

INSTRUMENTS FOR THE ENERGY:
REIKI, AUTHENTICITY, AND MEANING

INSTRUMENTS FOR THE ENERGY:
REIKI, AUTHENTICITY,
AND
THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

By

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Abstract

This thesis explores the narratives of individuals in southern Ontario who have adopted the practice of Reiki. Focusing on the narratives of Reiki Masters and practitioners, this thesis examines the relationships between illness, healing, and authenticity within the larger framework of energy work. The overarching goal of this thesis is to demonstrate the way in which Reiki Masters and practitioners draw on their experiences of Reiki to create meaning. As practitioners' narratives reflect, illness is understood as multivalent in nature, and thereby may be physical, emotional and/or psychological, and spiritual. As these narratives show, illness becomes a framework through which individuals can interpret their experience.

Often described as a conduit for the universal energy, the Reiki practitioner and his or her role are central to understanding the relationship between Reiki and healing. I propose that Reiki can be interpreted as a form of religious healing. Following Csordas' (1983, 2002) "rhetoric of transformation," I propose that Reiki provides a means through which practitioners become able to re-order experience. Like illness, Reiki Masters and practitioners also understand healing in multiple ways, including physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual.

Finally, I explore the increased interest in Reiki in the West and the importance to practitioners of the relationship between Reiki and Japanese culture. Through an analysis of Reiki practitioners' narratives, I will demonstrate that the nature of their experience and their interpretations of that experience influences their notions of what constitutes "authentic" or "real" Reiki. Ultimately, it is a fluid and flexible construction of the

“authentic” which allows practitioners the space in which to interpret for themselves their own experiences with Reiki.

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I. Introduction

That's what I'm talking about when you do Reiki, then you'll be Reiki. You know that anything you touch, and even if you don't touch it . . . Reiki comes out. Reiki comes out through my voice. Reiki comes out through my eyes. Reiki comes out through every cell of my being.

*Grace, an Usui Reiki Master
commenting on Reiki.*

After taking a deep breath, I walked into the house. There was gentle music playing quietly in the background. With its nondescript, yet melodic tone, it was the kind of music most people would associate with 'New Age,' the type of music that creates a calming atmosphere in which practices such as meditation and yoga could be performed, or simply used as an aid in relaxation. I was led down the hallway to a small, softly lit room in which my treatment would be given. I quickly surveyed the room from the entranceway. A massage table was set up in the center of the room, leaving only a narrow border around it for the Reiki Master and others to move. While the massage table obviously took precedence in the room, it was not alone. To my left a bright, colorful light shot brilliant colors up and onto the wall from its place nestled on the table. Behind the table and up against the wall was a stand holding what appeared to be large crystal bowls that almost looked like goblets. I wondered to myself what these could possibly be used for but did not have the courage to ask. A small window on the wall opposite me allowed rays of light to waft down and into the room. Drinking in the room, I watched as Mike, the Reiki Master, prepared for my

treatment by changing the pillowcases. He then asked me to lie down on the table while he went to wash his hands.

As I lay on the table and adjusted the pillows I thought back to the phone call I had made just two days earlier. I had telephoned Mike earlier that week inquiring about the next First Degree Reiki workshop he planned to teach. Unsure of what kind of reception I would receive, I nervously explained that I was a graduate student at McMaster University in the Department of Religious Studies and was interested in studying Reiki. At that time I was unable to give a clear explanation of my project and remarked that I was not exactly sure about the direction I wanted to take my project. I only knew that I planned to interview both practitioners and clients about their experiences with Reiki and its relation to illness. Hoping this was enough information, I asked about the First Degree workshop. Mike suggested that I come to meet him, have a treatment, and interview him about Reiki first. I agreed. After all, this meeting provided me with the opportunity to have both a Reiki treatment, something I had never experienced before, become somewhat familiar with the history of Reiki, and help in developing possible interview questions. A couple of days later I was on the massage table waiting for Mike to re-enter the room and begin my treatment. Not knowing what to expect, I was both skeptical and curious about what I was about to experience. Would I feel anything at all? What was I even *supposed* to feel?

Mike re-entered the room and asked why I was there. Why Reiki? Thinking I had already clarified this over the telephone, I once again explained

my interest in writing my Master's thesis on Reiki. I wanted to study Reiki in an academic environment. I planned to interview Reiki practitioners and clients about their experiences, but wanted to have a firsthand experience of a Reiki treatment before I went into the field so that I could better understand people's experiences. In the next breath, I also admitted I had a personal interest in Reiki and that this thesis was my opportunity to explore it further. Ultimately, I had to admit, I was unsure why I was there. Mike's response to my answer was simple: those who are not sure often have the most profound experiences.

Mike sat at the head of the massage table and settled in to begin the treatment. Although Mike told me that he would occasionally ask me what I was feeling, I did not have to answer. He explained that he only asks questions to heighten the client's awareness of what is happening and what they are feeling over the course of the treatment. Mike began at my head and started to move it gently so that he could cradle the back of my head in his hands. Instinctively I lifted my head so his job was made easier, but Mike asked me not to do so. It was important to avoid helping in the treatment. After Mike's hands were in place I felt warmth slowly spread across the back of my head. Almost instantaneously, the warmth I felt changed to cold and seeped into the back of my head. My eyes were closed, but they began to twitch uncontrollably. Mike left his hands in this position for a few minutes. At the time I wondered to myself, "How is this possible?" I thought it was impossible for heat and cold to emanate from someone's hands in this fashion.

After a few minutes, Mike gently slid his hands out from underneath my head and moved them to rest on the sides of my temples, almost cupping my head in his hands. Again, he left his hands there for a few minutes. His hands slid from the sides of my temple and came to rest over my eyes, one hand covering each. Again, I felt that same heat almost instantaneously change into a cold sensation seeping into my face. Why was it *so* cold? What did this mean? The cold felt as though it had sunken down and settled just above my cheekbones. I had never felt anything like this before. Mike asked me what I was feeling and I responded by telling him about my eyes and the cold I felt in my cheeks. He asked if the cold was deep in my face or on the surface. I replied it had settled into my face. As his hands covered my eyes, they stopped twitching and began to tear up.

Mike continued to move down my body, placing his hands in several different positions and staying for a few minutes in each. He placed his hands on my jaw, collarbone, torso, shoulders, and feet. In each position, he held his hands in place for several minutes. Unlike when he was working on my head, I did not feel anything. I began to question my experience. Why did I not feel anything? Did this really work? Or even, had I imagined what I had experienced in my eyes and on the back of my head? Occasionally Mike asked me what I was feeling as he worked on the rest of my body. I told him I felt nothing. He responded that I might experience something emotional as well as a physical effect. I was quiet while contemplated this suggestion. Was I feeling anything else? Was I feeling anything more than just the ‘physical’ as Mike suggested? No, nothing *more* was

happening. I thought to myself, “Should there be?” Again I returned to the question: What should I have felt? Is there a certain experience I should have?

There was very little conversation throughout the treatment. Noise drifted down from upstairs and Mike spoke little. I preferred not talking during the treatment; I wanted to focus on what was happening instead. I was also starting to feel very relaxed and calm, almost sleepy. The treatment itself lasted for an hour. When finished, Mike placed my glasses next to me and quietly left the room. I slowly raised my hands to my face and rubbed my eyes. I realized my treatment was over and, after a few moments, disappointment set in. Even though I was not sure exactly what had happened and what I had felt, I knew I wanted the treatment to continue. I felt extremely peaceful and relaxed. I sat up, put my glasses on, and climbed off the massage table.

After a moment Mike returned to the room, bringing with him an additional chair for me. He asked how I felt after my treatment. I thought for a moment. The exact words to describe my sensations seemed to escape me. I was more relaxed than I had felt in a long time, but there was something more than that as well. Even though I was relaxed, I also felt moved. I had no idea what had happened, but I knew instinctively that something had changed. I simply responded that I felt very relaxed and added a comment about my eyes twitching throughout most of the treatment and the intense cold settling into my face after he had covered my eyes with his hands. With a grin Mike asked, “What’s up with that?” I shrugged.

As we settled into our chairs, Mike and I moved directly into the interview portion of our meeting. I had difficulty forming questions and tried to take a moment to collect myself. I was not sure whether this confusion was a result of the Reiki or because I am normally a very shy person and Mike had spent the past hour forming what felt like a close connection with my body as he allowed energy to flow into me. Seeing this, Mike rescued me by giving me a short introduction to Reiki. As he explained Reiki is the fundamental energy that makes up everything. It comes from the creator and a person that does Reiki forms an intimate and direct relationship with that energy. Mike continued to sketch a short history of Reiki's founder, the lineage, and the most recent developments surrounding Reiki as a system. Of everything Mike shared with me that afternoon, one comment caught my attention. Mike told me, "Learning how to do Reiki and undergoing the initiations changes you. It changes your energy." Our meeting ended with Mike offering me an invitation to attend the First Degree workshop scheduled for the first weekend of October. I accepted the invitation.

This thesis explores the narratives of individuals in southern Ontario who have adopted the practice of Reiki. In this thesis I will explore the interconnections between illness, healing, and authenticity in relation to Reiki as practiced by Reiki Masters and practitioners. First, I will examine the relationship of Reiki and illness. I will argue that Reiki Masters and practitioners distinguish between disease and illness; thus leading to the construction of illness through practitioners' use of narrative. As the illness narratives of Reiki Masters and

practitioners will show, illness is not constructed as merely physical in nature. Rather, illness can occur on an emotional, psychological, and spiritual level as well as on the physical level. Practitioners' narratives also suggest that the relationship between Reiki and the biomedical tradition and the question of responsibility are significant issues for practitioners.

Next, I will consider how Reiki Masters and practitioners interpret healing. As I will demonstrate, Reiki can be identified as a form of religious healing. Although Reiki Masters and practitioners do not explicitly identify the practice as religious, they do recognize a spiritual component in their practice. I will demonstrate that Reiki can be understood as religious healing, building upon Thomas Csordas' (1983, 2002) theory of the "rhetoric of transformation." Like illness, the narratives of Reiki Masters and practitioners interpret healing as multivalent in nature. I will argue that healing can occur on physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual levels. Lastly, I will analyze the way in which practitioners determine the efficacy of healing.

Finally, I will examine the question of "authentic" or "real" Reiki as recognized by Reiki Masters and practitioners. I will argue that Reiki is legitimated not by its Japanese roots, but by the direct experience of practitioners. Ultimately, the relationships between illness, healing, and authenticity and Reiki are based on the theme of meaning. Through their use and understanding of Reiki, Reiki Masters and practitioners are able to create meaning out of both suffering and healing.

What is Reiki?

On more than one occasion I was told that Reiki could help me with my thesis. During my interview with Jill, an Usui Reiki Master, she explained that because Reiki is so experiential and subjective it is difficult to talk about it. For this reason Jill thought it was a good thing that I was writing about it. I responded by saying Reiki was a challenging topic; for example, formulating a description of Reiki was in itself difficult. There were numerous ways in which I could write about what Reiki is and how it is defined as a concept. Jill offered some advice:

So maybe you need to stop asking yourself and ask Reiki. Have you tried that? . . . You're going to take *five* minutes and clear yourself . . . Okay, maybe even call on your Higher Self. The part of you that's just connected to the divine and just say, "Reiki will you move through me? Write this for me." It's just amazing how it happens. Just comes out. So, maybe stop relying on yourself.

Grace, another Usui Reiki Master, also echoed this sentiment during our meeting at her home. Grace explained to me that I have Reiki now, or rather, I am Reiki now. I should trust Reiki and it will help me because that is Reiki's role. While I appreciate Jill and Grace's advice about how to approach writing my thesis, I have not yet been able to succeed in doing as suggested. Rather, at certain points when I write, I can feel the energy flow uncontrollably out of my hands. It is almost as though it is being drawn out from my hands and I can actually feel a pulling sensation as I write. Having this sensation reaffirms for me Grace's statements during our meeting.

Reiki, as understood by its practitioners, is a form of energy healing in which practitioners place their hands on the client and channel the energy of the

universe into the body. Literally translated from the Japanese characters, Reiki means Universal Life Force Energy.¹ Many of my informants initially described Reiki in this manner but quickly moved away from describing Reiki as universal life force energy, universal energy, or life energy to interpretations emphasizing its spiritual aspects.²

At our first meeting, Mike suggested that Mikao Usui, the founder of Reiki, actually used the term Reiki to connote a sense of the divine, a feeling of the divine, or a feeling of mystery. In actuality, according to Mike the term referred to what Usui experienced while meditating. In a similar way, several other people with whom I spoke incorporated a spiritual aspect into their explanations of Reiki.³ For most, Reiki was characterized as difficult to describe in words. Because Reiki *is* touch, it calls for a direct experience of the energy itself. It is experiential. When offering a Reiki treatment, the practitioner brings this energy into him- or herself and allows it to flow through him or her and into the person being treated. The Reiki Master, or practitioner, can be described as a channel, conduit, or instrument that simply allows the energy to flow through and into the body. Christie, a clairvoyant healer and Reiki practitioner, provided as simple definition of Reiki as she understands it:

¹ The term Reiki, pronounced Ray-key, is the romanized form of the Japanese kanji characters 靈(rei) and 氣(ki) and is translated as universal life force energy or universal energy.

² Specific descriptions of the Reiki energy will be discussed in later chapters.

³ The definition I provide here is primarily comprised of data drawn from my fieldwork, including the First Degree workshop I attended in October 2004.

Reiki is a healing technique that heals you on a spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical level. It clears you out. You lie on a table. You work on a person with the hand positions. You clear out their aura and it helps them to release and let go. Every single person has a different experience with Reiki because everybody is a different being. Some people experience complete exhaustion afterwards. Some people cry while you're doing it. Usually that means you're having an emotional release. Some people feel really clear and ready to bounce off the wall. Everybody's totally different. And that's just a mini version of it.

It is apparent from Christie's definition that Reiki is touch and the practice of Reiki enables both a connection to another individual and to a source of energy through that touch.

The interpretation of Reiki presented thus far emphasizes Reiki as a healing modality; however, each individual characterizes the energy flowing between practitioner and client differently. According to my informants, Reiki is healing energy, divine energy, adaptive energy, and loving energy. Many people told me that Reiki allows for connection with "something that is greater," however one chooses to define this term. Through connection with this energy individuals are able to bring themselves into balance and harmony with the universe. Interpretations of the energy itself are highly individualistic and often depend upon the experience of the individual.

The experiences of giving and receiving a Reiki treatment as described by my informants are again highly individual. Each Reiki Master and practitioner experiences something different with each treatment he or she gives or receives. Most report some sort of physical effect ranging from either a warm or cool sensation in their hands to a type of tingling. The way in which individuals

describe their experiences when giving and receiving treatments also depends on the way they approach Reiki. While practitioners may experience a physical sensation of warmth or coolness in their hands, they may also experience other sensations on another level as well. Many practitioners also emphasize the intuitive aspect of Reiki. Intuition can take the form of sensing where their hands need to be placed, learning to trust what is being heard or felt, and receiving images. According to my informants, a Reiki treatment provides a context in which individuals are able to engage in internal work and release blockages in themselves. When receiving a treatment individuals may hear sounds, see color, and feel movements within their bodies. Overall, both giving and receiving a Reiki treatment is often characterized as relaxing, peaceful, calming, and energizing.

My first experience of giving a Reiki treatment during the First Degree workshop was perhaps one of the most stressful experiences I had during that weekend. After explaining the form,⁴ Mike asked us to pair off to work with a partner. As I started to place my hands on my partner's eyes, I felt very hesitant

⁴ At the workshop, we learned to give Reiki to ourselves and others through a hands-on method. Mike began by teaching the positions for working on the head and torso. Mike first showed us how to work on the eyes. He prefaced this demonstration with an explanation that each person has an energy field which extends past our physical bodies and therefore we must enter a person's space with reverence as we are essentially entering into them. Gently lowering his hands over the volunteer's eyes, Mike explained that the eyes are our most important and largest energy gates. The order of hand positions that Mike taught that day was as follows: eyes, sides of head, back of head, jaw, collarbone, and continue to move down the body one hand width until reaching the hipbones. For women, the first hand position after the collarbone should be under the breasts and when at the hipbones place your hands in an inverted V position to direct energy down to the pubic area. Further along in the workshop, Mike also reviewed hand positions for other areas of the body, including arms, legs, and the back. Throughout the workshop, Mike emphasized that he was teaching a "form" for giving Reiki and we should trust our hands and intuitively follow where they want to go, even if their path deviates from the form he had taught.

and extremely nervous. The massage table on which my partner was lying was much too high for me to be working at and my arms were tense and sore from being held up in a rigid position. After I started, Mike walked over to me, touched me on the shoulder, and whispered, “Relax.” As I worked I tried to stay focused on my partner, but found it difficult to concentrate on what was happening. While working I felt few sensations, aside from some heat in my hands. As I moved down the torso my hands found a couple of cool spots that struck me as different from the rest of the body. After finishing, my partner thanked me, told me the treatment had been very relaxing, and said my hands felt very warm. As I have continued to work with Reiki and practice on others these physical sensations have continued to develop. Now, when giving Reiki, I feel both an intense warmth and coolness under my hands. I have also had other experiences similar to those reported by other Reiki practitioners, including visualizations and the ability to sense emotions.

The “Degrees”⁵

In the Usui system of Reiki there are three levels of instruction, including First Degree, Second Degree, and Reiki Master.⁶ In First Degree, students are taught a hands on method of giving Reiki to themselves and others. Students

⁵ I have developed these descriptions regarding the levels of teaching over the course of fieldwork. My descriptions are constructed from the differences in Degrees as I understand them.

⁶ The levels of teaching may also be referred to as Level I, Level II, and Level III or Reiki Master. Because participants utilize both sets of terms to refer to the system of teaching, they will be used interchangeably throughout the text by informants. However, I will utilize the terms First Degree, Second Degree, and Reiki Master when referring to the levels of teaching. The number of levels of teaching may also vary depending on the type of Reiki.

undergo four initiations, or attunements, to the Reiki energy. As Mike described it, the “pipe” which connects a person to the energy is being cleaned out during initiation. As an individual works with the energy and improves at using it, obstacles, expectations, and ego will be removed and clarity will increase. During the First Degree workshop students are also provided with a history of Reiki tracing the lineage from its founder, Mikao Usui, to its present forms. Students are also provided with ample practice time and opportunity to ask questions and share their experiences with others in the workshop. The workshops usually take place over the course of three or four days in order to provide sufficient time to both practice and process the energy.

In Second Degree, students are once again initiated, or attuned, to the Reiki energy. At this time, students are taught several Reiki symbols which assist in directing the energy more effectively. As well, during Second Degree, students are taught how to do long distance healing which involves sending Reiki through space and time. Finally, at the third level of instruction one is initiated as a Reiki Master. At this level, one is taught how to teach and initiate others into the Usui system.

History, Myth, and Lineage

Central to the transmission of Reiki as a system is the role of lineage, or, the way in which Reiki has been passed from teacher to student. During a lunch before my Second Degree workshop, Mike recounted to me:

If you have a person who devotes their life to a spiritual pursuit and then one day they actually get it. They have a transcendental enlightenment experience and they change on the mountain. The first thing is that person will want to share it and people will come to learn. Typically, there's no methodology because the person spent their entire lifetime developing the readiness, the preparedness for this to happen. So, they'll say to the students, "Try this." The students try it and some say, "Hey, that worked." Some of them will say, "I just don't get it." Out of a whole group of students, a few will rise to the top. That really are on the road and committed and have an understanding. And say you've got a dozen really good students. Some of them will actually get it. They all have that same transcendental experience. Most of them will not. But *all* of them will become teachers. Right? And *all* of them were in the inner circle. They were *all* disciples. So, they *all* will present themselves as having all that the other teacher had to pass down.

Mike also emphasized that it was personally important for him to know his lineage and the points in the lineage where there might be contention.

Often described as a re-discovery,⁷ the history of Reiki has been the focal point of much debate. Dr. Mikao Usui⁸ discovered Reiki in 1922. As Hawayo Takata's students recount the story, Dr. Usui was a Christian minister and a principal at a Christian boys' school in Kyoto, Japan. He was often questioned by the students regarding his belief in the Bible and asked to demonstrate his belief by performing miracles like Jesus. Expressing the desire that these students

⁷ I will be drawing on several accounts of both lineage and the discovery of Reiki energy in this section. Most prominently, I will draw on the history of Reiki as it was told to me by Mike, the Reiki Master who initiated me into the Usui system. As well, I will also be drawing on accounts published by several Reiki Masters, including Helen Haberly (1990), Fran Brown (1992), Walter Lübeck, Frank Arjava Petter, and William Lee Rand (2001). Haberly and Brown focus on recounting the history of Reiki as it was taught to them by Hawayo Takata, the woman accredited with bringing Reiki to the West.

⁸ I will be following the Westernized convention for names (first name, last name) rather than the Japanese convention (last name, first name) as this is the method used in publications on Reiki and by informants.

should not lose their faith, Usui left the school for America in order to study the Bible. In America, Usui studied philosophy, Christianity, and the Bible at a university in Chicago.⁹ When he discovered that the answer he was searching for was not located within the Christian tradition, Usui expanded his studies to include other world religions, primarily Hinduism and Buddhism. Eventually focusing on Buddhism in relation to healing, Usui returned to Kyoto to continue his studies of the Buddhist sutras after seven years in the United States. When researching the connection between Buddhism and healing, Usui was asked by a Zen abbot to study at a Zen monastery. While at the monastery, Usui studied several languages, including Chinese and Sanskrit, eventually reading Buddhist scriptures in the original Sanskrit. After discovering what he believed to be the Buddha's formula for healing in the Sanskrit sutras, Usui decided to mediate on

⁹ While the history of Reiki, as relayed by Hawayo Takata to her students, portrayed Usui as Christian and having traveled to the United States to study at a university in Chicago, these are points of some debate (see Lübeck et al. 2001). As Usui's life history has garnered more attention and has been researched more fully by Reiki practitioners, it was later discovered that Usui was in fact Buddhist. Fitzgerald (2000) examines the adoption of the term "religion" and its problematic use in relation to Japanese society.

One Reiki lecture I attended, at which a Japanese Reiki Master was invited to speak, also addressed the question of Usui's religious background. According to the speaker, Usui was a lay Buddhist, not Christian and Usui was seeking enlightenment while meditating on Mt. Kurama. The speaker also went on to assert that the story of Usui should be based on fact, or "truth," on material which can be confirmed. In the speaker's view, Usui's memorial stone confirms his Buddhist identity.

Several Reiki Masters, particularly Walter Lübeck, Frank Arjava Petter, and William Lee Rand, have researched and published on the subject of Usui's religious affiliation and educational background. According to Rand, Usui was not a Christian, but was a Buddhist. In addition, Rand asserts that Usui never enrolled at a university in Chicago. Lübeck et al. (2001) contacted the University of Chicago and were unable to locate any information on Usui as a student (Rand 2001: 24-29).

When I was taught the history of Usui and Reiki in Level I, Usui was not identified as a Christian. Rather, it was emphasized that Usui did have an enlightenment experience while meditating on Mt. Kurama that led him to acquire the ability to heal. However, in this section of the thesis I relate the history of Reiki according to Takata's students.

this information with the hope of learning how it could be developed into a practical and useful form of healing (Brown 1992: 46-47; Haberly 1990: 1-4).

When learning the history of Reiki, I was not taught the detailed account provided above. During the First Degree workshop, I was introduced to Usui's story at the point when he leaves Kyoto to meditate upon Mt. Kurama for a twenty-one day period. As he left the monastery, Usui requested that if he did not return on the twenty-second day someone should come to look for his body. After climbing Mt. Kurama, Usui meditated for twenty-one days and on the twenty-first day, he had a direct experience of the Reiki energy. Soon after finishing his meditation, Usui opened his eyes and peered at the darkened sky. He saw flashes of light moving very quickly toward him, which struck him in the forehead. Regaining consciousness, Usui watched as the colors of the rainbow filled the sky and then faded. As Fran Brown¹⁰ goes on to describe:

When the last color had faded, a white light came from the right and formed a screen in front of him. Some of the things he had studied in Sanskrit appeared in golden letters in front of him. Then a golden symbol approached from the right, moved onto the screen, then moved off the left side as another symbol came into sight, then another, followed by yet another, until all the symbols had danced in front of him, and with all this came the understanding of their meaning and the use to be made of them. (1992: 48)

According to the version of Reiki's history presented in my First Degree workshop, it was with this experience that Usui gained the ability to heal. His healing ability was so great that he did not have to touch a sick person directly in

¹⁰ Brown is a Usui Reiki Master initiated by Hawayo Takata. As I will discuss in further detail, Takata is the person accredited with bringing Reiki from Japan to the West.

order to heal, but only needed to be in his or her presence. Usui developed the system of Reiki by means of a trial and error process of teaching. His students originally called his system Usui-do, but later renamed it the Usui Reiki Ryoho Gakkai. From his practice, Usui developed the five precepts to be taught in conjunction with the system of Reiki. Often described by some informants as a code of conduct for practitioners, the five precepts can also be seen as pointing to the spiritual nature of Reiki. The five precepts are:

Just for today: Do not ANGER

Just for today: Do not WORRY

Just for today: COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS, honor your
Parents, teachers, and neighbors.

Eat food with gratitude

Just for today: LIVE HONESTLY

Just for today: BE KIND TO ALL LIVING THINGS (Brown 1992: 52)

Over the course of his lifetime, Usui is thought to have initiated between sixteen and eighteen masters (Brown 1992: 53; Lübeck et al. 2001: 17).¹¹ One, Chujiro Hayashi, a naval officer in the Imperial Naval Reserve broke from the other masters. Hayashi, an affluent man, opened a clinic in Tokyo at which he treated patients and taught the system of Reiki. In order to become a Reiki practitioner with Hayashi, an individual had to be accepted by the organization, use Reiki daily, and volunteer their services at the clinic. Hayashi is also attributed with establishing the teaching of Reiki and system of hand positions utilized by practitioners (Brown 1992: 55-56; Haberly 1990: 9-10).

¹¹ Brown (1992) states that Usui trained eighteen masters, while Lübeck et al. (2001) state that Usui trained sixteen.

The transmission of Reiki from Usui to Hayashi plays a role of central importance for Reiki's passage to the West. Born to Japanese immigrants on Christmas Eve, 1900, on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, Hawayo Takata was a frail and sickly child. As an adult, she was widowed and became solely responsible for her children's welfare. Takata worked hard to provide for her family. At the age of 32 years, plagued with gallstones and respiratory problems and unable to receive treatment in Hawaii, Takata left her children and traveled to Japan for treatment. After regaining some of her strength while in hospital, Takata was scheduled for surgery. On the appointed day, Takata was prepared for surgery, but while waiting heard a voice telling her that the operation she was scheduled for was unnecessary. After this was repeated three times, Takata asked aloud what she should do. In response the voice replied that she should speak to the surgeon. Upon hearing this, Takata immediately stood up and asked to speak to the surgeon. When Takata asked the surgeon about alternatives to surgery, he directed her to his sister, a dietician, who in turn recommended Hayashi's clinic (Brown 1992: 24-25).

Upon going to Hayashi's clinic for treatment, Takata was ushered into a room with eight couches and sixteen practitioners. Lying on a couch Takata experienced her first Reiki treatment, with one practitioner placing his hands on her head and another placing his hands on her stomach. Each practitioner commented about their experiences as their hands were on Takata's body. One

determined that her eyes were taking in a lot of energy while the other felt pain around her stomach (Brown 1992: 25). Brown recounts how Takata reacted:

HOW COULD THEY TELL THAT? There was no time for the hospital to send around a diagnosis. She pinched herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming and decided to wait until tomorrow to ask questions.

Why were their hands so hot? And why did they vibrate slightly?

WHY WERE THEIR HANDS SO DIFFERENT? (1992: 25-26).

As the Reiki practitioners' hands passed over Takata's body, they were able to identify her health problems independently of her biomedical information; her medical files had not been forwarded to Hayashi's clinic prior to her treatment.¹² Astounded by the physical sensations of heat she was feeling throughout her treatment, Takata surveyed the room looking for possible sources of the heat – batteries, machines, and wires – none of which were utilized by the practitioners.

After three weeks of daily Reiki treatments, Takata's condition greatly improved and after four months, she regained her health completely. Deciding she needed Reiki to maintain her health, Takata pursued training under Hayashi. Although he repeatedly turned Takata away, she continued to express an interest

¹² Badone (1991) interprets an alternative healing ritual involving *radiesthésie* (both a method of diagnosing illness and a divinatory technique) and notes:

In the eyes of the patient, a healer's credibility is based in part on the ability to arrive at an immediate diagnosis without taking a history or asking the patient any questions about his or her condition. This ability distinguishes alternative healers from biomedical doctors who, it is often said, order a barrage of tests and ask countless questions, after which they are still unable to determine the causes of their patients' illnesses. (1991: 529-530)

Similarly, a Reiki practitioner may also be attributed with this ability. While Reiki practitioners do not provide a diagnosis for their clients, they often refer to intuition and 'trusting their hands' when treating clients; the energy knows where it needs to go in the client. One informant describes the process of giving a Reiki treatment as "going to where the body calls."

in learning under his tutelage. However, Hayashi only accepted Takata as a student after receiving a letter of recommendation from the surgeon who had referred her to the clinic. As Hayashi's student, Takata was required to remain in Japan for a full year in order to ensure that she had learned Reiki properly. Within that year Takata was initiated into both the First and Second Degrees. At Hayashi's clinic Takata was expected to volunteer her services to the clinic and she gave daily treatments both at the clinic and outside of it (Brown 1992: 24-43; Haberly 1990: 17-46).

Shortly before World War II, Takata returned to Hawaii bringing Reiki with her. Initially, Takata had intended to give Reiki to her family and friends; however, as others' demand for Reiki grew, Takata left all other employment and opened a clinic. In 1937, Hayashi and his daughter came to Hawaii and initiated Takata as a Reiki Master. Before leaving, Hayashi requested Takata return to Japan when he called for her and she agreed. In 1940, Takata had a dream in which she saw Hayashi dressed in white robes. Feeling a need to return, Takata traveled to Japan to see Hayashi. Expressing surprise at her visit, Hayashi told her to leave and to come back when he sent for her. Returning in the next month Takata discovered that Hayashi had decided to make his transition, or die, later that day. Hayashi had already determined that between 1:00 and 1:20 p.m. he would make his transition. At 1:00 p.m. Hayashi entered the room dressed in a white kimono and proceeded to explain why he had decided to go into transition. Sensing the impending war, Hayashi was torn between his dual role of doctor and

naval officer. As a naval officer, Hayashi would be expected to join the war effort. As a Buddhist and a Reiki Master, Hayashi could not take a life. Rather than be forced to choose between these positions, Hayashi decided that it was time to make his transition. Takata was announced to be Hayashi's successor (Brown 1992: 24-43; Haberly 1990: 17-46).

With Hayashi's death, this line of Reiki in Japan came to an end. In the West the belief prevailed that Reiki died out in Japan. As Grace, a Usui Reiki Master, told me about Takata, "And it was she, and I'll tell you emphatically, that it was Takata-sensei who brought Reiki back to North America. Nobody else did that. It was she who did it. And that's so important." Over the course of her career as a Reiki Master, Takata initiated 22 Masters¹³ including her granddaughter, Phyllis Furumoto. At the time of Takata's death in 1980, the most experienced Master had only been initiated for four years; Furumoto had only been initiated for 18 months. In 1982, 18 of the 22 Masters initiated by Takata formed the Reiki Alliance, initially designed to be a support group for Reiki Masters. Two of the remaining Masters, Mary McFadyen and Ethel Lombardi, formed Mari el, their own version of Reiki. Barbara Weber Ray also broke from the remaining Masters and formed the American International Reiki Association (AIRA), later re-named The Radiance Technique (now a trademarked name). Of the 22 Masters, Phyllis

¹³ Takata initiated the following people as Reiki Masters: George Araki, Dorothy Baba, Ursula Baylow, Rick Brockner, Patricia Bowling, Barbara Brown, Fran Brown, Phyllis Furumoto, Beth Gray, John Gray, Iris Ishikuro, Harry Kuboi, Ethel Lombardi, Barbara McCullough, Mary McFadyen, Paul Mitchell, Bethel Phaigh, Shinobu Saito, Virginia Samdahl, Wanja Twan, Barbara Weber Ray, Kay Yamashita (Brown 1992).

Furumoto is considered to be the Grand Master. The lineage is now traced as follows: Usui → Hayashi → Takata.

As Reiki's popularity has increased, so have the number of initiates into the system. The rapid growth of Reiki is a source of concern for some Reiki practitioners (see Chapter IV). Hundreds of types of Reiki have developed since the 1980's, including The Radiance Technique, Mari el, Karuna Reiki, and Tibetan Reiki (Lübeck et al. 2001: 22).

As I discovered over the course of my fieldwork, Reiki is an oral tradition. During her classes Takata discouraged students from taking notes, arguing that to properly understand Reiki one must practice it rather than write about it. This has resulted in the development of different versions of the history of Reiki's transmission from Japan to the West through Takata. Usui, Hayashi, and Takata were undeniably historical figures of the recent past; however, the history of Reiki is not indisputable. As the oral tradition of Reiki's history has passed from one generation to the next, it has been shaped and molded by the Reiki community, and the narratives have taken on a mythic character.

In his definition of myth, William Bascom (1984) attributes several characteristics to myth. According to Bascom, myth belongs to a larger category of prose narratives, which also includes folktales and legends. Myths are considered truthful accounts of the past. According to Bascom, "They are accepted on faith, they are taught to be believed, and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief" (1984: 9). Bascom also acknowledges

that the way in which myth is interpreted may differ among societies making the distinction between myth¹⁴ and other genres of prose narrative as a flexible one. Following Bascom's conception of myth, the story of the Reiki lineage acts in a similar way to myth. Reiki Masters and practitioners are able to turn to the lineage as a means through which their activity is legitimated. Because the lineage history is considered a truthful account of the past, it constitutes a source of authority and authenticity.

Bronislaw Malinowski (1948) argues that myth is closely linked to society. According to Malinowski:

Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. (1948: 101)

Myth, then, functions to provide a justification for practices deemed significant in society. For Malinowski, myth is an integral part of culture because it provides a means through which society is governed and controlled (1948: 107-108). Mircea Eliade also echoes this position in his writing on myth and sacred history. As Eliade asserts, mythology is considered "true history" because in explaining how institutions or social practices came into existence it also provides a model for and justification of these institutions and practices (Eliade 1984: 141). Thus, myth

¹⁴ Bascom also identifies several other characteristics of myth, including the following: myths are sacred, their main characters are often non-human but are often ascribed human attributes, and myths may explain origins and recount the activities of deities (1984: 9).

becomes a means through which social activity in the present is explained and justified. The myth of the Reiki lineage determines the way in which the system should be passed from generation to generation and legitimates the techniques Reiki practitioners utilize.

Is Reiki a ‘New Age’ Phenomenon?

Often characterized as an eclectic collection of beliefs and practices drawing on Eastern influences, technology, and more broadly, alternatives to mainstream society, the New Age movement epitomizes a long history of unorthodox religious practice. Robert Fuller (1989) traces the development of alternative healing techniques in American religious life from the advent of Thomsonianism, a form of healing utilizing medicinal herbs, to contemporary healing techniques including Therapeutic Touch, psychic healing, and New Age and crystal healing. By placing the contemporary interest in metaphysical healing systems in its historical context, Fuller asserts that the relationship between unconventional healing techniques and unconventional religious practice is not necessarily new in American society (1989: 4). According to Fuller, “‘New Age religion’ is a convenient term for the newly resurfacing metaphysical currents set loose a century ago by the mesmerists, Swedenborgians, and spiritualists” (1989: 108). Working from Fuller’s framework the New Age is not necessarily a ‘new’ phenomenon, but, rather as it exists in the present, the New Age is an extension of a long history of practices and beliefs.

While Fuller refers specifically to examples of healing with their roots in religious traditions, his discussion also deals with healing techniques, such as crystal healing and Therapeutic Touch, which are commonly thought to belong to the New Age. As a healing modality Reiki can be regarded as an extension of the New Age healing techniques Fuller describes. As a practice anyone can perform, Reiki is held to activate the individual's own natural healing powers. Through their openness to accepting the energy, individuals choose how much energy they will accept thereby determining whether healing will occur.

Like Fuller, Tanya Lurhmann (1989) presents the New Age as the product of a particular social context and history. In her work on contemporary witchcraft, Lurhmann defines it as:

a broad cultural ideology, a development of the countercultural sixties, which privileges holistic medicine, 'intuitive sciences' like astrology and tarot, ecological and anti-nuclear political issues, and alternative therapies, medicines and philosophers. (Lurhmann 1989: 30)

The New Age emphasizes alternatives to mainstream social and religious practices. While Lurhman's definition emphasizes the ways in which New Agers privilege alternatives to the mainstream, Paul Heelas (1996) offers a definition of the New Age highlighting the importance of individualism:

as an *internalized* form of religiosity, the New Age is (albeit to varying degrees) *detraditionalized*. That is to say, *autonomy* and *freedom* are highly valued; and authority lies with the *experience* of the *Self* or, more broadly, the *natural realm*. (1996: 29)

According to Heelas' description, New Agers distance themselves from traditional religious institutions, such as Christianity, and instead develop a

spirituality which is most often located within the individual. The divine is not located ‘out there’ but rather exists within the individual, is accessible to them, and provides legitimacy for their experience. By internalizing religious experience, New Agers are able to escape everyday life and access an experience of the world more immediately and directly (Danforth 1989: 254-255).

Not all scholars conceptualize the New Age, or the New Age movement, as a distinct category. Steven Sutcliffe (2003) examines the problematic use of the term ‘New Age.’ Sutcliffe proposes the terms ‘New Age’ and ‘New Age Movement’ tend to be utilized as larger, overarching categories by scholars. As Sutcliffe demonstrates, “there is no useful boundary to this ‘New Age Movement’” (Sutcliffe 2003: 11). Rather, Sutcliffe (2003) proposes that the term ‘New Age’ should be replaced by “popular religion.” According to Sutcliffe, “that is, the necessarily incomplete and ambiguous – but no less potent – practices and beliefs of ordinary, ‘lay’ practitioners as they are expressed, negotiated and contested in everyday life settings” (2003: 19). The interpretation Sutcliffe (2003) adopts allows for the wide variety of practice and interpretation normally identified with the eclectic ‘New Age Movement.’

Drawing on emic definitions of the New Age, Reiki Masters and practitioners are unlikely to identify themselves with the New Age movement.¹⁵

¹⁵ Daren Kemp (2004) emphasizes that New Agers commonly do not identify themselves with the New Age movement, but rather claim a continuity with the past. According to Kemp, “New Agers themselves present their history, emphasizing continuity with the past and rediscovery of hidden traditions that have been perpetuated esoterically” (2004: 29).

When discussion turned to the relationship of New Age and Reiki, one informant, Jill, responded:

No, no, no. People have this issue with this New Age. And to me, it's just like a wave of awakening that people have experienced energetically. And unfortunately, it was attached to a lot of people who're kind of way out there and got a bad rap.

She went on to comment that she does not even know what the term New Age means and jokingly described it as “kind of ethereal, kind of fairy-ish.” Yet as Jill continued to discuss the issue of whether people are responsible for their own illnesses, it became clear that she believes the New Age is unfairly treated. Jill knows that many contest the New Age claim that people are responsible for the illnesses from which they suffer. However Jill argues that people are responsible for creating their own reality. By extension, that reality includes illness. As Jill told me, “If that's a New Age sort of thing, then I guess I'm New Age.”

Another informant, Joyce, believes that, like other New Age phenomena, Reiki has acquired a stigma because fear and ignorance about the practice have blended together. Distinguishing the “flaky folks” from those that utilize the “I believe in this, you should look into it” approach, Joyce maintains that as a Reiki practitioner you have to be willing to go outside of the mainstream and be included with the “flaky folks.”

Religion and Spirituality in Reiki

In her work on religion and home birth, Pamela Klassen (2001) examines the relationships among religion, spirituality, and contemporary society through

the framework of home birth. The women Klassen encountered during her fieldwork interpreted birth as a religious experience, and saw themselves as “procreating religion.” The relationship between religion and spirituality is an intimate one, and the two are often impossible to separate. Over the course of my fieldwork I quickly discovered that not only the practice of Reiki, but the interpretation of the energy itself and how it is translated into the lives of participants, is infused with spiritual overtones. When asked to comment directly on whether they thought Reiki is religious or spiritual, many of my informants responded that it is spiritual.

Like the women in Klassen’s study of home birth, Reiki Masters and practitioners distinguish between religion and spirituality. According to Klassen, “religion comes to mean dead ritual and hierarchy, while spirituality connotes a more personal, immediate, and authentic sacrality” (2001: 65). While Klassen found this basic distinction formulated by women who participate in home birth, she also discovered several ways of interpreting spirituality. Among the women she interviewed, spirituality ranged from referring to a means of coming to self-understanding, to a connection to “god-energy,” or to something which is not necessarily antithetical to traditional rituals (2001: 70-71). Spirituality refers to “a personal and embodied connection with a supernatural power that anyone who made that effort could access” (2001: 73). Linda Barnes and Susan Sered (2005) propose a similar interpretation of spirituality. According to Barnes and Sered, the term spirituality often refers to “an individualistic, sometimes secular, interior

experience that contributes to the well-being of the body, mind, and/or the self” (2005: 9). Similarly defined, spirituality as a personal, imminent connection is a theme echoed by Reiki Masters and practitioners.

For example, Laura, a Usui Reiki Master, describes her background as fairly traditional. Brought up in an Anglican household, she found herself searching for something more satisfying in the religious domain. When she began reading books written by psychic author Edgar Cayce¹⁶ at 13 years old, she discovered an avenue through which she was able to see that there are different alternatives to what she was learning in ‘mainstream’ life. Laura asserts she does not dislike her Anglican background, but it never generated an inner spark in her life. Laura never felt close to God or understood what the Anglican concept of God signified. According to Laura, her understanding of God “alternated between the big angry guy with the grey beard in the sky sending the lightening bolt down, which they throw at you when you’re a child, to this kind of cardboard figure that didn’t mean to much to me.” It was not until she reached university and enrolled in a comparative religions course dealing with Hinduism and Buddhism that she experienced an igniting of this religious “spark.” Through this course and her reading of Cayce, Laura says, “I went from being religious to spiritual.”

Laura does not describe herself as religious because “it [the Anglican church] didn’t bring any sort of spirituality in me, which I think is what it’s supposed to do.” Rather, Laura describes herself as metaphysical and her view of

¹⁶ Books authored by Cayce include: *Edgar Cayce on Atlantis* (1968) and *Auras: An Essay on the Meaning of Colors* (1945).

God has expanded to encompass God as a force of unconditional love or as energy. Laura has also come to understand that she is a part of that energy of God, or the creator. Likening God to a large sun, Laura describes humans as the beams emanating from that sun. As a representative of that sun, Laura takes her social relationships and interactions seriously because they reflect the way she acts in the world. As Laura told me, “If I’m representing, or doing my best to be as in tune with this energy as possible, then I really want to do my best to be – to heal myself, number one, and to help others.” When asked whether Reiki is spiritual for her, Laura is careful in distinguishing between religion and spirituality. She clearly states that Reiki is not religious, but recognizes that it is spiritual in her experience. As a healing energy, Reiki is another aspect of God, or the creator.

Judith is a 38-year-old Tibetan/Usui Reiki Master¹⁷ striving to eventually become a full time Reiki Master and teach other spiritually based practices. Besides Reiki, Judith also does Tarot card readings and makes crystal jewellery in addition to cleaning houses and providing childcare for a living. Judith was raised Catholic and attended Catholic school as a child. Her childhood experience of religion evoked similar images to those expressed by Laura of strict guidelines and punishment by a wrathful God. As Judith recounts:

I just felt like these guys are misrepresenting something. Call it God.
I don’t think God is like that. Why would God be so angry all the

¹⁷ Judith describes the differences between Usui and Tibetan/Usui Reiki as minimal. According to Judith, as a result of research into the roots of Reiki in Tibet, more Reiki symbols were discovered on Tibetan scrolls and added to the Usui system to form Tibetan/Usui Reiki.

time and why would he want to hurt us? So that feeling all the time growing up. I rejected religion more because of the people associated with it than the religion itself. And the hypocrisy and all of that. And as I got older, it just wasn't something that mattered to me any more. I had turned it off a long time ago and it wasn't something that was a part of my life.

Judith described a shift in her thinking after she started studying spiritual phenomena and discovered Reiki. While she once would have described herself as an atheist, she now believes there is a higher power, higher wisdom, or even, a universal life force. It is something that is “within all of us. We are linked together and we create this higher consciousness somehow. But there's something out there.” Judith attributes this certainty and her awareness of spirits and beings, which she describes as angels full of light and love, to the development of her spiritual beliefs. Judith characterizes Reiki as a spiritual experience, but her spirituality has developed over time. Reiki is now a part of her daily life.

Maggie is a 51-year-old Second Degree Reiki practitioner who first encountered energy work when she was seeking out grounding techniques to assist in her meditation practice. Raised Protestant, as a child Maggie and her family were members of the United Church. Maggie describes her childhood as including “a fair bit of religion,” but says she moved away from religion at a young age. It was not until after graduating from university that Maggie returned to religion after making her decision to practice meditation. Now an active member of the Unity Church, Maggie describes Unity as a non-denominational movement, including teachings emphasizing that individuals create their own reality, that God is good all the time, that the divine is part of each individual and

that it is simply a matter of coming in contact with the divine element in oneself in order to express it. When asked whether she makes a distinction between religion and spirituality, Maggie replied:

Yes, I think religion tends to be more dogmatic in the sense of . . . it's more the authority and the source of belief is out there and I have to simply tap into it and believe. Like, dogmatic. Whereas, spirituality is much more into having an inner experience, a connection, or something like that. Less denominational. Less around a particular form, a particular way, a particular expression of "This person founded it and we're going to follow that one person." More there's a commonality.

The spiritual aspect of Reiki was not an initial attraction for Maggie. Rather Reiki was the only modality through which she was able to develop her awareness of energies. She does however consider Reiki to be spiritual and now experiences it as such.

Celine echoes the sentiments of other Reiki Masters and practitioners in her comments about religion and spirituality. Celine describes her Roman Catholic upbringing during the Quiet Revolution, a time of cultural, educational, and religious revolution in Quebec, as a very negative experience emphasizing sin, punishment, and guilt. According to Celine, religion was originally something very simple and positive based on love. Describing herself as a spiritual rather than a religious person, Celine explains that at one point religion stopped providing her with the answers she needed in life. Emphasizing that this situation does not provide an excuse for atheism, Celine describes her belief that there is a spiritual aspect to experience:

It's something that is within. We are all a spark of that supreme intelligence. And I think our purpose in life is to re-connect with that spark of life. Because we are born in a body and we're spiritual beings in bodies. We're not bodies with a soul. When we come in a body, I think we tend to forget that there's more to us than what we see. And spirituality, for me, is re-connecting. Re-focusing. Re-centering. Remembering that spark. That divine spark within.

Celine believes because everything is energy, there is a connection to the divine or spiritual through Reiki.

A desire to move away from institutionalized religion towards spirituality is also echoed by informants who do not share a Christian background. Deena is currently in the process of becoming a Reiki Master in the Usui system. She describes Reiki as a large part of her “spiritual journey.” Born in India, Deena and her family moved to New York City when she was 11 years old. Raised as a Zoroastrian, Deena also attended an all girls Catholic school upon moving to New York. Her experiences with both Zoroastrianism and Catholicism have shaped the way in which Deena views religion. Deena described Zoroastrianism to me during our interview. As she explained, Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion from Persia emphasizing the responsibility of human beings as active agents in working for the “good.” According to Deena, “Through our thoughts, words, and actions we really can manifest a godly or positive life.”

In her abbreviated description of Zoroastrianism, Deena explained that as the religion underwent change and members relocated to India, the religion was maintained in a much more exclusive way in order to preserve itself from being lost in the “Indian milieu.” As Deena explained, this resulted in the development

of rules, including policies on conversion and marrying outside of the religious group. Deena describes her feelings on this as solidifying when she decided to marry “outside the community.” Deena realized she did not “want to be associated with *any* religion that thinks it is *the* way, we are *the* chosen people.”

Deena continues:

Virtually every religion I’ve come across feels like they’re better than the next guy. And that attitude, over time, has really made me realize that is not an attitude I want to associate with. It’s not like *this* way is the *only* way. For me, I have come to see that there are *many* paths to the divine. There are *many* paths to understanding our true nature. And it’s not just one way.

Deena believes that when she discovered Reiki, she found her “spiritual home.”

Because Reiki was not associated with organized religion, Deena found herself able to develop a much more personal relationship with the divine.

While some Reiki Masters and practitioners describe experiencing limitations in their traditional religious path, others perceive continuity between spirituality and religion. Sara has been a Reiki Master since 1998. She was originally initiated into the Usui system and later initiated into Komyo Reiki.¹⁸

Brought up in an active Protestant family, Sara describes her religious upbringing as incorporating spiritual as well as religious elements. Sara credits her father with providing her access to that spiritual element. Sara explains:

However, I was also taught by my father that church is where you are. That church has no walls. The ceiling was heaven. And the temple was full. It was very much a spiritual . . . The church was where people got together. You got to see your neighbors. It was a social thing, an allowing of exchanging of ideas. Which was a

¹⁸ Komyo Reiki is a form of Japanese Reiki. Sara describes it as a branch of Usui Reiki.

religious upbringing, not a *spiritual* upbringing. And although it was never said, “There’s a difference,” there’s always a difference, okay? I was taught to honor all living things. I was taught to talk to the trees. And I took it from there.

Sara was initially attracted to Reiki because of its spiritual elements and describes herself as partly “looking for it [spirituality].” For Sara there is nothing more spiritual than being connected to God-spirit and Reiki enables that connection. Reiki is a connection to God.

Gwen, a 57-year-old First Degree Reiki practitioner, was raised Anglican, but converted to Catholicism after her divorce. Gwen believes that discovering Reiki has not changed her religious beliefs, but is simply one aspect of her belief system. Like other Reiki practitioners, Gwen locates the spiritual aspect of Reiki in the fact that she calls on a higher being to assist her in her practice of Reiki.

Reiki Masters and practitioners largely define their practice in terms of spirituality rather than religion, but “spirituality is no less “created” than religion” (Klassen 2001: 83). Engaging in religious or spiritual activity involves the individual in a process of negotiation on the part of the individual. As Klassen points out, spirituality is interpreted within a larger social context which itself is shaped by religious and ethnic traditions, life history, and fortune and misfortune in life (2001: 83). Just as spirituality is shaped and negotiated through experience, so too is religion. Clifford Geertz proposes that “the religious perspective” is one perspective among many that provides a particular way of construing the world (1973: 110).

As Klassen argues, “religion and spirituality are difficult to sever” (Klassen 2001: 66). Geertz’s interpretation of religion and its role highlights the overlap between the two categories. According to Geertz:

Whatever else religion may be, it is in part an attempt (of implicit and directly felt rather than explicitly and consciously thought-about sort) to conserve the fund of general meanings in terms of which each individual interprets his experience and organizes his conduct. (1973: 127)

Religion, then, constructs meaning in life and becomes a framework through which individuals are able to make sense of their lives. While the Reiki Masters and practitioners discussed above believe that spirituality is an appropriate term for describing this process of seeking meaning, the definition of religion presented by Geertz brings religion and spirituality together rather than distancing these conceptual categories from each other. This distancing may result from the fact that frequently people assume that “religion” only refers to institutional religion.

Fieldwork

My fieldwork was conducted over the course of a six-month period during the 2004/2005 academic year. My initial introduction to Reiki was through a treatment given by a local Reiki Master. At this time, I was also briefly introduced to an abbreviated history of Reiki as a system. Shortly after this meeting, in October 2004, I participated in a traditional Usui First Degree workshop taught by the same Reiki Master. At this workshop, I underwent four initiations and was taught to give Reiki to myself and others through a hands on technique. Initiation,

or attunement, is a process likened to clearing out the “pipe” connecting me to the energy and enables the Reiki energy to flow through me more clearly and into the person being treated. As I continued to work with Reiki, this ‘pipe’ would continue to clean out and my experience of the energy would become increasingly more clear. Participation in the workshop provided me initial access to the “insider’s” perspective and a basic understanding of the practice.

As Mike told me when we first spoke, learning Reiki and undergoing the initiations would change me. After the three-day workshop, I was able to give Reiki to both myself and others. The divine energy, loving energy, or universal life force energy that my informants would later describe as Reiki could now flow through me. This realization inspired both wonder and excitement in me. I had originally attended the workshop and entered into this project as a skeptic; I now had access to something I could not dispute. Attending the workshop also provided me with a background I was able to take into the field. I had access to my own experience with Reiki, as well as the tools with which to attempt to understand my informants’ experiences.

In March 2005, I was initiated as a Second Degree Reiki practitioner. I was once again taught by Mike, the Reiki Master who had first treated me and initiated me into First Degree. In Second Degree I was taught to direct the Reiki energy more effectively, and to do distance healing, or send Reiki through space and time.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I conducted twenty-five open-ended interviews with Reiki practitioners, ranging from First and Second Degree practitioners to Reiki Masters, from October 2004 until the end of March 2005 (see Appendices). Originally when starting my fieldwork I had intended to interview both practitioners and those who had not been initiated into the practice. As my fieldwork proceeded, I discovered that the categories of practitioner and client were not as clear and fixed as I had anticipated. Often clients treated by Reiki Masters had also been initiated into either First Degree or Second Degree. As a result, all of the participants interviewed were practitioners ranging from First Degree to Reiki Master. These interviews were conducted in Hamilton, Toronto, and surrounding areas.

In addition to conducting interviews, I also performed participant-observation fieldwork. I participated in several Reiki practice nights at which individuals of all levels came to practice on each other and receive guidance from their Reiki Master. During these evenings, participants all have the opportunity to both to give and receive Reiki from those present. I have also attended other Reiki events in the Toronto area. In April, I attended a two-day lecture given by Wanja Twan, a Reiki Master initiated by Hawayo Takata. At this workshop, open only to individuals who had been initiated into Reiki, Twan shared stories of Takata and her training in Reiki and fielded questions from the audience. That same month, I attended a lecture given by a Japanese Buddhist monk speaking on “Traditional Japanese Reiki from a Buddhist Perspective.”

II. Illness and the Body

And perhaps it is at the margin, not the center, where we can find authorization to work out alternatives that can remake experience, ours and others. In that sense, I suppose, the margin may be near the center of a most important thing: transformation. Change is more likely to begin at the edge, in the borderland between established orders. (Kleinman 1995: 5)

Rather than stories about illness, such accounts are better characterized as being about a life disrupted by illness. (Mattingly and Garro 2000: 27)

What is illness?

Medical anthropologists tend to place illness and disease on an implicit continuum in which illness and disease are in direct opposition to each other (see Kleinman 1980, Kleinman 1988, Mattingly and Garro 2000). According to Arthur Kleinman, “*Disease* refers to a malfunctioning of biological and/or psychological processes, while the term *illness* refers to the psychosocial experience and meaning of perceived disease” (1980: 72). While disease is identified with the body as mechanism, a metaphor often associated with the Western biomedical system (see Kirmayer 1988), illness results from shaping disease into behavior and experience (Kleinman 1980: 72). Illness is related to disease in that it is the expression of disease by the individual and thus “is always a cultural construction” (1980: 78). According to Kleinman, disease and illness are “constructs in particular configurations of social reality. They can be understood only within defined contexts of meaning and social relationships” (1980: 73). As Kleinman (1980, 1988, 1995) suggests in his discussion of explanatory models, it

is essential to collect the narratives of individual's illness experiences in order to understand the way in which illness is constructed.

Cheryl Mattingly and Linda Garro echo the distinction between disease and illness in their work on narrative. As Mattingly and Garro point out, literature on illness narrative reflects “the need to distinguish disease, as phenomena seen from the practitioner's perspective (from the outside), from illness, as phenomena seen from the perspective of the sufferer” (2000: 9). Kleinman's analysis of the narratives of chronic pain sufferers also draws out this distinction that Mattingly and Garro propose. Disease is created through the practitioner when illness is defined in terms of theories of disorder. Through the biomedical model, disease is defined only in terms of physical functioning, or a change in the functioning of the body (Kleinman 1988: 5-6). According to Kleinman, “Disease is what practitioners have been trained to see through the theoretical lenses of their particular form of practice” (1988: 5). Because medical practitioners reinterpret a patient's illness as disease, an essential aspect of the illness experience becomes lost (1988: 6).

On the basis of my field research, I argue that Reiki Masters and practitioners typologize illness into three categories: physical illness, emotional/psychological illness, and spiritual illness. The narratives of Marie and Judith reflect how some practitioners view illness as primarily physical in nature. In these narratives, Reiki is used to relieve physical discomfort. While some Reiki Masters and practitioners propose that illness can be emotional or psychological

in nature, they also believe that illness manifests itself physically. Illness may be caused by emotion and when it manifests physically, it brings the individual's attention and awareness to the fact that something is wrong on another level. Finally, illness is also assigned a spiritual component by Reiki Masters and practitioners.

Marie is a 59-year-old First Degree Usui Reiki practitioner. In the summer of 2004, Marie discovered that her Stage 4 Breast Cancer had returned and spread to her abdomen. She started undergoing chemotherapy every three weeks in the middle of August 2004, and believes that Reiki "found her" in October 2004 following her recurrence. In describing illness, Marie asserts that "illness happens." It is "that your body is just not right." Marie believes that had she had Reiki treatments earlier, she would not have been caught off guard by the recurrence of her cancer because the Reiki Master treating her would have felt the cold emanating from the cancerous growths in her body. Marie believes that:

if Reiki can tell you what's going on in there Reiki would have said something. If I'd been doing Reiki. It would have said there's something, something unusual going on in here. Because in actual fact, I had had my treatments for breast cancer. I had just gone off it. You get your treatments then you see the doctor every three months, and then every six months. I had just started going for my sixth month appointment. And he had said, "Come back and see me in December." And I saw him in May. And then in August all hell broke loose. I don't, obviously he didn't know it was going to relocate and do strange things. And this is a man who's one of the top ten in North America. So, you know. But probably Reiki would have known.

Marie does not know why her cancer returned when it did; as she says about illness, "it just happens."

Before her surgery Marie describes herself as going from a reasonably slim woman to looking like she was eight months pregnant. After developing breathing problems, Marie turned to her doctor for assistance. The cancer had:

Metastasized. It hadn't attached itself to anything. It was still free floating. It could attach itself to anything – liver, kidneys, gallbladder, or anything in there. It was still just free floating. At the moment, tomorrow I find out because I had another CAT scan. Hopefully it hasn't attached itself to anything. Hopefully it's still just free floating. Hopefully the visualization of surrounding the cancer with love or having that golden beam come down is going to isolate it enough that it will die off on its own. Which, of course, is my desire. But being practical, it ain't gonna happen. That's probably just because I'm a practical person, rather than. . .

Marie believes that her breast cancer should be receiving the prescribed biomedical treatment, including chemotherapy, which she has been pursuing. However, Reiki provides Marie with energy she otherwise would not have and allows her to continue on with her daily life. In pursuing treatment for her cancer, Marie is utilizing the techniques available to her. In this case Reiki is being utilized as complementary to biomedical treatments, not as an alternative to them. Marie's illness narrative reflects her understanding of illness as primarily physical.

Judith is a 38-year-old Reiki Master who has been practicing Reiki since 2001 in the Usui and Tibetan/Usui systems. Judith explains why she decided to learn Reiki:

I did the Reiki because my daughter, who's seven, was born with clubfeet. When she had her surgery, she was in a lot of pain afterwards. In the hospital, I sort of instinctively started trying to take her pain away with my hands and I just knew there was something that I could do with my hands to try to make her pain go

away. After we came home from the hospital, and things were settled down after her surgery, I started looking around for this thing. I had, of course, heard of laying on of hands and different kinds of healing practices that you read about or that you hear about from old times. Old stories. But I found an ad for Reiki and took the Reiki course. The Level I not really knowing what I was getting into and at the same time finding out this was what I was supposed to do.

While her daughter's physical illness and the desire to relieve her daughter's pain prompted Judith to take the First Degree workshop, Judith's understanding of illness is not limited only to the physical. Rather, in Judith's view illness does not simply have to be physical, but can also include emotional, spiritual, and psychological dimensions. However, Judith hesitates to make the argument that illness is only the result of emotion, thought form, or unresolved issues from the past. Some illnesses may be attributed to these sources, but she believes that in other cases individuals come into contact with something that is unhealthy, such as a virus, which will cause illness.

Several Reiki Masters and practitioners assert that there is an emotional and/or psychological component to illness in addition to its physical manifestation. Grace is a 68-year-old Usui Reiki Master who has been practicing Reiki full time since 1984. Grace first encountered Reiki during Christmas 1978 while living in an ashram in British Columbia. At the time Grace had been teaching yoga at the ashram, which she describes as "a community of people based on yoga," for almost five years. Grace recalls that she frequently expressed the concept that "the body holds all memory" when she was teaching yoga. She encountered this concept again with Reiki.

During the Christmas vacation in 1978, two of Grace's friends had just completed a Reiki course prior to returning to the ashram. Although both friends treated Grace, her narrative focuses primarily on the experience of the friend who was treating the middle of her lower leg on the right side. While holding her leg, her friend began asking her, 'What's going on Grace?' Not sure what her friend was referring to, Grace replied, 'Nothing.' Her friend asked again, 'Well, something must have happened to your leg. What's going on?' After being questioned three times, Grace remembered having a car accident when she was eight months pregnant with her daughter. During the accident the glove compartment opened and hit Grace on the leg. Grace recalled that following her daughter's birth, her leg would hurt in the spot she had injured in the accident each time she menstruated. She had eventually accepted that this was what her menstrual cycle would be like each month. As Grace recalled this experience:

And then I remembered that I always knew in my head that the body holds all memory. And I realized at that moment that my body did hold memory. And what it held was the fear that something was going to be the matter with my baby. Now, nothing happened to my baby, but the fear in me. In my leg all that time. And, when I, after the Reiki treatment my leg never hurt again.

Grace's first experience with Reiki resulted in the relief of chronic pain and shaped the way in which Grace viewed illness. For Grace, the physical manifestation of illness brings to the individual's awareness the fact that something is wrong. Grace believes that "when it comes down to the physical level it [illness] has been there in the ethereal body for a long time and we haven't

listened.” Illness may be emotional, psychological, or spiritual in nature and when it physically manifests itself, the body is sending a message. This is one of the reasons why, as Grace claims, when she gives a Reiki treatment she does not “stay very long in the physical.” While her hands are on the physical body, Grace wants to know what is happening underneath and explore what a given physical illness is connected to on an emotional, psychological, or spiritual level.

Not only did Grace experience physical healing through a release prompted by a Reiki treatment, but Reiki also provided her with a means through which to heal from other experiences as well. Initially reluctant to offer Reiki treatments, Grace’s first experiences of doing Reiki on others were typically tearful and emotionally charged for the client. Eventually Grace learned to trust Reiki and learned to look at the factors in her client’s lives that prompted such extreme emotional responses. Grace also attributes her healing from childhood sexual abuse to the combination of Reiki and a healer from New Hampshire who incorporated other practices such as sounding¹⁹ into her work. After traveling to New Hampshire, Grace had saved enough money to attend both a private session and a workshop during the weekend. Grace recalls her experience during the private session:

¹⁹ Grace describes sounding as a technique utilizing the voice. When people are particularly frozen, scared, or fearful, Grace asks her clients to sound. According to Grace, “what happens is the fear comes out in sound, or the anger comes out in the sound, or the sadness comes out in the sound.” As a technique it is useful because “it’s just easier, things begin to move.” Of the Reiki Masters and practitioners I interviewed, Grace is the only one to utilize such a technique. However, most practitioners incorporate other elements into their practice, including regression therapy, channeling, Therapeutic Touch, crystals and gemstones, hot stone relaxation therapy, Axiatonal treatments (another energy technique similar to Reiki but using only two fingers), hypnotherapy, acupressure, and other techniques.

And she said to me, first thing she looked at me and she said, “Were you abused this lifetime or another?” And I said, “This lifetime.” I had tried to work on the abuse, but I could never do that. I didn't get the right . . . the people weren't right. So I knew I was in the right place. And that's when I began to start to heal the abuse. The sexual abuse I had when I was a child . . . I was abused by my uncle from the ages four 'til nine.

In New Hampshire, Grace also witnessed emotionally charged sessions. She saw “people around the table, they cried, they screamed . . . they carried on.” Identifying these outbursts with the experiences she had during her treatments, Grace no longer tried to suppress those types of reactions in her clients.

Wendy has been a Reiki Master for five years in two systems of Reiki, Usui Reiki and Gendai Reiki.²⁰ Although Wendy had been familiar with energy work prior to being attuned to Reiki, it was illness which led her to the practice. Wendy likens her illness experience to an “energetic upset.” As she describes it:

And something went wrong inside of me. I could *feel* it. It was *horrible*. I felt like I was trapped in an egg. When I meditated, when I tried to push my energy out into the universe it didn't *go*.

Thinking that she needed to pursue physical intervention for her problem, Wendy decided to see an acupuncturist. An acupuncturist would be able to work with the meridians²¹ to bring balance back to the body. However, unable to find an acupuncturist, Wendy continually encountered the same pamphlet for a local

²⁰ As Wendy describes it, Gendai Reiki is a Japanese form of Reiki. Hiroshi Doi, founder of Gendai, was originally trained in the Western system of Reiki and through initial contacts with the Gakkai, he eventually worked his way up the ranks of the organization. Japanese Reiki Masters are expected to hold monthly practice nights and give *reiju* (tiny attunements, each time you see your Reiki Master they will blow more power into you).

²¹ In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), acupuncture points are located on the body along an unseen system of meridians. Energy, or *ch'i*, runs along the meridian system and nourishes the body. When the flow of energy becomes blocked or unbalanced, it may result in illness (Gerber 2001: 122).

Reiki Master. After the third time she picked up the pamphlet, Wendy decided to pursue Reiki. Wendy describes her experience during her first treatment:

As soon as she [the Reiki Master] started doing the Reiki, I began seeing colors. I had *never* seen color before. When you see energetic patterns, it's . . . some people see it with their eyes. Like, "Oh, that's blue." Like that, right? Some people just know. "Oh, that's blue." Like you put your hand near a fire. You don't have to look at it. You can go, "Oh, that's hot." You know exactly what that is. And I had always been the sensing type. Well, as soon as I started doing this . . . Bang! I could see. And it looked like, you know those 1960s psychedelic posters? Like this all over the place. Of green and purple. As she [the Reiki Master] moved her hands down my body, starting at the head and moving down towards the feet, I could *feel* this change and saw the colors straighten themselves out. *Literally*. They went from this chaotic, horrific, nauseating pattern and they moved and moved to these stripes that went straight down my body. And as she did that, it became intensely peaceful for me.

Jokingly, Wendy said she had looked afterwards for acupuncturists in the area and there had been at least twenty in the phonebook. Wendy asserts that the universe led her to Reiki because she was *supposed* to find it at that point.

Wendy's illness experience and her narrative reflect her belief that illness involves disharmony. In order to explain this concept to me, Wendy utilized a metaphor in which she compared illness and the physical body to a hot pot of chocolate pudding boiling on a stove. According to this metaphor, when we are born, we are metaphorically very hot. Since we need to be able to interact with the physical world, we metaphorically begin to turn the heat down. As you do this to the pudding on the stove, it begins to cool and a skin develops over top of the pot; the skin represents the physical body. Underneath the skin, the pudding continues to hold the warmth from the stove and continues to boil. In her metaphor, this

continues underneath the skin because the soul, or the spirit, is energetically interacting with this. When an individual experiences disharmony it is as though the heat has been turned up on the stove. The chocolate pudding begins to heat and as the individual continues to get angry or worried, the heat continues to rise. It will continue to rise until a bubble develops and breaks the surface of the skin. According to Wendy, “That’s physical illness. That’s cancer. That’s heart attack. That’s the common cold over and over again. So turning the heat down is putting you back into harmony. The skin reforms itself clear and smooth.”

When asked whether people are responsible for their illnesses, Wendy replied, “I think people are responsible for absolutely everything that happens inside of them.” Being diagnosed with Hepatitis A taught Wendy many life lessons; for example, she was forced to rely on a friend for everything while she was ill. According to Wendy:

I learned *huge* lessons about reciprocal behavior. I learned *huge* lessons about relaxing and letting things go that I wouldn't have if I hadn't had that illness. If I hadn't had that illness I would have been a completely different person. Who knows if I would have even found Reiki? So having that illness was intensely important for me to have.

Like Grace, when seeing someone who has an illness Wendy is now prompted to ask the question “What’s going on here? Is this a life lesson this person needs to have? Is this a symptom of a disturbance?”

Brenda has been practicing in the Usui system of Reiki for almost four years. As both a nurse and a Second Degree practitioner, Brenda believes that illness is more than just physical. She recounts her first experience with Reiki as

enabling her to have “a healing discussion with my body.” Seeking out Reiki as a means to alleviate the pain caused by the arthritis in her back, Brenda was also attracted to Reiki because it allowed her to see the body in symbolic terms. Brenda draws on popular author Louise Hay’s book *Heal Your Body* when describing illness.²² Through her reading of Hay’s book, Brenda has come to understand that illness results from a combination of the emotional, spiritual, psychological, as well as physical factors. In line with this philosophy, Brenda attributes her arthritis to a sense of survivor guilt she has experienced since birth and, as a result, describes her arthritis as “long-standing since birth.” When asked about her thoughts on why her arthritis started when it did, Brenda replied:

It started probably shortly after I gave birth to my kids. . . We have three children. I think it was around healthy parenting. It went back to, when I was really young, my own experience of parenting. A loss of father. . . Probably fairly weak mothering. In the context of war and what that did. In fact, I worked with immigrants and

²² Hay (1988) argues physical illnesses have their source in emotional and mental thought patterns. Her book consists of a listing of physical illnesses, their emotional or mental causes, and a positive affirmation to utilize in retraining old thought patterns. For example, Hay postulates that arthritis is the result of feeling unloved, criticism, and resentment. In order to create a new thought pattern, arthritis sufferers should recite the affirmation “I am love. I now choose to love and approve of myself. I see others with love” (1988: 15). While Brenda does not make direct reference to Hay in relation to her arthritis, she does do so in reference to her husband’s illness experience. Brenda told me that after her husband had suffered a heart attack, he started to incorporate Hay’s approach and recites an affirmation emphasizing joy and vibrant health. According to Hay, a heart attack is the result of “squeezing all the joy out of the heart in favor of money or position, etc.” (1988: 39).

Energy worker Julie Motz develops a similar argument. Motz (1998) has published a book recounting her experiences with energy work during surgical procedures at several medical institutions in the United States. Motz traces her own journey to energy work, its use in treating cardiac patients and cancer patients, and her experiences of giving energetic treatments in the surgery room. Motz also proposes that disease and illness share their roots in emotion; however, Motz situates her work in the context of science and biomedicine. She also links illness experience to past traumas in our lives and emphasizes working through these in order to facilitate healing. For example, Motz recounts several experiences in which she encounters patients processing these traumas while undergoing surgery. She “speaks” to their bodies during the experience to help them process what is happening.

refugees because my early experience was of war and what the aftereffects of war would be. Also, migration. Because my parents were very in . . . they were brought up in small little villages in northern New Brunswick. They were married in Vancouver. I was born in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. When my father was killed we went back to this little village in northern New Brunswick and by the time I was four we had moved back out to Vancouver. Those first few years were really in Vancouver. So, early school. So I was a migrant. And it was the aftereffect of war and also poverty. I mean, there was some poverty. My father learned a trade. He went from . . . he was a fisherman . . . and trained to be a flight lieutenant. He went up through and became an officer in the air force and was killed just shortly before the war. So, I think the whole experience of that has been something in my past that particularly causes my back to have given me problems. And I think it was around that parenting. Some of the first things, maybe even before that too. But, there were other things. But, the arthritis, I think, came along with the psychological, emotional, and mental part of my history.

Brenda also incorporates magnets, water aerobics, Brain Gym,²³ and occasional Reiki sessions in treating her arthritis. Reiki is part of a holistic approach to treating illness which Brenda finds effective for coping with her arthritis. Brenda does not rely exclusively on Reiki when coping with her arthritis, but advocates a holistic approach. Brenda knows when a Reiki treatment has helped because the pain dissipates, leaving her feeling more lively and at one with herself. More importantly for Brenda, Reiki enables her to achieve a sense of calm, serenity, and peace.

Zoe describes her “journey on healing” as starting 20 years ago with the birth of her third son. Zoe’s third son was born with numerous health problems.

²³ According to Brenda, Brain Gym is a type of educational kinesiology. Individuals are taught movements to stimulate the right and left sides of the brain. Usually it involves doing a lot of cross body movements to stimulate the opposite side of the brain and is useful for people with developmental delays.

By the age of four months, he had been admitted to the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto and had undergone a gamut of tests. Possible diagnoses included liver cancer, pancreatic cancer, gangrenous bowel, Cystic Fibrosis, and Leukemia. Zoe describes her journey as really starting when her son was discharged from the hospital at one year of age. After their experience with the biomedical system, Zoe and her family pursued naturopathic treatments. The family changed their diet and “went completely holistic.” The naturopath determined that her son had a mal-absorption problem caused by a lack of hydrochloric acid. From that point on her son has never seen a medical doctor. Zoe described to me how her middle son also had health problems of his own, including environmental illness, hypoglycemia, and learning problems.

While Zoe struggled to find effective treatment for her sons, she was also plagued with her own chronic illnesses. After stabilizing both her sons and within a week of moving into the family’s new home, Zoe “crashed.” On oxygen, weighing approximately 70 pounds and confined to her home for two years, she was unable to leave unless it was a low pollution day. Zoe explained to me some of the other illnesses she has dealt with:

I have had paralysis. I have been paralyzed. I have lost my sight. I’ve lost color in my eyes. I had a lot of problems. I’ve had phobias. About 40 phobias when I was 18, which I got rid of. And I got rid of all the other different things. And then the environmental illness came in. So I got to that. I stayed in the house for two years. And worked with a naturopath who kept me very stable, but I was losing more and more food. So I basically was eating barely nothing. And then I decided to go off to the mind and work on what was going on emotionally.

Through her illness experience, Zoe came to realize the importance of emotion in relation to the generation and treatment of illness. Zoe believes that everything physical has an emotional component. After coming to this realization, Zoe “decided to go off to the mind and work on what was going on emotionally.” Once she addressed the emotions, Zoe “lost” her illness.

Zoe also explained to me that she started practicing Reiki very slowly, offering it to clients for a very low cost or even for free. After practicing Reiki for approximately six months Zoe began volunteering at a hospice. Describing it as a “very humbling experience,” Zoe became heavily involved with the hospice soon after volunteering. Zoe recounts one patient she worked very closely with for an extended amount of time:

So then this one gentleman who finally died, and he died just before Christmas. Almost ‘round about now. It was coming to the end of November. And when I got him, as such, and when we became partners, he had three months to live. And he absolutely loved Reiki and energy. He just, he found so much peace and calm in it. And after that three month diagnosis he lived for another eight and a half years. From then onward, he had his liver cut in half twice, he had his complete bowel taken away and a colostomy. He had each section of his lung taken away, the four corners, and finally, just before he died, he had the rest of the whole lung taken away and he was left with a quarter of a diseased lung. And he lived another six to eight months after that.

Zoe would visit him regularly to give him Reiki treatments, often before and after surgeries, and the treatments would usually have a calming effect on him. Zoe’s narrative implies that Reiki helped to prolong her client’s life.

Gwen believes that there are numerous kinds of illness, including physical, emotional, and spiritual illnesses. While there are many kinds of illness, Gwen

believes these may not be entirely distinct from each other. As she says, “One plays off the other” and “Probably in general illness is the lack of well being.” Gwen was one of the first Reiki practitioners I spoke to who referred directly to spiritual illness. When asked to define spiritual illness, Gwen replied, “I think that a spiritual illness is any kind of lack of spirituality of some sort. A belief in something. I think there are some people that you talk to and they don’t have a belief in anything.”

Reiki Master Jill also evoked the notion of spiritual illness. Through the practice of Reiki, Jill describes herself as coming to realize that “I am not this body. This body is my vehicle here in this dimension.” Although Jill does not directly describe herself as someone who came to Reiki because of an illness experience, she does attribute her practice to the “spiritual angst” she experienced shortly after the death of a family member. Jill describes her journey to Reiki:

All my life I have searched for meaning and I have never had a religion. I called myself an atheist. But, as a child I always said, when I talked about death, which apparently I talked about a lot. It disturbed my parents. That you returned to energy. And they kinda thought that was weird. I didn’t think anything of it. I just knew that I didn’t believe in God, in whatever. Then one day, well one time in my life, in my family’s life, we had a crisis. My brother-in-law committed suicide and for whatever reason, I had been particularly close to him. And you know, through the end and it was like I could sense that something was coming and it was like that last moment where he kind of let me know. But I missed it.

Jill continues:

After he died, I was left with this horrible guilt. And I actually kind of fell apart. My life kind of fell apart. I couldn’t even function with my kids, my husband. I was just dealing with this guilt. And I used to go for long, long walks and one day I thought, “This is

stupid.” I just said, “You know what? God if you exist you better . . .” At that point, I don’t know if you want me to use but, “You better f-ing well prove yourself to me right now because I need something.” And, honestly, I got home and the telephone rang and this woman I know said, “You know, I know you’re going through a really a hard time. I think you need to go for Reiki.” And I said, “What?” And she said, “Reiki.” And I said, “Never heard of it.” She said, “Just go. Call this woman and go and have Reiki.” So I said, “Okay.” So I called this woman and I said, “Somebody said I should come and see you.” She said, “Are you looking for relaxation or are you looking for spiritual help?” And I said, “I guess spiritual help.” It’s like, well, I wasn’t looking for relaxation. And I went and the minute I walked into her door, it was like the most phenomenal experience I’ve ever had and I said to her I need this in my life. And then I was attuned First Degree, Second Degree, then . . . I knew from that day I walked in that I was going to be a Reiki Master. So, that’s my background to it.”

Jill’s narrative reflects how she sees God as intervening to prove his existence by directing her to Reiki. It was through her experience after the death of her brother-in-law that led Jill to the vehicle through which she became able to “remember our source.” For Jill Reiki is a means through which she connects with her “God-self” and understands that “you are one with God.”

The Narrative Construction of Illness

Collecting the narratives of informants during fieldwork has always been an important part of research (see Mattingly and Garro 2000, Kleinman 1980, Kleinman 1998). Narratives provided to the anthropologist “address life as an unfolding affair” and reflect the process of negotiation individuals undergo in the course of their lives (Mattingly and Garro 2000: 17). Anthropologists rely on narrative to examine multiple aspects of the community they are studying,

including explanations of illness, healing techniques, and the interaction between healer and patient (Mattingly 1998: 6-7). According to Cheryl Mattingly:

Stories have played a part in these studies because anthropologists have routinely relied upon informant accounts either as a means of access to events they could not witness or as a way to learn something about their interlocutor's experiences and beliefs about illness. In eliciting informant accounts, many times what they have heard were stories. (Mattingly 1998: 7)

Mattingly argues that it is only recently that anthropologists have started to recognize that when eliciting information from their informants they are receiving stories. Mattingly proposes anthropologists should not interpret story as text, but “as some kind of social act” (Mattingly 1998: 7).

The use of narrative by Reiki Masters and practitioners provides the form through which meaning is created out of the illness experience. As Kleinman acknowledges in his analysis of the illness narratives of chronic pain sufferers:

The problem of illness as suffering raises two fundamental questions for the sick person and the social group: Why me? (the question of bafflement), and What can be done? (the question of order and control). (Kleinman 1988: 29)

The experience of illness necessitates the quest for a way to create meaning out of the situation. Each of the narratives presented in this chapter address the questions Kleinman proposes illness generates. Marie's illness narrative poses the question “Why me?” and formulates the answer, “Illness happens.” Other members of the Reiki community I interviewed, including Grace, Jill, and Wendy, offer more complex answers to the questions that Kleinman proposes. Each of these women holds that physical illness is often the final manifestation of a pre-existing

emotional, psychological, or spiritual problem. According to this interpretation, the physical manifestation of an illness is a warning sign that something is happening at a deeper level that the individual needs to be made aware of in order for healing to take place. In response to “the question of order and control,” these women have found incorporating Reiki to be useful in giving meaning to their individual experiences of illness.

Linda Garro (2000) examines the interpretations of diabetes in an Anishinabe community. She records narratives situating illness in the larger context of a person’s life history and examines how the past is represented in the present situation (2000: 70). According to Garro, “Remembering is reflexive and generative” (2000: 73). At the time of the experience, significance may not be assigned to the event by the individual. The event itself may not take on significance until it has long passed (2000: 73). Similarly, Reiki Master Jill did not recognize her experience of “spiritual angst” at the time of her brother-in-law’s death until after the event had passed. Though she would not have been able to identify her experience as “spiritual angst” at the time, she is now able to identify that is one of the reasons that she was “brought” to Reiki.

Reiki and the Biomedical Tradition

The Reiki Masters and practitioners I interviewed acknowledged that in some instances clients expect Reiki to “fix” specific ailments. Unlike practitioners in the biomedical system, Reiki Masters and practitioners do not reduce their understanding of the body to a mechanical metaphor (see Kirmayer 1988). As

Grace says when individuals come to her looking for her to “fix” them, “I get rid of that real quick.” Jill also echoed this sentiment when asked about the reasons why clients come for treatments. Jill thinks the desire to be “fixed” is one of the reasons people believe they come to her for treatment, but such a cure might not take place. Ultimately Jill claims she does not know why people come to her for treatment. She simply knows that they come, get on the table, and experience something profound. As a result, something shifts and changes. Maybe the client’s illness is healed or perhaps it abates for a period. But Jill believes that clients are drawn to her not for the physical relief from pain, but for some type of deeper spiritual reasons. Jill asserts that even if clients think they are coming for physical relief, they are really coming to her in order to deal with other issues at work.

As the narratives of Marie, Judith, and Brenda demonstrate, Reiki is an alternative healing technique often utilized in conjunction with the traditional biomedical system. On the basis of my field research, I argue that Reiki Masters and practitioners typically view illness and the treatment of illness as holistic. When I asked Grace about Reiki and the biomedical system, she asserted that Reiki should always be used in conjunction with biomedicine. Grace believes that people should utilize all of the tools available to them, including biomedicine, naturopathic medicine, chiropractic, and other alternative healing techniques like Reiki. In order to make this clear, Grace recounts her experience treating two women who developed ovarian cysts at the same time. Both women thought that

they might need surgery to remove the cysts. According to Grace, one woman's cyst disappeared while the second woman had to have her cyst removed surgically. When the woman returned to Grace later, she explained that she knew why surgery had been necessary in her situation. She needed to know whether her family really loved her or not. Grace concluded her story by telling me "Healing happens in many ways. That was her healing. And the other person said, 'Yes, we disappeared it.' That was her healing. We each have our own way of healing." Although the two women Grace spoke about were faced with the same physical ailment, the treatment necessary for each woman was found within two different contexts.

Some Reiki practitioners, like Grace, believe that Reiki complements the biomedical system, while others assert that the biomedical system is limited in its approach to disease and illness. Sara, a Usui Reiki Master, thinks that the Western biomedical system is very effective in identifying what is happening in the body. However, she also believes that if an illness cannot be treated with a pill or a diseased organ cannot be removed from the body surgically, biomedical doctors do not know what to do in terms of treatment. Jill also echoes this sentiment. Individuals should visit the doctor if necessary; however, it would also be helpful to visit a Reiki Master. In explaining her position, Jill related another story about how Reiki can be used in conjunction with, or perhaps even in place of, the biomedical tradition. Jill explained that she had a female client who had been diagnosed with cancer and was told she only had a certain amount of time left

before she would die. When asked if she would like to try Reiki, her client initially declined, wanting to distance herself from anything perceived as “witchdoctor stuff.” The client’s daughter, in an attempt to persuade her mother, tried Reiki. Seeing how much her daughter enjoyed having treatments, the woman agreed to try Reiki. After three years, she is still alive. According to Jill, her client’s doctors report that the woman no longer needs medical treatment. Although her health has improved dramatically, her client is not satisfied because she has not been completely cured. Jill attributes this situation to the fact that even though her client receives Reiki treatments there is still a part of her that resists looking at certain aspects of her life. Jill thinks that the health of the general public would improve if every doctor offered access to a Reiki practitioner in their office.

While most Reiki Masters and practitioners use Reiki in conjunction with biomedical treatments, not all do so. For example, Zoe and her family do not utilize the biomedical system. Zoe describes herself as never using traditional biomedical therapies; for example, she was able to rid herself of her numerous phobias without the aid of medication. Rather than depending on biomedicine for treatment, Zoe finds her own strength to deal with illness. Zoe describes it as “taking back your own power.” No one, including biomedical doctors, will tell Zoe what is wrong inside her body. Instead Zoe will figure out what is wrong on her own and will take care of it herself.

Illness and Responsibility

The question “Are people responsible for their illnesses?” elicited a variety of answers from the Reiki Masters and practitioners who participated in my field research. In the First Degree workshop I attended we briefly addressed the impact of thought on the creation of reality. The part of the mind that creates reality uses imagery and seeks to create what the mind desires. If we fear something, our mind tends to project that thought onto our reality and makes it into reality. However, if we base our reality on what we desire we also have the power to change our reality. Although some members of the Reiki community assert that individuals are responsible for “creating their reality,” it is important to draw a distinction between responsibility and blame. According to Wendy:

I think people are responsible for absolutely everything that happens inside of them. And outside of them as well. Now, understand that responsible does not mean to blame. Okay? We create our happiness. We create our own world. It doesn't mean, also, that you choose it at this level. Okay? Now, one of the things that I'm very aware of . . . I had a failed marriage. It was ugly. You know, very, very bad. I'm aware that on a higher level I chose to be in that relationship and learned lots of stuff from this guy. Plus I got two beautiful children. Okay? So even though on the surface it looks like it was a horrific mistake to do that, no. Absolutely it was the best thing that could have happened to me.

At times negative experience, as in the case of Wendy's divorce, and illness are thought to teach the individual an important life lesson. Wendy describes her experience with Hepatitis A as “intensely important” for her. As she stated, “If I hadn't had that illness I would have been a completely different person. Who knows if I would have even found Reiki.”

Although the question of responsibility for illness is often interpreted negatively, others find it empowering. According to Laura:

I, personally, accept that “Yes, I’m responsible.” And I find that empowering. Because if I am responsible for it, if I’ve caused it somehow – it’s not that people consciously go out and catch an illness – then I can solve it. I believe that if I am the source, I have the source of resources to solve it.

While Laura believes individuals are responsible for their illnesses, she also believes that the ability to treat that illness is within in her grasp. Other Reiki Masters echoed the theme of empowerment in relation to responsibility. Deena, a Usui Reiki practitioner studying to become a Reiki Master, also develops the theme of empowerment. While the term responsibility can generate negative feelings for the ill individual, the way in which that person responds to illness is key. Taking into consideration the impact a positive attitude and positive thought can have on the body, realizing the connection between mind-body-spirit, and acknowledging the signals that the mind sends the body are all crucial to overcoming the difficulties individuals face. Deena thinks that rather than speaking of a connection between illness and responsibility, attention should be given to empowering people to realize how much they have the capacity to positively respond to life.

The narratives Reiki Masters and practitioners shared with me over the course of my fieldwork drew together several significant themes regarding the relationship between Reiki and illness. The first of these themes is that illness is not perceived as merely physical. Rather, many Reiki Masters and practitioners

assert that the physical manifestation of an ailment or an illness is actually indicating that something may need to be addressed at an emotional, psychological, or spiritual level. The second of these themes involves the relationship between Reiki and the use of biomedical therapies. Although a few of the practitioners I interviewed expressed no interest in utilizing biomedicine, most Reiki Masters and practitioners continue to utilize biomedical therapies. Many practitioners were clear in their belief that individuals could benefit from the combined use of Western biomedicine in conjunction with Reiki. The third and final of these themes concerns the way in which Reiki provides a framework of meaning within which illness can be understood. The way in which Reiki Masters and practitioners are able to make sense out of suffering is reflected in their understandings of illness and its causes.

III. Reiki as Religious Healing

Love. It is, to my mind, the only healing.

*Sara, a Reiki Master describing
the nature of healing.*

I was late. My first night of fieldwork and I was late. I rushed up the walk to the clinic, hoping that the workshop had not started without me. I was uneasy enough about starting my research and taking the First Degree workshop without the added anxiety caused by the mix-up in directions that had delayed me. As I climbed the stairs to the front entrance, I passed Mike, the Reiki Master. He said, “We’re running late. The door was locked until 7:30! That’s never happened before.” With a puzzled look, I went inside and climbed the stairs. Immediately as I walked into the room, I apologized to the group for being late. Each one responded, “That’s alright.” One young woman looked up at me from where she was sitting on the floor and responded, “That’s okay. The universe had us wait for you.”

Shortly after I arrived, Mike had us settle into our spots in the room and introduce ourselves to each other. There were about six of us in the workshop ranging in age and background. The group was predominately female; there was only one man in the group other than Mike. Mike began by introducing himself to the group and recounted some of his past experiences working with energy. Gradually, each member of the group introduced him or herself and gave a short explanation of why he or she was attending the workshop. By the time it was my

turn to introduce myself, I was extremely nervous. Unsure of how the group would respond to me, I explained that I was a graduate student in the Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University interested in studying Reiki and healing. I also explained that I was attending the First Degree workshop so that I could begin developing a better understanding of Reiki and the experience of giving Reiki. In response to my introduction I was greeted with specific questions about the way I had discovered Reiki and what had prompted me to attempt a study of energy work. The first evening of the workshop consisted of a basic introduction to Reiki and the larger concept of energy.

Over the course of the next three days I was immersed in learning about energetic systems. I practiced the “hands on” form to give Reiki, and underwent a series of four attunements, or initiations, making me into a conduit for the energy. The final of the four initiations took place shortly before the conclusion of the last day of the workshop. After we had finished practicing the final set of hand positions Mike had taught us earlier that day, he asked us to collect the chairs from the room and set them up into a circle as we had done for the previous three initiations. When the chairs were in place, Mike asked us to take our places in the circle. Once each of us was seated, Mike instructed us to close our eyes and hold our hands together prayer-like at chest level for the fourth and final time of the weekend. As in the previous initiations, the room was extremely quiet. Occasionally a soft rustling of the leaves from the tree just outside the open window could be heard. I concentrated on the noises that drifted into the room

from outside, trying to distract myself from thinking about how quickly my arms tired from being held in this position for several minutes. The loud roar of cars and trucks periodically overtook the sound of the leaves as they passed by on the street outside.

After we had settled into our seats and moved into this now familiar prayer-like position, Mike paused for a moment. I heard him move softly in the background and wondered to myself whether or not he was preparing in some special way for what he was about to do. The initiation began in the exact same way as the previous three. Mike slowly circled the perimeter of the group several times until he returned to his start position. After pausing for a moment, Mike proceeded to move between me and the person seated to my right. As he moved from person to person around the circle, I overheard the occasional sound as he attuned the others. By the time it was my turn to be attuned, it had felt as though I had been waiting forever. While I was waiting I could not help but think, “Please hurry, my arms are shaking. I don’t think I can hold them up much longer.” Mike arrived just in time to rescue my arms before they collapsed.

I do not remember the exact process Mike performed in attuning me; however, the experience of the attunement itself was unique. The process of attunement did not seem to matter; I was overtaken by what I was feeling at the moment. As Mike performed this attunement, it felt as though my body was awash in heat. I could feel the heat as it rose in my face and spread throughout the rest of my body. It was as though the heat had entered every pore of my body and

permeated every aspect of my being. It was all encompassing. It was as though I could feel it moving through my body starting at the top of my head and out through my toes. I thought to myself, “What’s happening? Is this the energy? Is this what it feels like for it to move through your body? It’s amazing.” This experience was something totally different from what I had experienced in the previous initiations. I was overwhelmed with the sense that if something or someone did not anchor me by physically connecting me to something I would float away.

After Mike had finished the cycle of initiations, he told the group we could open our eyes. I sat for an extra second or two with my eyes closed, soaking in what had taken place. I felt different than I had before the initiation. It was as though this experience truly solidified what I had started to experience when I was both giving and receiving Reiki during the workshop. After a second or two, I sat rubbing my eyes while I looked around the circle. Everyone in the group was rather quiet and seemed to be absorbing what each had just experienced.

Recounting her experience with healing and energy work while ill during the 1996 American Anthropological Association meeting, anthropologist Edith Turner (2005) recalled that she could not deny her experience. According to Turner, “After that I had to admit that energy healing was real and that one could feel it” (Turner 2005: 389). Following this experience, Turner (2005) proceeded to explore alternative healing techniques, such as dowsing, Therapeutic Touch, and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). According to Turner, research

concerning the growing American New Age and popular medicine was marginalized in anthropology. As Turner points out, such phenomena are only considered “in context” and anthropologists would “not touch the main point, experience” (Turner 2005: 395). Rather anthropologists tended to write *around* experience without directly confronting it, by analyzing the conditions which led to such beliefs and developing explanations for why such phenomena exist (Turner 2005: 394-395; Bruner 1986).

Yet as Edward Bruner (1986) describes it, the relationship between experience and its expression is always problematic. While Turner acknowledges that the anthropologist may get “caught” in the experiences of ritual and religion and thus argues “one may never fully understand a religion until one experiences it” (Turner 2005: 388), the problematic relationship still exists between experience and its expression. Moreover, the anthropologist who does become “caught” then has to negotiate that relationship between experience and its expression. My attendance at the First Degree workshop could be considered an attempt to negotiate that gap between experience and its expression to which Bruner is referring. Bruner goes on to postulate that “experience structures expressions, in that we understand other people and their expressions on the basis of our own experience and self-understanding” (Bruner 1986: 6). Since, as Bruner suggests, we interpret the experiences of others through our own, it became necessary for me to develop my own understanding of Reiki and gain my own experiences in using this healing modality.

What is Healing?

As the narratives of Reiki Masters and practitioners presented in Chapter II emphasize, illness can potentially be attributed to a myriad of causes, many of which can result in the physical manifestation of disease. Over the course of my research, I also collected numerous explanations of healing and its relationship to Reiki and energy work. Although the definitions of healing may vary, there are several commonalities.

Like interpretations of illness, healing also may be more than physical in nature, according to Reiki Masters and practitioners. Healing occurs on multiple levels; it is not limited to physical healing, but may take place on emotional or psychological, social, and spiritual levels as well. For this reason, many Reiki Masters and practitioners maintain that healing should be viewed as holistic. Owing to the often unexpected nature of healing, it may have an impact on areas of life that are unforeseen and unanticipated. At times, individuals who believe they have experienced healing may not necessarily have received the healing that was initially desired, but rather a different type of healing occurred.

When I asked Reiki Master Grace about her thoughts on healing, she responded after a long pause, “What is healing? What do I know about healing? . . . I put my hands on myself everyday and I ask for my own healing.” Then, as Grace explains, something happens; for example, she and her husband may have a fight and are angry at each other. As a result of this situation, Grace would be prompted to look at what is happening between the two of them that could create

such a situation. She would need to ask herself the questions: “What am I fighting about? What’s that really about?” Through examining her thoughts, Grace believes she would be able to identify the cause of the situation. Grace amplifies her explanation by recounting her experience working with Emma, a woman who had passed away from breast cancer a few weeks before our meeting. Initially contained in the breast, Emma’s cancer had spread to the bone. Before she passed away, the cancer had also infiltrated the liver and spread throughout her body. Emma came to Grace for weekly Reiki treatments and lived six months longer than her doctors had initially predicted. According to Grace:

And she attributed that to Reiki. And she did her work. She was abused when she was a child. She did her work. She said she didn’t want to be a burden. If she was a burden, she wanted to die fast. She wanted to be at home. She wanted her friends and family around. And she did just that. She did just that. So I say that’s healing, even though she died.

As Grace goes on to describe:

Healing isn’t sometimes about healing physically so we can be here on the planet; keep remaining here. But we heal because we know what our life is really about. And she got to that place. It was Friday afternoon and she couldn’t take care of herself anymore . . . And she knew that was it for her. She was dead by Tuesday. *She made it! She did it!* To me, that’s healing.

In Grace’s interpretation, healing is not about being physically “cured.” Rather it is about self-awareness. Healing involves acknowledging what is happening in your life and coming to a decision about how to address those issues. Healing may mean coming to terms with why Grace and her husband argued or, as in the

case of Emma, coming to terms with death. Healing comes in a variety of ways to each individual.

When we met, Grace and I spoke about my personal experiences working with energy after my First and Second Degree workshops. I commented on how I had felt more aware of what was happening in my life. Grace replied, “That’s what Reiki does. It raises consciousness. At least that’s what I know about Reiki. You learn to pay attention. What you’re thinking. And what you’re feeling. And what’s going on around you. *Paying attention*. You’re not walking around unconscious.” Grace went on further to draw out this connection between Reiki and consciousness:

It’s about truth. Absolutely about your own truth. You’re really asking when you put your hands on, for me, you are asking for your own healing. And that’s going to come in spades. We don’t really know what our own healing is. We don’t really know what we need, but Reiki will show us. Reiki will tell us. We’ll get it. Oh, this is what I’m doing. Oh, this is what I have to look at. It’s *so* simple.

In speaking with me, Grace also explained how important it is to trust Reiki. According to Grace, “You just put your hands on and that’s all.” Healing happens simply by placing hands on and allowing Reiki to flow through.

Laura, a 53-year-old Reiki Master who has been practicing in the Usui system for the past ten years, also echoes this sentiment. When I asked Laura to describe healing, she told me “Healing is a multilevel process. Certainly physical healing, we understand the process . . . But on another level, there’s the energy body which I see heals the emotional, the mental body. I think healing is very

much a holistic spectrum . . . Reiki goes to all these different levels.” Laura trusts that the Reiki energy will know where to go in order to best help the person receiving the treatment. For example, Laura explained how her brother had been diagnosed with a brain tumor and described the impact this diagnosis has had on his life. Although the diagnosis was initially viewed negatively, Laura explains how this diagnosis has also had a positive impact on her brother. She describes her brother as having been an “emotionally closed off” person. However, when he came to the realization that he was going to pass away, he began “opening up” and expressing his love for family and friends, thereby healing fractured social relationships. According to Laura:

So I look at that and I go, “Wow, this is a very negative thing.” But on the other hand, it’s allowing him to show a different side of him that was very repressed. That was repressed for a good reason. He’s a different person. He’s a softer, kinder, more at peace person . . . Illness is complicated. Illness in some ways has its benefits for some people. You can see it quite clearly.

Although her brother has not experienced the physical healing of his brain tumor, healing has taken place in other ways. Upon discovering his brain tumor and recognizing that he had limited time remaining with his family, Laura’s brother has been able to heal his relationships with others.

Zoe also shares a view of healing similar to that expressed by Grace and Laura. Zoe believes healing can come in many forms. In order to explain this concept, Zoe recounted her experience working with Beth, a client who had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Zoe was asked by Beth to touch her breast thereby giving Reiki directly to the area affected by the cancer. Zoe had prefaced this

story with a comment about the difficult relationships Beth had experienced with members of her family. As Zoe described it, she had been unable to relate to her parents or her brother; however, after she was diagnosed with cancer, the family came together and Beth was able to develop a wonderful relationship with her family. According to Zoe, “The healing [the woman experienced] came from her having cancer.”

This narrative demonstrates an aspect of healing that is important for Zoe: healing does not necessarily always happen in the way it is expected. As Zoe told me, “Because what happens is there is a healing. And God says, “Yes, I will give you a healing.” But sometimes the healing is not what people want.” Zoe continues to recount the way in which this particular woman had been “given” her healing. The Thursday before she died, Beth asked Zoe to be with her when she passed away. Zoe agreed. On Friday, Beth went into a deep coma and on Saturday the family contacted Zoe. Zoe had asked the family if she should come down, explaining that when Beth was very ill she liked to receive Reiki. The family declined and explained that the doctors recommended that Beth be left alone. On Sunday the family once again contacted Zoe telling her she did not need to come to the hospital because the family wanted to be together on Father’s Day. Zoe was told to come to the hospital the next day to give Beth a Reiki treatment. Later that day, Beth passed away in her father’s arms. According to Zoe, “I wasn’t meant to be there. God set it up. That was the healing. The healing came. She had tried so desperately to be close to her father.” In this case, the healing occurred in death.

Beth was able to spend almost a year with her family and, in the end, the healing came in the form she wanted.

Cate is a 50-year-old Reiki Master who has been practicing in the Tibetan/Usui and Karuna Reiki systems for the past four years. Cate first encountered Reiki after deciding to take time off from her work as a radiation therapist. “Burnt out” and exhausted from work, Cate decided she needed to take time to “re-energize” herself. Upon realizing that she had always wanted to work with people, Cate found herself “wanting to put her hands on people” and first looked into Therapeutic Touch²⁴ to fulfill this need.

At the same time that she was exploring Therapeutic Touch at workshops, Cate recalls her encounter with a Reiki Master giving classes at an educational workshop. Rather than waiting for a Therapeutic Touch course to be taught, Cate decided to visit the Reiki Master she had met for a session and was immediately “hooked.” Cate’s involvement in Reiki has continued to grow from that point. Cate’s experience with Reiki has brought her to incorporate other elements in her practice. Cate credits Reiki with bringing her to past life regression therapy and channeling. Cate feels she would not have otherwise pursued these practices without Reiki. As Cate recalled, “I don’t think I would have gotten into it

²⁴ Therapeutic Touch (TT) was developed by nursing instructor Dolores Kreiger and based on the principle, like Reiki, that there is “a universal energy underlying all life processes” (Fuller 1989: 98). Kreiger draws significantly on the Hindu concept of *prana*. According to Kreiger, “*prana* is the metaphysical agent responsible for all life processes and is thus the ultimate power behind every form of healing” (1989: 98). Illness occurs when there is a lack of *prana* in the body. Therapeutic Touch is a form developed by Kreiger to channel *prana* into patients (Fuller 1989: 97-99).

[channeling] except that I found myself channeling with Reiki and I wanted to get a better handle on what it was I was doing.”

Cate also attributes her practice of past life regression therapy to Reiki. Cate describes herself as not knowing whether she “believed in past lives or anything like that.” However, during her first Reiki session when she found herself in a past life Cate was prompted to explore regression therapy. As with channeling, her interest was a result of her desire to know how to work with this experience since it was presenting itself. Cate describes regression therapy as a method of returning to the past, whether it is childhood, the recent past, or a past life, and addressing the impact that the past has had on a person’s current state. Cate acknowledges that regression therapy does attract individuals who are curious about their past lives, but for her it carries greater implications:

And so by healing that aspect, it can help to heal what’s going on now . . . There’s something back there that you are still carrying in your body and in your energy that can be healed by going back there and just healing it.

Cate’s decision to incorporate other techniques, such as regression therapy, into her Reiki practice also reflects her conception of healing. Since the body holds and brings with it the traumas and injuries it has collected over the course of time, it may be necessary to go back to the source of the problem in order to begin healing.

Cate believes that healing can occur in a variety of ways and does not take place only on the physical level. Rather, since all aspects of an individual’s life are interconnected, so too is healing. As Cate explained to me, someone may

chose to “work” on one aspect of his or her life, such as a relationship, work, or family, and this effort will have an impact on the other areas of life. For example, if a person decides to improve his or her working conditions, it is inevitably going to affect not only that person’s relationships but physical health as well.

Cate describes healing as “helping the flow happen again.” Like Zoe, Cate had treated a client who had been diagnosed with cancer for several months before she eventually died. When Cate would ask her client why she was there and what she wanted, her client would respond “I want healing.” After some questioning by Cate, her client explained that she wanted her cancer to be cured. Cate struggled with this definition of healing because it entailed complete recovery from physical disease and she was not sure this woman would be physically whole again. Cate shared a similar experience to Zoe in that the healing that occurred was not necessarily the one which the client expected. As Cate recalls:

In the end, for me, what the healing was - and maybe that’s why healing is hard to define because sometimes we don’t know what the healing is until it’s done - for her to actually cross over and be at peace was huge. She was so afraid. So discordant with her family, so many people around her that to have a peaceful passing was an incredible healing.

In this case, healing occurred not as a physical “cure” of cancer, but came in the form of the acceptance of death. Wendy also offered an interpretation emphasizing the multivalent nature of healing. As Wendy explained, healing can take place on an emotional level in which a person experiences, for example, relief of anxiety, tension, or anger. Yet healing may also take place spiritually,

leaving one feeling lighter and more connected to the universe rather than alone and separated.

The description of healing offered by Zoe and Cate demonstrates the multiple ways in which healing can be interpreted. Not only does Cate understand healing to occur on multiple levels, but she also identifies healing as “helping the flow to happen again.” The conception of healing as reinstating a balance or wholeness to a body that has been made partial by illness is also shared by members of the Reiki community that I spoke with over the course of my fieldwork. Celine, a Usui Reiki Master from the Toronto area, describes healing not in terms of “curing,” but:

Healing is more making the person whole. Or working at looking at the person not in terms of a disease, but looking at the person as a whole with every aspect of their being. And that person *happens* to have a disease but *is not* the disease itself. And the healing involves the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. All aspects.

When the Reiki practitioner views the client in a holistic way, the individual is able to move beyond viewing him or herself solely in terms of what is happening within or to the body.

The need to distinguish healing from curing is also important for Louis, a 53-year-old First Degree practitioner with his own Traditional Chinese Medical (TCM) practice. Louis primarily practices shiatsu massage at his clinic, but does feel that he incorporates Reiki into almost everything he does. Louis’ interpretation of the energy worked with by Reiki practitioners reflects his interest in Traditional Chinese Medicine and its philosophy and practice. Louis interprets

Reiki energy through this lens and sees it as ch'i. Prior to adopting Reiki and opening his own practice, Louis was a Lutheran pastor for 15 years. He then converted to Catholicism and became a high school chaplain. After leaving his position as chaplain to care for his ill parents, Louis had the opportunity to study Eastern practices and philosophy, including Reiki, Tai chi, Qi-gong, and shiatsu in greater detail.

In describing illness, Louis was careful to make the distinction between healing and curing. Curing would entail the physical “fixing” of an ailment: for example, a broken leg is set in a cast and in time the bones will knit together. Healing, in contrast, implies wholeness: for example, healing could occur even when an individual injured a leg so severely that it required amputation. Although the individual would be physically changed, healing could still take place; however, not in the sense of curing. On the contrary, healing would entail being able to incorporate that change into the individual’s “sense of self.” Healing would involve accepting that situation and incorporating it in “a balanced and a celebratory way.” Louis’ analogy demonstrates that healing is “an integration and a wholeness of the person’s experience.” Brenda also drew on the concept of wholeness and integration in explaining healing. She described it as “That feeling of more life. More bubbiness. Less inner conflict, more a holistic sense of self.” As both Louis and Brenda’s comments suggest, for Reiki practitioners focusing on only the physical aspect of healing does not do justice to the full potential of healing.

Like Cate, Maggie, a Second Degree Usui practitioner, emphasizes balance in her definition of healing. When asked what healing is for her, she told me that healing is “bringing disorder back into alignment or to peace. Harmony.”

According to Deena, another Second Degree practitioner:

You know, what [does] the word healing mean? And on what level? To me, is the question. Healing is just coming back to some harmony. Some balance. And that could very well be at a spiritual level. So it may not manifest instantly in a physical healing, it may be at a spiritual level that the person receives some inspiration from having this Reiki treatment. And certainly, I have clients who will say that. They feel like they received some inspiration as to where they are going with their life or whatever. They might receive certain information that would help them during the Reiki treatment. So healing can come in many forms.

The belief that healing is both a multilayered and holistic concept comes together when healing is characterized as “letting go.” When Mike and I met for lunch shortly before I decided to take the Second Degree workshop in March 2005, we spoke at great length about questions of authenticity, Reiki in Japan, and about some of my experiences since being attuned in First Degree. Near the end of our conversation we were discussing my desire to have tangible, concrete experiences of Reiki. Mike explained to me that although the physical sensations we have do not really matter, people tend to place too much importance on them. As Mike told me, Reiki is fun, and you do need to have those physical sensations, but phenomenology is not important. It is important to let attachment to these experiences go. In his next breath, Mike told me he would go as far as to say that all healing is letting go and all letting go is healing. As Lynne, an Usui Reiki

Master, said in agreement, “I would certainly define healing as letting go. I mean it really is that simple and that complicated. Simple and hard, right?”

Reiki Masters and practitioners each have an individually tailored understanding of healing based on their experience with Reiki. Owing to the variety of ways in which healing can be interpreted the nature of healing must be recognized as multivalent. Healing does not only, or even primarily, take place on a physical level, but rather, may occur on numerous levels often incorporating emotional and spiritual aspects.

Instruments for the Energy: The Role of the Healer

In her study of alternative healing in suburban America, Meredith McGuire (1988) found that the majority of members of the healing groups she studied believed that the power to heal was accessible to anyone.²⁵ According to McGuire, “individuals were encouraged to exert control in their own lives and, by extension, over their health and healing” (McGuire 1988:161). This view was also commonly held by members of the Reiki community that I spoke with during my fieldwork.

After being attuned to Reiki, an individual has the ability to give Reiki to oneself and others. When asked whether anyone can be attuned to Reiki and become a channel for the energy, I received a unanimous answer: yes. According to Grace, “Anybody can do Reiki. All it takes is commitment, dedication, a

²⁵ McGuire’s (1988) study included an examination of Christian healing groups, metaphysical movements, Eastern meditation and Human Potential groups, and psychic and occult healing groups.

willingness to say “I will.” Anybody can do Reiki.” For some of my informants, there was a further understanding that the ability to work with energy is a natural ability. Laura explains to me:

Anyone can do Reiki. It’s a natural ability, but only some people resonate with it for whatever reason and at different times in their lives. It’s a natural ability that we’ve shut off somehow throughout the years. I’m sure back in history; way, way, way back before doctors, energy healing was probably quite normal.

In this statement Laura explicitly expresses her belief that all people can perform Reiki; it is simply that not everyone is aware of this ability. Celine also shares this opinion and reiterated it in our discussion: “It’s something that we all have. Being, sensing, I guess, the energy. And being open to receive the energy and to let it flow through us.” Clara, a Usui Reiki Master believes that:

we are all born with that connection; with that energetic connection of all that is; with the greater energy. I mean, you know, if you want to get technical with words, that’s what Reiki is; it is the energy we swim in. The *ki* or the *ch’i*. And I almost picture it as an umbilical cord. We each have that and it’s joined to that placenta in the sky. So in that sense absolutely, everyone can learn it. Where they go with it has to do with their story.

Everyone has the potential to put their hands on and, in being a conduit, allow the universal energy to flow through and into the person to whom they are offering Reiki. This notion is also reflected in the fact that Reiki Masters and practitioners hesitate to declare that they are healers, and more often completely reject this label. The energy “knows” where it needs to go in order to best assist the person.

According to Sara, anyone can do Reiki, but “There are levels at which they will be efficient at it. Depending on how much they can let go. Allow. How

open they can become. But because you receive an attunement, anybody can do it. It's just the opening up. What you do with it after that it is up to you." As Sara implies in this statement, an important aspect of Reiki is letting go of expectations, attachments, and ego. Practitioners should work towards letting go of the expectation that when giving Reiki to another person there will be a physical sensation, or a "release," or a healing will occur. This expectation and attachment needs to be let go of by both the giver and receiver of Reiki. As Gwen points out, the giver of Reiki is unable to control the session. One does not know what the energy flowing through is actually going to do. Gwen told me, "I'm just the channel. I don't *know* what the energy is really going to do." Whether or not the person receiving Reiki feels some type of physical sensation or experiences something that could be identified as healing is not within the control of the person giving Reiki. Gwen explains as a practitioner she tries to be open enough to allow the energy to move through her.

The ability to "get out of the way" is very difficult according to Wendy. She asserts that it is difficult not to want to take responsibility if Reiki has assisted someone in attaining whatever form of healing was desired. It is difficult to let go of the belief that 'this person would not have healed if they had not come to see me for Reiki.' Closely linked with letting go of ego and expectations, holding an intention to help others when giving Reiki is also important for many of my informants. As Gwen describes:

intention is your spirit is open and honest. And you're drawing in good energy from all around you; all of the good energy. And you

are asking for that to be channeled through you and so the intent is to give a person good energy. To heal in whatever way they need; emotional, spiritual, physical. And when you are working on a particular area, whatever they need for that area, the intent is a healing intent. And when I say that, that's what I mean. It's an energy and I intend to give good energy flowing through.

Although the ability to become a conduit and work with Reiki is accessible to anyone expressing an interest and willingness to learn, some distinctions are made regarding those interested in becoming Reiki practitioners. When making the decision to work with Reiki energy, it is also necessary for practitioners to work through their own "stuff." As Grace expressed to me:

the more that you put your hands on and work on people, what you're doing is opening yourself up. You are the recipient of the Reiki. It's going to *affect* you. It's going to *affect* your life. And so those blocks are going to melt down. And you are going to do your own personal work, *whether you like it or not. That's what's going to happen.*

Grace emphasizes that through involvement with Reiki individuals' lives will be changed. It is the natural process for an individual's life to be affected as he or she continues to work with the energy and does his or her "own personal work," or experiences his or her own healing. Whereas Grace believes that doing "personal work" is a natural outcome of the increased use of Reiki, Jill believes that "personal work" entails commitment on the behalf of the individual. Jill asserts that Reiki Masters and practitioners have to be committed to their own healing. There has to be a willingness to examine what is happening and "all the stuff they carry around." The process of healing does not stop once the practitioner has been attuned at the Master level; rather, it is an ongoing process. As Jill explains,

healing is a willingness to do that “personal work” on a daily basis. Jill believes that it is difficult for her to facilitate healing in others, if she is not willing to examine her own life and remain committed to her own healing on a daily basis.

Reiki Master Lynne also believes that everyone has the ability to give Reiki. Those who choose to continue and become practitioners or Reiki Masters tend to have a high degree of commitment. However, while they are committed to growing with Reiki, they are no more special than other members of the Reiki community. Lynne accepts that she has made a commitment to growing with Reiki when she became a Master, and postulates that being at this level of commitment is almost akin to making a spiritual commitment. As she develops and “deepens” her relationship with Reiki, she is also deepening her relationship to “spirit.”

Enacting Healing: Csordas and the Transformation of Self

Treatment serves a twofold purpose; at once it makes suffering more concrete by identifying experience with a specific illness while also making illness more manageable for the ill person (Danforth 1989: 54). In identifying illness through treatment, and thus making illness more manageable, the process of constructing meaning commences. According to Loring Danforth, “Religion generally, and religious rituals concerned with healing in particular, attempt to deal with the problem of human suffering by placing it in meaningful contexts in which it can be expressed, understood, and either eased or endured” (Danforth 1989: 51). Religious healing provides a means through which individuals can

make sense out of their illness experiences. Thus, religious healing translates otherwise incomprehensible experience into meaningful experience.

In his analysis of Catholic Pentecostal religious healing, Thomas Csordas (1983, 2002) develops the “rhetoric of transformation.” According to Csordas:

The notion of rhetoric, as against the notions of suggestion, support and nurturance, or placebo effect, contributes a recognition that healing is contingent upon a meaningful and convincing discourse that brings about a transformation of the phenomenological conditions under which the patient exists and experiences suffering or distress. (Csordas 2002: 25)

As Csordas suggests, the way afflicted individuals experience healing, and how it changes them, is dependent on more than the experience of treatment. By directing afflicted individuals to their actions and experiences, the process of healing enables the development of a new perspective on the situation. In the creating meaning out of experience, “a new reality or phenomenological world” is formed (Csordas 2002: 25). By forcing the afflicted individual to view his or her world in a different fashion, and as a result, creating new meaning, healing results. Following Csordas’ (1983, 2002) view, being moved into that new reality is healing for the afflicted individuals. Danforth continues to develop this theme and states, “Religious healing involves ritual performances that move people metaphorically from illness to health. It is in the power of these healing metaphors that the therapeutic efficacy of religious healing lies” (1989:56). In this view, healing is creating a new view of “health” for the afflicted individual. Religious and symbolic healing provides individuals a range of possible meanings to explain and understand their experiences (McGuire 1988: 188).

Csordas (1983, 2002) proposes a threefold process for the “rhetoric of transformation” to be successful. Csordas argues that the afflicted individual “must be persuaded that healing is possible” (Csordas 2002: 27). As such, the afflicted individual displays a predisposition to the possibility of healing. Following Csordas, Danforth argues that, “By giving people’s suffering new meaning in this way religious healing is able to bring about a change in people’s attitudes toward themselves, their suffering, and their entire social world” (Danforth 1989:57). Religious healing not only changes the way in which the afflicted individual understands his or her illness experience, but changes the way in which he or she understands life in general. Thus, Csordas proposes “The rhetoric of predisposition in healing is, then, a specific elaboration upon the process of conversion” (Csordas 2002:29). Healing comes to entail an experience of conversion from illness to health and to recognizing the possibility of healing.

Following predisposition, Csordas (1983, 2002) proposes that religious healing generates a sense of empowerment for the afflicted individual. According to Csordas, “the supplicant must be persuaded that the therapy is efficacious – that he is experiencing the healing effects of spiritual power” (2002: 27). The afflicted individual seeking out religious healing develops a sense that when healing takes place it is not the result of his or her actions, but is attributed to the experience of divine power (2002: 30). Finally, the afflicted individual experiences transformation. As Csordas explains, “the supplicant must be persuaded to change” (2002: 27) and “this movement amounts to a reconstruction of the self”

(2002: 34). The afflicted individual no longer orders experience according to illness, but constructs a view of him- or herself as “healthy, whole, and holy” (2002: 34). In her study of religious and symbolic healing, McGuire argues it is erroneous to view healing as solely coming from outside the afflicted individual, rather she found that most of her informants viewed healing as “a transformation process within the person” (McGuire 1988: 165).

As I conducted my research, it became apparent to me how Csordas’ (1983, 2002) “rhetoric of transformation” is a useful tool to understand how healing occurs within the Reiki community. When recounting their initial experiences with Reiki, some Masters and practitioners did experience a certain degree of predisposition, empowerment, and transformation as Csordas (1983, 2002) suggests of religious healing in general. I first introduced Jill’s narrative explaining how she found her way to Reiki in the last chapter.²⁶ Jill explained to me that as a child she was always fascinated with death and the belief that after dying individuals “returned to energy.” She describes how after the suicide of her brother-in-law she felt extremely guilty because she did not recognize the “moment where he kind of let me know.” Jill recounted that during one of her frequent walks she reached a point where she had to appeal to God. According to Jill, “And I used to go for long, long walks and one day I thought, “This is stupid.” I just said, “You know what? God, if you exist you better . . . At that point, I don’t know if you want me to use but, “You better f-ing well prove

²⁶ Refer to pages 53-54 in Chapter II: Illness and the Body for a more detailed explanation of Jill’s narrative.

yourself to me right now because I need something.”” Shortly after this experience a friend recommended to Jill that she consider having a Reiki session.

Jill describes her decision to practice Reiki as always having been about herself. Reiki has assisted her in healing her “issues,” in developing her relationship with God and, more broadly, in developing her own relationship with the universe. Jill’s understanding of Reiki clearly reflects her belief that her decision to practice Reiki is personal. Jill explains her understanding of Reiki to me:

I think our purpose here is to remember our source. Remember what we are a part of and I believe that Reiki offers us a form to experience that. When I put my hands on somebody, Reiki comes out my hands. It comes out of my being. . . what I truly believe is that I am connecting with part of me that is my God-self and this [Reiki] is just offering me a nice vehicle . . . I think if you get it so clearly that you are God. That you are God. That you are one with everything . . . That it’s a way of finding your way home.

Jill continues to speak on her understanding of God:

Energy. You know, God is a really difficult word. It’s a word, right? And I had so many issues with that word. I can finally use it now without, because in my concept God is an energy field. God is what I tune into when I feel Reiki. . . It’s a field. It’s a process. It’s a becoming.

In hindsight, Jill identifies “spiritual angst” as the primary reason she initially practiced Reiki. For Jill, Reiki is a means through which she is able to “remember our source” and holds an implicit spiritual aspect for her.

Jill’s narrative explaining her discovery of Reiki and her thoughts on the meaning of her practice in her life reflect elements of Csordas’ (1983, 2002) “rhetoric of transformation.” After the death of her brother-in-law, Jill

experienced a strong sense of guilt and her “life kind of fell apart.” Jill’s narrative implicitly reflects the need to re-order her life in light of her experience. It was not until later that Jill was able to recognize she was experiencing “complete and utter spiritual angst.” Reiki became a useful means through which to begin the process of transformation. The sense of empowerment Reiki has offered Jill is reflected in her understanding of the energy. Reiki enables a connection with her “God-self.” Jill believes “That it’s a way of finding your way home.”

Lynne is a Reiki Master in the Usui system and has been practicing Reiki for the past nine years. At the time she first discovered Reiki, Lynne describes herself as doing her “personal work.” Taking the suggestion of her art therapist, Lynne contacted a Reiki Master for help with her “personal stuff.” Lynne recounts her first experience with Reiki:

I just went. And for me, from that first kind of session on, it just blew me out of the water. I was, I had quite profound sort of experiences right from the very beginning. It was big and dramatic. I think that’s because it needed to be big and dramatic to get my attention. Oh, oh, oh, what this all about? For me I actually felt like there was this like. . . It was quite instantaneous.

Lynne explains that because she was having “very profound experiences,” she was unable to deny the existence of Reiki. Lynne describes her experiences with Reiki as “big and dramatic” right away, getting at issues years of talk therapy had been unable to address. According to Lynne, “I was just captivated.”

Lynne initially describes Reiki as Universal Life Force energy and goes on to speak about its origin:

Universe becomes a euphemism, I believe, for God. And really, what gets revealed in that are people's spiritual wounds. Religious wounds. I think that's what happens. I mean, that's my personal take on it now. That universe is just euphemistic. And, in truth, I think we all know it. . . I believe we all do know. Like even source. People say source. Oneness. It comes from the universe. It comes from creator. Creation. All these euphemistic things. And I think there's a level on which we know that what we really mean is God.

Lynne's narrative exemplifies the way in which Reiki is inherently spiritual. It enables an intimate connection with the sacred source.

Marie has her First Degree in the Usui system of Reiki. During the summer of 2004, Marie discovered that her breast cancer had returned.²⁷ Marie asserts that Reiki found her shortly after her cancer recurred. Her daughter commented that Marie often felt better when she had "some sort of attention." Marie agreed and contacted her friend who was a Reiki Master. According to Marie, "Now, before that when I was going through my first bout with breast cancer. I am a Christian. I was praying. Whatever. It was working, but it wasn't working like Reiki's working." For Marie, the efficacious quality of Reiki was an attraction for her. Marie approaches Reiki with a sense of incredulousness:

Last night when I was doing it, suddenly instead of focusing on the breathing, I had this vision of a golden pillar coming down. *My palms, my hands got so hot I couldn't believe it.* It was . . . and I'm going, "I don't believe that this is really happening." . . . That's the thing about Reiki, you can't explain it. It just is. As far as I'm concerned. Anyway, it has, as I say, made an appreciable difference in my life to the point that people around me, will say you probably need to go and do some Reiki.

²⁷ Refer to pages 41-42 in Chapter II: Illness and the Body for a more detailed explanation of Marie's illness narrative.

Marie's experience of the Reiki energy reflects the sense that her experience of the energy and practice of Reiki is both practical and inexplicable.

While the way in which Marie understands illness has not changed since adopting Reiki as part of her treatment for cancer, the way she keeps it “at bay” has changed. She can practice Reiki and continue with her daily life in an uninterrupted manner. According to Marie, the way in which she understands the term “healthy” has changed somewhat. As she explains, “Friday. I was very healthy. I got everything I needed accomplished. The house being done, the laundry being done, and the this and the that. To me that's health. The cancer is just buried somewhere in there.” Marie believes that Reiki has had an appreciable difference in her life. Not only does Reiki physically make her feel better, but it has made her “more aware of the universe” and the impact of emotions on health and illness.

As Wendy described in her illness narrative,²⁸ she sought out an alternative healing technique in an attempt to deal with the “energetic upset” she was experiencing. After failed attempts to locate an acupuncturist, Wendy decided to contact the Reiki Master on the brochure she repeatedly found. According to Wendy, she had such a profound experience while receiving her first Reiki treatment, she knew she needed to be attuned in Reiki immediately. Wendy describes her sense of familiarity with Reiki after that first session, “I just knew. Absolutely, this was my path. This was it. This was the big one.” Her experience

²⁸ Refer to pages 46-48 in Chapter II: Illness and the Body for a more detailed description of Wendy's illness experience.

during the First Degree workshop only strengthened Wendy's belief that she had found her "path." According to Wendy:

And she [a fellow student in the class] heard someone say something. Now, what she had not known was I had been talking to a God about what I was doing. And that I had made an arrangement with Him. And the answer to that arrangement, she's like, "Well, I heard these words." I'm, "Well, what are they?" And she told me what they were. And they were the answer to what I had been saying to him. . . I'm like, "I'm so on the right path with this." It feels right.

As Wendy's comments show, she feels as though she has found the "path" she was destined to take. Her illness experience led her through a sequence of events bringing her to Reiki and igniting the desire to learn and practice energy work.

While Csordas (1983, 2002) initially developed the "rhetoric of transformation" in relation to his own research concerning Pentecostal religious healing, the framework he developed can also be applied to other forms of religious healing. As the narratives of Jill, Lynne, Marie, and Wendy reflect, Reiki has had a significant influence on their lives. Each practitioner experienced some form of predisposition, as defined by Csordas (1983, 2002). Jill experienced "spiritual angst" after the death of her brother-in-law necessitating a development of a more spiritual way in which to view the world. Lynne found Reiki very effective in addressing the "personal stuff" she was struggling with at the time. Marie continues to utilize Reiki as a means to deal with her breast cancer. Wendy initially tried Reiki hoping it would help with the "energy imbalance" she struggled with at the time. In each of these cases, the practitioners expressed a

need for some sort of intervention in their lives to help them understand the situation they were forced to address at the time.

Following the “rhetoric of transformation,” these practitioners did experience a sense of empowerment through their practice of Reiki. Reiki “worked” for them. Reiki provided Jill with a means through which to re-order and understand the world in light of unexpected death. Lynne described her initial experiences with Reiki as “big and dramatic.” Thus, she could not deny the experiences she was having and as such was “captivated” by Reiki. Reiki offers Marie the energy to get through the day, allowing her to perform tasks she would not otherwise be capable of completing. For Wendy, illness brought her to Reiki and enabled her to discover her “path” in life. Finally, each of these practitioners has experienced a form of transformation. Jill, Lynne, and Wendy have become Reiki Masters and identify their willingness to be on that “path” with great commitment. Although Marie has not experienced a physical “curing” of her disease and holds no expectation that Reiki will provide that, she does appreciate the benefits of Reiki.

The Efficacy of Healing

As in the construction of illness narratives, religious healing also provides a means through which individuals seek to create meaning in and from their experience. As Danforth argues, “Religion generally, and religious rituals concerned with healing in particular, attempt to deal with the problem of human suffering by placing it in meaningful contexts in which it can be expressed,

understood, and either eased or endured” (Danforth 1989: 51). Reiki creates the framework through which individuals become able to interpret illness and healing. The adoption of Reiki offers an opportunity whereby illness can be identified and made meaningful. As a result, healing can take place. Although many Reiki Masters and practitioners typologize illness into the categories of physical, emotional and psychological, and spiritual illness, the physical manifestation of illness is typically the final signal that a problem is present, whether it is a physical, emotional, or spiritual difficulty.²⁹ In receiving Reiki, the ill person is actively participating in transforming their illness experience into what could potentially become a healing experience.

As Danforth suggests, the goal of religious healing is to aid in reformulating the way in which individuals understand their situation and, thus, to help them move from a state of illness to health (Danforth 1989: 56). Likewise Bonnie Blair O’Connor claims that some individuals prefer to utilize practitioners who conceptualize disease and illness in an unconventional way relative to the biomedical approach, thus offering alternative ways to approach health and health problems (O’Connor 1995: 164). McGuire’s (1988) study of alternative healing groups in suburban New Jersey exemplifies the ways in which individuals seek out alternative approaches to illness and healing. As McGuire discovered, “Alternative healing systems are meeting some people’s needs, which the dominant medical system does not address” (McGuire 1988: 14). The increasing

²⁹ Refer Chapter II, the section on What is Illness?, p. 39-54.

adoption of alternative medical techniques reflects the fact that individuals are “authoritative agents of their own health care” (O’Connor 1995: 161). Individuals are basing their health care choices on their priorities and belief systems, as well as on their experiences (O’Connor 1995: 77). As Reiki Master Zoe explains, health care for her involves taking back her power. She is not dependent upon the biomedical system to identify illness, but rather will care for her body on her own.

Difficulties arise when the practitioner is primarily concerned “only with “curing” the *disease*, and the patient is searching for “healing” the *illness*” (Kleinman 1980: 355). Individuals utilizing Reiki tend to view the treatment of their ailment or illness in holistic terms. For example, Brenda approaches the treatment of her chronic arthritis as a “package.” Not only does Brenda receive occasional Reiki treatments, but she also incorporates other practices, including water aerobics, magnetic therapy, and educational kinesiology.

Practitioners attribute their initial attraction to Reiki to numerous factors, including interest in energy work and feeling the energy, a feeling of self-empowerment, a sense of groundedness, and a sense of connecting to something deeper than themselves. However, I argue that the prevailing sense that Reiki “works” for practitioners involves each of these factors. Whether Reiki “works” in the physical sense of relieving pain, in the emotional sense of addressing underlying emotional concerns, or in the spiritual sense of connecting individuals to something deeper or greater than themselves, the key principle is that Reiki “works.” Ultimately, the way in which it “works” is up to the individual. As

Waldram notes, efficacy “must be viewed as something that is essentially negotiated, in part, in each encounter of a patient and a practitioner in both biomedical and traditional medical systems” (Waldram 2000: 607).

The relationship between Reiki and healing is of central importance to practitioners and clients. According to Grace, “Reiki is healing. Healing is Reiki. It’s one and the same.” As a conduit for the energy to flow through, Reiki Masters and practitioners do not take on the responsibility of gauging the efficacy of healing through Reiki. As Samantha, a Reiki Master who has been practicing in the Usui system for approximately ten years, emphasizes, the Reiki Master or practitioner is not the healer. The client is the healer. While the Reiki Master, as a conduit, is the facilitator creating the space in which healing may occur, the person receiving Reiki during a session does the actual healing independently.

Ultimately there is no way of knowing whether or not healing has taken place as the result of a Reiki treatment. Several Reiki Masters and practitioners describe feeling a “shift” when healing takes place. Joyce, a First Degree practitioner who was attuned in Usui Reiki in the late 1980s, describes the feeling as a “switch” or “click” in the energetic field of the person. It involves a subtle change in the person. Whereas Joyce “knows” that healing has taken place through a subtle sensation she is able to detect, other practitioners such as Brenda, Maggie, and Celine characterize their experiences of healing in an internalized manner. According to Brenda:

If I see somebody with tears in their eyes after [a session has finished]. Or they have a deep sense of gratitude. I’ll know if I’ve

touched somebody. And I don't know how to say that. It's just that I know I'm doing the right things. A feeling inside that this is the right experience. So it's how they respond. It's how I feel from inside. That's how I know.

Maggie also echoes this type of sentiment about healing. Maggie notes that books she has read emphasize that it is actually a person's "higher self" receiving the Reiki. It depends on the willingness of that "higher self" to determine what amount of Reiki is being received. For Maggie healing may occur if she is able to bring herself to a calm condition in which she is accessing her own meditative state thereby opening up to allowing the energy to flow through her and into the person she is treating. In combination with a sense of warmth in her hands and a sense of validation from the person she is working with, this state indicates for Maggie that Reiki is coming through her. Maggie described how she had sat with her daughter's babysitter and held the woman's knees a few times. In one instance her babysitter told her that she had felt much more comfortable and felt that her range of motion had increased for the rest of the day. According to Maggie, her babysitter also recognized how she normally holds herself very rigidly and realized how she had fallen back into that pattern. Although Reiki provided temporary relief for Maggie's babysitter, it also directed her attention to the way in which she treats her body.

Reiki Master Celine also believes that the person who has received a Reiki treatment must be the one to determine whether healing has taken place. According to Celine:

Sometimes I know. Sometimes I don't know. Sometimes I see transformation in the person. Sometimes I see the breathing change. I see a lot of the emotions. I see the tears. I see the laughter. I see the body relaxing. I see the person's face change. I see the color in their face. And sometimes the client will tell me what they've experienced and express it in terms of healing.

In Celine's account, healing is very much experiential and dependent upon individual experiences. Gwen also describes this familiar sentiment. According to Gwen, healing is always successful. The practitioner and client may never be fully aware of the extent to which healing has occurred, but "If you have an open heart and good intentions, it will always be successful."

According to Sara, "You never know. You don't know because you don't know what the healing needed to be. And sometimes the person you're working on doesn't know either. It could be something totally different from what they envisioned. What you envisioned." As Sara describes it, healing can occur on multiple levels and can often at times be unexpected. Although an individual may seek out a Reiki practitioner for assistance in addressing a specific illness, it may not be healed. Zoe also shares this view with Sara. Only the person who has received Reiki will be able to tell the practitioner whether or not something has changed or a healing has occurred. As Zoe described through her experience with Beth, healing can occur in unexpected ways. In the case of Beth, healing did not result in the "curing" of her cancer, but occurred in her passing away while surrounded by her family. Through her illness experience with cancer, Beth was able to heal her relationship with her family. As Zoe demonstrated, healings do

not always come in the form that clients seek or expect. It is not her responsibility as a Reiki Master to provide the type of healing sought by the people who come to her; rather she assists in creating a “safe space” for whatever will happen.

Even if Reiki Masters or practitioners see some sort of result in themselves or those they practice on, it is ultimately the people receiving Reiki who determine whether or not healing has been efficacious. As Waldram argues, efficacy is something which is “essentially negotiated” (Waldram 2000: 607). Because it is “shifting and fluid, shared among many role players who do not necessarily exhibit the same views, and whose views may develop or change through time” (Waldram 2000: 619), efficacy must be considered in context. Both Reiki practitioner and client are active participants in that negotiation.

While the Reiki Masters and practitioners I interviewed assert that the individual receiving Reiki must determine efficacy, this was not necessarily reflected in their narratives. In the narratives presented, it falls on the practitioner to create meaning because the perspectives of the clients were not available. As McGuire asserts, the practitioner assists in determining the efficacy of healing by helping the afflicted individual to make meaning out of his or her experience. The practitioner contributes various methods in doing so, including assisting in producing order from experience, developing a sense of empowerment, and addressing the experience of suffering (McGuire 1988: 165). Thus, the role of the practitioner became an important means through which the transition from illness to healing as Danforth (1989) suggests of religious healing was interpreted.

IV. Construction of the Authentic: Japan, Reiki, and its Growth

. . . tradition cannot be defined in terms of boundedness, givenness, or essence. Rather, tradition refers to an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity. (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 273)

Since its inception in 1922, Reiki has attracted considerable interest as both therapy and spiritual practice. When deciding on Reiki as a topic for my thesis I carried out some initial research on the subject through Internet searches and surveying popular literature. In the process, I started to find out more about the various types of Reiki and discovered that the practice had expanded considerably. Not only is there a large body of literature available (cf. Brown 1992; Haberly 1990; Lübeck et al. 2001; Petter, Yamaguchi, and Hayashi 2003; Stein 1995; Usui and Petter 2003), but also knowledge of Reiki seems to be growing steadily. Initially, this discovery surprised me; however, I quickly started to notice advertisements and signs for Reiki Masters around my community and in Toronto.

Although I had stumbled on Reiki's increased popularity, which has resulted in numerous different systems, I had not anticipated this expansion becoming a line of inquiry over the course of my fieldwork. During my initial meeting with Mike, prior to attending the First Degree workshop, I was introduced in greater detail to the phenomena of Reiki systems in which

individuals are initiated as Reiki Masters over the course of a weekend³⁰ and attunement occurring over the Internet. We also discussed the issue of “questionable” literature as opposed to “good” literature to draw upon in my research. I was further introduced to these issues as the First Degree workshop progressed. The expansion of Reiki was an intriguing topic and I decided to incorporate questions directly addressing the topic of authenticity and Reiki in my interviews.

What is Authentic?

There has been a long history of studying the “Other” in anthropological theory and practice with both an explicit and implicit interest in the issue of authenticity (see Durkheim 1915, Malinowski 1948). Contemporary interest in the question of authenticity in anthropology crosses the boundaries of several areas of interest in including the anthropology of tourism, religious practice, and identity (cf. Badone and Roseman 2004; Bruner 1996; Clifford 1988; Conklin 1997; Handler 1986; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Handler and Saxton 1988; Hanson 1989; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Wallis 2003).

Richard Handler (1986) argues authenticity is a Western cultural construct closely linked to the Western construction of the individual. According to Handler, “Our search for authentic cultural experience – for the unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional – says more about us than others.”

³⁰ As I was later taught, the process of becoming a Reiki Master is a lengthy process. Refer to my explanation of “The Degrees” in the Introduction, p. 12-13.

(Handler 1986: 2; Said 1978). Not only are anthropologists actively engaged in seeking out an idealized and “authentic” Other in research, informants are also actively presenting the “authentic” to anthropologists. Conklin (1997) explores issues of self-representation and its political implications among Brazilian Amazonian Indian activists. In this study, authenticity becomes a valuable tool adopted by activists. According to Conklin, “Advocates who hope to evoke interest and sympathy for indigenous peoples often consciously recognize the potency of exotic visual images as symbolic communicators of authenticity” (Conklin 1997: 722). Conklin questions the boundedness of authenticity as a category. Rather than a static category, it is one which can be adopted and negotiated by both anthropologist and informant.

Authenticity is often significant to both anthropologists and informants. However, as Badone notes “authenticity is not “an absolute value but rather . . . a culturally and historically situated ideal that is *believed* to exist by individuals or groups” (2004:182). As I will demonstrate, Reiki Masters and practitioners understand “authenticity” through a variety of means in their beliefs and practices.

“Real” Reiki: Authenticity and the Growth of Reiki

In my First Degree workshop, Mike spoke about the history of Reiki and described the 1980s as period of increased growth in the initiation of Reiki Masters. In addition to the Usui system, there are a variety of other types of Reiki including, Tibetan/Usui Reiki, Karuna Reiki, Mari-El, and The Radiance

Technique (Lübeck et al. 2001: 22).³¹ According to Mike, many of the changes to the way in which Reiki is passed on occurred after the death of Takata and prior to the development of a standardized form of teaching. When I discussed the emergence of Reiki and the issue of authenticity with other Reiki Masters and practitioners, a number of themes emerged.

One of the common views expressed was how it was not useful or beneficial to make distinctions between different types of Reiki, because such distinctions involve placing limitations and labels on these practices. Arvind, a 24-year-old First Degree practitioner in the Usui system, provides the most direct response to this subject. He believes distinguishing between the Usui system and others involves using “labels.” Arvind went on to explain that this endeavor is unnecessary and unproductive. Rather, individuals interested in pursuing Reiki should focus on finding a teacher best suited for them; a teacher who is experienced and understanding.

When I asked Grace about her thoughts on making distinctions between Usui and other forms of Reiki, she told me that she tries to stay away from these types of judgments. Grace recalls that she was initially very upset about other systems of Reiki and the methods of teaching utilized by some of these systems when she first started practicing Reiki. However, she now says, “I’ve been able to live long enough to know people change things. You know, they learn something and decide this may be a better way of doing it.” Grace believes that “there is a lot

³¹ See Lübeck et al. 2001 for a more detailed listing.

of healing that needs to happen on the planet” and therefore any form of Reiki is beneficial. Grace explained that someone could take a Reiki course and never use it again over the course of his or her lifetime, while another person might take a course and become committed and dedicated to Reiki. According to Grace, “Then *that’s* Reiki.” In this example, initiation into a particular Reiki system, whether it is the Usui system or another, does not matter. Rather, it is the individual’s commitment and the way in which Reiki is used that become important. Grace continues:

I’m committed. I am committed to the way I was taught. Things have changed for me in the way that I do Reiki and it’s always been a bit different. You know, I’m more at peace with that now, more okay with that. That’s my gift. We all have our gifts, you know. And that’s what Reiki does. Whatever gifts we have, Reiki will bring that forth. And so I honor the tradition of Dr. Usui, Dr. Hayashi, Takata, Phyllis Furumoto to the best of my ability.

Grace chooses to focus on the way in which she practices Reiki. She says, “I just want to do my work. I just want to do Reiki on people and I try not to get caught up in that. It’s not worth it.”

Like Grace, Celine also attempts to avoid drawing distinctions between the different schools of Reiki. Although she did study to become a Reiki Master, Celine believes everyone can do Reiki. According to Celine, “It’s not something that I necessarily want to keep and be exclusive. I believe that everybody, everybody, anybody can work with energy.” Celine believes because Reiki started out in the West, it was the “chosen few” who were able to study it in the

beginning because it was very expensive to become a practitioner.³² However, if more and more individuals were to learn about and practice Reiki, it “wouldn't take anything away from anyone. It would just make the world a better place.” Celine explains that when an individual becomes a Reiki practitioner, he or she becomes a conduit for the energy. As Celine tells her clients, because the practitioner is a conduit, the client then becomes the healer. According to Celine:

Because you [the client] decide how much energy you take and you decide at what level you're going to work; physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. I provide you with the energy and I put myself in a state where I will be able to be the best conduit for that energy, but the rest . . .

Celine's explanation implies that because anyone is able to work with the Reiki energy, it cannot be something exclusive to one group.

Zoe offers similar thoughts on the increased interest in Reiki and the numerous systems of Reiki that have developed as a result. Zoe thinks that when Reiki first came to the West, there was a desire to establish an identifiable form of Reiki, thus providing it with a “pedigree.” Zoe elaborates:

In my opinion, I think that's sort of run a little bit with ego. Because I look at it as, and this is just purely my opinion, I look at it that it is energy. Energy is through anything . . . So my theory is that is held together by egos. Saying “I'm *better*. And this is *better*.” I don't *believe* that. I *believe* that any energy work is as good as the person that brings it through.

³² Originally, Takata charged \$10,000 to become a Reiki Master in the Usui system. As Mike explained in the First Degree workshop, this amount was chosen to reflect the high level of commitment an individual was making and indicated that becoming a Reiki Master was an important life change. Reiki Master Wendy explained that she does not charge for the Reiki, but charges clients for her time and skill. Whereas she does not presume to charge for Reiki because it is “free,” she does believe that she is a highly educated and skilled practitioner and will charge for her time and experience.

Rather than focusing on the system of Reiki that an individual has been taught, it is better to consider the intent of the practitioner allowing the energy to flow. Zoe believes everyone has Reiki and that God and the divine energy want everyone to be utilizing Reiki. According to Zoe, “And none is better than the other.”

Cate is a Reiki Master in both the Usui and Tibetan/Usui systems. While the distinction between what is often described as ‘traditional’ Usui Reiki and other forms of the practice are not important to Cate, she does acknowledge that this distinction may be important for others. As a result, when teaching Cate describes other forms of Reiki to her students because “It just makes sense to know what’s in the different traditions.” Cate believes all systems of Reiki are equally efficacious and it is useful to understand the different systems. Cate points out, “To me they are all working with the same energy.” As Cate’s explanation shows, the method through which practitioners access the energy is not significant because it is the same energy being utilized by every practitioner.

Judith also practices in both the Usui and Tibetan/Usui systems. She shares a belief similar to Cate’s about the distinction between Usui and other systems of Reiki. Judith explains that she believes there are multiple varieties of Reiki because it is a “creative energy.” Judith also “advocate[s] no rules for Reiki.” Provided the practitioner is working for the highest good and holds that intention, Judith believes that “you really can't do any wrong kind of Reiki.” Because it is a universal energy, it belongs to everyone. According to Judith:

If you went and had a treatment from a Tibetan Reiki Master as opposed to whatever other kind; there's Karuna Reiki, and Crystal Reiki and it goes on and on. And I think they're all pretty much learning the same thing. You're going to feel really relaxed. You're going to have the added health benefits of doing it. Putting a label on it doesn't really make a lot of difference to me.

Judith's statement demonstrates the conviction she shares with Cate that despite being initiated into other systems, all practitioners are working with the same energy. Individuals receiving Reiki will often have similar experiences whether the practitioner acting as conduit has been attuned in the Usui system or any other system.

As the comments of these practitioners illustrate, the distinction between Usui and other systems of Reiki does not influence the way in which they practice. Just as it is important to avoid focusing on distinctions between systems, it is also imperative to recognize that individuals may be following their "path." Jill provided a simple answer to my question about authenticity: people need to do what is necessary to find their truth. When they choose a certain method or system, then they are learning their truth through that form. Or, as Jill pondered, they are learning what is *not* their truth. As Jill said, "Reiki is Reiki." Deena also provides a succinct response:

Well, you know, I went through sort of trying to understand how to deal with this idea that there is Reiki out there happening in a very different way than I've been taught. But the only conclusion I've come to now is that is their path. For whatever reason, different people are doing different things with Reiki. And different students are drawn to different teachers. When I just had come to the conclusion of "well, that's their path," so I try not to be judgmental about it. But I keep in mind what is important to me. And that's the way I've been taught Reiki.

Both Jill and Deena express the sentiment that individuals need to follow the path necessary for them, and that may involve another system of Reiki besides Usui.

Sara has been initiated into three systems of Reiki, including Usui, Komyo, and a third type she could not recall at the time of our meeting. When I asked Sara about her thoughts on the distinction between different systems of Reiki, weekend mastery and Internet attunement, Sara first responded by questioning what is meant by ‘traditional’ Reiki. Sara has performed distance attunements and believes individuals can be attuned over the Internet. According to Sara:

I have done attunements on people in Afghanistan who were not with me when I did it. Who were not able to contact me physically. Contacted me in spirit. And I imagined them sitting there and do the attunements. And ask them to put their hand over yours and feel the energy actually there . . . I was told to do it by spirit.

Performing a distance attunement appears to be a natural extension of Sara’s Reiki practice. She is careful to explain that she maintains a relationship with the individuals she attunes. She knows who they are and knows when they are ready for attunement they will contact her. Sara has never initiated anyone as a Reiki Master who she has not deemed ready to be initiated. Sara also explained to me that she had attended both First and Second Degree workshop and was initiated as a Reiki Master within a year. As Sara explained, she was ready to become a Reiki Master and her initiating Master recognized that quality in her.

Sara also emphasizes that today is a very different time than when Usui lived and re-discovered Reiki. Certain “rules,” such as the allotted time between

degrees, were established during Usui's time. As Sara points out, the present-day moves at a much faster pace. Sara likens attunement to the Master level to graduating from kindergarten. It is the Master's learning from that point on which becomes important because "It's an ongoing process . . . It's a lifetime of learning." Mastery provides individuals with access to that continual learning process. And, as Sara also emphasizes, "We *need* a lot more people to be Reiki Masters. We *need* people to attain that level of spirituality." Sara's response regarding the rapid growth of Reiki and the different schools developing out of that growth implies that the path of the individual seeking Reiki is more influential than the school with which he or she is affiliated.

Whereas these Reiki Masters and practitioners explicitly downplay the distinction between schools of Reiki besides the Usui system, other Masters and practitioners struggle with this distinction. Lynne describes her thoughts and feelings regarding the issue of authenticity as tending to shift back and forth. At times there is tension and conflict about it and at times that tension and conflict are not present. Lynne describes herself as very much concerned with identifying Usui Reiki as "the traditional one" early on in her practice of Reiki. Lynne now recognizes that she made a lot of judgments about other forms and systems and she is presently trying to move away from that judgmental stance in her practice. Her original Reiki Master was quite ardent about this issue and Lynne adopted a similar stance. At the time she first started Reiki, Lynne describes herself as "an extremely political person" and for her "this was like a political position." As she

told me, “I just plugged that into Reiki.” Lynne’s growth with Reiki and spirituality has involved a process of letting go of this political activism and the judgment involved with it.

At first Lynne almost seemed hesitant to comment on the differences among Reiki systems. She has not had much experience with other forms and systems; therefore, she believes that in some ways it is inappropriate for her to discuss them. However, Lynne recalled an experience two or three years earlier when she exchanged Reiki with a woman who had been taught in a different system. As Lynne told me:

it was an important kind of learning for me around being cautious about moving to judgment. Because for all intensive purposes and experiences this was the Reiki that I knew; was what I was receiving from her . . . It felt like a cautionary note for me.

Lynne also expressed her uncertainty about making distinctions between systems and separating them from one another. It does not serve anyone, but instead tends to generate competitiveness, judgment, and a spirit of self-righteousness.

Yet, Lynne also explained to me that she had undergone an intense, deliberate, and conscious training once she “put out her intention to become a Reiki Master.” Lynne underwent an intensive yearlong apprenticeship with her Reiki Master during which she experienced an extreme amount of “clearing,” or experienced a working through of her “personal stuff.” According to Lynne, “It was phenomenally intense.” When Lynne hears about individuals who become Masters over the course of a single weekend, she is unable to fathom how they are able to adjust to receiving that amount of energy. Lynne is perplexed when she

thinks of these individuals adjusting to the energy and becoming “clear” over the course of a weekend. Because Lynne cannot imagine how this could take place she cannot help but be somewhat skeptical about the possibility. But she also wonders if it is possible for these individuals to grow into their Mastery. According to Lynne, “There’s a kind of perpetual growing into it anyways.”

In her attempt to resolve this issue, Lynne recounted to me how the division between Usui and other systems is starting to become significant when people inquire about taking Reiki classes. When individuals inquire about classes, Lynne is careful not to comment about other systems, since she feels such comments are inappropriate. Lynne feels she is only able to comment regarding her own system. Referring to other Reiki systems Lynne states, “There’s a reason why it exists, and there’s a reason why some people go there.” Their personal spiritual journey may require them to explore other forms and systems of Reiki than “traditional” Usui. Other forms and systems may serve a purpose for that reason. Lynne also believes practitioners should exercise a certain amount of caution in dealing with this issue. A sense of superiority can arise among practitioners of the Usui system that can become problematic. According to Lynne, “You can almost hear it. People feel the judgment.”

Like Lynne, Samantha, a Reiki Master in the Usui system, also expresses tension in her comments regarding the growth and development of Reiki in the West. Although Samantha is certain that distance attunements are possible owing to the power of the Reiki symbols, she nonetheless advocates a student-teacher

relationship. Her Mastery program incorporates both theoretical and practical elements. By the conclusion of the program, individuals have experienced working with the energy, so that their knowledge is not simply theoretical.

Samantha, who also works in the food industry, offers this analogy:

it's not just about Reiki. Anybody can go to cooking school to be a great chef, but it doesn't mean you can run a restaurant. There are many other skills . . . we better have a discussion about how you are going to run that restaurant. Running a restaurant is not the same skill as making a really great hollandaise. It's the same thing. How can you optimize your practitioner skills?

According to Samantha, becoming a Master involves developing skill with Reiki and understanding how Reiki affects the individual's entire life. Samantha acknowledges that anything is possible, including becoming a Reiki Master in a weekend and being attuned over the Internet, but she asks: "What would it be like to be supported in your process of that?" Samantha's point of view reflects the importance of developing a relationship with both clients and students in which the Reiki practitioner provides support.

Some of the Reiki Masters and practitioners I interviewed held the position that making the distinction between Usui and other systems of Reiki is insignificant. Others believe that such a distinction is imperative; however, they also emphasize that caution must be exercised because it is not useful to judge other Reiki schools.

Clara attributes the fast growing number of schools and practices such as weekend mastery partly to the nature of Western society. According to Clara:

as a culture we are impatient. And I wonder if, you know, the many off shoots of Reiki or the very different directions that students take it to, isn't a direct reflection of how we are impatient. That, and not just how we are impatient, but that we have a picture of how we think things should be. And we love to do. And we just find it really hard not to do. So, I guess there are two things. One, here's the pill. Here's the fast way. You can be a Master in a weekend! And then you are already there and you know it all. And can do everything. Or anything. There's that and then there's the drive for the practitioner to be so important to the treatment. Which is in total opposition to the practitioner holding the space.

In Clara's response to my question regarding the "authenticity" of Reiki, two themes became apparent. The first of these themes is the conception of Western society as "impatient," which underlies the desire to seek out and develop the quickest possible way to become involved in Reiki. This theme is also reflected in Clara's comments about the differences in the nature of the "student mind" between the West and the East. Clara describes the "student mind" in the East as "it's you know *nothing* . . . And to carry the concept throughout life where *you know nothing*." Whereas in the West, "We like being specialists. We like to know." The second theme that emerges from Clara's statement also involves responsibility. Clara recognizes that some people interested in Reiki have been hurt by those claiming to teach Reiki. According to Clara:

My offense is about a lack of responsibility. A lack of responsibility that has nothing to do with Reiki, but it has everything to do with it. *Because* if the person were just doing Reiki, that wouldn't even come up. There would not be any offense or hurt because the practitioner would not be *trying to do something*.

Reiki Masters and practitioners must assume responsibility for those clients who come seeking treatment.

Wendy also expresses concern over the increased number of Reiki systems that have come into existence since the 1980s. Wendy is a Master in both Usui traditional Reiki and Gendai Reiki. As Wendy explains, Usui Reiki is the Western Reiki in which most people have been trained; whereas Gendai Reiki is a Japanese form of Reiki, in which only a limited number of people in North America have been trained. It emphasizes the spiritual aspects of Reiki. As Wendy explained:

For the most part traditional Western Reiki has been mutated so that it focuses on healing all the time. Healing. Healing. Healing. And that's not what Reiki's about. It's not what it was supposed to be about *at all* from the get go . . . Healing is just something that happens when you become more spiritually enlightened.

In these statements concerning “Western Reiki” and “Eastern Reiki” there appears to be a distinction made in which one seems to be more “authentic” than the other. For Wendy, in the West the primary purpose of Reiki has been lost to a certain extent; the spiritual aspect is not emphasized. However, as I discovered over the course of my fieldwork for many other practitioners, Reiki does in fact appeal to the spiritual aspect of their lives. While spirituality may not have been a primary attraction for many practitioners, it is something which has developed over the course of their growth with Reiki.

When I inquired about Wendy's thoughts on the increased growth of Reiki and the numerous new systems available, some of which may charge much less for courses and condense teachings so that courses may be shortened, she expressed her opinion adamantly. Wendy offered this metaphor in response:

Our bodies are like an old hose that's been left out over the winter. It's dry. It's cracked. There's leaves in it. There's a dead mouse in it. It's disgusting, right? The power of Reiki, the universal energy, is like turning the water on in that hose. If you just crank it up to full right away, what's going to happen to the hose? It's going to explode. It's going to be blocked. It's going to suffer terribly. It's going to be a lot of power going through. You turn it up a little tiny bit; the water starts flowing through. Clears out all the debris. It starts to re-hydrate. Turn it up a little bit more. It goes through. The hose becomes flexible and able to bend now without breaking it. More and more and more. Like that.

Wendy's "moral objection" to practices, such as weekend mastery courses, lies in the danger this could pose for the student learning Reiki. According to Wendy, "People don't realize the actual damage they do to other people's lives by putting too much power in them." As a Reiki Master, Wendy believes it is her responsibility to ensure that what she has been taught is "accurately and clearly passed on to the next person." It is not her place to make changes or additions to the system she was taught; rather, she will make corrections to any misconceptions. Wendy also acknowledges that she will share her own thoughts and opinions but is careful to do that apart from her Reiki practice. As a Reiki Master, Wendy believes it is her responsibility to accurately pass on to her students what she was taught so that there can be "a true passing along of the legacy."

Wendy recalls an encounter with a woman on a trip to Ottawa who had been "trained" as a Reiki Master in a non-Usui system. Wendy comments that this woman was in a very bad state. After the woman had asked for help, Wendy attuned her to Reiki Master. Wendy recalls that after her attunement, the woman

commented that the colors she saw were brighter. According to Wendy, after attunement you start seeing the world more brightly because you are in harmony. Although this type of “ad hoc” attunement is not something Wendy would normally do, it was appropriate for the time. Wendy believes it was something she was “in that place to do.” Wendy’s narrative demonstrates her view that improper training can be harmful to students.

Shortly before I made my decision to attend the Second Degree workshop, Mike and I met for lunch and discussed some of the questions I had after practicing Reiki for several months and issues that had arisen as I continued my fieldwork. Mike was the first Reiki Master who brought my attention to the question of authenticity and the distinction among schools of Reiki. As Mike explained to me during that meeting, the time after Takata’s death was one of turmoil for the Masters she initiated. At the time of her death, Takata had only initiated 22 Masters. The most experienced Master only had four years of experience as a teacher and the least experienced had only 18 months of experience by the time of Takata’s death. After her death, the initiated Masters went through a period of growth and change. While a large number of these Masters established a support system for Reiki Masters through an organization called the Reiki Alliance, others broke from the group and began to make small changes in the way Reiki was taught; perhaps one of the most significant of those changes had to do with cost. As a result, one particular line of Reiki became much more accessible and affordable. According to Mike:

That particular line grew at a tremendous rate and it became more and more watered down. So initially, most of the changes were about money . . . And very quickly what happens is somebody is getting paid almost nothing for initiating somebody as a Master.

With reductions in cost, Mike believes reductions in standards followed. As newer forms of Reiki transmit their lines, it is not uncommon for individuals to take both First and Second Degrees together on a Saturday and be attuned to Reiki Master on a Sunday. Mike also explained that some teachers do not even bother initiating their students in the First or Second Degrees, but will immediately attune students to Reiki Master. According to Mike, “So this means that most of the lines of Reiki now have dozens and dozens of generations of people who have invested a whole weekend to become a Master.”

Curious, I asked Mike whether this type of distinction is common within the Reiki community. Mike responded by explaining that it tends to be important for those “who care about standards. Who care about really trying to adhere to what Usui taught *and* who have a short lineage; short enough that they have a better idea of what really was taught.” According to Mike, only within the past five or ten years have people started realizing that what they have been practicing does not have any “substance or depth to it.” Mike postulates as individuals are coming to realize this lack of depth, new forms of Reiki have developed in response. In his experience, “all of the other main forms of Reiki are trying to replace or rediscover what was lost. Most of them don't understand that it was lost because they've never experienced it. They only experienced the watered down versions.” Although Mike does not explicitly state that the Usui system is more

“authentic” than others, he does imply such a distinction could be made. Mike believes that through studying with someone who is aware of his or her lineage and who has undergone the process of “clearing” with Reiki, a student will receive the most beneficial teaching and experience of the energy.

Still attempting to grasp this concept, I inquired about the energy these practitioners are working with in their practice. “Ultimately,” I asked, “Are they working with the same energy?” Mike answered me in an analogy. As he explained, he could approach two people who had never experienced Reiki before and have one put their hands on the other for 15 or 20 minutes. Mike asserted it would almost be a certainty that they would both feel the energy. Both would also probably be amazed because they had never previously had an experience of this nature. According to Mike, “In the sense of defining Reiki as universal energy, there’s even some truth to that, but it’s not pure universal energy.” In his example, the energy these two individuals are experiencing is coming through their bodies and, as such, is being “heavily filtered through them.”

Mike continued to explain that he could then take one of them and teach that person the process of initiation without actually performing the initiation, thus, enabling that person to be able to perform the ceremony of initiation. Again, Mike emphasized that both individuals would probably feel some energy, but the initiation had not actually been performed. In the end, “What they’ve done is an empty ceremony. Because in order to do that attunement, you first have to have developed and nurtured your *own* connection with the energy.” In this analogy,

Mike suggests that some practitioners in the newly developed forms of Reiki share similar experiences. Students will feel the energy because that energy is within everyone. However, “It is not the same.” If the practitioners performing the initiation have not “done their own work first to a deep level” then initiation tends to be an empty ceremony. According to Mike, “What’s happening is if you have dozen of generations of people that have invested a couple of hours and become a Master, they’re performing empty ceremonies.” The explanation offered by Mike reflects his belief that involvement in Reiki should entail a strong sense of commitment, both to “doing their own work” and to developing a relationship with the energy when becoming a Reiki practitioner.

Like most practitioners with whom I spoke, Mike was careful to point out that it is not beneficial to judge other non-Usui systems of Reiki. While some practitioners, like Celine and Lynne, believe individuals should be cautious when commenting on other systems of Reiki owing to the danger of passing judgment, Mike’s position differs slightly on this subject. Mike believes that making such a distinction does not mean that “ego” becomes an issue for Usui practitioners. In fact, he postulates that the situation is actually inverted. Rather than “ego” becoming an issue for practitioners who utilize such a distinction, according to Mike “the reason for the weekend master thing is actually an ego thing. It’s people who want the title . . . Originally, people who wanted the title but weren’t willing to put in the years of commitment to get it.” Investment in the title of

Reiki Master over the course of a weekend and without “doing the work” becomes an issue of “ego.”

In this section I have briefly explored the varying positions expressed by Reiki Masters and practitioners regarding the popularization of Reiki and the resulting growth of multiple Reiki systems. As I was listening to practitioners’ thoughts on the subject, I came to realize that my own opinion rested somewhere in the middle of the two viewpoints. As I was contemplating attending the Second Degree course, I did realize that for myself the distinction between systems was influential in my decision about taking the course. On the one hand, there was a certain appeal to receiving training in the Usui system and becoming part of that lineage. On the other hand, I also understood the position adopted by many of my informants who feel that it is unnecessary to be overly conscious of distinctions since all the other systems may simply be working with the same energy. At the same time, as an academic I was also questioning the construction of “authenticity” as a category.

The construction of “authentic” Reiki appears to be dependent on the experience of practitioners. Some, like Lynne, view the process of letting go of these distinctions as part of their growth with Reiki and with spirituality in general. Others, like Deena and Jill, view the alternative systems as serving a purpose and believe some individuals will explore those systems as a part of their spiritual path. Yet others, like Wendy and Mike, advocate approaching non-Usui systems with caution since those involved with these forms of Reiki may offer

diluted teachings and may not have made a commitment to developing their own personal relationship with the energy. Reiki Masters and practitioners' approaches to recognizing "authentic" or "real" Reiki are highly dependent on their position. For some, distinctions do not matter, while for others distinctions are necessary in their practice. As a result, interpretations of authenticity also occupy shifting places of importance for practitioners.

Reiki and Japan: Authenticity in the East

Initially when I started my fieldwork I expected to discover that Reiki's Japanese roots would be important as a legitimating factor for practitioners and clients. Although connections with Japan, particularly with lineage, validate the authenticity of Reiki for some practitioners and clients, this is not the case for all. However, for the majority of practitioners I interviewed the connection of Reiki to Japanese culture did not contribute to their attraction to the practice. For some, the answer to my question about the importance of the Japanese roots of Reiki was direct: these roots were not significant in their practice or understanding of Reiki energy. For others, their answer was slightly more complex.

Judith does not view the connection between Reiki and Japan as "personally very important" for her. It is valuable to understand the history of Reiki, where it came from, and why it was re-discovered, but Judith returns to the conception of Reiki as "a universal thing." According to Judith, Reiki "doesn't belong to Japan," although she has great respect for Usui and for the Masters who

have continued to pass Reiki down through the lineage.³³ Judith did speculate that, “maybe it came back to Japan because there was an openness to enlightenment there perhaps. There’s a Buddhist philosophy of searching for enlightenment. It was easy for it to come back there as opposed to other places.” For Judith, the conception of Japan as more spiritually enlightened in comparison to the West accounts for Reiki’s re-emergence in Japanese society. First Degree practitioner, Joyce, also echoes this sentiment. According to Joyce, “Because of the ancient history of Japan it’s kind of a nice place for it to have originated in. If in fact, that’s where it did. Maybe it originated way before that.”

When asked whether she valued Reiki’s connection with Japan and Usui, Marie replied that it did not play a central role in her use of Reiki. For Marie, it “just happened” that Usui was from Japan, although “I suppose because we tend to think of the Far East as a more meditative part of the world. Then it doesn’t surprise me that it came from there.” However, Marie places more importance on her experience of the energy than on the Japanese roots of Reiki. It has had such an impact on her physically that her family can now detect when she has given herself a treatment and often comments when she has not done so. Although Marie underwent several Reiki treatments before “actually feeling the energy in her,” she now experiences a detectable change in her demeanor (she can climb the stairs, speak above a whisper) and, her family, as objective observers, can see that

³³ Refer to the Introduction for a detailed outline of the Usui lineage.

change. In this way, Marie's experience is authenticated through an empirical and "experiential" legitimation.

Like Marie, Sara also does not find the connection between Japan and Reiki to be personally meaningful. She is "forever grateful to Usui-sensei for doing what he did and allowing it to become so universal" but "everyone of us changes it to fit." In Sara's view, while Reiki was brought through Japanese society, the way in which each practitioner works with the energy and creates meaning out of their practices is more significant than its place of origin.

Although most practitioners did not consider the Japanese roots of Reiki to be significant, there were some practitioners who expressed an affinity with Japanese society which they associated with their practice. Brenda was the most vocal about her feeling of affinity for Japanese society. Before Brenda and I conducted our interview, Brenda spent some time over lunch showing me pictures of the trip she and her husband had taken to Japan several years earlier. Brenda identifies particularly with "the Buddhist influence" coming from Japan. Brenda recalled an experience she had while in Japan:

I have this memory of a temple in Japan that the monks had gone up the wooden stairs so much that their white socks had worn the wood smooth and we had to take our shoes off to go up. I could *feel* that experience of years and years of the monks going up these steps on the mountain . . . There's something very sensual and spiritual combined in the Buddhist practices that I've done. And that's part of what really feels whole for me. That whole experience of the Eastern influence. I know I would like to have more of that in my daily life.

Brenda's recollection of this experience while in Japan reflects her belief that she feels a close connection with Japanese culture. Brenda believes the connection between Reiki and Japan holds more meaning for her than for others who have not traveled there and experienced something similar.

Much of the importance attributed to the connection between Reiki and Japanese culture is related to the importance of lineage and the role of teachers in passing Reiki to each generation of practitioners. As I quickly discovered over the course of my fieldwork, the biography of Usui has been much contested by Reiki practitioners. Initially thought to be a Christian minister (see Brown 1992; Haberly 1990), Usui was later discovered to be Buddhist. During my fieldwork, I was never told Usui was Christian. In the history I was presented, the religious background of Usui was not an issue. My informants came to take for granted Usui's Buddhist background. In the history of Reiki as relayed by Takata to her students, however, Usui was portrayed as having a Christian background. For Grace, the lineage of Usui → Hayashi → Takata is very significant in her practice of Reiki. Even though Grace has questions surrounding the history of Reiki, she continues to retell the history as she was taught. According to Grace, "I still tell the story the way the story was told to me because of what happens when I tell the story. The energy that comes in when I tell the story. Healing happens." By recounting the history of Reiki as she was taught, Grace enables students to have an "authentic" and "real" experience of the energy. Telling the "story" of Reiki is

one means whereby Grace is able to bring in the energy and facilitate healing. According to Grace, “It’s palpable what goes on in the room.”

After providing her students with the “story” of Reiki as she was originally told it, Grace then explains how this “story” is now thought to be different. However, as Grace acknowledges, “But Takata was a Christian woman who went to Japan who did Reiki. Went back to Hawaii and all her friends were Christian. What was she going to tell them about Reiki? So she began to say, change the story a little bit. And it worked.” In Grace’s view, Takata made necessary changes in the history of Reiki in order to facilitate its acceptance by a Western audience. Wendy provides a similar explanation for Takata’s adoption of Christianity in historicizing Reiki. Because Takata was presenting Reiki to a Western audience she presented it in terms familiar to that audience. According to Wendy, “It’s directed towards the people.” It is noteworthy to recognize that these Reiki Masters, Grace and Wendy, believe Takata felt compelled to ‘translate’ Reiki into Christian terms in order to appeal to a Western audience. Today, in contrast, there is a desire to return to the “original,” “authentic,” or “true” background of Usui by acknowledging that he was indeed Buddhist and making this correction.

Raymond Firth (1984) examines the flexible nature of myth in Tikopia and proposes two questions for consideration in his discussion. The first question he raises involves the “measure of agreement on the form of a myth” expected by the members of a group (1984: 208). Firth contends that when versions of myth

differ, those differences are recognized as a result of “the differences of interest of the narrators” (1984: 208). The second question Firth raises concerns the “degree of fixity that is expected in myth” (1984: 209). According to Firth, “If myths represent the traditional values of the society, including the moral norms, one would expect them to maintain a firm shape, to show very little variation from one generation to the next” (1984: 209). As Firth (1984) proposes, in actuality myth tends to be a flexible construction. The flexibility of myth is reflected in the narratives of Reiki Masters Grace and Wendy regarding the transmission of Reiki from Japan to the West. As these narratives demonstrate, Grace and Wendy believe that Takata adapted the history of Reiki to better appeal to the Western audience, thus legitimatizing Reiki.³⁴ As Takata altered the details regarding the history of Reiki when she brought it to the West, the history of Reiki is once again being adapted by practitioners to address their interests. As Firth (1984) suggests of myth, it is a flexible construction adapted to suit the needs of those who utilize it.

The connection of Reiki with lineage also figures prominently for Lynne in her practice. When asked whether she valued Reiki’s connection to Usui and Japan, Lynne replied that although she had not considered this before, she instinctively wanted to reply yes. As Lynne said:

There’s something about the teachings coincide more . . . I mean, even the precepts. Using the word honor. We don't use the word

³⁴ Bronislaw Malinowski (1948) proposes that myth provides a legitimating function in society. According to Malinowski, myth acts to legitimate certain beliefs, practices, and actions in a particular society (1948: 101).

honor here in the West, right? That is brought to us from the East. I mean, I think we would be wise to learn right now. So in that way, I like lineage, right? I like the idea about respecting the lineage beyond my teachers. Would that matter if it were Tibetan rather than Japanese? Probably not.

Lynne recognizes the importance of lineage and its association with Japan. However, for her the exact location of Reiki's origins within the East is not particularly significant. As she pointed out, it would not matter if Reiki originated in Tibet as opposed to Japan.

When I asked Wendy whether she felt an affinity for Japan and its connection to Reiki, she did not express personal interest in the connection. However, she found the relationship to be significant in terms of the transmission of Reiki. Historical accuracy is important for Wendy because she wants to be sure “that what actually happened is what’s passed on.” When students come to Wendy, she is careful to ensure that they understand their lineage and know exactly how Reiki has been passed down to them as a system. Wendy makes a connection between lineage and the purity of the Reiki energy. Wendy is fifth in both her Usui and Gendai lineages. According to Wendy, people tend to believe that because she is not further down in the lineage, the Reiki energy is “purer.”

As Wendy explains, this is not the case:

That’s not true if they’re doing it right. Because instead of it going like 100% of it goes to Usui, then 90% goes to this person, then 80% goes to this person, like that down the road. That’s not what happens. 100% goes to Usui, then because he didn't do it, he opens up the conduit in you, that’s what attunement is, 100% of it goes to the next person. Then next person opens up the conduit in you, 100% goes to them. Like that. So it’s not diluted if it’s done properly.

As Wendy's comments show, lineage is not necessarily significant in bringing the student closer to the "original" teachings. Rather, lineage, and therefore attunement, provides individuals with access to an "authentic" experience of the energy.

Although Mike also finds lineage important, as for Wendy this importance is not necessarily the result of a connection to Japanese society through Usui. According to Mike, when someone has a transcendental enlightenment experience he or she will instinctively want to share that experience with others. However, there may not be a previously determined method through which to teach others how to attain a similar experience. Typically, the person who does have this type of experience spent a lifetime preparing and working towards this spiritual goal. This person will in turn teach his or her student through a process of trial and error. Some students will understand and have that same transcendental enlightenment experience, while others will not. However, all of these students will continue to teach and "will present themselves as having all that the other teacher had to pass down." In the same way some of their students will in turn attain that same transcendental enlightenment experience and some will not. Those students that study with the teachers who did not have that experience will have a much more difficult time trying to reach that enlightenment goal. According to Mike, "But the more generations who are removed from that, from that original, the more diluted it becomes."

For some practitioners, like Wendy and Mike, lineage is important in terms of “authenticity.” For these practitioners, recognizing lineage and ‘traditional’ Usui Reiki creates an “authentic” experience or understanding. However, authenticity has nothing to do with the connection between Reiki and Japanese culture, but is framed by a larger set of principles that contribute to an understanding of “authentic” or “real” Reiki. Some Reiki practitioners feel that a connection to the traditional, “pure” Reiki is essential in their practice. For example, Grace and Lynne both point to the role of lineage. Lineage brings with it a closer connection to the “original” teachings of Usui and because of this, brings in the energy for Grace.

Reiki practitioners and clients are engaged in a constant process of negotiation. The way in which they interpret the energy and place that experience within Reiki’s larger history is undergoing constant revision. For some, Reiki’s connections to Japan are an essential part of the experience, for others this link is unnecessary. Ultimately, it is an individual’s personal and direct experience of the energy that creates the space in which illness is given meaning and healing takes place. For Reiki practitioners and clients, it is this direct experience that is considered “authentic.”

V. Conclusion

Reiki as Religious Healing

In this thesis I argue that as an alternative therapy, Reiki is viewed as a form of “spiritual healing” by Reiki Masters and practitioners. Although participants may not necessarily view Reiki as religious, many practitioners do attribute a spiritual significance to their practice. Moreover, Reiki Masters and practitioners tend to distance themselves from the term “religious” because of the assumption that “religion” refers to institutional religion. Practitioners are more likely to speak of spirituality rather than religion because it “connotes a more personal, immediate, an authentic sacrality” (Klassen 2001: 65) which better reflects the flexible nature of Reiki. Clifford Geertz proposes a definition of religion emphasizing it as flexible category:

Whatever else religion may be, it is in part an attempt (of implicit and directly felt rather than explicitly and consciously thought-about sort) to conserve the fund of general meanings in terms of which each individual interprets his experience and organizes his conduct (1973: 127).

Following the definition of religion offered by Geertz, religion and spirituality do not necessarily need to be placed in opposition to each other. Rather, religion encompasses spirituality, since it constitutes a framework through which individuals are able to create meaning in their lives.

In understanding Reiki as a form of religious healing, the way in which Reiki Masters and practitioners interpret illness becomes significant. Drawing on the distinction between illness and disease as outlined by Arthur Kleinman (1980,

1988, 1995) and Cheryl Mattingly and Linda Garro (2000), I propose that the narratives of Reiki practitioners support this distinction. As Kleinman (1980) contends, disease refers to the biological dysfunction of the body while illness reflects individuals' interpretations of disease. I argue that the illness narratives presented in this thesis reflect practitioners' personal interpretations and experiences of illness, whether these narratives deal with their own illnesses or those of their clients. As Kleinman proposes, illness "is always a social construction" (1980: 78, Kleinman 1988).

Moreover, in their "construction" of illness, practitioners shape a perception of illness that is not merely physical. Rather, their narratives reflect the belief that illness always occurs on the emotional, psychological, and spiritual level, as well as on the physical level. Although Reiki Masters and practitioners differ in their interpretations regarding the cause of illness, notions about the types of illness – emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical – are commonly shared. By conceptualizing illness in a multivalent fashion, practitioners are able to create meaning out of multiple types of suffering. These interpretations of illness enable individuals to make sense out of emotional and spiritual suffering. Thus, I propose that Reiki provides a framework for meaning within which individuals become able to understand illness.

As Reiki provides a framework for understanding illness, so to does the experience of healing. My research suggests that Reiki Masters and practitioners interpret healing in multiple ways. According to practitioners, healing may take

place on physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. Several practitioners also provided narratives suggesting that healing may take place through the experience of death. I suggest that as individuals undergo healing, they also experience a transformation. Thomas Csordas argues healing generates a creation of meaning in which afflicted individuals are moved to a new reality (2002: 25). I conclude that several of the Reiki Masters and practitioners I interviewed over the course of my fieldwork have actively experienced healing as a means through which to create meaning out of suffering.

Csordas (1983, 2002) proposes that religious healing involves the “rhetoric of transformation.” According to Csordas (1983, 2002), the rhetoric of transformation must fulfill three aspects. First, individuals “must be persuaded that healing is possible,” thus demonstrating a predisposition for healing to take place. Second, individuals “must be persuaded that the therapy is efficacious,” thus demonstrating that healing can occur. Finally, Csordas (1983, 2002) proposes that individuals “must be persuaded to change,” thus accepting the transformation of their state from illness to health. Utilizing Csordas’ (1983, 2002) framework, I was able to trace the movement through healing that generates such a transformation. As the narratives of Jill, Lynne, Marie, and Wendy demonstrate, each practitioner was seeking out a means to address the changes they were undergoing in their lives at the time they discovered Reiki. For example, Wendy describes herself as having an “energetic upset” when she found Reiki. Through her discovery of Reiki, and subsequent practice, she was able to find her “path.”

Loring Danforth (1989) and others argue that religious healing is a process through which meaning is created for the afflicted. Healing provides individuals with the belief that the universe makes sense and that events are not random. As Ellen Badone (1987, 1989) demonstrates in her examination of the supernatural in Brittany, *intersignes* (omens) provide individuals with a means through which to make sense of death, particularly accidental or unexpected deaths. She suggests that the process of identifying *intersignes* allows individuals to bring order to an otherwise chaotic experience. Badone describes one woman's attempt to understand the unexpected death of her son through reference to omens: "This process enables Marie to reconcile the apparent meaninglessness of her son's death with her desire for an ordered, meaningful vision of reality. She achieves this reconciliation by framing her son's death in the context of a predestined pattern beyond human control" (Badone 1987: 100). As Marie is able to "order" the experience of her son's death, so too are Reiki practitioners able to "order" their experience of illness through healing. As one of my informants asserted, "illness happens," but so too does healing. Reiki Masters and practitioners are not responsible for healing, if or when it takes place. Rather, as I came to learn about Reiki, "the energy knows where to go." As a conduit for the energy, the Reiki practitioner allows the energy to move through him or herself and into the person being treated.

When I started my fieldwork, I had anticipated that Reiki's Japanese roots would be significant for both Masters and practitioners, legitimating the

authenticity of Reiki. However, as I discovered the issue of what constitutes “authentic” Reiki centers instead on the popularization of the practice and the resulting growth and development of new schools. While this is not an issue of significance for some members of the Reiki community, I argue that the question of “authentic” Reiki should be understood within this framework. Contestation over the transmission of Reiki from one generation to the next, lineage, and intent shapes the way in which practitioners view their own practice. While some practitioners acknowledge a potential danger in new, non-Usui practices, others believe that individuals using these techniques are following their “path.” The comments of other practitioners suggest a desire to protect the Usui system.

However, the comments regarding the relationship between Reiki and its Japanese roots also implicitly suggest that Reiki Masters and practitioners express a sense of dissatisfaction with the West. Numerous practitioners, like Laura, Judith, and Maggie, expressed dissatisfaction with the Christianity that they experienced in their youth, thus prompting them to explore alternative types of spirituality. Moreover, as Deena’s narrative in Chapter I suggests, practitioners’ sense of discontent with religion is not limited to Christianity, but involves institutionalized religion in general. The discontent implicitly expressed by Reiki practitioners is also reflected in their comments regarding the Western biomedical system. Some individuals utilizing Reiki are perceived by Reiki Masters and practitioners as having an expectation that Reiki will “fix” specific ailments. Unlike the perception of biomedicine as providing a “quick fix” for individuals,

Reiki Masters and practitioners do not make this claim or hold this expectation. As Grace explains, if clients come to her with the expectation that she will be able to “fix” an ailment, she gets “rid of that real quick.” As Bonnie Blair O’Connor suggests, individuals are “authoritative agents of their own health care” (1995:161). The dissatisfaction of Reiki Masters and practitioners with the West is almost so pervasive that it is taken for granted.

Directions for Further Research

As my research progressed I quickly came to recognize that the growth and popularity of different systems of Reiki was a significant issue within the local Reiki community. When I was preparing for my research I anticipated that “authenticity” would be a significant issue in relation to Reiki’s association with Japanese culture. However, I discovered that Reiki’s Japanese roots were not the primary issue around which authenticity was contested. Rather, early on in my fieldwork informants directed my attention to the issues surrounding adapting the Usui system of Reiki, developing new schools, weekend mastery, and Internet attunement. As one informant told me, I had “accidentally walked into that whole mine field” during my fieldwork. Although I did encounter and interview a few Reiki Masters and practitioners who had been trained in schools other than Usui, these practitioners did not comprise a large part of my research sample.

A larger study of Reiki and authenticity extending further into the diverse Reiki community would better address these issues. In light of the questions raised through my fieldwork, exploration into other systems would raise

numerous questions. How do members of other systems interpret their practice in relation to the Usui system? How is teaching and practice transmitted from one generation to the next? Do these practitioners view energy in a similar fashion? Do these practitioners view their understanding and practice of Reiki through the lens of spirituality as suggested by the practitioners I interviewed? As Reiki continues to gain popularity in the West, it will continue to be modified and adapted by its practitioners. Thus, the issue of “authentic” or “real” Reiki will continue to be of central importance within the Reiki community. The system of Reiki which individuals practice will continue to be a focal point of debate.

Appendices

Interview Questions – Reiki Practitioners

Background:

- 1.) Please tell me briefly about yourself (i.e. age, religion, place of origin, job, education, etc.).
- 2.) How did you discover Reiki?
- 3.) How long have you been practicing Reiki?
- 4.) What type of Reiki do you practice? Please elaborate (i.e. how does it differ from other types?).
- 5.) Do you have any comments on the distinction between Usui and non-Usui systems of Reiki, Weekend Masters, and/or Internet attunement?
- 6.) How did you come to the decision to practice Reiki on others?

Therapeutic Treatments:

- 7.) Do you practice other forms of alternative healing techniques (i.e. acupuncture, reflexology, yoga, chiropractic, etc.)? If so, how did you discover these techniques?
- 8.) How often do you practice each of these techniques?

General Reiki Philosophy:

- 9.) How would you describe Reiki?
- 10.) What do you experience when you give a Reiki treatment (i.e. physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.)?
- 11.) What do you experience when you receive a Reiki treatment (i.e. physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.)?
- 12.) Have you always has this power or ability to perform Reiki?

- 13.) Can anyone be a Reiki practitioner or does a Reiki practitioner possess specific/special qualities? If so, what are they?
- 14.) What aspects of Reiki appealed to you when you first discovered it? Have these changed over time?
- 15.) Can you explain the impact Reiki has had on your life?

Explanatory Model of Illness:

- 16.) How do you define illness?
- 17.) What causes illness?
- 18.) Are people responsible for their illnesses?
- 19.) Do you treat specific ailments? What types of ailments do people seek treatment for?

Reiki and Illness:³⁵

- 20.) Has your definition of illness changed since you have started practicing Reiki? If so, how?
- 21.) Is illness one of the reasons why you practice Reiki? If so, why?

If participant responds yes, ask questions 22-28:

- 22.) What do you call your illness? What name does it have?
- 23.) What do you think has caused your illness?
- 24.) Why do you think it started when it did?
- 25.) What does your illness do to you? How does it work? How severe is it?
- 26.) What do you fear most about your illness?

³⁵ Questions 22-28 are from Kleinman, Arthur. 1980. *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, p. 106.

- 27.) What are some of the primary problems your illness has caused for you?
- 28.) What kind of treatment do you think it should receive? What are some of the most important results you hope to achieve from treatment?
- 29.) Is Reiki among one of the more effective treatments for illness? If so, why?
- 30.) How has your conception of your illness changed since you discovered Reiki?

Reiki and Healing:

- 31.) How would you define healing?
- 32.) Is the traditional medical model the only means for attaining healing? What other methods of healing might individuals try?
- 33.) Would you consider Reiki to be one of these methods? Why? Why not?
- 34.) Is Reiki effective for healing? Is it central or a side effect of Reiki practice? Why? Why not?
- 35.) How do you know if healing has been successful?

Health Definition and Maintenance:

- 36.) Describe what it means for you to be healthy.
- 37.) Has this changed since you discovered Reiki? Why? Why not?
- 38.) Do you still visit a medical doctor or utilize the biomedical system? Why? Why not?
- 39.) Do you think Reiki has made you a healthier person overall? How?

Reiki and Spirituality:

- 40.) Please tell me a little about your religious and/or spiritual background. Has this changed since discovering Reiki? If so, how?

- 41.) Do you consider Reiki to be religious and/or spiritual? Why? Why not?
- 42.) Were you initially attracted to Reiki because of a religious and/or spiritual component? Has this changed since you have discovered Reiki?
- 43.) Do you feel a special connection with Reiki energy? If so, how would you describe it?
- 44.) Do you feel a special connection with your clients? If so, how would you describe it?
- 45.) Is it important for you that Reiki is connected to Japan? Does this connection make Reiki more or less spiritual for you? Why? Why not?
- 46.) Do you feel you are connecting to something that is ancient and/or timeless when practicing Reiki?

Interview Questions – Reiki Clients

Background:

- 1.) Please tell me briefly about yourself (i.e. age, religion, place of origin, job, education, etc.).
- 2.) How did you discover Reiki?
- 3.) How long have you been practicing Reiki?
- 4.) What type of Reiki do you practice? Please elaborate (i.e. differences/similarities with other types).
- 5.) Do you have any comments on the distinction between Usui and non-Usui systems of Reiki, Weekend Masters, and/or Internet attunement?

Therapeutic Treatments:

- 6.) Do you practice other forms of alternative healing techniques (i.e. acupuncture, reflexology, yoga, chiropractic, etc.)? If so, how did you discover these techniques?
- 7.) How do you view these alternative healing techniques in relation to Reiki?

General Reiki Philosophy:

- 8.) What is Reiki? How would you describe Reiki?
- 9.) What do you experience when you receive a Reiki treatment (i.e. physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.)?
- 10.) Can anyone be a Reiki practitioner or does a Reiki practitioner possess specific/special qualities? If so, what are they?
- 11.) What aspects of Reiki appealed to you when you first discovered it? Have these changed over time?
- 12.) Can you explain the affects Reiki has had on your life?

Explanatory Model of Illness:

- 13.) What is illness? How do you define illness?
- 14.) What causes illness?
- 15.) Are people responsible for their illnesses?
- 16.) Do you ask your Reiki practitioner to treat specific ailments during a treatment? What types of ailments do you seek treatment for?

Reiki and Illness:³⁶

- 17.) Is illness one of the reasons why you practice Reiki? If so, why?

If participant responds yes, ask questions 18- 26:

- 18.) What do you call your illness? What name does it have?
- 19.) What do you think has caused your illness?
- 20.) Why do you think it started when it did?
- 21.) What does your illness do to you? How does it work? How severe is it?
- 22.) What do you fear most about your illness?
- 23.) What are some of the primary problems your illness has caused for you?
- 24.) What kind of treatment do you think it should receive? What are some of the most important results you hope to achieve from treatment?
- 25.) Is Reiki among one of the more effective treatments you use? If so, why?
- 26.) How do you know that a Reiki treatment has been successful in treating your illness? Is this what you experience when Reiki is successful?
- 27.) Has your conception of your illness changed since you discovered Reiki? How so?

³⁶ Questions 18-24 are from Kleinman, Arthur. 1980. *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, p. 106.

Reiki and Healing:

- 28.) What is healing? How would you define healing?
- 29.) Do you practice Reiki because it has healing effects? Please elaborate.
- 30.) Would you characterize healing to be a side effect of Reiki practice? Why? Why not?
- 31.) How do you know a healing has been successful?
- 32.) Are people responsible for their healing?

Health Definition and Maintenance:

- 33.) Describe what it means for you to be healthy.
- 34.) Has this changed since you discovered Reiki? Why? Why not?
- 35.) Do you still visit a medical doctor or utilize the biomedical system? Why? Why not?
- 36.) Do you think Reiki has made you a healthier person overall? How?

Reiki and Spirituality:

- 37.) Please tell me a little about your religious and/or spiritual background. Has this changed since discovering Reiki? If so, how?
- 38.) Do you consider Reiki to be religious and/or spiritual? Why? Why not?
- 39.) Were you initially attracted to Reiki because of a religious and/or spiritual component? Has this changed since you have discovered Reiki?
- 40.) Do you feel a special connection with Reiki energy? If so, how would you describe it?
- 41.) Do you feel a special connection with your practitioner? If so, how would you describe it?
- 42.) Is it important for you that Reiki is connected to Japan? Does this connection make Reiki more or less spiritual for you?

43.) Do you feel you are connecting to something that is ancient and/or timeless when practicing Reiki?

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