestingly some of the participants drew upon their spirituality and expressed their desire to reconnect to the Great Goddess. Conversely, the atheists in our group declared how engaging with their Goddess was nothing more than a tool to understand and develop certain qualities. In either case, the depth of exploration in our inquiry went as deep as we would go to reclaim those ‘memory-seeds’, located either in the Goddess or within our deeper knowing, or anywhere in-between. Being present to the opportunity that lies in the latency that Flinders (1998) refers to, was a big starting point for most of us.

Ultimately, the data generation in this inquiry was based on our active engagement with a deeper knowing. This process resulted in a rich and deep dialogue, full of potential for
transformation, as we began our journey to gather our seeds. I discuss the results of this journey in Chapters Four and Five.

### 3.3.8 Collating, Meaning-Making and Reaching Agreement

The entire inquiry process is about discovery, leading to meaning-making and it is through the implementation of this co-operative inquiry methodology that the quality of meaning-making is enhanced. The process includes research cycling and the additional use of validity procedures which encourage critical subjectivity and enhances the validity of the participants’ claims or findings, hence contributing toward a sound and robust inquiry. These validity procedures (which I explore in greater depth in Chapter Six) include managing divergence and convergence of themes within and between cycles to check the soundness of participant feedback; balancing reflection and action to ensure conclusions are valid; the use of the devil’s advocate to challenge uncritical subjectivity; managing unaware projections; attending to the dynamic interplay of chaos and order; and securing authentic collaboration (Heron, 1996, pp. 131-157).

Making sense during the reflection phase is considered time-intensive and requires patience and tolerance for collaborative group engagement (Reason, 2000). What we found was that it was the diversity of the research, rather than unanimous agreement from participants, that drove the meaning-making process. Our approach was very informal and occurred organically through group feedback and group questioning. Amongst ourselves we intuitively began to identify similarities between the shared reflections and subtle themes that had begun to form. Our discussions were always captured as key bullet points on a flip-chart or whiteboard. We also used large sheets of paper with coloured pens for people to draw and write up their accounts. From there, based on the similarities and differences of our ideas, themes would emerge. As there is no conventional data-analysis done in a co-operative inquiry, these methods contributed toward the quality of the reflection process – the more in-depth our sharing was, the more we were able to reflect and derive meaning therefrom.

The final component addresses reaching agreement on these findings, a process which also occurred organically in our inquiry. At Meeting Five, I presented a journey map – using a large sheet of white paper that depicted key quotes from each participant taken
from the transcripts, as a way of describing their journey thus far. I read these out to the group prior to us engaging in our personal conclusions and meaning-making and to prepare us for developing our individual maps. In keeping with the collaborative nature of the inquiry, a spirit of camaraderie in sharing experiences was evident, rather than a discussion around interpreting them (Laverty, 2003). This approach requires conscious awareness in not seeking agreement or confirmation of our own personal understanding of each other’s experiences and responses, but rather actively identifying what is different and what is similar. It is in the difference that new insights may arise (Smythe as cited in Sleeman, 2007). This process was inspiring as we each came to draw on our own conclusions around our journeying and recognise the strong threads that connected our findings to each other’s, as outlined in the next chapter.

3.3.9 The Inquiry Format

An agenda was prepared prior to each reflection meeting as a way to ensure time-keeping and management of key discussion points (see Figure 9).

![Figure 9. Example of Agenda used in Inquiry](image)

Each reflection meeting began with a two minute individual check-in which was about creating a space for the group to share its general state of well-being. After the check-in, we would each provide a detailed account of our action week, followed by a joint reflection on our findings, usually done toward the end of the meeting. The whiteboard was used to write up the group’s feedback and we would take turns scribing.

The second part of the reflection meeting was to identify corresponding actions that we would take to deepen our inquiry. However, as we discovered, despite our planned
actions for the action-phase, the Dionysian culture of our inquiry meant we did not have much control over our actions as they would emerge or unfold spontaneously during the action phase.

The devil’s advocate procedure was used to challenge and seek soundness in what each of us were proclaiming in our findings (see Appendix 5). Due to time constraints, this process was conducted as a one-off meeting rather than part of every meeting agenda. In hindsight, I think this procedure should have been integrated into all our reflection meetings as it was very helpful in gaining deeper clarity around our meaning-making. Although it was intense and challenging, the devil’s advocate process helped clarify each of our positions around the inquiry and what the divine feminine actually meant to us. The process also ensured that our meaning-making and collective agreement was based on sound critical thinking and discussion.

The use of co-operative inquiry felt very suitable for this research topic and the methodology offered a process that guided our journeying toward understanding the divine feminine in our lives and as a transformative agent for social change.

3.3.10 *Beginning the Inquiry Journey with Ritual*

I arrived early on the day of the Introduction meeting, to set up our meeting room so that chairs were arranged in a circle and tables were pushed into the far corners of the room. Heron (1996) refers to the “archetype of the circle, of human equality and presence” (p.129), so by arranging the chairs in a circle and removing the tables I was consciously creating a space for autonomous inquiry.

In the centre of the circle of chairs, a small display of flowers was set up as a ritual for expression of gratitude to the divine and also as a way of creating an aesthetic for our space. As I arranged the flowers, I was aware of bringing in my personal interpretation of the ‘kolam’, an Indian tradition I grew up with but the meaning behind the tradition had been long forgotten in our family. It was not until initiating this inquiry and as I began my research on cultural interpretations of the divine feminine that I finally understood the significance; Nagarajan (2001) in her research on embedded ecologies succinctly states,
“We draw the kolam as our first ritual act in the morning to remind ourselves to remember Bhudevi [Mother Earth]” (p.159).

I questioned my imposition of tradition on the group in terms of the principles of a co-operative inquiry which encourages co-created rituals. I was concerned that I may have compromised these values. And so I began to recognise the journey ahead as a learning process, as I welcomed the group into the inquiry.
CHAPTER FOUR

MEANING-MAKING: JOURNEYING INTO THE DIVINE FEMININE

Thus it is that I have now undertaken...to tell my personal myth. I can only...‘tell stories’. Whether or not the stories are ‘true’ is not the problem. The only question is whether what I tell is my fable, my truth (Jung as cited in Rowland, 2002, p. 72).

4. Chapter Overview

This chapter tells the story of our inquiry and how the group progressively gave meaning to the inquiry into the divine feminine. It reflects our journeying as a group, through the different stages of action and reflection, as we uncovered the transformative element of the divine feminine. It begins with an overview of the definition of the divine feminine based on the idiosyncratic perspectives of the participants. The two main themes that emerged from the inquiry are also discussed; these are The Shutdown Feminine and Reclaiming the Divine Feminine. Sub-themes including Power, Autonomy, Vulnerability, Body and Feelings are also discussed.

In my attempt to represent everyone’s voices in the inquiry, I have had the group read, review and amend some of the comments. However, ultimately the document was authored by myself and therefore represents my account of the inquiry.

Note on Pseudonyms

To respect the confidentiality of the participants including myself, each co-researcher has been identified with a pseudonym symbolising a Goddess name that we each chose as part of the inquiry process.
4.1 Definitions of The Divine Feminine

One of the first tasks of the inquiry was to explore the meaning of the divine feminine from each participant’s viewpoint. I initiated the inquiry with the question that I wrote on the white board at the Introduction meeting (see Figure 10).

![Whiteboard Discussion on the divine feminine](image)

Whiteboard Discussion on the divine feminine included the following threads:
- What is the difference between divine and sacred
- Women as agents for change
- Our experience beyond biology
- Interconnectedness to something greater
- How does patriarchy, social construction influence our experience
- What does the journey from head to heart to womb entail

**Figure 10. Inquiry Process: Using the whiteboard to capture broader ideas on the meaning of the divine feminine**

**What does the divine feminine mean to you?**

Our exploration into the meaning of the divine feminine linked in to our experience of womanhood. The following map (see Figure 11) indicates the discussion points we explored at this early stage of the inquiry in terms of what the divine feminine meant to us. I developed this map using the notes from the whiteboard and flip-chart after a group discussion as per Figure 10.
Although our discussion was quite wide ranging, some topics were not pursued as part of the research cycling; for example the influence of patriarchy on the role of women and matriarchal societies were discussed at the first reflection meeting but these themes were not pursued. In the very first reflection meeting, some of us discussed the negative influences such as cultural and religious effect on the feminine and others drew on their positive experience such as the body as a medium through which to express the divine.

For Athena, the divine feminine was about relationship; how she related to herself and to others. Based on her drawing (see Figure 12), she located her understanding of the divine feminine in her experience of femininity, which interestingly was altered by the end of the inquiry when her experience deepened (discussed in Chapter Five).
So this is just how I kind of imagined my femininity to be, which was after all that we’ve discussed, so it included my mind, the spoken word, my heart, what initially was the word I was looking for, the sexual, the sensual which is the touch and the skin, my body and the clothing I wear, the feel of my body and the look of my body (Athena, March 1, 2014).

Athena also explained how the divine feminine was an experience of being present to the moment:

When I think of the two words together [divine feminine], I really get a sense of for me, of being in a place, in a moment, of interaction and that it is an interaction within myself but it’s also an interaction with the person I’m with. And so it’s a moment to moment thing […] which really does require me to be more inward reflecting. So, I am responding, not reacting, and reflecting more inwardly into heart rather than into the head (Athena, March 1, 2014).

Lakshmi’s understanding of the divine feminine was located in her role as mother. She said:

I recognise it as being a Mother, carrying the softness, attending to other’s needs as well bringing it all back to me [as a female]. It’s been a journey from my head to my heart (Lakshmi, March 1, 2014).

She also commented that her understanding was based on her experience of womanhood, which was shaped and influenced by her childhood, growing up in a traditional family. Through use of metaphor, she described her sense of being a woman as being perceived as
an object for others and felt that by inquiring into her divine feminine self, she was coming into a new relationship with womanhood, coming back to herself:

Something comes to mind, this is very cultural, growing up, most girls had hardly any contact with boys of our age even to play with or uncles, you know, very matriarchal in a sense the way we were brought up. Like my father didn’t cuddle me, I would sleep in the car just pretending to sleep so that he would carry me because my mum had a back problem, and I knew it would be him who would carry me to bed. All we got was a peck on the cheek from my dad…and from that, suddenly when you turn 18, 19, suddenly all the aunts and the extended family, females, are looking at you like a piece of meat to dress up. You should not be wearing that colour, your hair should be like this, and after a while the penny drops, I’m in the market; they are looking for a man for me. So overnight this girl who has been so sheltered, you don’t look at a man, nobody touches you, you don’t touch a person suddenly you are expected to take a 180 degree shift, now it’s open for business?! (Lakshmi, March 1, 2014).

Aphrodite drew upon her spirituality to express her relationship to the divine feminine. She described her experiential knowing as follows:

For me when I initially think of the divine/sacred feminine, it’s to me, from the heart place, its, its deeper than that, it’s the eternal self, whatever that may be, the term, the eternal, the ongoing… I don’t know, maybe it’s just my interpretation of the divine and sacred, but to me, it means not so much the religious, we mentioned earlier, the religious connotations where else to me it is more the eternal connection, the ongoing, it’s that, yeah, religious is more containing and limiting, a demarcation about it, which kinds of suffocates the feminine (Aphrodite, March 1, 2014).

Minerva’s understanding of the divine feminine was expressed as a process to come into a new understanding of who she was, as she began menopause. She describes this process as a journey from being intellectually driven to becoming more emotionally aware linking in to her creative self. The process of inquiring into the divine feminine for her is synonymous to the metaphoric expression of ‘birthing her true nature’:

I really am going from brain to heart to guts really, even vagina. The way I look at it is we are basically used [...] to put all these human beings on the planet, you have to come from our bodies, but by the time you are reaching menopause, you are actually giving birth to yourself rather than all the other people on the planet, yeah, you’ve got to give birth to, something, maybe the feminine maybe the sacred feminine I don’t know (Minerva, March 1, 2014).

Artemis felt that the inquiry into the divine feminine highlighted a conflict in the way she lived her life as opposed to what she wanted to be doing. She felt she did not know who
she was, as she lived most of her life appeasing her family and addicted to the glamour of the ‘ivory tower’:

I’m confronting what’s not authentic that is living in me that I want to be consciously aware of, it’s been there…but where I find myself with it, there is that pain in myself in hanging on to the ivory tower because that’s where I will get recognition, people will see that I have accomplished something,...so I’m aware now of that part of me that is turning away from the ivory tower...and there’s this experience of ok...that external validation from my parents and society, I don’t need that external validation anymore, I can find it within...and that has created a discomfort in me, am I ready to let go off what I know. (Artemis, March 1, 2014).

She defined the divine feminine as a way of being which she experienced as shut down in herself. For Artemis, this inquiry process was a beginning toward shifting her focus in her life toward a more meaningful vocation and she hoped to do this by re-calibrating her practical knowing of the feminine.

Hestia’s exploring into the divine feminine meant the freedom to explore who she is outside her role as mother. She also reflected on the cyclic nature of femininity and the rituals to re-incorporate into our lives to honour those cycles;

It’s not autonomy but having space, and actually working within the space of doing what I want instead of this lifetime of being in the role of the mother, its’ like an expression of more than solo mum. More than just someone who parents alone...so finding myself I guess within my studies in this discipline of being conscious, being cognitive, and it’s almost like birthing the unconscious, processing the knowledge... I almost think of the feminine like an urn, like a vessel – a holding, containment. It’s something which allows, is the, how we come through, and there’s that containment and I often see the image of the vessel of the urn. It’s like a divine, yes like a chalice (Hestia, March 9, 2014).

In defining the divine feminine, Hestia located her experiential understanding from within her female body as a medium that expresses the divine feminine and she reflected on this by way of representing the feminine as a symbol of containment.

Each of us explored and shared our understanding of the divine feminine based on our different ways of knowing. Our process was synonymous to locating the memory seed (described in the previous chapter) from within our body, our relationship with others and from memories of our childhood. For some of us, the memory seed was lodged in an experience of a god or Goddess.
Each participant revealed their idiosyncratic understanding of the divine feminine which in itself was rich and multi-layered. It seemed most of us initially drew on our ‘practical knowing’ of the feminine, shaped in terms of how we act as mother or career-woman, or our ways of relating to people. Hestia and Aphrodite had begun to inquire using their ‘experiential knowing’, taking their experience of the divine feminine into a more experiential spiritual realm and Minerva was sensing into a way of being through metaphor using ‘presentational knowing’.

4.2 Initiatory Journey

As a result from our discussion at the Introduction meeting, our awareness of the divine feminine was heightened in the first action phase. Subsequently the group reported at the first reflection meeting, how much the inquiry had begun to challenge them and how difficult it was to bring focus on ourselves to serve our own inner-feminine. The check-in process indicated that each of us was already deep in process with the inquiry. For instance, Minerva found herself engaging with a ‘new experience of self’, synonymous to her idea of birthing herself, when she faced an intimidating police-officer:

…and its funny when I left [the inquiry] last week its more in my mind about working on my masculine, my sacred masculine, masculinity, and this week I’ve had fights, I mean yesterday I’ve been fighting on linguistic points with the cop because what he is writing down is not what I’m telling him so I’m arguing about the points. He’s trying to intimidate me (Minerva, March 9, 2014).

After the check-ins, I began by proposing a launching statement for our inquiry, which was:

- Our own personal journey toward understanding and reclaiming the divine feminine

I provided a simple story-board with some of the quotes from our discussion during the definition phase to connect us to where we ended our discussion (Figure 13 illustrates the use of a story board and subsequent discussion points).
I then opened the discussion around the focus of the research; the group concurred that it included:

- Mapping out our inner experiences of the divine feminine
- Understanding how our inner experiences shape and affect our external relationships, in particular in our role as social practitioners

To begin, we explored aspects of the divine feminine that we were personally drawn to, through a brainstorming exercise. The second part of the inquiry was about identifying the corresponding actions we would take to deepen our inquiry.

4.2.1 Mapping Our Inner-Experiences

We explored what motivated us to want to inquire into the divine feminine so that we were more conscious of our actions during the action phase. What became evident from this discussion was how the nature of our relationship to our roles as mothers, wives or career-women, impacted on our ability to bring attention inward. It seemed our inner divine feminine experience was deeply influenced by the social constructions of those roles and society’s expectations of how we should be in this world. Our original map,
outlining our definitions of the divine feminine, now included the larger theme of social construction (see Figure 14).

![Figure 14. Influence of Social Construction on our Understanding of the Divine Feminine](image)

Individually, we attempted to unpack these social constructions to see how much they influenced our understanding. Athena had begun to try and differentiate the social constructions around feminine and masculine and her own experience of it:

> Coz [when] I think of feminine and masculine, I still feel they’re value laden, those terms, I think in culture generally, the masculine is valued so much more highly. Of course so you know, and that’s a social construction (Athena, March 9, 2014).

Hestia felt she had to take a strong stand for herself when everyone around her expected her to stay home and be the eternal serving mother:

> And I feel like I've been waiting till my kids were grown up so that I could come back and do my studies and I was nearly not going to confirm doing [my studies] and only paid a day before the course and I said no, I’m not going to be defined here and actually said no, I’m making a stand I want to do this, I’m not going to admit defeat, I’m not going to concede, I’m not going to give in, I’m not going to crumple, I’ve been a solo mum since my husband and I split up so it’s been like me having to be mum, dad, creator, launching the kids, so this was my thing.
Lakshmi and Hestia looked at their role as mothers and began to consider the super-mum model that they found themselves in and challenge this idea. Hestia found herself mothering even her student-boarders:

I’m driving a lot because my daughter can’t walk [after her accident] so I’m chauffeuring her around and her son, I need to drop him off at school and he’s struggling […]. I feel like the eternal super-mum. My student-boarder said to me, - Oh I’m sorry my room was messy….smelly socks and dirty clothes - I mean he’s 28, but he sends me a text saying, sorry about my room being messy. […] I hear that a lot, that I’m a mother to my students...so this motherhood thing has been quite strong for me this week...the eternal mother (Hestia, March 9, 2014).

Minerva explained that by inquiring into the divine feminine, paradoxically she had already found herself having to draw on what she saw as her ‘inner-masculine’ qualities:

The second stuff I didn’t sign this week is my contract, I’m not signing that either so here I am at battle with [my employer]. I’m not signing it. So I could be without a job! In other times I would have changed it but that’s the big change this week, I’m kind of saying ok, enough I’ve had enough of this, I’m not going to be bullied (Minnerva, March 9, 2014)

She also felt motivated to address an imbalance within herself around the impact of gender-stereotyping in her culture:

Shame and guilt [being born a woman], I mean when you are born, some areas more than other, it’s like you are being born with a life sentence. […] That’s how it is in real life…you are either highly sexualised, watching [my culture] on TV is like, oh going to a porn movie, so hyper sexualised, I couldn’t believe it. So you’re either seen like that or you’re completely not there, invisible….but I don’t want to be either…I don’t want to be invisible and I don’t want to be over sexualised either…. (Minnerva, March 9, 2014).

So her experience of femininity was either highly sexualised, or the feminine voice was invisible, that is dismissed and not taken seriously. Her awareness of the impact this had had on her own sense of her womanhood had now led her to want to explore her inner masculine qualities further, which she felt were not developed. In a devil’s advocate process, I questioned if Minerva was abandoning the feminine in her pursuit for what she saw as masculine strength. Although Minerva felt that she had not abandoned the
feminine, she felt the need to focus on masculine qualities in order to bring balance within:

Because of the way it has been socially constructed in me, I associate [the feminine] with a weakness and invisibility. Vulnerability is a weakness. In order to balance it, I decided to get the masculine on board. I’m trying to create a balance, I’m not abandoning [the feminine] (Minerva, April 27, 2014).

Artemis was interested in the social constructions associated with success and she questioned how ‘feminine values’ are often dismissed in pursuit of economic gains. She cited as an example, the intensification of indoor dairy-farming in New Zealand to boost the economy and how the feminine values were not considered, especially regarding the impact on the environment:

I’m very aware of my masculine self, the feminine, her voice has only starting to come out, and I’m really wanting to give her voice because I think this thing around communication, because it is only in my voice that I would be able to feel that I can speak to issues like the farming thing, if I can find that voice that is powerful in the feminine, what would I say? (Artemis, March 9, 2014).

Artemis felt powerless without the voice or words to articulate her concern in this matter. For her, the social constructions around success had supressed a voice within her.

Aphrodite was keen to explore how her understanding of the divine feminine could be integrated into daily life:

It’s about taking [consciousness] and grounding it in the physical, if we have this, if the divine is part of who we are, from a sacred, divine, Goddess, spiritual, eternal, whatever it is, if we had that as part of who we are, the eternal who we are, and I know that it’s a social construction, but its about the grounding it in the everyday, bringing it forward, allowing it into the physical, into the human realm (Aphrodite, March 9, 2014).

She felt until she could embody the concept, which would then express itself in how she spoke, her choice of words and so on, it remained a concept to aspire for. So for her it was about the actions necessary to experience and integrate this divinity.

There was further discussion in terms of the difference between power over others and power in our autonomy in relation to others, particularly as we spoke about our roles as mothers, wives and women in positions of power in our careers. Some were interested in
evaluating how powerful we felt at the start of the inquiry and whether we would come into a new relationship with power by the end of the inquiry.

At this early stage of the inquiry, the group agreed that the action items would be more informative in nature, but that it may lead to transformative outcomes based on our own personal motivations. We agreed that our actions would be divergent; we were going to explore different areas from each other.

At our first reflection meeting, we had also decided to each research a Goddess name that resonated with us personally. This was originally for the purpose of identifying a pseudonym for this report. However, interestingly everyone turned their attention to the Goddess name they could choose and were excited about what that process would involve. Although this deviation to the plan seemed like an early indication of consensus collusion, each member identified different motivations (see Appendix 4) to find a Goddess that resonated, hence it seemed we were still on track for a divergent action phase. Some of these motivations included:

I’m quite curious about the Goddess I will choose and how she’s living in me. I guess it goes back to more how I’m presenting myself as a whole, you know how I sound, how I speak, how people perceive me (Athena, March 9, 2014).

But for me, within the Goddess, I’m hoping to reach the masculine and the strength...I’m looking for a Goddess that might be a bit masculine (Minerva, March 9, 2014).

If it’s about bringing the divine feminine forward and it’s not claiming any particular Goddess in particular but what are aspects of that that resonate, if I’m wanting to ground it in my every day being (Aphrodite, March 9, 2014).

Initially, I did not believe that researching a Goddess would be a suitable action item, particularly as my personal view was that it would not be taken seriously and would be seen as a ‘fluffy’ action item. As it transpired, the Goddess journey was a breakthrough action which catapulted most of us on a deeper, inward-reflective journey and, for some of us this process reconnected us to an inner-voice we had long shut-down.
4.2.2 Meeting the Goddess: How Our Inner Experience Affects External Relationships

Although each of us engaged with the process of identifying a Goddess, we were not fully conscious of what this process entailed. The initial reason for identifying a Goddess was to choose a pseudonym for this report. The expectation from the action phase was that each co-researcher would have a better idea of a Goddess name and quality that resonated for them but, as it transpired, the process set them off on different paths, revealing to them layers of new understanding of themselves.

Athena was drawn to Goddess Athena who validated and reaffirmed qualities and skills that she had forgotten in herself:

For me it’s about, what I’ve got to is an essence of awareness, mindfulness, reflectiveness, flexibility, strength and I guess going back to the moment by moment thing how I am every day and what I am hoping for, what this Goddess kind of feels like, I have permission just to be, and not be afraid of that, whether its feminine or masculine whatever it is that fear has shut me down from speaking my mind, and on reflection, that has come from the social construction of what feminine or being female or woman might have meant you don’t speak your mind, you don’t have an opinion, I don’t have an opinion, I was not worthy, and masculinity on the other side was domineering, dominating, opinionated, disconnected and I thought - Is it or is it just the social construction of it? What I came to also was that I want to be independent, independent feeling person outside of my husband, alongside but outside of him but that means I can make my own decisions, mindfully, and feel that they are right without his validity or without his saying ok (Athena, March 22, 2014).

Minerva also who found inspiration in Goddess Minerva (the Roman representation of Goddess Athena), whom she said is linked with warrior-like qualities. Minerva explained her choice during the devil’s advocate process, as she discussed being an atheist, yet finding resonance with a Goddess;

I’m not religious, I have an extreme rejection of religion, so the Goddess, I don’t believe in a god so I’m not going to swap a god for a Goddess, I’m not into that voyage, but why not use it as a tool, as a metaphor for exploring. I was trying to find [a Goddess] with the qualities that I would like to include in my life. Which was Minerva, a bit of a warrior, for me it was a tool, like a hammer, there is no Goddess. Divinity is a word I reject, but I see the divine in that collective consciousness (Minerva, April 27, 2014).
Aphrodite decided she did not feel attracted to any of the Goddess names she explored (so I personally chose the Goddess name for her). The process opened up for her a desire to revisit her pagan tradition. She chose to reconnect with the Goddess-within through the use of simple invocations and rituals, using poetry, meditation, drawing and dancing. For her, this process was intriguing and inspiring. It provided a structure in the form of daily practical exercises aimed at deepening the inquiry further. We challenged Aphrodite in the devil’s advocate process regarding how much of her pagan beliefs influenced her understanding of the Goddess in terms of an embodied experience; was she expecting something external to occur to validate her experience? She felt that the invocation had become more a reminder of her divinity rather than an expectation of something external. For her the Goddess offered a way to focus on that aspect within herself. Hence this inquiry process had been about grounding what seemed to be a concept that felt much larger than her, to bring meaning and expression to it in her everyday life.

Artemis explained that her relationship with the Goddess was shut down in her and consequently the power in the feminine for her was lost - there was no relationship with the Goddess outside of fear and religious understanding:

> The Goddess archetype is informing me of who I am and in exploring the Goddess, I researched Artemis, it was powerful for me, it highlighted a lot about me, my desire for community and working with women but it also highlighted for me my desire to be an independent woman which explains my struggle to be in partnership (Artemis, April 27, 2014).

Focusing on the Goddess was Artemis’s way of trying to understand and come into relationship with the divine feminine. For her, this new awareness has meant a transformation in how she perceived herself, her voice and her relationships to others. However, she felt she needed courage to engage with the divine feminine as it called for a new way of being. Artemis was not sure if she was ready to step into that way of being. Alas, the group concluded that bringing visibility of the divine feminine out to the world was going to require courage.

Seemingly for each of us, getting to know our Goddess became a deeper journey about aspects of ourselves that we were now seeking to reintegrate, for instance our voice and autonomy, as well as bringing visibility to ourselves in relationship to others. Interestingly,
regardless of our spiritual beliefs, pagan or atheist or otherwise, we each found the process of connecting with our Goddess inspiring, transformative and cathartic.

4.3 Development of Themes

Over the course of the first action and reflection phase, two themes had emerged; the Shut-down Feminine and Reclaiming the Divine Feminine.

The theme of the Shut-down Feminine emerged out of a conversation the group had on menstruation. We spoke about how much we don’t talk about our periods and how we hide our sanitary products so “no one will know” or even, how in some countries, sanitary products are wrapped in newspaper at the supermarket-checkout before they are put into a grocery bag. From here the idea emerged of how much we hide our femininity and shut down our communication around our femininity impacts on our relationship to our inner divine feminine self:

...and it was until I had gone to this dance workshop where we were supposed to dance in the way a particular Goddess would, so we had to randomly pick a Goddess card and then you do a dance. And when I picked up that card, I realised that I cannot move like that Goddess, I had shut her down, I don’t know her... (Artemis, March 9, 2014).

The discussion then segued from shutdown feminine to the idea of being conscious of our divine feminine and this was the point at which we began to notice the theme of the Shut-down Feminine closely linking to the theme Reclaiming the Feminine. As we began to inquire deeper into how it got so shut down, we felt drawn to reclaiming the divine feminine. For instance, some participants observed that:

See I’m curious about, even though that’s a question that we have to hold, I’m more interested in how do we then, reclaim it. I know that we are shut down, I know because of my own wellbeing, but how do we reclaim it? (Athena, March 9, 2014).

But this specific research is about the divine feminine but how is my divine feminine unfolding in my life, if its’ been there and I’m unconscious about it, what’s it been doing up until now, and how can I bring it...its that giving birth, its back to the menopause thing, that transition thing how do we birth more of it now... and not doing all the caring and looking after all and sundry (Aphrodite, March 9, 2014).
Some of us were drawn to investigating the Shut-down Feminine further in the next action phase whilst the others felt ready for reclaiming what ‘had been lying dormant’ until now.

4.3.1 Development of Sub-themes

As we explored our experiences as they linked to the main themes, we also noticed sub-themes emerging. As the group deepened their awareness of the role of their Goddess in their daily lives, a pattern began to unfold. We noticed that Power and Autonomy, Body and Feelings, and Motherhood/Womanhood were the main areas that each of us were exploring.

I compiled a list of sub-themes (see Figure 15) which I personally identified from our transcripts and shared this list with the group. This list described the breadth and depth of our inquiry, highlighted its expansive scope which I reflect on from a quality and validity perspective in Chapter Six.

![Figure 15. List of sub-themes identified in transcripts](image)

Figure 16 outlines a snapshot of a dialogue that the group had over two refection meetings which provides an overview of how these sub-themes evolved.
## Group Dialogue

P1: so when we find ourselves screaming at the kids, is that my divine feminine voicing itself or is that...If the Goddess was speaking right now, what would she be saying?

P2: I like that...

P3: Yeah that’s good.

P2: And also maybe to be conscious when she does speak...

P1: if the Goddess resides within my body, or even just a tiny aspect, how would I respect her...how would I want to have that embraced?

## Group Reflection

P4: so it seems we are looking at it from the body perspective, looking at it from our communication, how would I say this if the Goddess was speaking...?

P5: It also goes hand in hand with that we’ve been literally shut down so it’s the power over...so how do we come up tops from being in a position of power over because usually we are told what to do and all that...

P2: I know that we are shut down, I know because of my own wellbeing, but how do we reclaim it?

P6: When the power resides in the feminine, when we derive the energy from, when the power comes from that feminine aspect or that balanced aspect, how would that be expressed....is that sound like what you’ve been speaking to?

P1: Sounds like you’ve got quite a vocal Goddess.

P4: So basically I’ve had a similar experience as P2 because I chose Minerva...So she’s been quite vocal as well, she got me a bit into trouble not that I care really... I’m kind of saying ok, enough I’ve had enough of this, I’m not going to be bullied by the woman in the 4wd or the cop who’s like 2 meters tall....

P6: So coming back to your week then P4, you found the Goddess, what’s opened up in that research for you...you’re finding your voice...and being heard?

P4: Yeah, let her speak!

P6: That’s the theme this week! But for me, in talking about my week, its been about how that essence has been so denied in me. I am aware of how much is shut down in my own body, voice, experience of being a female really.

Note: P stands for participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 16. Identifying Themes</th>
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<td>P4: so it seems we are looking at it from the body perspective, looking at it from our communication, how would I say this if the Goddess was speaking...?</td>
<td>P2: because my inner Goddess allowed me to raise my voice, and I never raise my voice in a prof session and I had to raise my voice at my coordinator in the week just gone, and that never happens...I have never raised my voice to stick up for myself ever. She was using power over me in the entire conversation I’ve never done, I’ve never ever, ever raised my voice like that!</td>
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<td>P1: if the Goddess resides within my body, or even just a tiny aspect, how would I respect her...how would I want to have that embraced?</td>
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As shown in the first column of Figure 16, our discussion began by inquiring how our embodied experience of the Goddesses may alter our communication style or how we might experience our body differently. As the group reflected on this idea, as denoted in the second column of the table, a new sub-theme was identified around the essence of power in relationship to the Goddess; i.e. what would the power dynamics be in our relationship with others, when we express ourselves from a place of connectedness to the Goddess? In a subsequent reflection meeting after an action phase, shown in column 3, we reported on our experience of connecting with the inner-Goddess. It became evident there was a sense of reconnection with the feminine and the result of that reconnection was demonstrated in the way we spoke and our experience of power from our voice. However, on the flipside of that experience, was the essence of feeling our voice and body as shut-down.

These themes were likened to a map or guide in our inquiry, to help coordinate and ground us in the area we were exploring. As such, the following sections will be grouped by the main and sub themes as discussed, as markers on our journey. We were also able to plan our divergence-convergence strategy based on these themes.

4.4 The Shut-Down Feminine

Our discussion covered a wide range of experiences that linked in to what we felt was the shutdown feminine within. Figure 17 outlines the main areas which we explored that highlighted the experiences of the shutdown feminine.
Figure 17. Voices From Within the Shut-Down Feminine as Identified by the Group
Power, autonomy and vulnerability

Some of the group explored the idea of power and power-over others in terms of how we relate to others and vice-versa, from the place of the shut-down feminine. Lakshmi had initially associated the idea of the shut-down feminine with power-over, particularly to explain how subservient she felt in her relationships:

It also goes hand in hand with that we’ve been literally shut down so it’s the power over...so how do we come up tops from being in a position of power over because usually we are told what to do and all that (Lakshmi, March 9, 2014).

We questioned how power is expressed in a ‘divine feminine way’ and the group responded with ideas such as “not an egotistical way”, “respectful”, “discerning”, “vulnerable” and “a place of autonomy”. Athena observed that her challenge was to remain in her autonomy so that she did not use her power-over others or allow others to dominate her.

Artemis explained how she worked through a conflict in her desire to reconnect with her vulnerable side as opposed to her more domineering side by using artwork. She intuitively used pastels on paper to randomly make marks resembling a forest or jungle. As it transpired, and upon reflection, her drawing (see Figure 18) revealed a symbol of a womb.
This symbol, she reflected, showed her deeper desire to return to her feminine self which she felt she had denied in order to retain a sense of social status and recognition in the materialistic world, i.e. the ivory tower, which she identified as a masculine trait. The symbol of the jungle for her was her wild, authentic self which she experienced as feminine.
Body and Feelings

After a few cycles of reflecting on our own personal actions, the shut-down feminine theme had deepened; we now equated our shut-down self to our sensitive nature including our feelings, our bodies and our views. We were beginning to become aware of the impact this has had on our lives. There was a lot of sadness and grief around the impact of the shut-down emotional self and I regret we did not offer the space for any emotional discharge. Whether this oversight had any impact on the group’s ability to transcend, will remain unknown. Artemis, for instance, discussed her repressed shame around being born a female in her country of birth which stereotypically devalued women and began to acknowledge the impact it had on her sense of self, her body and subsequent adoption of a macho personality as a way of being accepted. She shared this using a collage she had developed that demonstrated aspects of shame within herself (see p.64). She explained how she had found so many different references in a single day’s newspaper that mirrored her own personal experience of shame in her femininity. As her understanding of her shame deepened, she proceeded to make a larger piece of painting which evoked a new experience for her. This felt like an immense process to acknowledge and address however there was no space or time to offer any form of emotional catharsis to support one another through these personal issues.

Minerva’s action was to look at how her strength in her voice was influenced by social constructions surrounding femininity. However as she considered Artemis’s discussions on the stigma of the female body, she too became aware of her ‘invisible-ness beyond her voice’. She said:

I am stuck with a feminine body, my body is invisible to me because it only serves others. People treat you based on how you look, so I shut down my body (Minerva, March 30, 2014).

Minerva claimed that unlike Artemis who chose to become more ‘macho’ in appearance and expression to compensate her views of an inferior female-self, Minerva simply chose to be ‘no-body’. Interestingly, Minerva explained how this invisible nature extended into other aspects such as not claiming credit for her research, in that she had been happy for her research findings to be used by others without people acknowledging her contribution. In shutting her body down, had she also shut down her self-worth?
Aphrodite explained how in viewing her body as a temple she had finally given herself permission to take the time to admire the beauty of her body when she noticed a lump on her breast. Her doctor reassured her she had nothing to worry but to remain aware and to take note of changes to her body. The group concluded that the impact of the shut-down feminine could cost us our lives if we did not stop and take notice and bring greater awareness to our bodies.

For Athena, her shut-down self, presented itself as anxiety and depression. She explained:

I was feeling my feminine was not valued (emotions, body), I felt my role of mother was undervalued and isolating, I felt disconnected from my physical/sexual being - my body had to be whipped into submission after child birth. My body was my husbands, not mine. I shut down and ignored my feelings and emotions and I stopped speaking my mind and expressing my viewpoints (Athena, March 30, 2014).

As the group discussed Athena’s experiences of depression, the conversation segued into how the medical system is quick to suppress our feelings of depression and anxiety with medication, rather than encouraging a deeper inward process. We discussed how much our inquiry had revealed about our inner experience of our self and that swallowing a pill would deprive us of the richness of this deep inward journey. So it seems even the medical system perpetuates shutting down the body and feeling self.

Aphrodite was also exploring a Goddess-invocation exercise when she was confronted by an activity that had her reflect on ‘how she acts in the world, the services she desires and how the Goddess challenges her’. Aphrodite explained how she was conflicted by her opinion of her feeling self which she felt she had to suppress or make less because she felt that people did not validate or place any value in the emotional body:

I’m embarrassed of my emotions – who do I think I am? There is no measure of my emotions as valid (Aphrodite, March 30, 2014).

The group concluded that just like the medical fraternity, society attaches very little value to emotions and expressions of feelings and women particularly shut down their authentic feeling self so that they will be taken seriously.

Artemis also reflected on the theme on shame around menstruation that kept recurring for her. She spoke about a news article condemning a tampon advertisement as ‘filth’. 
She was surprised to acknowledge how her own opinion of femininity was entangled in that idea of ‘filth’ and so it dawned upon her that she needed to redevelop her relationship with menstruation – her femininity – before she could embrace social activism from an empowered place.

The shut-down feminine thread was very entrenched in my own life. I shared with the group how I felt exposed and embarrassed when the invitation for this inquiry was first published on Facebook, as it had meant my friends and family would know I was researching the Divine Feminine and there was nowhere to hide. Athena aptly commented:

Because it is scary, because what would people think, how would I be treated, would I make my way in the world if I’m like this, who’s going to take me seriously, will it impact on my ability to get work? So, there’s very good reasons why the feminine got shut down (Athena, March 9, 2014).

So it seemed that our repressed shame in our femininity translated into our experiences of power either as dominant or submissive, experiences of our feelings as unworthy, depressed and anxious and our body as invisible or ‘filth’.

4.4.1 Signals to Reconnect

From the discussion, as each of us became aware of our shut-down feminine we also became aware of our desire to reclaim or awaken it. We looked at relevant signals or markers that highlighted the need to take action, particularly when considering the impact of the shut-down feminine within (see Figure 19).
For some of us, these signals presented as a feeling in our body, as dreams or, for some in our relationships. For example, during the action phase, Aphrodite began to experience digestion issues, whilst Artemis and Athena felt a state of fuzziness and lethargy as though they needed deep rest. Lakshmi spoke of her experience of guilt in claiming space to be present in the inquiry, once again highlighting the challenges in turning toward our own personal process.

We explored the link between these somatic experiences and our inquiry and concluded that these signals were an invitation for each of us to explore aspects that we had begun to bring awareness to; unfortunately due to time constraints, we did not explore these ideas of somatic or psychic triggers any further.

We also agreed that our dreams had become chaotic in nature. One of the women shared a dream she had immediately after a reflection meeting where she was on flat ground facing an approaching tsunami with nowhere to run. Another woman shared her dream about walking in circles. Someone else dreamt that a dark feminine figure approached her, but the woman felt unprepared and said she had no courage to face this figure. Although the group did not jointly reflect on the possible symbolic meaning of these dreams, we were beginning to realise how the inquiry had agitated us.
Three of the women experienced car accidents during the inquiry and although we did not arrive at any conclusions about this co-incidence, we wondered how much of this chaos was a signal to go further inward.

The following is some of the check-in feedback at the fourth reflection meeting:

I have had an edgy time, quite anxious, so much unknown, [...] trying to slow things down and to be aware of things...and I've got to trust that everything will unfold (personal communication, April 27, 2014).

I just wish I knew what this means, I feel like I need to let go off something but I don’t know what (personal communication, April 27, 2014).

I feel trepidation, not knowing, feel like I am coming back to a deeper place or am I walking round in a circle? (personal communication, April 27, 2014).

These reflections can be likened to the “voices in the chrysalis” in which someone on a transformative journey of self, is undergoing an ego death before experiencing themselves in a new way, as symbolised by a butterfly emerging from the chrysalis (Woodman, 1985, p. 71). Although as a group we did not name it as time in a chrysalis, nor did we recognise it as a transitioning time, each of us was aware of being on the threshold of birthing something new. So it was no surprise that our next action phase was mainly focused on how to awaken and reclaim the divine feminine within. But first, we embarked on a group ritual which is analysed next.
4.5 Ritual to Acknowledge the Divine Feminine

We did not plan to participate in a group ritual but in typical Dionysian style, Aphrodite invited us to join in a Goddess-invocation at the time of the full moon in April. Everyone except Athena was able to participate.

The idea of a full moon ritual conjures images of moon-worship or Wiccan traditions. To ensure we did not comply with any form of tradition or belief system which did not honour our personal autonomy in the ritual, we attempted to co-create the process in which each of us would contribute in our own way to the overall design of the ritual. Unfortunately, much of this discussion was had via email and there wasn’t an opportunity to co-reflect on what we were intending to do for the night. In fact, none of us reflected on the significance of the moon in our email discussions so there was a level of naivety and clumsiness in our organising but a deep trust that we were responding intuitively to something innate in us. There was a mood of quiet excitement as we planned to be together in this way.

It was no surprise that on the night of the full moon, when we all gathered at Hestia’s caravan by the beach, we instinctively gathered in a circle and expressed our gratitude for
the opportunity to be together as a community of women, honouring our deep instinctual selves and acknowledged our personal experience of the divine feminine. The full moon ritual opened up a new awareness of the power of community and honouring the feminine. Each of us was touched and deeply moved by this experience and very grateful to Aphrodite for the opportunity to expand our experiential knowing. We celebrated with chocolate cake, pomegranate juice and shared stories together. We decided thereon to continue to meet at full moons by way of continuing our journey in reclaiming the feminine, but more so as a community of women.

4.6 Reclaiming the Divine Feminine

It seemed that for each of us who became aware of aspects of the shut-down feminine within, we also began to inquire how we would reclaim what we had lost. We found as we explored our deeper experiences of shame, of body-consciousness and the impact on our feelings that we also began to notice new emerging experiences, particularly as we stayed present to our connection to the Goddess. Figure 21 displays an overview of the key discussion points referring to what it meant to reclaim our divine feminine.
For some of us, it was a process of returning to our deeper experience of womanhood, for others a new experience of activism began to stir. The process of reclaiming the divine feminine within was not about achieving a particular goal or outcome; rather it was about a process. Our process of reclaiming the feminine would continue long after the completion of this inquiry. At the fifth reflection meeting, we used art and journey maps to express our findings in terms of what it meant for each of us to reclaim our feminine.

For some of us, it meant integrating our masculine-self to experience a sense of balance in our life. For some, it was about holding the body as a temple and honouring the feeling-self and experiencing vulnerability in our relationships. For others, it was reclaiming a
feminine heritage that empowered and grounded us in our feminine self, and reclaimed our womanhood as an experience of beauty and sensuality.

4.7 Closing the Inquiry

The inquiry came to a close May 25, 2014 when we had our final reflection meeting over brunch at my home. In response to the question, “What does the divine feminine stand for?”, each of us created a by-line (see Figure 22) to represent our conclusion.

![Diagram of by-lines](image)

**Figure 22.** What the divine feminine stands for: Participants’ bylines

We also reflected on our journeying together and shared our gratitude for the process. We reflected on current affairs in New Zealand and particularly the challenges we face as a nation in honouring the feminine. Our discussion led us to some questions: How can we honour the inner-feminine of our counselling clients when the medical model is driven by financial imperatives for quick results? How can the feminine express herself when we are overly focused on achieving profit-driven results? These questions felt like the beginning of the next stage of the inquiry however no commitment was made to continue with this thread of discussion, as we prepared to close the inquiry.

I thanked the group for their commitment and participation in the inquiry and looked forward to the continuing of our journey together.
4.8 Summary of Findings

We began the inquiry by asking: “What does the divine feminine mean to us?” Through the action and reflection stages, our focus centred mostly on the understanding of the divine feminine in terms of our identity and our experience of ourselves. We became more aware of how we experienced our femininity, womanhood, our bodies and feeling-self. We also associated the inner-feminine as a way of being. In this way, our understanding of the divine feminine was defined as a relationship with an ‘inner-feminine’. The inner-feminine was understood as follows:

- As shutdown or where we did not have a relationship with our inner-feminine
- As a search for balance with the inner-masculine
- As an inner divinity
- As an aspect of self and experiencing it in terms of how we spoke and our personal power

For those who inquired into the divine feminine from a spiritual context, the inner-feminine was about mirroring the expression of the divine, experienced as inner-divinity. Others found a new experience of the divine in a collective consciousness. This experience was strengthened through group ritual which inspired us toward a new way of activism. All our experiences were influenced and shaped to some degree by social constructions of the divine feminine.

The outcomes generated as part of this inquiry included a series of steps and themes summarised in Figure 23.
Within each point of our inquiry, as detailed in Figure 23, we began to understand how the divine feminine shapes our perspectives on our autonomy, femininity, womanhood and experience of activism.

Towards the end of our inquiry, our focus began to shift from an inward self-reflective journey toward an outward expression of the divine feminine, particularly around activism. This journey resulted in transformative outcomes for us as discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

INQUIRY OUTCOMES: RECLAIMING THE DIVINE FEMININE

What is of primary and intrinsic value is the ongoing process of being transformed and of exercising transformative skill. The propositional, conceptual knowledge gained about the universe is consequent upon this process and is of secondary and instrumental value in refining and honing this skill (Heron, 1998, p. 126).

5. Chapter Overview

This chapter is primarily about outcomes, including what we each experienced through the process of inquiry. We found that the process of inquiring in itself provided opportunities for transformation. In particular, the sharing process in the inquiry deepened our knowing during the action phase, and we experienced a shift toward reclaiming what was shut-down. Through presenting evidence of our experience through the inquiry, I report on these outcomes. I conclude this chapter by arguing against critical analysis of these outcomes.

5.1 Inquiry Outcomes

In our inquiry, we identified that it was initially through the informative outcomes where we progressively came to understand the meaning and influence of the divine feminine in our lives, in particular in our understanding of our femininity and autonomy. These informative outcomes are represented as our propositional understanding and presentational knowing of our experiences in this inquiry. These informative outcomes established the foundation for new skills to emerge or begin to gestate.

For some of the inquirers, their propositional understanding very quickly translated into practical action expressed as new communication and activism skills, which is fundamentally a demonstration of transformation of being. Heron argues that practical outcomes, have primacy over the propositional outcomes (1996, p. 104). I believe the nature of our inquiry can be likened to a gestational process; the seeds were sown in the inquiry process in the form of informative outcomes and the transformation and growth of a new way of being will continue to sprout for each of us over time.
5.1.1 Informative Outcomes

Propositional Understanding on Autonomy, Femininity & Activism

The informative outcomes from this inquiry generated a more intimate understanding of our experiences relating to femininity and womanhood, and deepened our understanding of balance, solidarity and vulnerability. The inquiry into the divine feminine revealed the following to us:

- By connecting to our inner experience of the divine feminine, we move from a place of separateness to a place of inter-connectedness and solidarity
  - This interconnectedness was experienced as group energy. For example, we found that by signing a petition to the Bring-Back-Our Girls-Campaign\(^\text{11}\); that we were immediately connected to the cause, to all those who supported it and even to the 230 kidnapped girls. This experiential realm could not be expressed through use of words, except that each of us who experienced the group energy felt a deeper sense of solidarity and a connection as we brought our awareness to the girls and to the cause. We concluded that this experience affirmed our interconnectedness with each other.

  - Athena through her process of inward journeying using the qualities of Goddess Athena, developed a connection to a wider worldview and her interdependence to that connection. She came to see the strength in being detached yet connected to the people around her and to herself. Athena also reflected how the image she had drawn at the beginning of the inquiry (see Figure 12) had transformed; by reclaiming the divine feminine Athena’s worldview changed as she saw the interconnectedness of who she was with the wider world, opening up a new way of relating.

\(^{11}\) On April 14, 230 School girls were kidnapped from the Chibok Government Secondary School by Boko Haram Terrorists in Nigeria. All 230 are still missing. The “BringBackOurGirls” Campaign was started on social media to bring awareness and put pressure on the Nigerian government to take action.
• The experience of the divine feminine brings us into balance, i.e. to reclaim our experience of the divine feminine, we also reclaim our experience of the divine masculine

  o Minerva reflected on her political views which she felt were extreme. However a new awareness that came about from working with the masculine qualities of Goddess Minerva had challenged her views, particularly of her body, her voice and her activism, bringing balance to her views (see Figure 24).

![Figure 24. Minerva’s reflections of her journey toward balance from reclaiming her divine feminine](image)

  o Minerva spoke about drawing from the wisdom in her feminine body and thus bringing visibility to herself in a humble and grounded way. This wisdom she said she was drawn from an integrated mindfulness from her mind-heart-womb and demonstrated in terms of her balanced, collaborative activism. It seems for all of us, the theme of reclaiming our inward relationship with the divine feminine, also opened up a new relationship to the greater collective.

• Reclaiming the divine feminine means reclaiming the power in our femininity

  o By reclaiming a relationship with her inner feminine, Lakshmi became more aware of the times where she was being influenced by other people’s
opinions of her. By reclaiming her autonomy, she recognised her own sense of self-worth and value. In being mindful from a moment-to-moment perspective of the impact of people’s opinions of her and her own opinion of herself, she honoured her divine feminine. Lakshmi’s process helped deepen her experience of her femininity expressed as a beautiful image of a flower which she drew (see Figure 25) and described it as “a flowering of who I am as a woman”:

![Figure 25. Lakshmi's Drawing: Journey towards reclaiming the feminine](image)

Our discussions have helped me to discover and rediscover the many layers in me. Coming together as a whole person and winnowing out what is not needed, it’s an opening, I am a prize to be claimed, not to be given away freely. I am divine and reclaiming that part of me that is divine. Even though I thought I was masculine [in nature], but underneath there was no power. So in essence it’s come down to reclaiming my power with being feminine, with being ok with being feminine and finding the softness in my strength. Its been quite a ride reflecting on what everybody in the group says, feeds, reverberates in me (Lakshmi, May 18, 2014).

- Artemis found that before she could advocate for change based on the divine feminine qualities, she had to first reclaim her relationship with her femininity:

If I want to be comfortable talking about feminine values in the context of the farming-issue, I need to get comfortable with my own discomfort around myself
being a female and my own womanhood. And this week it has been all about my experience of shame in my femininity and how it lives in me, how I’ve seen it live in others and how it continues to get perpetuated in everyday situations. I see how much power I lose in my womanhood simply because of this shame that I carry (Artemis, March 22, 2014).

- By bringing visibility to our experience of the divine feminine, we are taking a stand for the empowerment of women
  
  o Hestia summed up her actions (see Figure 26) as a way to freely express the divine feminine by taking a stand for her own education despite her family’s resistance.

![Figure 26. Hestia's reflections on reclaiming the divine feminine](image)

- She spoke passionately about how crucial it was to find the strength in the voice of the divine feminine and courage to bring visibility to what she has to say and express. She also expressed how this could be done by playing an active part in supporting climate change initiatives, an eco-spirituality activism.

- The process of reclaiming the divine feminine includes reclaiming the feeling self and the emotional self
Through experiencing power in being vulnerable, as an experience of the
divine feminine, we give up power-over others and we reclaim validity in our
emotions so we are free to express our vulnerability. Artemis explored the
quality of vulnerability as a divine feminine expression of power, but what
she came to realise during an action phase, was in becoming vulnerable, she
had to come into a new relationship with the idea of power-over:

It’s easier for me, to like show up as strong and you know, have this image of
being this person who is strong and in control all the time when everyone else is
falling apart, I’ll be the one who remains reliable. So, this way I can avoid being
vulnerable and I’ll never show my weakness. It keeps me in power-mode. If I
showed weakness, then I won’t be in charge anymore. But I don’t want to be in
charge anymore, I just want to be able to cry freely (Artemis, March 22, 2014).

Artemis concluded that by avoiding being vulnerable, she found herself
feeling power over others.

Working through the Goddess exercise helped Aphrodite to recognise the
impact of shutting down her emotions. She explained, “Expressing my
authentic emotions, even when it means crying at the most inopportune
moment, like when I am watching the TV show Lassie or speaking to my
supervisors, it connects me to that consciousness” (Aphrodite, March 22,
2014). Through her emotions, she feels connected to her divinity.

Presentational Outcomes

The presentational outcomes were art-based and were predominantly used as a medium
to process ideas generated in the inquiry. For Artemis in particular, art-making was a
powerful vehicle to work through her issues with shame, and ultimately her relationship to
the divine feminine. Her presentational outcomes described her process in reclaiming the
female body and in doing so, her womanhood. This experience altered her understanding
of the divine feminine.

• The process of reclaiming the divine feminine includes the body

  Artemis, over the course of two action phases, had explored her experience
  of shame in her body and menstruation by working on an oil painting. This
painting gave her the space to freely explore and experiment her deeper understanding of herself. She painted intuitively and was very surprised at how much the image had evoked for her a new experience of strength which she saw as the *power of menstruation*. She named the painting The Menstruating Woman (see Figure 27). The painting helped to re-establish a new relationship to Artemis’s body and experience of menstruation.

Figure 27. Painting by Artemis: The Menstruating Woman
Artemis explained the painting:

That painting has been very evocative – it seems to call on something rather innate in me, quite wild and sexual and oozing with power and love. She seems to be menstruating and pregnant at the same time. Somehow when I look at that painting I am connected to an experience which seems beyond my physical being yet I seem grounded, it connects to people, to humanity but also to my female body. I don’t know what the symbol above the woman is about [in the painting], I just sort of painted it not knowing what it was...I don’t know maybe I will in time (Artemis, April 27, 2014).

- The process of reclaiming the divine feminine requires courage

  - Artemis also shared a painting at the end of the inquiry (see Figure 28) regarding her process of reclaiming her divine feminine.
She described how her painting revealed her personal fear (represented by the woman with a baby on her lap), of looking toward her inner divinity (the image of the woman in blue) and how this fear when transcended, births the divine child (image of the baby on the lap) who is reaching out to her connection to her divinity. Artemis described how her process of exploring her shutdown feminine was about facing that fear. In doing so, the process opened the pathway to reclaim her experience of the divine feminine which has been deeply transformative; from experiencing menstruation as filth and
shameful to finding power in it, from experiencing power-over to acknowledging vulnerability as powerful.

- There was a lot of personal process and courage required to truly address and grieve the shut-down feminine and for Artemis, the potential for transformative action is now waiting to come forth.

5.1.2 Transformative Outcomes from Inquiry

These transformative outcomes are expressed by way of our ‘experiential knowing’ and demonstrated through practical action.

Experiential

The Goddess exploration evoked a way of being that was transformative. How did the process of identifying a Goddess grab us and have us re-calibrate our voice and sense of self-worth? Why did it evoke such a strong resonance for Minerva and Athena who were both able to draw on their warrior qualities and allow themselves to be heard in a different way, especially as they were both atheists? How did this process transform their experience of themselves, such that they were able to demonstrate a new way of responding, with assertion and confidence in their voice and sense of self?

For Athena, she reconnected with an experience that was latent in her psyche, like those memory seeds, and in reconnecting she was moved; her being transformed. Heron and Reason (2008) explain “The threat to quality [experiential] knowing here is that co-researchers create a defensive inquiry which guards against the discovery of the novel and different, and which reproduces in encounter the habitual social and personal taken-for-granted” (p. 378). The fact that Athena and Minerva engaged with this experiential process demonstrated how they extended themselves in being present to the experience and was willing to push the boundaries in terms of experiential knowing.

Figure 29 illustrates each of our personal reflections in researching the Goddess. Although this was meant to be an informative process, each of us experienced transformative outcomes.
This is She!
Autonomy
Warrior-self
Moment-by-moment awareness
Relational or Independent

Love thy Enemy!
Balanced activism away from extremist views
Shared suffering of humanity

Hear my voice!
A new voice emerging
Belief in self to be heard
Communicate with love & respect

Your body is my temple!
Embrace my feminine lineage
Embody my divinity
Visible

Figure 29. Meeting the Goddess: Group’s reflection on how the Goddess transformed our understanding of self
**Practical Outcomes**

Some of the more practical outcomes generated from this inquiry included new communication skills and ways of being in relationship to others. The main impetus for change was from the embodied experience of our Goddess qualities – when the participant was in touch with her Goddess qualities, her communication skills were transformed. For instance, Athena’s experiential outcome on embodying her Goddess, is seen in the way she now communicates.

- When the Goddess is experienced as an inner voice, we speak our truth with love, respect and courage
  
  - Athena was able to articulate this embodied experience of Goddess Athena as a cathartic:

    That’s my inner Goddess speaking, with love, respect and it was moment by moment, and I could feel it, with my daughter who was sitting there watching: mum’s got my back, mum’s not arguing, mum’s not angry, mums not using bad words, mums just...There was Athena (Athena, March 22, 2014).

  - She explained how her experience of autonomy meant she was calm, mindful and present in a conversation she had with her husband, one which she said would have normally been full of anger and resentment. Essentially, the practical skills she brought to her conversation, as inspired by Goddess Athena, included, love, respect and being present to the moment despite the contentious context of the conversation.

  - Additionally, Minerva said she could draw upon those warrior strengths in a discussion with her employer around her work contract. Finding resonance with Goddess Minerva, helped her to find reassurance in her ability and courage to stand up for herself, regardless of the potential loss of employment:

    I’ve decided I’m not going to shut up, I’m done shutting up, [...] so I went to see [my employer] and said I’m not signing this contract, I’m not being paid, do you want me to go and talk to the department of labour about it? (Minnerva, March 22, 2014)
For Minnerva, the practical skill she integrated was courage in being heard, which she drew from the warrior quality of Goddess Athena.

- Reclaiming the divine feminine as an embodied expression means honouring the female body
  
  o Artemis found herself claiming an aspect of being a woman which she had denied in herself. In practical terms, this was expressed as:

  Caring for my body, having greater empathy for other women who struggle with their body...I find I can walk alongside them and really hear their struggle because I can appreciate my own struggle with my femininity, I find a gentleness in responding to other women now, who complain about their body, rather than judging and criticising them. Feels like the power of menstruation translates into a loving way of being (Artemis, May 18, 2014).

- Activism based on the divine feminine is sacred and balanced, and in collaboration with others through an experience of unity
  
  o One of the participants demonstrated the practical knowledge she gained from this inquiry by engaging in a new form of balanced activism. She demonstrated this balanced activism by inspiring the principal of an Auckland college (boys' high school) to take a stand for women's right to education, with regard to the kidnapped Nigerian girls. As a direct result of her conversation with the Principal, the College played an active part in developing a large banner (see Figure 30) to show their solidarity and published an article in their school magazine to promote awareness of the plight of these girls.

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12 To respect and maintain her confidentiality, I have removed any reference that may indicate who this participant is.
We men need to understand that injustice against women still exists in our own society and that we are the perpetrators of this. It will be so good if at some time in the near future the Nigerian school girls are returned to their families. But, in a sense, this campaign will have been a failure unless we men realistically address injustice against women in our own society and work to ‘bring back our own girls’ to the dignified position they deserve, especially in employment and family life. By all means let’s shout out for justice in Nigeria but, at the same time, let’s also start raising our voices for justice for women in our own country (Auckland boys college, n.d)\textsuperscript{13}.

Interestingly others in the group also reflected on how their approach to activism had been transformed as a result of this inquiry. The common theme for all of us was that we felt connected not just to the cause that we were supporting, but to all those linked in to it. Most of us immediately signed petitions on the “BringBackOurGirls” campaign and some of us began to discuss other ways to address this issue, such as using Facebook to create and promote a page to raise awareness. Rather than feeling alone,

\textsuperscript{13} This quote was taken from an article published in a school magazine. To respect the confidentiality of the participant, the name of the magazine and school has been omitted.
insignificant and unable to make a difference, we felt connected to what we referred to as the ‘group-energy’ of the cause.

- Aphrodite reflected on ideas of a gentler form of activism that did not include taking an extreme stance but action that had her use her strengths from a moment-to-moment awareness:

It was very interesting after our session, I felt strongly about what is happening and having a voice, I am not an activist, I never have been but what I’ve taken from what we’ve talked about, it’s that quiet activism, it doesn’t have to be the extremes, it doesn’t have to be so out there, I can have my own role, like Lakshmi got a women’s meditation group to do a prayer [for the Nigerian girls], signing those petitions, and the other one on animal testing. I don’t know what to do but this is something I can do. So I felt really moved to taking some quiet action. For me this journey has been about the awareness, its seeing it in the moment, in the present, it’s not what I’ve done or what I want to do but what I am doing right now, and seeing the resonance and value behind that, in one breath. Bring it on, this quiet fearlessness, it’s the confidence, it’s the divine power I’m drawing on to do, to be, to express and experience (Aphrodite, May 18, 2014).

To summarise, Figure 31 shows the key elements that each of us agreed, describes a way of activism based on the divine feminine.
Although ‘Grounded and Humility’ were new attributes that were not part of our research cycling, we concluded they were part of bringing a balanced perspective and working collaboratively.

5.1.3 Influence of Age, Gender, Ethnicity and Spiritual Beliefs

The age-group of the women in this inquiry ranged between 40 to 60 years. In terms of how it shaped the inquiry actions, the phase of life we found ourselves in, in particular the impact of biological experiences regarding menstruation and menopause was apparent in our developing relationship to our feminine. For instance, Aphrodite noted, “What does it mean, if menstruating is the mark of femininity or womanhood, [...] when menopause begins, do we embrace that femininity in a different way so does that allow the divine to come through more?” (Aphrodite, March 1, 2014). The impact of age-group with regard to our biological understandings was considerable in the shaping of the actions we took to explore our experiences of the divine feminine.
How does being a woman influence our actions and thus our findings? Interestingly, Maguire (2008) notes how it is more common for women than men to share their experiences of gender and how it influences their sense of self.

To begin with, it was through our shared womanhood where trust and camaraderie was initially established in our group. The influence of gender was also evident in the nature of actions that we took to explore our experiences of the divine feminine. Some of these actions were based on exploring our biological experiences of our bodies, as noted in the influence of the age-group, and some actions were based on our roles as wife, mother or as a female employee. However, interestingly, the outcomes from these actions were evidenced through a way of being or an attitudinal shift, not so much about gender per se. For instance, Lakshmi’s interest in this inquiry was located in her personal experience of what it meant to be feminine and so her actions included exploring the way she dressed, the way she related to her body, the way she mothered which were seemingly gender-based actions. Yet what Lakshmi discovered in this process was how much she was influenced by other people’s opinions of her and how that affected her autonomy and sense of self-worth which shifted her point of reference from gender to a way of being.

The group’s ethnic backgrounds were varied and it became very evident how our personal beliefs affected our choice of actions and then our personal reflection on it – our spiritual beliefs influenced our experiential knowing. On one hand, Aphrodite was keen to explore Goddess invocation exercises that were linked with her pagan beliefs. Athena, on the other hand, reflected on her actions as ideas on her personality and attitudes, rather than being about a divinity within. The balance between respecting one’s beliefs and holding the group’s democratic spirit is a fragile relationship as we found in our inquiry. As Rothberg says, “In contemporary spiritual settings, there frequently remain hierarchical social structures and authoritarian relationships often at odds with the contemporary democratic spirit of inquiry” (as cited in Heron, 2000, para.9). Generally, I don’t believe we experienced any discord as a result of our various beliefs however we may not have adequately teased out this issue (see Chapter Six, Unaware Projections).
5.1.4 Additional Outcomes: Participants’ Feedback

I have collated some of the responses from a questionnaire that I sent out to the group regarding what they felt they achieved through the inquiry. I asked: It has been three months since we completed the inquiry. Can you describe or list what the main outcomes were for you from this inquiry? For example, is there anything that you do differently now as a result of this inquiry?

Oh boy! I do everything differently it seems...I see my jobs - I have got 4 jobs at the moment - differently (I have taken a new position in an NGO rather than looking for a counselling job.) I realised, thanks to the inquiry, that my heart is leaning towards activism rather than healing/counselling. I have discovered 'sacred activism' at the end of the inquiry; it is a path I am moving towards. Practically, I am more assertive in my teaching position: with the students, the staff and above all the administration. I raise my boys differently with more confidence: they will be the men I want to see in the XXI century.

Absolutely! The pace of my life seems to have slowed and I feel surer of myself and have more courage to speak. Social justice has always been important to me and this inquiry has brought this facet of my being back to the forefront of my thinking. I am speaking up for myself and now feel I can speak on behalf of my children and my clients; in fact other people in general. I am able to speak even though it can be difficult at times.

I think the main thing for me is it has encouraged me to live more consciously. I have also become very aware of my critical voice and I am learning the impact of this. I really miss the regular connection with this amazing group of women and the opportunity to talk so freely and openly about issues that are so meaningful including; our relationship with ourselves and with others, what it means to be a woman, awareness of our bodies and the clothes we choose to wear, having a voice and taking a stand, our spiritual and/or religious experience of the divine and everything else in-between. It is an opportunity that rarely presents itself in our busy lives and I have felt the loss of not meeting on a regular basis since the inquiry has finished.

Being a participant in this process has left an indelible mark in my life. The opportunity presented at a very critical moment in my own personal life where I had come to long for the company of likeminded people with a view to conversing and elaborating on the feminine principle, the divine feminine aspect and how the divine feminine expresses itself in and through us, and most importantly how to understand and come to terms with my own divine feminine.

Through our discussions, I have come to accept myself as primarily the 'mother', and own this energy with confidence. Before the inquiry I was confused as to what it meant to be 'feminine'. I have since accepted that the 'goddess' is my
own self, and that this divine aspect may manifest as a maiden (playful and sensuous), the mother (nurturing) and the Matriarch (the wise and in service to the world). Perhaps the most important change is that I am no longer confused about my femininity nor afraid to make decisions or take actions from what I call a 'feminine perspective'. This is not to say that I have disowned my 'masculine' or 'doing' persona, rather I have incorporated the feminine ('being' self) such that there is much better balance in my life.

5.2 Critical or Reflective Analysis

There are challenges in developing an academic piece of work, such as this, while staying true to the underlying philosophy of the co-operative inquiry methodology. For instance, as Bruning (2009) observed in her research:

Co-operative inquiry is not a process which is meant to be analysed. There are no theories or hypotheses to prove or disprove [...]. The complexities of this were evident when it came to writing up the thesis, as critical analysis is a major component at a master’s degree level. In this thesis the critical analysis has been replaced with a reflective analysis which was done as a meta-reflection by the researcher after going over the material following the group inquiry sessions (p. 1).

I too face the same challenge in writing this chapter in particular, where I am expected to provide evidence that I, as ‘researcher’, am able to demonstrate critical analysis, as per the requirements of a thesis at master’s level. To critically analyse means;

- to interpret or [...] to break a subject (such as a segment of a work of art or, in other fields, a culture, person, or event) into its constituent parts, examine these components, and offer a meaning--or alternative meanings--about each (Jewell, 2013, para. 4).

During the process of analysing and providing alternative meanings to the data, the researcher is required to compile and refer to scholarly articles or texts to support their meaning-making. Yet, the analysis happened within the inquiry as part of a collaborative effort and the outcomes have been established. The outcomes themselves are evidence that the true nature of human inquiry lies in the transformation of our beings (Rowan, 1981). What would critical analysis prove or disprove, and how would it validate or invalidate actions, that have touched, moved and inspired our beings? I would submit that such analysis is counter-intuitive to the process of participative inquiry because co-operative inquiry places human beings at the centre of research, opposing anything that appears to dehumanise or trivialise people and their situations (Heron, 1996), including
their contribution. Furthermore, I would also submit that an evaluation of a report based on critical analysis rather than the transformation that it purports to have achieved, only further de-potentiates the feminine principle – the very premise this research aims to reclaim and bring meaning to. I critically analyse this argument next.

Co-operative inquiry is based on a notion that the monopoly of knowledge traditionally held by academia is replaced by the emancipatory approach of enabling of ordinary people to “regain the capacity to create their own knowledge in the service of their practical purposes” (Reason, 1999, p. 207). Reason also argues that co-operative inquiry calls for a paradigm shift from a “modernist worldview based on a positivist philosophy and a value system” (Reason, 1999, p. 207). It is this value system that continues to perpetuate the silencing and the devaluing of feminine principles seen in the validation of masculine objectification over the feminine, resulting in epistemological quests being given priority over existentialism (Sleeman, 2007).

The feminine is about process and not about outcomes (Adams & Duncan, 2003; Sullivan, 1989). Co-operative inquiry affirms and enables the process (Reason, 2000). Furthermore, as Sullivan (1989) says, “The product of the feminine immersion in life is experiential knowledge [...] called feminine consciousness wisdom” (p. 24). This wisdom resides as an expression of a way of being. Conducting analysis on a way of being, expressed within the context of sharing and participating amongst a group of people, would imply that there is less value offered to the group outcomes. In this way, traditional academic practice which demands the researcher stands outside to analyse findings about the subjects, runs contrary to the way of the feminine. The way of the feminine is through dynamic relationship and participation (Mahdi et al., 1987). The feminine is experienced when there is an interaction with “engagement, enlivenment and enlightenment”, where we are explicitly participating in a given reality, and “tacitly participating in the whole multidimensional field” (Heron, 2006, p. 53). In this field we are open to the reality between us, to “the divinity that is an ever-present flame of unity here and now where we are” (Heron, 2006, p. 54). Thus, I assert that it is within this field of inquiry which we co-created, where the experiential outcomes were generated; namely the domain of the feminine.
Engaging in this academic form of critical analysis would also imply we are making conclusions about another person’s experiences without their involvement or input. Worse still, it could also imply that we did not confer respect to the group’s own conclusions. They would have been “denied an opportunity for increased self and peer generated knowledge of their human condition” (Heron, 1996, p. 207).

Conversely, one may argue that providing additional analysis on the topic of inquiry does not devalue or invalidate the findings identified by the group, rather that it stands to support the findings from the group inquiry, as was demonstrated by Bruning (2009) in her thesis. Furthermore, our inquiry findings also demonstrated how having balance is an integral aspect of reclaiming the divine feminine in contrast to taking an extreme or oppositional position. Moreover Reason and Rowan (1981) explain how the paradigm of participative knowing, on which co-operative inquiry is based, is itself birthed from a synthesis of naive inquiry and orthodox research. They loosely refer to it as objectively subjective; research that on one hand respects the “systematic, rigorous search for truth” (Reason & Rowan, 1981, p. xiii), yet on the other hand does not deny the validity in human experience. In that way, I believe the literature review chapter offers such a balance, bringing objectivity to this subjective process of inquiry and additionally offering some critical analysis of what the literature proposes.

Another argument against critical analysis of research outcomes is based in the axiology of a co-operative inquiry. The defining characteristic of the inquiry paradigm is the axiology which serves to understand: “What is intrinsically valuable in human life; in particular what sort of knowledge, if any, is intrinsically valuable?” (Reason, 1999, p. 9). The mere commitment to human flourishing in itself is a political act which is intrinsically worthwhile (Heron, 1996); worthy participative worldview that Fals Borda (2004) maintains is about changing the world. As evidenced by the participants’ feedback, the outcomes we achieved in this inquiry were nothing short of human flourishing. Further critical analysis will not contribute to our experiences of transformation.

The case against critical analysis carried out by the researcher on their subjects, can also be argued from an ontological perspective. The ontological question is what “one’s world view is and how this shapes what can be known about the world and indeed what it means
to be a full human being” (Somekh & Lewin, 2004, p. 66). The ontology of a subjective-objective reality in a co-operative inquiry is explained as a world in which each co-researcher draws on their own idiosyncratic ways to reflect and explore the inquiry yet in coming together to share, collate, agree and disagree, create a practice with varied perspectives (Heron, 1996). In our inquiry, we shaped and created our reality within our intersubjective agreements and disagreements on the definitions of the divine feminine. From ideas of gender, womanhood, activism and spirituality, our subjective-objective ontology was expansive yet immersed in our direct experience of the personal and in relationship to a wider awareness.

Heron (1996) states, “It is about how the different experiences do and do not overlap, and about how this mix of diversity and unity articulates more or less the inquirers’ subjective-objective reality” (p. 175). Reason (1999) explains that in a participative worldview, what emerges as reality, is the creative output of the interaction of the given cosmos and the way the mind engages with it. Although I was involved in creating that reality with the group, attempting to critically analyse this intersubjective reality outside the inquiry is a sure way of misrepresenting that reality – my personal preferences and values would override that of the individuals in the group. This preference is evidenced in the types of literature I reviewed in Chapter Two; these do not represent the collective ideas generated in the group more than it does my personal interests.

An epistemological perspective essentially is a study into the nature of knowledge as well as its foundations and the assumptions made to comprehend this knowledge (Somekh & Lewin, 2004). As an argument against critical analysis, and further proclaiming validity in our collaborative effort in the meaning-making process of our inquiry, I offer here some other examples of inquiries that prove the primacy of an experiential epistemology over the factual.

Co-operative inquiry was used as a research method to explore the relationship between art making and the mental health recovery process by Van Lith (2014) as it offered a platform for equality that challenges the power imbalances amongst the vulnerable and the disenfranchised. The initiating researcher found that rather than negating or diminishing the value of the feeling-self and the insights it brought to the process, she
found intuitive knowing was deeply informing her co-operative inquiry and that it actually enhanced the findings (Van Lith, 2014, p. 261). Intuitive knowing is located in the pre-linguistic domain – it is the “the unnoticed context [...] and it is this we can bring to the fore and access through the process of extraordinary heed” (Heron, 1996, p. 117), which occurs in the process of inquiry (not critical analysis).

Linking this idea with our inquiry, the moment where we began to self-reflect beyond the social construction of ideas and meanings, we were basically venturing into this pre-linguistic domain. No amount of critical analysis conducted outside on the ‘subjects’ will have access to this depth of knowing as it resides in the transpersonal domain of the inquirers. In this way, the outcomes from our inquiry already contain a wealth of information.

Similarly Douglas (2002), whose co-operative inquiry looked at issues such as domination, exclusion, and disadvantage for black people, which are more often acted out rather than explicitly spoken, explained how some knowledge is only accessible through intimate observation and reflection: “As we observed ourselves relating to each other, we were able to move beyond what we think and say we do, to seeing what we actually do” (p. 251). She concluded that co-operative inquiry allows for an organic process that validates emotions and encourages the development of self-reflective skills.

These examples show how co-operative inquiry offers an alternative to orthodox research methods, where the emphasis is on the development of skills and transformation of being. Furthermore, it demonstrates some of the feminine qualities and wisdom in intuitive knowing and validity in emotional knowing. Evaluating the findings outside the inquiry, runs counter to what the method is intending to generate.

I argue that co-operative inquiry can also be likened to indigenous research methods. I refer to Bishop’s (2005) argument in which he asserts that traditional research methods undervalues and belittles Māori knowledge. He states: “Such [neo-colonial] practices have perpetuated an ideology of cultural superiority that precludes the development of power-sharing processes and the legitimation of diverse cultural epistemologies and cosmologies” (Bishop, 2005, p. 112). Co-operative inquiry uses power-sharing processes and is based on
a wide-ranging epistemology located in a paradigm that is cosmologically participative. Hence, adopting a traditional research model to evaluate such a human-inquiry, only serves to undervalue and belittle the human experience (Choudry, 2013). Similarly Rowan also explains how traditional research methods can be disempowering:

> If we want to know about people, we have to encourage them to be who they are, and to resist all attempts to make them - or ourselves - into something we are not but which is more easily observable, countable or manipulable... (as cited in McArdle, 2004, p. 50).

This approach suggests that conducting further analysis on the outcomes that a group of participants have already established through the medium of their being, can be considered disempowering. For these reasons, I have chosen to preclude conducting any critical analysis on the findings and outcomes outside of this inquiry to honour and respect the outcomes we already generated as a group. I also submit that the way of the feminine is in the process of inquiry and, if the voice of the feminine is to be heard, then we also must transform how we evaluate and value research.
CHAPTER SIX
VALIDITY: REFLECTIONS ON THE QUALITY OF THE INQUIRY

Be truthful, gentle and fearless (Gandhi, n.d).

6. Overview

To build validity into our findings, we adopted the procedures that Heron (1996) proposes as the criteria for assessing the quality of an inquiry process (and the validity of its findings) during the reflection phase. In this chapter, I personally review the quality of our inquiry in terms of these validity procedures which include research cycling, strategies for divergence/convergence, challenging uncritical subjectivity, addressing chaos/order, managing unaware projections and establishing authentic collaboration. Each of these criteria were supported by the rigour of reflection that occurred during our inquiry. Additionally I used a questionnaire (see Appendix 7) to gather participants’ views on the validity of our inquiry and quality of our outcomes. I have included feedback from four participants.\(^\text{14}\)

6.1 Validity Procedures

Heron (1996) explains the “purpose of these [validity] procedures is to free the various forms of knowing involved in the inquiry process from the distortion of uncritical subjectivity, that is, a lack of discriminating awareness” (p.59). The validity procedures used were designed to challenge our personal views and instil soundness so that we could feel confident with our outcomes. Without these validity checks an inquiry could become “another round of restless, unmonitored activism” (Heron, 1996, p. 97). It would be inauthentic and inaccurate if I were to claim our inquiry was free from uncritical subjectivity and the following feedback provides an overview of the validity of our inquiry in terms of these checks:

\[^\text{14}\] Only four of the five participants were able to respond to the questionnaire. The fifth participant had to withdraw from participating in the questionnaire due to a family crisis.
6.1.1  *Research Cycling*

The degree to which the research topic is taken through several cycles of reflection and action encourages the production and refinement of the different ways of knowing, looking at experience from different perspectives, creating new ideas and trying different ways of behaving (Heron, 1996). From my own perspective, research cycling may have been improved if we had had at least three more cycles. Extra time may have allowed some of the sub-themes such as ‘validity in emotions’ to be taken through a few more cycles and a few more practical actions around sacred activism to be refined. However, our Dionysian inquiry meant we were focused on themes that were most relevant and personal to us and so, in this way, the research cycling process adequately supported us individually.

6.1.1.1  Group Feedback: Research cycling

Two participants felt they were: “Not aware of the degree of reflection and action. Our inquiry was quite organic and random week to week and somehow we managed to pull it together.” Two participants felt there was: “Good balance of action and reflection. I felt we refined our ideas adequately.” This feedback shows that research cycling was not a prominent consideration yet it occurred seamlessly.

6.1.2  *Divergence and Convergence*

Heron (1996) suggests there is no one best strategy around the variations of convergence and divergence although some balance between the both helps with the quality and soundness of findings. In our inquiry, despite our initial strategy, which was to diverge in the first three action cycles and to converge for the last three cycles, in reality we were all responding to actions that emerged organically rather than as planned. In retrospect, the idea that we would systematically converge on our action items seems unrealistic considering the very Dionysian method of inquiry we had adopted. As a result, some of the areas that were discussed were not converged on by the group; for instance, the idea of vulnerability as a strength was only actioned and reflected upon by one person. The reflection on this area would have been more substantial if more than one person had explored vulnerability in their action phase.
6.1.2.1 Group Feedback: Divergence and Convergence

All four participants agreed, “There was good balance of divergence and convergence of action items which helped validate our conclusions”, suggesting that the group felt this process was adequate.

6.1.3 Challenging Uncritical Subjectivity

The use of the devil’s advocate process was to ensure each of us applied critical thinking and challenged each other around our claims. Ideally, this would have been done at every meeting where everyone took turns to test the validity of the others’ stories. However, time constraints meant this important process only happened at the fourth meeting. Nevertheless, the devil’s advocate process helped to clarify our personal motivation regarding the Goddess process. Most of us demonstrated congruence in our claims regarding our Goddess and only one person showed inconsistency with the role her Goddess played in her practical outcome. The efficacy of the devil’s advocate process should not to be underestimated as it may have nudged the group toward chaos and from my own personal perspective, did nudge me into deep chaos particularly regarding collaboration.

6.1.3.1 Group Feedback: Challenging uncritical subjectivity

Two participants felt that, “The devil’s advocate process helped to weed out uncritical subjectivity and we sufficiently challenged each other during the reflection meetings. Our findings are quite sound”. One of the participants also suggested the following:

The devil’s advocate process certainly helped to weed out uncritical subjectivity. Perhaps we could have engaged in it a little more on some occasions, but I’m unsure how we could be more critical of very personal experiences and expressions of what the divine feminine means to an individual. Time plays a factor in what can be covered in each session and because the conversation flowed easily and quickly experiences were often taken to a deeper and richer understanding as a result of the group conversations and reflections (personal communication, August 25, 2014).

Two participants felt: “There was a mix of unchallenged and challenged uncritical subjectivity. Some items were adequately challenged but some were not”. One participant commented:
Time was a critical factor, but I believe our findings are sound and authentic in that we challenged and deepened understanding of each other’s points of view on an ongoing basis as well as through the [devil’s advocate] process (personal communication, September 5, 2014).

6.1.4 Chaos and Order

Heron and Reason (n.d) explain the role of chaos in enriching the quality of an inquiry:

If the group is really going to be open, adventurous and innovative, to put all at risk to reach out for the truth beyond fear and collusion, then once the inquiry is well under way, divergence of thought and expression is likely to descend into confusion, uncertainty, ambiguity, disorder, and perhaps chaos, with most if not all co-researchers feeling lost to a greater or lesser degree (para. 28).

I believe our group was very close to nudging into full chaos with the potential to transcend toward a new way of being in group during the devil’s advocate process. However we may have lost that opportunity as we did not challenge the process we engaged in, in co-creating our ritual. If we had ‘courageously’ challenged our beliefs, we may have uncovered some ideas that perpetuated the ‘traditional cosmology’ of thought. There were however, two occasions when there was significant divergence of thought for me personally, as initiating researcher, which sent me into my own personal chaos.

The first was when each person defined their personal meaning of the divine feminine following the devil’s advocate process, I was thrown into a personal chaos regarding the fact that each person’s understanding of divinity was very different to mine. I began to think that the group were in fact ‘abandoning the inner feminine’, colluding with social constructions of it or simply denying the feminine aspect by choosing to use the term ‘self’ over divine feminine in their definitions. I was ready to throw in the towel as I felt that the inquiry was not about the divine feminine as I knew it. I took this concern to John Heron in a planned consultancy meeting. He reminded me that whilst there is a hierarchical positioning in my role as facilitator, “I could support others claim their autonomy so that it can flourish” (John Heron, March 12, 2014). He also recommended that I affirm and validate each person’s view of the world despite the differences – in doing so, I was honouring their autonomy.

This piece of advice went a long way for me in terms of what collaboration means and the challenge that it presents. I experienced a shift in how I engaged with the group as it freed
me from trying to ‘get it right’, or to ‘change their views’, or even ‘to get them to see it my way’, to simply being with the group in an authentic participative way. I cannot describe how liberating this experience was.

The second matter that tipped me into chaos was in relation to unaware projections, which I discuss next.

6.1.5 Managing Unaware Projections

As discussed in Chapter Three, an entire strand of co-operative inquiry is dedicated to the management of the emotional well-being of the group. Heron (1996) explains how inquiry into the human condition may stir up fear and defensiveness in researchers which could distort the research process. This was probably one area around which I personally did not feel adequately skilled to proactively engage the group. One of the biggest demands I found in this process was due to my intimate involvement in the inquiry as both co-researcher and co-subject (which sent me into my own personal crisis). It was very difficult to stay alert as facilitator of the methodology and at the same time consciously address issues of unaware projections.

The one area where unaware projections went unchecked was around the group ritual at the full moon. I regret that I personally did not present the opportunity to the group to reflect on the ritual as part of our devil’s advocate process so that if there were any unaware projections, these could have been discussed.

Athena had precluded herself from attending the ritual on the basis that she was unavailable, however it was only after the inquiry had closed that she declared that her beliefs did not align with full moon rituals. It is very interesting how these discomforts or emotional states when not openly spoken about or declared can escalate and affect the inquiry. Heron (1996) describes the need for emotional competence in a co-operative inquiry and expresses the importance of this skill within the emotional and interpersonal strand of a co-operative inquiry. I feel this inquiry was a steep learning curve for me particularly in finding the confidence to challenge unaware projections from others, as well as declare my own, and so I found this strand very challenging. As a result, the impact of unaware projections on our inquiry outcomes may not be known.
6.1.5.1 Group Feedback: Managing unaware projections

Interestingly all four participants responded positively with: “Each of us had sufficiently held the space to support one another through the distress caused by the inquiry. This process was adequate.”

However, I believe I may not have clarified the meaning of unaware projections adequately in my questionnaire, demonstrating my own lack of comprehension.

6.1.6  Authentic Collaboration

How much was I directing the group and how much collaboration was truly occurring? The concept of co-created processes is a cornerstone of co-operative inquiry in the spirit of participative knowing, which when done successfully is a very liberating experience (J. N. Bray et al., 2000; Heron, 1996, 1998; Reason, 2000).

As much as I would like to stake a claim that ours was a fully-fledged co-created inquiry, due to my position as a master’s student, there was always going to be a perception that this inquiry was more a fulfilment of my study needs, which ultimately influenced my position in the group. As I explored these concerns with the group, I began to see that the quality of our findings and reflections rested on the participants including myself, engaging in collaborative inquiry. Treleaven (1994) suggests allowing collaboration to unfold rather than forcing or engineering it. I believe, based on the camaraderie and openness to each other’s company and willingness to share that became evident after the first meeting, that we grew organically into a co-operative group despite my position as a master’s student. The following journal entry I made after the Introduction meeting outlines how I was grappling with the concern of authentic collaboration, as well as using co-operative inquiry as an academic research method:

As my body energy was abuzz after that first meeting, I went for a brisk walk as though I had much excess energy to burn off. What was I processing at a transpersonal level? What had the inquiry triggered within me? It was only a few hours later, when I was resting on the sofa in my lounge, that a thought dropped into my awareness; This inquiry was no longer My Project. The inquiry belonged to the Group. In that moment I realised that the tension between the integrity of a co-operative inquiry and the validity of an academic research would in itself, i.e. the tension itself, would keep the process authentic and balanced. A dialectic relationship between co-operative inquiry and academic
research can be developed. How this would take shape, will be revealed as the process evolved or at least I had to trust that it would. What I was certain of was that the question was not about choosing one over the other, the question was how to hold the tension alive? (Journal entry, March 1, 2014)

On reflection, I felt this tension very challenging at times. There was a delicate balance in this process as I found my masculine propensity to drive or direct could stifle the emerging form – so I found myself having to let go of the planning and directing a lot of the time, and to trust that the method inherent in co-operative inquiry would get us there.

The idea that the group also shared facilitation duties in the spirit of co-operative inquiry was discussed although not fully implemented. Athena had taken the reins in Meeting Three, however due to the four week gap between meetings I felt it was appropriate to reconvene with me as facilitator, particularly as we moved into the devil’s advocate phase of reflection. Due to the lack of collaborative facilitation, the overall strand for authentic collaboration was not truly established. I also personally felt challenged by my facilitation style and wondered constantly if I was directing rather than facilitating. The following is a journal entry which I recorded after our first reflection meeting:

At this point, something I had noticed in myself as facilitator was that I had interrupted their stories with my view of it. I had also made it mean something. Rather than holding the space open for releasing their energy into, I named their story and gave it relevance to our inquiry. Albeit my view and conclusions of this situation may be relevant and mirrors the co-researcher’s, the point is, the natural ebb and flow of the story which had its own direction, was interrupted by my personal view. But then again, was it? Why was I quick to discredit my facilitation? (Journal entry, March 9, 2014)

I concluded that I would simply be aware of these concerns and consciously reflect on my style as the inquiry progressed.

6.1.6.1 Group Feedback: Authentic Collaboration

Three participants responded as follows: “I always felt involved in the decision making and design of the inquiry and felt I had equal rights as others in the group.” Further to this, some additional comments:
I believe the inquiry to be the product of the 6 women involved. The way it would be run was collectively decided and in my opinion, we stayed on track most of the time, except maybe for the Moon rituals.

One very important factor that stands out for me as per the way the inquiry was conducted was the personal responsibility that each of us held with regard to the inquiry process. This was a totally and wholeheartedly co-creative and collaborative process as opposed to Dheepa being the sole facilitator with her own agenda and the rest of the participants merely responding to her questions. I believe that the co-creative process made our discussions much richer and thus the questioning and challenging only lead to deepening and further clarifying of my/our own understanding. My personal view is that given the theme of the inquiry, any other conventional process of inquiry would not have allowed for the resultant deep and varied findings.

One participant felt, “On some occasions I felt deeply engaged with the design and decision making. On other occasions I felt I had no say, was not consulted or was not heard.” She also added:

I think the inquiry was run well. However in my opinion the idea of sharing facilitation seemed good in theory but was not really suitable; as Dheepa was really the only person with the depth of knowledge to facilitate appropriately. I wondered if Dheepa’s personal connection with the feminine Goddess may have influenced the overall direction the group took. Not necessarily because of anything she said or did, but more because of the position she held as researcher/facilitator. I wonder what influence her role as ‘researcher’ had on the development of the group’s ideas; due to inherent power relations at play within the group.

6.2 Challenges using Co-operative Inquiry

The challenges that I personally found in using co-operative inquiry are as follows and are a reflection of my own personal limitations:

- The dynamics of collaboration will be impacted, although not unsurmountable as in our inquiry, when the initiating researcher is a student using co-operative inquiry as their academic research project method. This is because the true nature of authentic participation is questionable when only one person stands to achieve an academic qualification from reporting on the research.
- The skill for self-reflection is very important in a co-operative inquiry particularly in enhancing the validity of the outcome, yet if members of the group have not developed this skill then the very nature of inquiring is affected.
• Addressing and managing emotional distress and unaware projections is a necessary skill in ensuring that unspoken distress does not distort the inquiry process and, although Heron (1996) has dedicated an entire section in his book on this matter, I still found this aspect a difficult one to facilitate. Having said that, I am now certainly more aware of how much unaware projections affect our relationships on a day to day basis.

• Being a co-subject means being affected by the triggers and distress caused by the inquiry. The process of addressing the distress caused by the inquiry meant that I was unable to work on my thesis until such time my distress had dissipated. I needed to give myself sufficient time to integrate the outcomes I personally experienced from this inquiry, prior to beginning any academic writing.

• Finally, writing up an account of an inquiry as an academic thesis, has presented its own set of challenges as discussed previously regarding critical analysis. Managing the tension between honouring the process and balancing academic requirements was a deeply frustrating process. Fitting a co-operative inquiry into an academic model is synonymous to trying to express the feminine within a mechanistic worldview. Although I included a literature review as a compromise to address academic requirements, the process of writing and analysing the literature was done outside the group and therefore only I stood to gain knowledge from that process – this is not in the spirit of co-operative engagement. I struggled to reconcile with this decision however I also acknowledge that this dualism can only be addressed if both realities, i.e. the feminine expression as well as the academic requirements, are considered.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Your inner-man and inner-woman, have been at war, they are both wounded, tired, and in need of care; it is time, to put down the sword, that divides them in two (Murdock, 1990, p. 155).

This research was a journey toward their understanding of the divine feminine embarked on by six women social practitioners using co-operative inquiry. It explored how an inquiry into the divine feminine is transformative. In the course of this journey, we each found a renewed sense of power in our femininity and became present to a new form of sacred activism based on unity, balance and inter-connectedness. Ultimately our inquiry process, which forms the heart of this research, was a collaborative effort by participants from a diverse range of backgrounds. Our journey shows that this inquiry was equally relevant to atheists as to any other spiritual orientation.

Primarily, I was looking for an embodied experience in this research so that I would be able to articulate the outcomes from a position of experience. I felt I needed to feel this divine connection in my body, so that the expression of sacred activism was embodied, not as an idea but as an authentic feeling. We either pay lip-service to ideas of compassion, collaboration, and non-violence in our activism, or we truly embody these qualities so that it becomes a way of experiencing ourselves. As such, this research has been as much about co-operative inquiry as a vehicle to give voice and expression to the divine feminine, as it was about our individual transformations.

In this vein, do I pay lip-service to the idea of human inquiry by writing from a conventional analytical perspective, or do I write from an embodied perspective that truly honours the emancipatory approach in which a group of women ‘regained the capacity to create their own knowledge in the service of their practical purposes’, in other words an approach which gives credit to group generated outcomes and personal transformation? This seemed like one of the biggest challenges I faced in writing this thesis. Alas, this inquiry was an expression of our understanding of the divine feminine at this time of our lives, an understanding which will continue to change and evolve over time. From this perspective,
I honour the voices and group-derived meaning gained from the inquiry because the experience generated from collaborative and inclusive effort is situated in the feminine realm (Naraine, 2000), which contributes toward experiencing life in a new way.

By engaging in this inquiry we explored how our understanding of the feminine shapes the way we respond to our bodies, our feelings and our personal autonomy in relationships. It demonstrated that the way toward embodying the feminine as transformative agency, involves a deep intimate exploration into the shut-down experience of the feminine and subsequently the reclaiming of our experience. This process confirmed how engaging with ancient mythological influences, as described in the literature review, can help us develop the insight required to modify our behaviour and give voice to the repressed feminine (Baring, 2013a).

Interestingly, we also found that by inquiring into the feminine, we reclaimed a new relationship with our masculine. In this way myths that point to the sacred marriage shed light on what is an inner alchemical process, supporting us to find wholeness within (Raff, 2000). As Tarnas (1993) explains:

An epochal shift is taking place in the contemporary psyche, a reconciliation between the two great polarities, a union of opposites, a *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) between the long dominant but now alienated masculine and the long suppressed but now ascending feminine (p. 443).

What we found in our journey toward reclaiming the feminine, was a way toward reclaiming balance within ourselves.

Our understanding of the transformative aspects of the divine feminine was like memory waiting to be reinstated – it was as though these ideas were latent in our psyche. Jung once said that nothing that the psyche is part of is ever lost, and that “to live fully, we have to reach down and bring back to life the deepest levels of the psyche from which our present consciousness has evolved” (as cited in Baring, 2013a, p. 103). Our process took us deeper into our consciousness and what it revealed is that social justice is innate in our being. Furthermore, as women, our voices and our identity can be powerfully expressed not just authoritatively but creatively, when we reclaim our femininity from our experience of the divine feminine (Woodman, 1985).
In conclusion, we can stake claim that when we advocate from a place of the shut-down feminine, we are doing so from a place where our identity is defined within social constructions that demean and devalue the feminine – our experiences of power is out of balance, our voice based on external validation, and our experiences of femininity and womanhood disrupted by ideas of highly sexualised female bodies. We are caught up with a more oppositional approach to advocacy rather than acting from a place of collaboration and participation. The extremes are seemingly the way to be heard and seen. This shut-down place cuts us off from our body and feeling self, so that we find that power means having power-over others, or that our experience of power is diminished because we are at the mercy of people’s power-over us. We turn off our tears so that we can be taken seriously. In the place of the shut-down feminine, we are more likely to be depressed and/or anxious.

Through an embodied experience of our Goddesses, we were able to experience a way of being that was empowering and liberating. The Goddess within, we found, was a warrior, whose mission was to serve from a place of unity. We also found that this experience felt innate to us, as though we found a tool we had long lost. By exploring Goddess qualities, we found our voices from a deep and meaningful place. We also found that the journey toward our Goddess required courage as it called for a new way of being. The life that we were used to, for instance the ivory tower with all its glamour and social recognition, had kept us from experiencing the full splendour of the Goddess within. It seemed that the process of moving toward the Goddess meant letting go of a materialistic and goal-focused life in favour of a more organic and process-based one.

It is in this letting go of old structures such as the ivory tower, where the masculine must undergo an ego-death to allow for the feminine to be reintegrated, that we must be willing to challenge all ingrained ideas and belief-systems (Tarnas, 1993). Tarnas (1993) submits that this is the great challenge of our time as the masculine comes into a new relationship of mutuality with the feminine. In this mutual relationship, the feminine is not objectified but “fully acknowledged, respected, responded to, for itself” (p. 444).

And so we found that by reclaiming our relationship to the divine feminine, we reclaimed an aspect of our being. This new way of being opened up a whole new experience for us,
from a transformed way of advocating for justice for one woman, to reclaiming the power of menstruation for another. Each of us began to experience ourselves in a new way. It is this transformed experience of self that I assert a new movement toward social justice can begin.

For me personally, this journey to reclaim the divine feminine has revealed how much of my experience of being a woman, a female in this age and time, is caught up with feelings of shame and disempowerment. Recently, a girlfriend’s suggestion that women should be held accountable for how they dress if they are raped, deeply affected me. I wondered how much of that way of thinking also existed in my psyche. I wondered why women have continued to carry this shame of their bodies when there is much beauty, sensuality and power in the experience of being a woman. Where once I had held my status and position in my career as synonymous to my identity, I now find myself liberated from that idea as I rejoice in the beauty, creativity, power and wisdom of my body and my female-ness. I also feel a renewed sense of justice, one that seems to be nudging me toward companioning other women in their journey toward their divine feminine – this time from a much more compassionate place, now that I too have seen and experienced my own shame.

A century ago, Hazrat Inayat Khan, a Sufi sage declared that “the hour was coming when women would lead humanity to a higher evolution” and Sri Aurobindo said "If there is to be a future, it will wear the crown of Feminine Design" (Amat-un-Nur, 2008, para. 27). In 2009, the Dalai Lama declared at the Vancouver Peace summit that the world would be saved by Western women (Lowen, 2009). So it is then in a woman’s struggle to articulate the highest values of the feminine principle, in recognising:

...her longing to outgrow the subservience and powerlessness of her past and present experience, in recognising and supporting her deepest values, she may accomplish something truly heroic and extraordinary for life and the planet, something that humanity in centuries to come will celebrate (Baring, 2013a, p. 238).

For that reason, nothing is of higher importance than a woman’s reclaiming of the divine feminine in herself.
Future Research Opportunities

Some of the suggestions from the group include:

- Using a co-operative inquiry on the divine feminine to work with pregnant women to help them nurture and sustain their experience of femininity into motherhood. This inquiry could be run alongside prenatal classes.

- To begin an inquiry with a group of women who wish to enrich and deepen their understanding of what it means to be a woman, mother, daughter, sister, wife, grandmother, lover, a Goddess or more simply put, women who want to explore the divine through their own femininity.

- Create an opportunity to jointly inquire with men to understand how men are impacted when their experience of their inner-feminine is shut-down and reclaimed. This could be run as a relationship inquiry.

Other areas whereby the use of a co-operative inquiry into the divine feminine may be helpful:

- As a medium to reinvigorate the Karanga. There may be an opportunity for furthering the work of Te Raina Farris\textsuperscript{15} which includes running Grandmother-circles to support women reclaim their heritage and the sacred karanga using an inquiry into their relationship as matriarchs and as expression of Hine-ahu-one.

- The inquiry outcomes have shown the impact of the shutdown feminine and the transformation that is possible from reclaiming the feminine. I see an opportunity to bring a co-operative inquiry to work with women in prison.

Opportunities for using co-operative inquiry as a medium for other inquiries:

- I have found co-operative inquiry to be a medium that plays an instrumental part in facilitating toward collaboration. It is an excellent medium for understanding the challenges that collaboration poses and it also demonstrates how each person is a valuable contributor and responsible for their own self-transformation. In this way, I

\textsuperscript{15} Te Raina’s work includes personal empowerment, spiritual awakening, advocating for women’s rights (mana wahine) within the culture, healing through karanga. She is one of the guardians of the marae ritual that welcome visitors, she oversees many things. Please see \url{http://gcefoundation.com/?page_id=858}
feel drawn to exploring how collaboration can play a greater part in addressing some of the issues of poverty and inequality within my neighbourhood. By working collaboratively with the local community group, I hope to initiate a new inquiry group to address how we can foster the spirit of collaboration to nurture communities.

- There might also be an opportunity to explore how partner violence can be addressed within a co-operative inquiry into the divine feminine to support women or men.
- Reason (1994c) proposes in his hypothesis, a future opportunity is presented by way of a joint-venture between a co-operative inquiry and PAR. I see the potential to use co-operative inquiry to work with other activists or advocates in areas where the application of the qualities of the divine feminine can be transformative and then for these advocates to work with their communities using PAR; for example, an assessment of whether there is an opportunity to work with groups associated with eco-initiatives, whereby ideas and new skills developed from the inquiry into the feminine may then be applied to the wider community they work within using PAR.

In conclusion, hooks (1989) suggests that as women, we must broaden our discussion on feminism, moving on from being the victims of patriarchal culture to bring intersectional concepts such as race and class into the mix. She states:

> Feminist thinkers engaged in radically re-visioning central tenets of feminist thought must continually emphasize the importance of sex, race and class as factors which together determine the social construction of femaleness, as it has been so deeply ingrained in the consciousness of many women active in feminist movements that gender is the sole factor determining destiny (p. 467).

I submit that intersectional and multiple positioning of our understanding of self needs to also include, in addition to gender, sex, culture and race, our relationship to the divine feminine. From my perspective, based on the outcomes of our inquiry, it seems when we explore the divine feminine, all the other positions disappear, and instead a new relationship with justice and shared humanity comes forth.
REFERENCES


Murphy, N. (2011). Te Awa Atua, Te Awa Tapu, Te Awa Wahine: An examination of stories, ceremonies and practices regarding menstruation in the pre-colonial Māori world. Master of Arts (Masters), University of Waikato.


APPENDIX 1: Ethics Approval

Dheepa Nedungath
360 Hillsborough Road
Hillsborough
Auckland 1042

12.12.13

Dear Dheepa,

Your file number for this application: 2013–1015
Title: Spirituality & Social Practice: How social practitioners use spiritual resources based on the divine feminine in lived-practice.

Your application for ethics approval has been reviewed by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and has been approved for the following period:

Start date: 3.12.13
Finish date: 3.12.14

Please note that:

1. The above dates must be referred to on the information AND consent forms given to all participants.

2. You must inform UREC, in advance, of any ethically-relevant deviation in the project. This may require additional approval.

3. Organisational consent/s must be cited and approved by your primary reader prior to any organisations or corporations participating in your research. You may only conduct research with organisations for which you have consent.

You may now commence your research according to the protocols approved by UREC. We wish you every success with your project.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Whalley
Deputy Chair, UREC

cc: Ksenia Napan
Cynthia Almeida
APPENDIX 2: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Information for participants

| Project title: Spirituality & Social Practice: How Social Practitioners Use Spiritual Resources Based On the Divine Feminine in Lived-Practice |

Synopsis of project

My name is Dheepa Nedungat, and I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Social Practice programme at Unitec Institute of Technology. I am inviting you to be part of the cooperative inquiry group that I propose to organize in February 2014. I understand we share the same passion with regards to the above topic.

By participating in this group, we will together initiate an inquiry into the role of the divine feminine in today’s social practice environment, exploring the qualities we wish to deepen further, for example inclusiveness, creativity and intuitive knowing, in our service to community. In the spirit of companionship and collaboration, we may engage in action that embodies these qualities fostering compassion and mutuality both for ourselves and our larger community.

What it will mean for you

Although personal questions will be asked, discussed and reflected, your name will not be mentioned in the written results. Information you give is completely confidential. Your response will provide valuable information about this research topic. You will sign a consent form before the interview proceeds if you agree to participate.

The methodology used is called Co-Operative Inquiry and the nature of this process is cyclic and reflective which means we will meet over the course of 13 to 15 weeks to review and reflect our experiences of the inquiry. At the very least, we will meet fortnightly over 3 months and each meeting is expected to take between 1.5 to 2 hours depending on the size of the group and consensus from all members of the group.
You will have the opportunity at the first meeting to determine if you wish to participate as we will discuss in further detail:

- The research topic and what the inquiry entails, what this means for you personally and how the group inquiry process works
- The logistics of the inquiry group; the intention is for the group to decide collaboratively when the group can meet (what day and time of the week), how regularly (recommended fortnightly or every 3 weeks) and the venue.
- The risks of the inquiry in terms of self-reflection processes

If you are happy to take part, please give me a call or text me on cell phone number 027 255 4367 to arrange meeting time and place.

My supervisors are Helene Connor, 8154321 ext 5010 or email hconnor@unitec.ac.nz.

**UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2013-1083**
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 03/03/2013 to 03/03/2014. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Participant Consent Form

**Project title:** Spirituality & Social Practice: How Social Practitioners Use Spiritual Resources Based On the Divine Feminine in Lived-Practice

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this if I don't want to and I may **withdraw within two weeks of engaging** in the research project (Inquiry Group).

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the members of the inquiry group. I also understand that all the information I give will be stored securely on a computer protected by a password for a period of 5 years.

I understand that my discussion in the inquiry group will be recorded and transcribed and that I will have access to view the transcriptions of the recording.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

*Participant Signature:* ………………………….. *Date:* …………………………….

*Researcher:* ………………………….. *Date:* …………………………….

**UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2013-1083**

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 03/03/2013 to 03/03/2014. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
INVITATION

to participate in a Co-operative Inquiry:

How is the divine feminine expressed in our jobs and daily life?

"...the Sacred Feminine has been identified with the qualities of creativity, wisdom, justice, beauty, and compassion..."

"...the irresistible power that destroys old forms and brings new ones into being...

"...an essential part of both women and men—is the dimension of soul to which we are connected through our instincts, our feelings, and the longing imagination of the heart."

I am studying towards my Master in Social Practice and am deeply interested in understanding how the divine feminine is expressed in New Zealand social practice through social work, community services, environmental justice, counselling and other healing modalities. I long for a deeper connection to the sacred feminine and to my sense of purpose or meaning particularly in my vocation as a social practitioner.

By participating in this group, we will together, initiate an inquiry into the role of the divine feminine in today’s social practice environment, exploring the qualities and actions we wish to deepen further as practitioners. We will share our personal journeys of reconnecting to the divine feminine and explore practices that support us in engaging with the divine feminine and how this manifests for each of us.

This information will also be used as part of my research data. In the spirit of companionship and collaboration, we will engage in action and reflection that embodies these qualities, fostering compassion and mutuality both for ourselves and our larger community.
How could we explore this together?

As this will be a group-inquiry, we are free to co-create how we may want to explore the expression of the divine feminine in our lives and our practice. We may begin our inquiry by exploring what the Divine Feminine means to us. In this way we can each explore aspects of the divine feminine that is personal to us and as a group reflect on how this may or may not show up in our practice and day to day living. The following is an indication of the logistics of the group:

- Between 3 to 8 participants
- Social Workers, Community Workers, Advocates, Counsellors, Teachers, Healthcare Providers, Body-Work Practitioners, Lawyers, Mediators
- Methodology: Co-operative Inquiry
- Shared group facilitation and collaborative group exploration of topic
- Light refreshments will be served. No costs involved.
- Meet fortnightly over 3 months beginning March 2014
- 2 hourly meetings
- Meeting day and time to be agreed by group (likely outside office hours)

If you would like to find out more about this topic and if it is relevant for you, please come along to the Introduction Meeting. You are encouraged to call me or email me your details to have an initial discussion prior to attending this meeting.

**Introduction Meeting**
Saturday 1st March 2014
9:30am to 12:30pm (morning tea and lunch provided)
Building 55, Unitec Mt Albert Campus
## APPENDIX 4: Action Phase Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Part / Strategy</th>
<th>Motivation for reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sacred Union:</strong> Reconciling my inner Sacred and Divine Feminine to my inner Sacred and Divine Masculine</td>
<td>Motivation is to address the imbalance within self&lt;br&gt;To bring consciousness to Balance&lt;br&gt;To address impact of the feminine gender being seen as:&lt;br&gt;Highly sexualised&lt;br&gt;Dismissed&lt;br&gt;Invisible&lt;br&gt;Not taken seriously&lt;br&gt;If the feminine within has been asleep, how do we awaken to it&lt;br&gt;To explore the inner masculine and how that shows up in our expression&lt;br&gt;To explore where our autonomy resides&lt;br&gt;<strong>ACTION ITEMS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Researching the different Goddesses (Informative)&lt;br&gt;Picking one that resonates (Transformative)&lt;br&gt;Revisiting the masculine within my Goddess – Identifying how this is experienced / shows up (Transformative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Embodying:</strong> Consciously Bringing the Goddess into Being</td>
<td>Motivation is to ground it in the physical (to have an embodied experience)&lt;br&gt;If the divine is part of the universe, how do we bring this forward so that it is expressed in us&lt;br&gt;How did it get so shut down&lt;br&gt;How do we reclaim it&lt;br&gt;What does it mean to reclaim the feminine&lt;br&gt;How does it impact humanity&lt;br&gt;How am I aware of this part of me – how does this show up&lt;br&gt;Or do I forget this part of me&lt;br&gt;If the Goddess was speaking right now, how would I be speaking&lt;br&gt;To be conscious when the goddess speaks&lt;br&gt;<strong>ACTION ITEMS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Researching the different Goddesses (Informative)&lt;br&gt;Picking one that resonates (Transformative)&lt;br&gt;Identifying ways to experience – how she is alive or not in our everyday lives (Transformative)&lt;br&gt;Identifying way to recognise her voice – how does she sound when she speaks (Transformative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Change (e.g. farming issue)</strong></td>
<td>Motivation is to understand what is called for from me when advocating for social change based on the values and principles of the divine feminine&lt;br&gt;What are the principles of the divine feminine&lt;br&gt;What does this look like in practice?&lt;br&gt;Where does this show up?&lt;br&gt;Where does this not?&lt;br&gt;Where is my voice in this&lt;br&gt;Why am I stopped – my own values and perceptions on the feminine?&lt;br&gt;<strong>ACTION ITEMS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Researching what the principles of the divine feminine are (Informative)&lt;br&gt;Investigating how these principles can be spoken to with regards to the farming issue (Informative)&lt;br&gt;Finding my articulation based on the feminine principles (Transformative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Our Different Roles: Mother / Wife / Single-Mother/ | Motivation is to understand what our roles as Mother – Wife – Single Mum and its impact on our relationship to the Feminine  
What is it about those roles  
Why is the feminine deemed helpless  
Why can’t we choose to be cared for instead of always caring for  
To liberate my feminine  
**ACTION ITEMS**  
Identify Goddesses (Informative)  
How does the Goddess sound to me – verbal, non-verbal, presence (Transformative)  

**Working within Unconscious Realm:** Motivation is to understand the different energies between the feminine and masculine with regards to the type of support needed during a psychic reading  
**ACTION ITEMS**  
Paying more attention to the feminine and masculine energies in my psychic readings and the essence of both (Informative) |
| Our Feminine Body: | **The Feminine Body**  
Motivation is to understand the impact of discourses on my feminine body  
My relationship and experience of my body as biological  
My relationship and experience of my body beyond biology  
My relationship to the Womb  
The impact of menopause on my relationship to the feminine  
How much do we wear it in our clothes?  
**ACTION ITEMS**  
Self-awareness of our personal relationship |
APPENDIX 5: Devil’s Advocate Procedure

As the devil’s advocate procedure was conducted as a one-off, I identified the following questions to challenge our thinking and reflection:

- Are we focusing on the Goddess because we don’t actually know what the divine feminine means?
- How do you know that it is in the divine-feminine voice that we are finding our strength? How do we know we are not deluding ourselves?
- Are we regurgitating what we have read about rather than truly engaging with an embodied experience?
- How do we know that this is a Feminine and not Masculine experience?
Induction meeting
Welcome and round of intro
Introductions present topics (OP, D8)
Intro to C1 method (OF, MC, D8)
Who wants to join? (SSP)
No. of cycles, time structure, dates
Simple closing ritual to be

Three-stranded initiation
Inquiry method
Collaborative decision-making
Emotional dynamics 92-72

Four ways of knowing
Practical knowing from
Propositional knowing that
Pragmatic knowing by imaging
Experiential knowing by meeting 12

Co-operative inquiry

Types of inquiry
Appraisal or Dionysian
Informative or transformative
Inside or outside
Closed or open boundaries
Group process or group-based
Same, reciprocal or counterpoint or mixed
role
Informally or formally initiated
Partial or full form 10-16

Facilitator gradient
Maps and directives
Facilitation of group decisions
Planned or emergent rotating facilitator 81-86

Special inquiry skills
Being present
Imagined grasp
Bracketing
Reframing
Dynamic congruence
Non-attachment
Self-transcending intentionality 88-89

Dynamics of inquiry
First reflection meeting: clarify inquiry topic, type of inquiry, individual action plans for first action phase, method of recording experience.
First action phase: implement individual action plans, apply inquiry skills, keep an eye on validity issues, keep records of it all.
Second reflection meeting: review and share learning from action plans of first action phase, including data on inquiry skills and validity issues, in light of this learning, modify topic, and plan (DO) actions for second action phase, review and modify method of recording experience.
Continue this process: five to eight complete reflection-action inquiry cycles, obtaining divergence and convergence.
Final reflection meeting: pull all these aspects of the inquiry process together, agree on divergent and convergent outcomes in terms of the four ways of knowing, inquiry skills and overall validity 49-62

Validity procedures
Research cycling
Divergence and convergence
Reflection and action
Aspects of reflection
Challenging: unacknowledged subjectivity
Managing unaware projections
Authentic collaboration
Chasing and ordering 51-61
APPENDIX 7: Questionnaire

Please describe your understanding or experience of the inquiry.

1. Did you feel the degree of reflection and action in terms of the areas that you were individually exploring was sufficient?

2. Was there adequate collaboration in decision making, planning and design of the inquiry?

3. How would you rate the overall convergence and divergence of action items?

4. Did we sufficiently challenge each other regarding the soundness and validity of our findings and therefore exercise a good degree of challenging uncritical subjectivity?

5. How were unaware projections managed and processed?

6. What are your thoughts on the whole about how the inquiry was run?

7. It has been 3 months since we completed the inquiry. Can you describe or list what the main outcomes were for you from this inquiry that have emerged since we finished? For example, is there anything that you do differently now as a result of this inquiry?

8. Where else do you see that this inquiry into the divine feminine may be helpful? For instance, do you know of people or groups that may benefit from this inquiry?