

MAKING SENSE OF SYNCHRONICITY

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Abstract

This research project explores the experience of synchronicity by everyday people.

Synchronicity is the idea that apparently random events are related because of the meaning attributed to them. This study is qualitative in approach utilizing thematic analysis to examine in detail the transcripts of interviews with participants who were selected based on their belief in synchronicity, their interest in sharing their stories and understandings of synchronicity and where located by chance using word of mouth. The interviews appeared to be a delight for all involved. This research provides a voice to the perspectives and responses stirred up by this enigmatic phenomenon for people who otherwise would pass us by. The findings focus on seven predominant themes organized into three categories. They suggest that more than a mere crack exists in the dominant Western worldview of the nature of reality as a result of synchronistic experiences.

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I wish to acknowledge something greater than this project that has called me forth. I have no definition for this *implicate order* as referred to by David Bohm (1980) that interweaves what I see to be all the happenings in our lives with that of all reality that surrounds us. I do know that I have placed myself at its service in the emergence of the relationships that constituted the coming together of this study.

This thesis journey would not be were it not for my wife Marian's vision of possibility for me, her constant belief in my ability and contribution, and her support as a resource and dialogue partner about the topic and the process. In the same light, I wish to thank my daughter Maggie for her total and unwavering support and the picture frame on my wall with her twenty dollar contribution towards the costs.

I wish to thank the four people that stepped forward to participate in the interview process. Their personal contribution and journey in the discovery of the gift of their synchronistic life experiences fueled my passion for the topic.

This research could not have taken form without the guidance and support of my co-supervisors Dr. Linda O'Neill and Dr. John Sherry as well as Dr. Geoff Peruniak serving as a thesis committee member.

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In closing, I am indebted to Joseph Jaworski and his shared life's journey through his books revealing the role of synchronicity and its relationship to leadership which launched me on this quest.

A man from Canada met a woman from Florida and they eventually became engaged. Two days prior to the wedding, she brought out her childhood photos of a family trip to Disney World when she was four or five years old. To their surprise, he identified his father pushing him in a stroller just behind her family in the forefront of the photo. Alex Voutsinas declared, "I got chills. It was just too much of a coincidence. It was fate" (Taylor, 2010).

If this were your story, what would come to mind?

Would you call this a meaningful or a meaningless event?

Would it be mere coincidence or would it be more?

Chapter One

Introduction

The above short-story will no doubt evoke a full spectrum of responses and interpretations, as will further inquiry. Each interpretation will be individualized, drawing from the worldview of each person. Some may interpret such an event as meaningful, intermingled with a sense of fate; while others will not see it as significant but rather as a random event. These responses are so unique to each person that even in cases of shared experiences (like the one above) disparate levels of meaninglessness or meaningfulness can result.

This study explored the spectrum of responses and interpretations to what can be interpreted as a meaningful coincidence or synchronicity. I examined its many facets and accounts from sources including scientists and scholars, and in particular Carl Jung. More importantly, this qualitative study of synchronicity gave a voice to the experiences of this phenomenon as lived by common everyday people, like those in the above story.

This study was one of exploration and discovery through qualitative inquiry. It is my sense that what was gained in terms of the uniqueness of experiences, perspectives, and worldviews can be added to the growing body of knowledge on this topic. I also explored some of the undercurrents that operate visibly and invisibly. For some, synchronicity is both obvious and meaningful, verging on transformational and fundamental to their lives. On the other side of the spectrum, the occurrence of synchronistic events can evoke little or no meaning and can be dismissed as random or simply coincidental. For some, these experiences are dormant or private, until such time they are inquired about or are spoken about. For others, synchronicity is yet another expression of the wholeness of all existence.

This inquiry approached synchronicity bearing in mind that there are different cultural perspectives on the topic as is the case of the Chinese culture where it is more fully embraced and not seen as rare, but rather as a common occurrence as suggested by Jung (1973).

I will begin this study by exploring the terminology most often associated with these synchronistic events.

Definition of Terms

My pilot discussions on the topic of synchronicity revealed considerable ambiguity as to the nature of synchronicity and that of several related terms: synchronicity, coincidence, serendipity, causal, and acausal. To address this, I have defined them for the purposes of this study.

Synchronicity: The Greek root of *syn* means together, with, in agreement with and that of *chronos* means time resulting in a sense of simultaneity unifying “psychic and physical events, in agreement with fixed/linear time” (Yiassemides, 2011, p. 460). The

following definition is drawn from Carl Jung who coined the word in the early 1930's and published it in 1952: *Synchronicity is the random occurrence of events related only by the meaning assigned to them by the observer.* These events are presented simultaneously to the observer in the present though they may have occurred at different times in the past. They are not connected or related by cause and effect (Jung, 1973). In other words, one of the events did not cause the other. Jung came to expand on meaningful coincidence by inferring a sense of implicate interconnectedness (Bohm, 1980).

With the intent of providing a better comprehension of the concept of synchronicity, I have added additional examples in Appendix A.

Coincidence: This represents the occurrence of events in conjunction with one another in time where there is no relationship between them whether of cause and effect or of meaning. The happening of these events does not cause surprise or warrant attention. If meaning is given to a coincidence, it is then referred to as a meaningful coincidence or synchronicity (Jung, 1973).

Serendipity: This phenomenon occurs when events result in unexpected discoveries which are considered fortunate or useful.

Causal: This term is used to describe the relationship between two events where one is seen as the direct consequence of the other.

Acausal: This term is used to describe the relationship between two events where one event is related to another by meaning rather than by cause and effect. Synchronicity was seen by Carl G. Jung as acausal (Jung, 1973).

Significance of the Research

The study of synchronicity is relatively recent and is making a significant impact in the fields of psychology, science, and leadership theory. The goal of this study is to contribute and enrich this body of knowledge through the experiences of ordinary people.

The main discussion or debate at hand is about how things happen and the nature of reality. On the one hand, the universe is seen as a causal environment with the only connection being that one event is considered to be the consequence of another and all causes are seen as from a physical origin (Peat, 1996). The occurrence of two or more events in proximity in time that appear to be related or connected is seen as pure coincidence, the chance result of randomness. On the other hand, quantum physicists such as David Bohm (1980) argue that the universe is a maze of interconnections and relationships in motion. The occurrence of two or more events in proximity in time is seen to be related, connected, and not at all random. Seen through the lens of cultures that are suckled on the inter-relationship of all things, such as many indigenous cultures of the world, these occurrences are not surprising or out of the ordinary (Peat, 1996). Scholars like Peat attempt to expose these relationships. In contrast, Newton imposes a mechanistic view of the universe similar to clockwork, operating on a cause and effect premise (Bohm, 1980). Seen through this lens and the causal Western perspective, the occurrences of synchronicity emanate mystery and do not fit the conventional explanations.

The primary reaction or what sets this phenomenon apart is the assignment of meaning or significance to the event. It is an out-of-step response which establishes relationship between self and the events. When meaning is applied, one enters the realm of synchronicity. Although little is known about the experience of synchronicity for the

ordinary person, it would appear that stories or accounts of this phenomenon are easily accessed. To date, the ability to replicate the conditions for synchronicity in experimental environments is rare if not non-existent. However, these synchronistic events appear to be widely available to all human beings. Observable only after the fact, I believe there is much to be discovered from the unique perspective that any one person brings to its observation and interpretation. As this appears to be an unexplored realm for the most part, this inquiry intends to shed more light on this experience.

Background of the Study

My focus on synchronicity sprang from my research on the role of vision in leadership. I came upon a title of interest by Joseph Jaworski (2011), *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*. I was aware that synchronicity was a common phenomenon to which most people can relate to with one kind of a story or another. My intrigue in the topic deepened as I read Jaworski's book which revealed connections to psychology, quantum physics, and leadership.

The phenomenon of synchronicity is the proverbial spanner in the works of a positivist world. It has always provided a fascination about the nature of reality that was often relegated to the non-sophisticated and non-educated until the advent of Jung and Pauli.

In my metamorphosis in attaining a Masters level in the academic realm, I have come to a better appreciation of the importance of bringing forward the voice of ordinary people. This, in conjunction with the fact that the phenomenon of synchronicity does not play favorites, led me to identify the nature of my research quest. I wondered, "If I were to listen to what ordinary people had to say about their experience of synchronicity and about their understanding of it all, what surprises might emerge?"

Extended discussions with my wife, Marian, who is of Aboriginal descent, have added a dimension and backdrop to the predominant focus of the Western societal view of synchronicity. These perspectives dovetail with my twenty years of involvement in Aboriginal ceremonies and extensive travel with medicine men and women in North America. These encounters have particularly impacted my experiences and shaped my views on the interconnectedness of all things.

Purpose of the Study

In line with Jung's intent, I wanted to contribute to creating a sense of normalcy regarding synchronicity by drawing on the experiences of the ordinary person. I was also awake to the possibilities and the unexpected perspectives that might surface on the phenomenon. It is my belief that though synchronicity had been considered by persons of academic and scientific repute such as Carl Jung, Albert Einstein, David Bohm, and F. David Peat, there exists a possibility of unveiling attributes of synchronicity that can be beneficial to all.

Synchronicity is not a phenomenon, at least to date, for which it is possible to replicate the conditions for manifestation. As such, synchronicity is difficult to test and examine. However, because it is seen as a common occurrence and is under-studied, listening to those who have encountered synchronicity holds the potential of validating a sense of interconnectedness and also of more discoveries about the phenomenon.

A secondary personal objective was to be alert to the ways in which synchronicity might come into play in the unfolding of this project. As a result of this attention to possible emerging synchronicities, I have noted them and given them due reflection.

Research Question

The main question of this study is: *What is the experience of synchronicity for the common person or the person in the mainstream?* The structure of the inquiry contained the following elements: accounts of personal events of synchronicity, an opportunity to relate what it was like to experience the phenomenon, and an exploration of the fascination and a possible explanation of it.

My approach to the experience of the phenomenon was open-ended. Participants provided indicators as to which realm of experience they wished to concentrate on, such as physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual or religious. Sub-questions (see Appendix B for samples) served to explore further the nature of their experience.

Researcher Context

In life and now as a researcher, I have undergone many transformations. For example, years ago I would have perceived synchronistic events as outstanding whereas they now blend into a more comprehensive canvas of life and are seen from a perspective of interconnectedness. I attribute this to having espoused a worldview that accounts for few elements of chance in the unfolding of a day. I have been impacted by an intensive immersion over many years into an Aboriginal worldview of reality which sees everything as related or interconnected and influenced by the sense of the *implicate order* (Bohm, 1980) perspective advanced by quantum physics. Synchronistic events evoke my sense of a dynamic element that underlies, connects, and animates the interplay of all elements of my existence.

Since researchers interpret the world through their conceptual lens, it is important at this point to bring forward filters I have that may have impacted how I approached this study.

Conceptual Lens

My gravitation to the subject of synchronicity has its basis in a deep fascination with mystery. My ongoing interest in spirituality, indigenous ways of healing, the unexplained, and in what motivates people, has set the stage for the exploration of this phenomenon. Some of the dominant influences that have shaped my worldview are: (a) the complete collection of Antoine de St. Exupéry's writings that has been a bedside book since I was a teenager; (b) a hunger for discovering what is beyond the cause and effect world; e.g., what can impact it, exploring the nature of who I really am, and how I am connected to all things; (c) the twenty-plus years of direct involvement in the ceremonial and healing ways of the indigenous peoples of the Lakota, Cree, and the Dene; (d) the amazing personal encounters I have had with the natural world; (e) a life of engagement with experiences based on the trust of life, e.g., the influence of hitch-hiking over 10,000 miles in North America and Europe, the learning acquired from obtaining a private pilot's licence, working in different countries, developing fluency in several languages and its impact; (f) participating in extensive personal development trainings as a student and subsequently, as a trainer; and (g) two experiences of acute illnesses, whereby I needed to prepare for my own death in short order.

One of the primary tenets of my belief system is that we are interconnected and part of a dynamic creative force linking all that is, including all our thoughts. I believe that our thoughts are part of and are influencing reality. As such, I am exploring the potential that thoughts, thinking, and observing have on impacting manifestation in the physical reality and in synchronistic events.

Though any experience of synchronicity is an unexpected event, its occurrence is not a complete enigma to me. I find sympathetic alignment in the writings of those like Senge,

Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2004) who believe that our task as leaders, and for humanity as a whole, is to learn to sense and actualize what is calling to come forth in service to a larger whole. This I hold as the emerging path of leaders and leadership and as a path of true service. This resonates with the teachings shared with me by many Elders and medicine people I have come in contact with. These above-mentioned beliefs have translated into a way of life for me, a way of being that impacts all my relationships, my beliefs, what I value, and everything I interact with and which interacts with me.

On a gradient scale of belief in a causal to an acausal world, I would position myself far to the side of the acausal spectrum. I do not see myself as religious person or a theist but rather, as a spiritual person. Bohm's (1980) *implicate order* suits me well as I believe there is an overall order, occurring at a level permeating the external order of matter and events and seeming to contain it.

It is important to emphasize that I have always been interested in any events in my life that fell into the category of synchronicity. However, because I do not overlay them with a heavy coat of meaningfulness, they do not dominate my everyday reality. As such, it would be a challenge for me to produce a list of very significant events. Such past events become more acute when stimulated through reflection, dialogue, or reminders.

Recently, I was reminded of a personal experience that I would classify as an example of synchronicity in my life. In 1993, I moved from Courtenay, BC to Regina, SK to be with Marian (my current spouse) to set up our life together. At a family gathering, my soon-to-be brother-in-law approached me and asked, "Are you Mr. Laval?" I replied, "Yes, why?" After further inquiry, it turns out that he was one of my students in a grade 6 class that I had taught for only six months in Regina while their teacher was on leave in 1968. He also

went on to say that I had made a positive impact on him and his best friend. A few days later, I was able to produce an old photograph featuring a few children from this class, one of which was him.

Even today, I find this circumstance of our familial interconnections quite amazing. I stop short at suggesting that it “means” something. However, for me, it has crossed the line of the coincidental into the zone of the something else. Events such as these suggest to me that there is more at work than mere randomness and is the source of my interest and curiosity.

In this spirit, I was very keen to hear of other examples and possible explanations for the occurrence of acausal events commonly referred to as synchronicity.

Intended Audience

It is my desire for this paper to be available to a broad audience. I have attempted to select a level of language that was widely accessible to readers with a non-academic background and be of interest to academics as well, through the sharing of this experience, its analysis and description of results, its findings along with my conclusions and sense of their implications.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review provides background to the topic of synchronicity while maintaining a focus on the main characteristic of it being the occurrence of events that are viewed as beyond the realm of cause and effect and of chance and to which meaning is attached.

Considering that the term synchronicity was coined by Carl Jung approximately eighty years ago, much has been written about it and in particular in the area of psychology. There are two primary tendencies in the interpretation of synchronicity. On the one hand, synchronicity is seen as simple random coincidences to which meaning is attached (Frey-Wehrlin, 1976). On the other hand, the events are seen as related in some capacity because of the dynamic interconnectedness of reality (Peat, 1987) and meaning is subsequently attributed.

The full implication of the phenomenon is difficult to comprehend from either the perspective of psychology or that of science because of its complexities and because it cannot be replicated. It is seen as beyond the scope of traditional causal thought processes (Frey-Wehrlin, 1976). However, with the current evolution of new sciences, the applications of synchronicity in a multitude of disciplines today, including leadership, are spurring on new dialogue, knowledge, and insights.

This study lends itself to a review of an old concept within a new paradigm, of which ordinary people and in particular indigenous knowledge-holders are an integral part.

Worldviews and Synchronicity

Many cultures view the world as whole and interconnected and are not as driven to resolve paradox as we are in the Western world. Durant (2002) suggests that accepting synchronicity precludes a relationship to paradox. Commenting on the relationship of other cultures to synchronicity, Colman (2011) states, “The reasons for this remain mysterious: there seems to be a cultural component in that prescientific cultures are more likely to accept the possibility of such experiences” (p. 475). This is an important point as it tempers the expectation that though one accepts the phenomenon of synchronicity as real that one should therefore be shocked by it or should see it as outstanding.

In writing his paper, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* Carl Gustav Jung risked¹ his credibility as a psychologist in challenging the Newtonian perspective of cause and effect (Cambray, 2009). Had Jung been born in China, he would likely not have felt the need to validate his fascination with the phenomenon of synchronicity and our Western world might have yet to meet with the term synchronicity.

In his book, he refers to the Tao² (twenty times) and the I Ching³ (sixteen times) highlighting the value and importance he places on the Chinese way of seeing the world. He states, “The concept of Tao pervades the whole philosophical thought of China” (Jung, 1973,

¹ Cambray declares about Jung, “I suggest his synchronicity concept, aligned with the radical aspect of the new physics as he understood it, was indeed seeking such a leap into new and was a part of the postcolonial Zeitgeist” (Cambray, 2009, p. 96).

² The Tao represents the foundational order that moves through and imbibes the universe. It brings to mind David Bohm’s sense of *implicate order*.

³ The *I Ching* is translated into *The Book of Changes* in English. One asks a question and throws the yarrow sticks or coins to establish six lines. Each line is either broken or solid. These sets of six lines form hexagrams with prescribed meanings reflected through nature. It is of special interest to Jung (1973) because, “The *I Ching* presupposes that there is a synchronistic correspondence between the psychic state of the questioner and the answering hexagram” (p. 111).

p. 70). The sense and experience of synchronicity for the Chinese appears to be as generally accepted for them as causality is to the Western mind.

Other indigenous cultures also resonate with the Chinese I Ching worldview, like those in North America. Indigenous philosophy and science holds that there is no separation between mind and matter that wholeness is the fabric of life, that relationships are the key to balance in the cosmos, and that everything is in a state of flux and process (Peat, 1996). Jung felt there was a resonance of his worldview with that of the First Nations peoples (Aziz, 1999, p. 66).

From a vantage point of Newtonian-based perspectives, where everything stands to be proven scientifically via the lens of duality and that of cause and effect, phenomena that do not fit these conventions are seen as extraordinary. Those with a worldview for which paradox is not disconcerting, these same phenomena are seen as quite within the norm. As Peat (1991) says, “Synchronicities and moments of illumination become natural unfoldings of the underlying order of nature” (p. 230). Other scholars like Dr. Leroy Littlebear (Peat, 1996) and many anonymous Aboriginal philosophers and medicine people, are playing key roles behind-the-scenes in the merging of traditional knowledge with new sciences. These aboriginal peoples are quietly reshaping the landscape through dialogue and mentoring, such as Peat’s (1996) book, *Blackfoot Physics*.

Interconnectedness

In our Western worldview, empirical scientific, rational, and causal proof has been the agreed upon basis for determining reality. Over the last two hundred years since the apple fell on Newton’s head, this way of thinking has become the accepted way of seeing things and the basis for decision making. Incidents of the paranormal were and still are

marginalized and barely tolerated. These phenomena of occurrences to which meaning was attached, as was entertained by Jung, a psychologist who befriended physicists Wolfgang Pauli and Albert Einstein, now held the possibility of being explained by a scientific view. Jung's intrigue for cultures with a worldview based on the interconnectedness of all things significantly challenged the status quo of Western thinking. In particular, the phenomenon of synchronicity highlighted the very core of this challenge by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all things. Many views are expressed on the theme of interconnectedness.

Donati (2004) points out that near the end of his essay, on the nature of the psyche, Jung presents his hypothesis of an inherent unitary reality where the psyche and matter are viewed as different facets of the same reality (p. 712). Jung is noted for saying that “[the] principle [of synchronicity] suggests that there is an inter-connection or unity of causally unrelated events, and thus postulates a unitary aspect of being which can very well be described as the *unus mundus*” (as cited by Yiassemides, 2011, p. 466), translatable as one world or unity of existence.

Particular to synchronicity, Bolen (1979) stated that, “In the experience of a synchronistic event, instead of feeling ourselves to be separated and isolated entities in a vast world we feel the connection to others and the universe at a deep and meaningful level. That underlying connection is the eternal Tao, and a synchronistic event is a specific manifestation of it” (p. 24). Sheldrake (2003) speaks of the common experience of synchronicity where we are thinking of someone that has not come to mind for a long time who then calls us shortly after. He believes that though we have considered this type of experience as paranormal for a long time, these are actually normal and based on our interconnectedness. He states, “We are

no longer alienated from our bodies, alienated from our environment, and alienated from other species. We are interconnected” (p. 285). Bright (1997), a critic of Jung, postulates that Jung’s true motivation for introducing synchronicity was as a front to really present his acausal connecting principle. In other words, Jung was more fascinated by the interconnection of all things and simply used his concept of synchronicity as the vehicle to communicate it with.

In Chinese and Aboriginal cultures, the principle of interconnectedness is an accepted fact, giving synchronicity an aura of normalcy. In mainstream Western culture, the perspective of interconnectedness is only beginning to seep into the consciousness thanks to the challenge issued by Jung and supportive physicists. In particular, the Jungian approach to the Chinese I Ching is seen as sharing a common worldview where a person is an integral part of the world’s impersonal fabric (Zabriskie, 2005, p. 226). Scholars like Durant (2002) point out that in their lives synchronicity carries with it a glimpse of hope because it infers a “unity with a larger wholeness” (p. 491).

Self’s (1990) thesis is a heuristic study on the experience of synchronicity. The main themes that emerged were enhanced awareness, an emotionally charged time, and spiritual awareness. She emphasizes that though one cannot predict or cause synchronistic events, it is possible to become more sensitized to them. Most of the literary sources cited refer to interconnectedness, implicate order, or the Tao which all support the concept of a dynamic order operating in the background of all existence. She sees synchronicity as representative of a worldview where the individuals are part of a larger, natural, and spiritual dimension.

Furthering this idea, the theme of interconnectedness is addressed by Combs and Holland (1996) as wholeness or the unbroken process. From the scientific perspective this

sense of continuity between objects based on the absence of separation though they appear separate is based on wholeness. This correlation between apparent separate objects is called synchronicity in quantum physics (Combs and Holland, 1996).

Synchronicity and Science

Much has been written about the influence of physicists of the new science on the formulation of Jung's concept of synchronicity. The focus in this review is to present some of the more salient influences and does not claim to be comprehensive.

In Jung's journey to define and substantiate scientifically his concept of synchronicity, Wolfgang Pauli, Nobel Physics prize recipient in 1945, was his main champion and influence. It is well documented that they collaborated together extensively over years and even published a book together called *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*. They were aligned on the concept of *unus mundus*, the unity of existence (Lindorff, 1995). Donati (2004) asserts, "Pauli's critical reflections induced Jung to widen his definition of synchronicity" (p. 718). This view is supported by Yiassemides (2011) who specifies that Pauli was particularly skeptical of Jung's use of the concept of time in relationship to synchronicity. In the final analysis, it appears unlikely that Jung's sense of synchronicity could have been communicated as successfully to the scientific community without Pauli's support.

David Bohm's work provides scientific validation for the phenomenon of synchronicity though he does not appear to address it directly. Jung drew upon this area to give foundation to his concept of synchronicity. Here are some of the primary thoughts from the science of quantum physics taken from Bohm's (1980) work, *Implicate Order*. "In the implicate order the totality of existence is enfolded within each region of space (and time)"

(Bohm, 1980, p. 219). This view allows for synchronicity to operate with a greater degree of normality if everything, including thought, is contained in everything. Bohm stresses that in our search for reality we are working with probabilities rather than certainties. This applies very well to the phenomenon of synchronicity. In addition, Bohm reinforces the Aboriginal worldview where everything considered to be reality is in a constant state of flux and process (Peat, 1996).

F. David Peat (1987), imminent physicist and colleague of David Bohm, wrote, *Synchronicity: The Bridge Between Matter and Mind*. This book reinforces the theme of how synchronicity is a challenge or a “flaw in the fabric” (p.2) of how reality has been viewed to date. The perspective he brings is in line with that of Wolfgang Pauli and the subsequent scientists that have spoken to synchronicity and the new science. Peat keeps the conversation at the level of worldviews which does not negate Newtonian science per se but puts it in a much broader context.

Sheldrake (1987), biologist, sums up well the dilemma facing traditional science, “In so far as these phenomena cannot be explained in terms of the known laws of physics and chemistry, from the conventional mechanistic point of view they ought not to occur” (p. 29).

The Role of Carl Jung

Since this study will explore the experience of synchronicity for a limited number of participants, the impact of Jung will be related in as much as it serves to establish a basic backdrop for the study. Most of what is written on the topic of synchronicity refers to Jung in regards to its definition, the influences and people that impacted his sense of meaningful coincidence, its application to psychological analysis, his deeper understanding of the psyche, and his relationship to the discoveries of modern physicists. Simply put, Jung’s

impact was in bringing forward the presence of the self in rare and genuine moments (Hogensen, 2005). Jung (1973) published his cornerstone paper on the subject, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* in 1952. In this study he is suggesting that there is a dynamic underlying connecting principle woven throughout all of existence, including thought.

The evidence provided for synchronicity also gave credence to his sense of archetypes and collective consciousness and has profoundly impacted the realm of psychology and its practice. It was the beginning of a bridge between the vibrational world and its manifestation in the world of matter beyond the eyes of duality and cause and effect.

Less obvious and less discussed than the relationship of synchronicity with psychology and science is its relationship with leadership.

Synchronicity and Leadership

Scholarly study and the development of theory of the presence of synchronicity in leadership are new and emerging. I have found little other than this work on the specific relevance of synchronicity in leadership. Joseph Jaworski (2011) secularized the concept of synchronicity in his first book, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*. He removed synchronicity from the dissection table and set it free in the real life context of leadership. The merit of his work is that it ties into the worldview of the modern physicists and Aboriginal worldviews as portrayed by F. David Peat, and Jung's perspective of reality. From the moment of his turning his back on a successful career as a lawyer to found the American Leadership Forum (ALF), synchronicity became overwhelmingly evident in his life. Two days after his decision he met David Bohm fortuitously. This set the course for the rest of his life. Jaworski's account of the establishment of the ALF is contingent on

synchronistic events and paves the way to a deeper perspective on emerging approaches to leadership in his subsequent books *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* and *Source: The Inner Path of Knowledge Creation*.

Cambray (2009) makes a passing comment on how challenging the dimensions of synchronicity are for leaders in the political realm. He adds, “Yet, leadership that ignores the kairos⁴ of events can quickly get out of sync with the people it is meant to represent and guide” (p. 111).

These limited works reveal that the area of influence of synchronicity may be broader than originally anticipated. The prevalence of synchronicity for the common person suggests that we anticipate discussion of the phenomenon in other areas impacted by it.

Relevance of Synchronicity for the Average Person

The most outstanding determinant of value in querying the average person on the topic of synchronicity is that the phenomenon cannot be replicated and studied directly. Therefore, the primary source of study is anyone who has experienced the phenomenon. Since it is unsought and spontaneous as mentioned, every person has equal opportunity to experience and relate synchronistic occurrences.

There may be advantage for people to talk about the synchronistic events in their lives. Durant (2002) suggests that it has the benefit of opening “those lives to the power of the self, the archetype beyond paradox” (p. 497). One of the key elements that the sharing of synchronistic stories fosters is that of creating hope. It opens the door to possibilities like

⁴ “A second type of non-chronological time notion, kairos time, was discussed as the ability to act intelligently and wisely on a concrete and opportune occasion” (Hans Rāmō, 2002, p. 573). This author also refers to it simply as “timing”.

never before and this is a key element in the process of creativity (Deri as cited by Durant, 2002, p. 498).

Though many of the attributes of synchronicity are witnessed by the common person an identification of them could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Characteristics of Synchronicity

Though I have introduced the term synchronicity in Chapter One, listing some of the characteristics of the phenomenon that have been identified in the literature will contribute to a better formulation of the concept. Here is my synthesis of the main elements of synchronicity encountered.

Generally, the phenomenon is unsought and spontaneous and the events are not necessarily simultaneous (Zabriskie, 2005). Donati (2004) commented on Wolfgang Pauli, who considered synchronistic events to be non-reproducible (p. 716).

Another element is that synchronicity seems to occur more frequently at points of change in one's life. Jung noticed that it occurs more frequently in "states of crisis, transformation or pushed to extreme limits – meaningful times in life" (as cited by Nechita, 2010, p. 2). According to Combs & Holland (1996), it occurs predominantly during major life changes, career changes, and the time of death (p. 85). This is supported by previously stated example of Jaworski (2011) who met with David Bohm two days after leaving his law career. Combs & Holland (1996) emphasize how life transitions are ripe with meaningful coincidences (p. 85). Jung's ideas for this heightened frequency and why this is so are that it occurs "when the subconscious mind is intensively activated in one area, it is weakened in

another and the psychoid⁵ or the cosmic wholeness makes it possible for a connection to be established. Such would be the case of the Freudian slip⁶” (Combs & Holland, 1996, p. 95).

Jung also noticed that such events demonstrate a connection between the human psyche and the natural world (Main, 2007, p. 363). As pointed out by Zabriskie (2005), the I Ching is of great interest to Jung and its images are “analogies drawn from nature and culture” (p. 225).

The role of meaning attribution in the identification of the phenomenon is highlighted. Zabriskie (2005) notes that meaning does not exist by itself in the event, it is attributed to the event by the person who experiences it (p. 226). She refers to Pauli who in his interpretation of synchronicity placed much more emphasis on meaning than on the simultaneity of events.

Another notable element is that the end-results of the experience can be characterized by “effortless decision-making such as in the choice of a career” (Guindon & Hanna, 2002, p. 206); the transformation of one’s personal life (Durant, 2002, p. 499); and resulting in “personal growth” (Combs & Holland, 1996, p. 85).

One manifestation of synchronicity not mentioned thus far, has a loose connection to the concept. It is that of what I would call Pechvogel⁷ incidents where misfortune, rather than fortunate synchronicity seems to be the predominant pattern, as though it were following the person around. In many of these cases, misfortune occurs primarily to the person in question;

⁵ Jung describes a psychoid as, “The psychoid state lacks articulation, representing a fusion of both inner and outer reality. In it coexist all past and future possibilities” (As cited by Combs & Holland, 1996, p. xviii)

⁶ Merriam-Webster’s definition of a Freudian slip: “a slip of the tongue that is motivated by and reveals some unconscious aspect of the mind (He meant to say “I’m glad you’re here,” but what came out was a *Freudian slip*: “I’m mad you’re here.”)”

⁷ A *Pechvogel* is a person that attracts misfortune or bad luck by their mere presence wherever they tread.

however, it can also occur to others or in environments they are in at the time. This is the case for Wolfgang Pauli, the physicist who worked with Jung on the formulation of the concept of synchronicity. It is a well-known fact that some of his fellow physicists would not allow him near their laboratories because when he came near, scientific instruments would break down (Lindorff, 1995). This came to be known, tongue in cheek, as the Pauli Effect (Combs & Holland, 1996). The concept of Pechvogel is also well known in the world, as it is for example in the domain of gambling. The motion picture, *The Cooler*, depicts a man who emanates so much bad luck that the casino manager has him stand by winning patrons to bring about a shift in their results (Furst & Kramer, 2003). Though the Pechvogel incidents have been referred to as synchronistic events, I see them on the fringe of the concept of the phenomenon. They do result in negative consequences for the observer in many cases; however, it appears more time is spent cleaning up from them than in interpreting their personal relevance and meaning.

It is my hope that this closer look at the characteristics of synchronicity has contributed to a better understanding and identification of the phenomenon when it occurs.

Summary

To summarize the key points, synchronicity is at odds with the Newtonian scientific worldview. However, it reaches normalcy when approached from a worldview of interconnectedness and wholeness, such as is the case for the Taoist, Aboriginal, and quantum physics perspectives. Since it is difficult, if not impossible, to replicate the occurrence of the phenomenon and since the phenomenon potentially can occur for all people, the experience of the ordinary person has significant importance. Experts in leadership theory are examining synchronistic events in order to find ways of increasing its

frequency. Finally, the examination of Jung's definition of synchronicity along with many of its manifest characteristics contributes to a better identification of the phenomenon.

In closing, the words of Frey-Werlin (1976) serve as a simple rule of thumb, based on Jung's concept, when considering whether an event should be interpreted as synchronistic or not, "It is recommended that synchronicity should be invoked only in those cases which involve a unique event, or coincidence of events, and which the individual concerned experiences as meaningful" (p. 48).

I would invite you to reread the brief opening story and reflect on the phenomenon of synchronicity once again, as well as any questions that may have surfaced or any changes in your perceptions, having now considered some of what has been said about it.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

Synchronicity is not a phenomenon that can be placed under a microscope, dissected and then analyzed. It is a naturally-occurring, illusive, and non-replicable phenomenon that appears to be universally-based, in that anyone may potentially encounter the phenomenon in their lifetime. It poses a significant scientific dilemma because it's very existence challenges and does not conform to conventional science that is based on cause and effect. Nonetheless, researchers and ordinary people alike, once entering into this topic are left with a rich and varied source of information and knowledge of the personal experiences of those who have become aware of its occurrence and effects in their lives.

This chapter provides a general overview of research methods and their application to the topic of synchronicity. I outline distinctions between qualitative and quantitative approaches and will demonstrate my rationale for choosing qualitative research as an approach and thematic analysis as a methodology to achieve my intended results. Finally, I address how these approaches translated into addressing ethical concerns, ways of selecting and interviewing participants, and performing the final analysis of the data.

About Qualitative Research

If synchronicity “represents a tiny flaw in the fabric of all that we have hitherto taken for reality” (Peat, 1987, p. 2), quantifiable research methods based on the mechanistic premise of our reality may not be best suited for this inquiry. Synchronicity is deemed unpredictable and thus difficult to study in a quantifiable experimental environment. If the very worldview upon which quantitative research is built is being challenged by the phenomenon and the primary source of information regarding its occurrence lies in the

experience of the common person, then it is most appropriate to turn to qualitative research as the methodology, which offers a more inductive and interpretive approach. Synchronicity, as held by quantum physicists like Wolfgang Pauli, David Bohm, and F. David Peat and psychologist Carl Gustav Jung contrasts with the Western worldview of causality, as its manifestation brings into consideration the existence of an entirely different perspective of reality. These differences in methodology beg the questions, “What is reality?”, “What makes something real?”, “What is time?” and so forth.

In choosing qualitative over quantitative research, my choice hinged on which would best retain the integrity and the wholeness of the data by summarizing the key features and highlighting similarities and differences across the data set, generating unanticipated insights, and allowing for social and psychological interpretation of the data.

In contrast to qualitative research, the usefulness of quantitative research “derives from what is the generalizability of findings from study samples to populations not studied but deemed to be like those samples” (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1371). Quantitative approaches are based on phenomena that are for the most part quantifiable, replicable, predictable, and the result of the principle of causality, all of which fall short in the light of phenomena associated with synchronicity. These substantive differentiations led me to choosing a qualitative research approach.

This approach was selected for this inquiry not simply because it is often viewed as mutually exclusive to quantitative research (Kelly & Long, 2000); rather, it best suits the purpose in responding to the research question, “What is your experience of synchronicity?” In dealing with the experience of the mainstream person on a topic such as synchronicity which challenges the very worldview upon which quantitative research is based and leads us

into uncharted territory, much needs to be derived from the delivery and content of the data. Mayan (2009) states, “Qualitative inquiry is primarily naturalistic, interpretive, and inductive. By studying naturally occurring phenomena, qualitative researchers attempt to interpret or make sense of the meaning people attach to their experiences or underlying a particular phenomenon” (p. 11).

It is my hope that this foray into the realm of acausal coincidence does provoke some wonder and consideration of a different worldview, one similar to that advanced by quantum physics and that espoused for centuries by Aboriginal peoples, the Chinese, and other world cultures. As supported by Harman (1996), “The conventional scientific method has not proven to be very helpful in exploring a wide range of phenomena relating to consciousness, mind, or spirit; it does not tell us about the world seen through the eyes of indigenous culture” (p. 31).

This study constitutes a contribution in impacting existing beliefs. According to Seabrook (2001), beliefs are “amenable to the influence of change, although they tend to change slowly” (p. 291). If beliefs are as described in the Merriam-Webster (Mish, 1998) dictionary, habits of mind, this incursion into the world of beliefs and perspectives of interconnectedness holds the potential of impacting, expanding, or even changing the habits of mind surrounding one’s sense of reality.

One goal I had for this study was to help expose and explore long-held beliefs. Additionally, in this process of trying-on other perspectives like those held by the aforementioned quantum scientists and indigenous peoples, who espouse a sense of the nature of reality as being more than a causal composite of elements, it is fitting that I, as the researcher and the readers consider approaching this topic in-kind, with a mind open to the unknown.

Sandelowski (2004) emphasizes this point well for all participants, “For individuals with no personal experience of a target event, qualitative research findings offer a window through which to view aspects of life that would have remained unknown” (pp. 1371-1372). She adds, “For individuals with personal experience of a target event, qualitative research findings offer a mirror that allows them to look back on and reframe their experience” (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1372). Therefore, whether a person has no, little or a high exposure to this topic, some level of engagement with one’s beliefs is assured.

Qualitative research has provided an opportunity to give voice to people who would otherwise have slipped by unnoticed. This process of giving voice does not exclude my role as a researcher and the impact of my selection of which evidence to present may have had. This research approach values the experience of individuals and holds it as an equal source of authentic information and perspective that can make a difference in understanding the world we live in. This is particularly relevant when “the recurring depiction of understanding [is seen] as the prime imperative of qualitative research” (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1373). From this perspective, my qualitative inquiries have entailed asking ordinary people to give their interpretation of synchronicity, relate stories of personal experiences with the phenomenon, and share their responses to the phenomenon. The resulting interviews constituted the research data and generated perspectives and information of interest on the topic.

Since “doing useful qualitative research requires that we make sense of complexity” (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002, p. 44), it is my view that this form of inquiry has contributed to a better understanding of the complex phenomenon of synchronicity even as seen through the lens of Western thinking. Mayan (2009) comments on the complexity of knowledge today and how it is additionally influenced by politics, history, and culture. Nonetheless, she adds

that, “although research from a postmodern⁸ perspective produces a limited and local knowledge, it is still knowledge that can reveal and inform” (Mayan, 2009, p. 27). It is also knowledge that can be transferred to “situations beyond the ones from which they were generated” (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1371). Even though the sampling was not meant to be representative of all phenomena of synchronicity and the formulation of theory was not held as an objective, data has provided a clue to the revelation of the *flaw in the fabric* as a portal to uncovering a new matrix of thought. It held the potential of serendipity. Therefore, unexpected outcomes have provided an opportunity to peek beneath the cloak of mystery that shrouds this experience.

Qualitative research has a strong reflexive component. The phenomenon of synchronicity can be better understood by reflection on the context in which it happened and a witnessing of the importance and value it holds for individuals. I believe that the results of this study have, at the very least, provided a good venue for the experience of awe, wonder, and further reflection. I suspect that some of the substance of the stories shared may remain either as curiosities or as strong evidence for further reflection and study. I especially find that the factors of unpredictability, impact, and reflection surrounding the topic of synchronicity have opened possibilities in the consideration of the findings.

Sandelowski (2004) refers to three types of utilization of findings: instrumental, symbolic, and conceptual. The instrumental utilization of findings brings about change that is visible to all. Symbolic utilization occurs when the findings are less visible and are used to legitimize a position or a practice. Of most interest to me is the conceptual utilization of the findings. Though they result in no observable action, they can bring about “a change in the

⁸Post modernism rejects the claim that the only route to knowledge must be purely rational through empirical science. It is open to different theories, methods and traditions to discover knowledge (Mayan, 2009).

way users think about problems, persons, or events” (Sandelowski, 2004, p. 1371). This sentiment is evident in a favorite saying of the physicist David Bohm, “A change of meaning is a change of being” (cited by Jaworski, 2012, p. 89). Changes in thinking are generally followed by some visible modifications in behavior, and in the why and how things are done.

In closing, the choice of an inductive⁹ qualitative approach has served well the discovery of attitudes, observations, imagery, and perspectives surrounding the phenomenon of synchronicity. Underlying my curiosity about the phenomenon is a philosophical stance that resonates with Reason’s (1996) purpose for the application of human inquiry, “We are more concerned to correct what we see as the devastating consequences of the positivist worldview on the planet, its life, and its people” (p. 28). This search is an attempt at moving “toward a living inquiry that is integrated in the lives of all those involved” (Reason, 1996, p.15). To achieve this end, thematic analysis was chosen to best identify patterns in the data collected.

Thematic Analysis

In this study, thematic analysis as a methodology has served to emphasize emerging patterns in meaning structures or themes prevalent in the experience of synchronicity in the lives of ordinary people. Though several methodologies might have lent themselves to the exploration of the phenomenon of synchronicity, thematic analysis served to draw out the meaning from its experience and to provide some insight into the role it plays in the minds of the participants in making sense of what is considered reality in this day and age.

⁹ An inductive method is one which derives more general rules or conclusions from individual instances. In the case of this research patterns will be determined from individual instances of data and themes will be derived from these patterns.

For instance, the object of this inquiry was not to develop theory as in the grounded theory approach. Instead, I strove “to be faithful to the phenomena evoked rather than posit explanations” (Singer & Hunter, 1999, p. 66). Though after the analysis of the data some conclusions were reached about synchronicity, a deliberate effort was made to resist involving the interview participants in the development of theory about the phenomenon. In addition, the intent was not to place focus on the essence of the phenomenon as in phenomenology; nor was it to instigate change through social action as in participatory action research; and nor was it to study a particular culture as in the case of ethnography. In fact, the best methodology to make sense of the phenomenon of synchronicity, to understand it a bit better was thematic analysis. It “can be a method that works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). This methodology drew on the power of themes, where the most meaningful and common elements from all the data collected surrounding the phenomenon came together, as the pieces of a rough mosaic. These themes projected an image that allowed me to better grasp what synchronicity is about.

Thematic analysis is not as easily identifiable as some of the methodologies previously mentioned. It is also usually the first method learned as a foundation tool to develop the core skills of data processing and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). This method was pivotal in arriving at themes from salient elements or codes and thus highlighting what was of primordial importance in the mind of the participants regarding the phenomenon.

Boyatzis (1998) gives a comprehensive summary of the use, application, and validity of this methodology, “Thematic analysis enables scholars, observers, or practitioners to use a wide variety of types of information in a systematic manner that increases their accuracy or

sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations, and organizations” (p. 5). One of the main advantages of thematic analysis as emphasized by Boyatzis was that it served as a research bridge between different disciplines and epistemologies. Understanding and agreement on the validity of the meaning made was facilitated by the method.

Making meaning or making sense is a predominant human endeavor and is reflected in academic inquiry. As was the case in this study, when I asked the participants about their experience of synchronicity, I was fundamentally asking them to make meaning or sense of the event as it was experienced. Bolen (1979) suggests that, “Taking an Agatha Christie approach¹⁰ to synchronistic events, one proceeds with the assumption that such events have meaning that can be detected” (p. 26). Thus, this inquiry did seek to expand the existing bank of meaning on this topic through the means of thematic analysis.

Max van Manen (1990) sees thematic analysis applied to the lived experience as a tool or means to determine themes or “structures of experience” (p. 79). These themes or structures of experience simply provide a focus point that facilitates the description of the experience and of the phenomenon. The theme is not the center of the attention but places the spotlight on the experience itself. To attempt to capture or contain lived experiences in linear conceptual abstractions, I dare say is not possible, as they are intensely multidimensional. To approach a human experience with themes preserves some of the characteristics of the experience, such as openness to what the experience is about and to individual insights. Conceptualization in essence is a compartmentalization process resulting in distortions and

¹⁰ Agatha Christie was a prolific writer of crime novels, short stories, and plays. Bolen (1979) gives this description of an Agatha Christie approach, “To me, the Agatha Christie approach is intuitive; it asks, ‘What is the meaning of this event?’ ‘What are the circumstances in which it arose?’ ‘What are the possibilities inherent in it?’” (p. 26).

possibly closing the door to the unknown or inexplicable. Whereas, an openness to insight matches human experience and is a great fit to a topic like synchronicity that is impossible to compartmentalize from the Western scientific perspective. Thus, thematic analysis has dovetailed well with the question of this inquiry and with the complexity, wonder, and even awe accompanying the experience of the phenomenon of synchronicity.

A particular area of interest of mine in this inquiry was the fascination and amazement that the experience of synchronicity evokes. Thematic analysis also contributed to illuminating this human response by revealing themes that surfaced directly as a result of its presence in the data. This approach opened the door to insights pertaining to the prevalence and magnitude of this response, to its origins, some of its characteristics, and to a deeper understanding of the experience of the phenomenon.

In addition, judging from my research thus far, I do not consider thematic analysis to be in conflict with my personal engagement with the experience or with the literature on the topic. Braun & Clarke (2006) identify two positions regarding contact with the literature prior to conducting a thematic inquiry. On the one hand, it could be seen as narrowing the “analytic field of vision” resulting in the possible oversight of elements. In other words, it could constrict openness in approaching the data. On the other hand, it can expand and sensitize one’s awareness to emergent possibilities. Braun & Clarke (2006) adjudicate this dilemma by stating that, “there is no one right way to proceed with reading for thematic analysis” (p. 86). When considering the experience of synchronicity there is such a strong component of unknown that it tilts the scale to the advantage of having greater familiarity with what has been said about the phenomenon.

Familiarization with the writings of authors such as Jung, Pauli, Bohm, and Peat, contribute to considering factors that may not be in the experience of the ordinary person; such as, considering synchronicity from a different cultural or worldview perspective or from the perspective of new science. Indeed, much of the effort displayed by the writings on synchronicity has actually served to better define the phenomenon thus ascertaining that we are closer to talking about the same thing. Ultimately, this added information expanded rather than constricted the playing field of possibilities that thematic analysis of the data was based on. The existing literature has whetted the appetite to go beyond what is known and increased the potential for insight and understanding beyond our existing parameters from ordinary to extraordinary, and explored where this phenomenon is nudging the edges of the envelope.

Thematic analysis can be considered to be the bed-rock methodology for qualitative research and in its simplicity provided an openness that is in line with the core intent and question of my inquiry into the experience of synchronicity.

Ethical Considerations

This inquiry into the experience of synchronicity consisted of interviewing willing, interested, and consenting adult participants who were fascinated by the phenomenon of synchronicity. These participants were drawn from the general population and did not represent any typically vulnerable or at-risk population, thereby provoking any undue concern.

I attempted to create a context that was supportive of individual freedom, safety, and privacy by being empathetic and providing a comfortable private room free from distractions at the Terrace, UNBC campus where a relaxed conversation about their stories and views on synchronicity could occur. This context endeavored to make the participants feel at ease and

secure. I reminded them that they were free to speak, to take their time to share, or to end the conversation at any time. An opportunity for questions and comments on the upcoming interview process was provided in an interview pre-meeting. It was my observation that the participants expressed a sense of the process being enjoyable and for one participant it was even considered as “fun”.

The following research elements and processes contributed to the anticipated low level of risk: (a) an information sheet was provided describing all facets of the event (see Appendix B); (b) a signed consent form was used and required for each participant (see Appendix C); (c) the topic tends to evoke awe and wonder and as a result did not cause distress, on the contrary; (d) as the researcher, I focused on developing rapport by establishing respect and trust with the participants; (e) the interviews were conducted in a quiet and comfortable environment approved by each participant at the Terrace UNBC campus; (f) the findings were represented in such a way that the participants were not identified by name or by context and (g) the needs of the participant superseded the goals of the research.

Confidentiality and Anonymity. Finally, to ensure the highest standards, this research proposal was vetted through the University of Northern British Columbia’s Ethics Board. In preparation, I consulted with seasoned researchers in the event of difficulties arising in the protection of the privacy of the participants or other issues. A pre-interview meeting was set up with each participant at which time I explained the principles and limits of confidentiality and provided an information sheet as a written version for further consideration. In terms of anonymity, participants were given the option to choose either a pseudonym or their own name for the transcription of the interview recordings and notes. At

the interview, the terms were reviewed and a release form which included an option for either personal name or pseudonym was signed.

Research Procedures

The entire research process for this study was characterized by simplicity and flexibility.

Interviewing Process. The formulation of the interview questions and the basis for the data collection reflected different aspects of the research question. The interview did so by drawing from three core questions: (a) the relating of some examples of synchronicity in the participants' lives; (b) an exploration of possible explanations for the phenomenon; and (c) a relating of what it was like to experience synchronistic events.

Since the interview gathered data "based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314), several factors contributed to creating respectful, ethical, and effective environments for this to occur.

The format used was that of a semi-structured in-depth individual interview. This type of interview is "organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee/s" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). The three core questions of the interview were given to the participants beforehand should they have wanted to ponder on some possible responses and are included in Appendix D. The agenda of questions was kept flexible (Britten, 1995, p. 252) to allow the interview to evolve naturally for the interviewee.

The duration of the interview was approximately one-hour in length, with some flexibility to allow for natural closure. The content of the interview was digitally recorded using two recorders, an iPod™ and a SmartPen™ which were both non-obtrusive. Though it

was available for the recording to be stopped at any time should the participant have requested it, it was only stopped twice when I felt the sharing was maybe too personal. Having determined with the participants whether it was appropriate to continue recording or not, I then proceeded with the interview. I did take a few notes as the interviews progressed but only to jot down further points of discussion. Participants were compensated with a one-time gift of an honorarium of twenty-five dollars for their participation as a form of respect and gratitude for lending their time and story to my research. Each participant received an electronic copy of their transcript for perusal and approval. The findings were distributed to the project co-supervisors Dr. Linda O'Neill and Dr. John Sherry. Much thought was given to providing the best possible interview environment with a focus on the honoring of the participant and the fullest release of the knowledge in place (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 13) about his or her experience of synchronicity.

Selection of Participants. My intent was to limit the number of adult participants to four with a possibility of extending it to six depending on the nature of the data collected in the interviews. This complied with the validity of thematic analysis, which is not based on a large number of participants but on having sufficient data upon which to base the derivation of codes and themes and the rigor of the manner in which this process is enacted. The data was collected over four interview sessions. The participants were keen to engage on the topic sharing anecdotes of synchronistic events and they welcomed any opportunity to say more to bring out their experience of the phenomenon. The data broadened in scope and in depth in particularly when they provided their understanding of it and did not hesitate or hold back to illustrate, directly and indirectly how it fit into their worldview and sense of reality. As a

result of the ample amount of information collected the arranging of further interviews was not pursued.

The process of the transcription required that the data be listened to repeatedly to assure accuracy and as such was then, read, and re-read multiple times to bring it to a status ready for coding. In-depth attention was given to the data in the process of formulating codes to best encapsulate the meaning and the intent of the participant. The data was then gone over again to establish the patterns evident in the codes and then distilled into themes. This degree of rigor resulted in producing a quality assessment of smaller amounts of data collected. Thus only a small number of participants were required to be interviewed (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000, p. 1002).

The sampling method used for the selection of the participants was a combination of purposive sampling and convenience or accidental sampling. Purposive sampling was used in a broad manner since the experience of synchronicity appears to be universal for the most part. Meeting the objectives of the research question was the determinant of the criteria applied (Curtis et al., 2000, p. 1002). My selection process was based on chance meetings with people and in particular through my network of acquaintances. I did casually inquire if they knew someone who had experienced synchronistic events and might be interested in sharing them. A referral was followed up with some form of introduction in person, by phone, or by email. Participants considered for this inquiry were required to believe in synchronicity as a somewhat mysterious phenomenon that is revealing of something at work that is beyond pure coincidence and to be willing to relate some examples of it from their personal lives. Convenience sampling, which is based on who is most easily accessible and available, was applied amongst the homogeneous group of participants who met the initial

criteria. In other words, participants were identified by their belief in synchronicity, their willingness to share their experiences, and their availability for an interview. To some extent, the selection of participants proved to be synchronistic.

The selection of participants involved one-on-one discussions to determine if the basic criteria were met. At that time, I did clarify the understanding of the concept of synchronicity by providing examples of the phenomenon (See Appendix B). This process provided an excellent opportunity to renew or establish a rapport with the participants and to set a tone of safety, trust and even enjoyment for the interview environment.

The participants all met the primary requirement for selection which was belief in the phenomenon of synchronicity. In fact, I can say they all had a strong belief in the occurrences and were most keen to talk about their experiences and how they viewed them. The process of *accidental selection*, which can also in some cases be interpreted as ‘synchronistic’, was the result of letting a few people know in the community that I was looking for candidates interested in talking about synchronicity. All four participants were referred to me by someone else. Two of the participants were distant acquaintances in the community and two were unknown to me. All participants spoke fluent English though one had a different mother tongue and originated from a different continent. Two of the participants were artists in the community. One other dominant worldview strongly espoused by one participant was that of Buddhism supported by years in Asian and North American monasteries. Two of the participants were closely related. The above information serves only to provide a general context of the participants and is not meant to be comprehensive or representative of the local population. This information was derived solely from the interview process.

More detailed information about the participants was not provided as well as subsequent reference was not given to specific participants when quoted or paraphrased for two reasons.

My rationale was primarily to maintain a high level of anonymity for the participants who reside in what is considered to be a small community thus making them and the people they referred to in their synchronistic anecdotes relatively easy to identify. Though consent was given by the participants and their stories were freely shared without reservation at the time, the people in the stories whose identity could be extrapolated had not granted permission for personal aspects of their lives to be revealed.

The second reason is that I wanted to expose the topic of synchronicity and its manifestation in the lives of the everyday person. I wanted to mitigate the influences of generalized filters and/or assumptions based on the participants' gender, background, age, culture, mother tongue, or other. Looking at the impact of these influences might be of interest for further research. By not focusing on the mentioned filters, more attention can be given to listening to the commonalities and a greater openness to the possibility of discovery and revelation can be fostered. This is particularly of interest when dealing with an occurrence that points to a view of reality where the whole is contained in the parts and where everything is interconnected and reflecting an *implicate order*. Thus the participants remain not only anonymous to a large degree, but also more universally human.

Consent. After advising the participants of the parameters of the research, the expectations of them, and the guarantees of privacy and confidentiality via an information sheet (see Appendix B), they were required to sign a Consent Form (see Appendix C) which acknowledged that they were participating in a free and willing manner.

It is my sense that the following of the above-mentioned research procedures contributed to the production of insightful responses.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis has been applauded for its openness, affording a wide spectrum for exploration. It was a good fit for this inquiry. The analysis was enacted in such a way as to assure the highest possible degree of validity and to provide an accurate and efficient means of verification of the findings. The analysis process comprised transcription, coding, and thematic analysis. The reference point throughout was the research question: “What is the experience of synchronicity for the common person or the person in the mainstream?” and launched an unfolding of the phases in the analysis process analogous to the falling of dominos.

Analysis Overview. In broad brush strokes, the process of analyzing the data followed the six phases provided by Braun & Clarke (2006) as guidelines: (a) familiarizing myself with the data; (b) generating initial codes; (c) searching for themes; (d) reviewing the themes; (e) defining and naming themes; and (f) producing the report. The data in this thematic analysis was reviewed multiple times from different angles of perception and purpose, each time increasing the level of rigor in arriving at my findings. This structured approach facilitated the ease of review of the findings and their substantiation resulted in an abundance of informative and verifiable data.

Throughout the analysis, an inductive approach was used, meaning that a deliberate focus was given to coding the data and then establishing themes from the codes. Further linking of the themes directly to the data was accomplished by verifying the existence of corresponding data for each theme. The intent was to work with what was there, rather than

to drive it in one predetermined direction or another. Braun & Clarke (2006) warn that when ascertaining the themes from the explicit meanings of the data, it is important to not intend to look “for anything beyond what a participant has said or what has been written” (p. 84). This was held as a priority throughout the process. Thus, the analysis was not constrained by any level of commitment to the development of theory even though it might have been possible to determine some rudimentary form of theory from the organization of themes.

The primary reason for doing the transcribing of the interview recordings myself was that it assured me a much more intimate knowledge of the content of the study with its nuances, the context sounds, and voice emphases. The noting of laughter, hesitations, pauses, and intonation patterns provided non-verbal clues that supported a more accurate determination of codes. It was deemed to be important to have as holistic a context as possible in dealing with a topic that pushes the boundaries of what is held as reality, in particular for those of us steeped in Western thinking.

Once the coding was completed, the list of one hundred and sixty-three codes was expanded to include a column for themes and one for sub-themes. When the initial list of themes and sub-themes was established, it was organized alphabetically according to themes and then to sub-themes. The codes in the sub-themes were grouped together under the main theme to better present the findings based on commonalities within the theme. The final rendering of the original raw data resulted in seven themes. This final list of themes was subsequently organized into three main categories (see Table 1 below). All items mentioned above were kept in a project three-ring binder code book along with the coded transcripts.

Table 1
Analysis Flow Chart

Categories (3)	Themes (7)	Codes (163) (samples only)
About Synchronicity	What It Is	not random part of life different way duality ...
	Traits and Characteristics	available to all mystery fun throws off balance positive thing ...
	How It Occurs	saying yes type of person focus as trigger intention ...
	How To Make It Occur	tuning into world magnet letting go ...
Worldview	Interconnectedness	of events connected to natural order connections – map ...
	Indicators of Another Reality	other reality order enfoldment separation is illusion ...
Experience of Synchronicity	Experience of Synchronicity	wonder awe bewildered fear ...

Interest in the data was more focused on individual experience rather than on any degree of generalization about the phenomenon. Conclusions were drawn about attitudes and perspectives, but no general concept of synchronicity was sought.

Codes. “Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). This encoding or creation of codes serves to encapsulate meaning, to provide the essence of different segments of the transcription. The organization of similar codes into identifiable groups facilitates the emergence of patterns. The naming of these patterns results in themes. In the analysis for this inquiry, coding was done with a great deal of openness allowing for surprises. Thus the coding used is commonly referred to as open coding.

Since the process of coding is a systematic and organized system, a code book was used. It served as a container for all the codes and the themes reflecting the entire analysis process and serving as a quick and accurate tool to locate the codes in context. The coding process was done with a particular attention to rigor with two purposes in mind: (a) quick and easy location of the context for each code; and (b) accurate representation of the content by the code. The first step comprised listing, by interview transcript, each actual interview question along with an identifier and a summary of one or more words (see Appendix E). To arrive at a code, a segment of the transcript of several sentences or of a portion of the page was read over sometimes several times until a word or short phrase surfaced as a distillation of the content. As a code was determined it was listed alphabetically in a single list of codes along with a page and transcript identifier, a short description for an accurate interpretation of the code, and a reference by identifier to the question asked in the interview.

Themes. The development of themes is the recognition of patterns in the codes and each distinct pattern is given a name as an identifier. This is a step or level of pattern identification beyond what Saldana (2009) refers to as pattern coding where a smaller number of sets are established. Since this is qualitative and not quantitative research, the determination of a theme was not based on frequency or any quantifiable element. In qualitative research, frequency can be used to establish what Saldana (2009) refers to as focused coding which is useful in supporting the development of theory. In the case of my thematic analysis of the data, the focus in establishing groups of codes, and subsequently themes was primarily on the patterns of meaning. In the case of divergences within a theme each had their own groupings of code and yet had commonalities with the main theme. These internal groups were brought together as sub-themes under the primary theme (Tuckett, 2005, p. 76).

According to Van Manen (1990) themes are like focal points or threads that facilitate the description of a phenomenon based on the meaning, or the imagery attributed to a phenomenon (p. 91). The search for themes uncovered commonality in attitudes that were triggered by the occurrence of an event.

The determination of themes from the data served to identify indicators of trends of thinking relevant to the experience of the participants with the phenomenon. The process of re-examining each code led to the emergence of a commonality of thought or view among the codes. At this stage, I was particularly open to the emergence of surprising themes which reflected predominant patterns of meaning not yet entertained.

The table for the list of codes was expanded by adding two columns to the left, one for themes and one for sub-themes with the intent of having the table sorted by theme rather

than by code. After the first run-through of the alphabetically sorted codes, several salient patterns became evident particularly through the words used in the codes. By examining repetition in the codes, I began to draw out emerging concepts and themes. For example, I noticed the repetition of the root “connect” multiple times. By going over the description of each code with this root in the code list table and verifying it in the context of the transcript, the concept of “interconnection” surfaced and constituted a theme. This approach resulted in a preliminary list of over twenty themes.

In the process, codes were occasionally deemed to better reflect a different theme and were subsequently associated to it. In some cases, theme names morphed into something different. The themes were then examined as whole and connections between certain themes became evident. As a result, a broader theme emerged that could contain the group and was identified as a dominant theme and if necessary given a new name. The remaining themes within the group were then recognized as sub-themes of the identified dominant theme. This process resulted in seven primary themes that were subsequently grouped into three categories for reporting the findings.

I reviewed each code again with the newly established themes for verification, while being alert to finding more associations or patterns not visible at the offset. In fact, a small number of codes did not fit the emerging patterns and in the light of the research question were dropped. This structured approach facilitated the ease of review of the findings and their substantiation in the data through clear lines of reference and association creating ease of location identification. The data in this thematic analysis was reviewed multiple times from different angles of perception and purpose, each time increasing the level of rigor in arriving at my findings.

When all is said and done, the development of codes and themes constituted the essence of the analysis and of the findings. This was the most awaited for segment of my journey as my curiosity grew in anticipation of what would be revealed. I was aware of the depth of the conversation held with the participants but could not second-guess what surprises the data would reveal by using a thematic analysis. Throughout the coding process, a list of outstanding statements were recorded by quoting the participant directly and once the analysis was complete, a review of the quotes revealed additional connections with the codes and themes. Many of these quotes were then introduced into the text of the findings in the reporting on the individual themes. The analysis process revealed and resulted in a much more comprehensive, complete, and revealing portrait of the experience of synchronicity for the participants than initially anticipated.

Final Analysis. Thematic analysis served as an appropriate tool for an inductive approach moving from coding the data to the establishment of themes. The organized use of tables to record the codes established and the subsequent themes facilitated the accurate and efficient retrieval of data when focusing on the findings and conclusions. I interpreted the easy flow of the entire process of data analysis from interviews to findings as an indicator of the likelihood that the findings and conclusions in fact did reflect synchronicity as experienced by the common person.

Evaluation of the Study

I focused on two areas for the evaluation of this study: (a) validity; and (b) reflexivity.

Validity. Preparation and forethought prior to a qualitative inquiry are key to ensuring rigor and to achieving validity which Morse & Richards (2002) explain “requires that the results accurately reflect the phenomenon studied” (p. 168). Several points of focus

were maintained in order to achieve validity in the study: (a) consistency of approach for all interviews; (b) a high degree of consistency on decisions about themes based on researcher judgment with only one researcher analyzing all the data; (c) substantiation of coding and theme development with personal documentation of their evolution (Morse & Richards, 2002); (d) an ability to cross-reference the themes across the entirety of the data; (e) the development of themes that captured something important in relation to the overall research question; and (f) participant checks.

Though flexibility in the entirety of the process was not included in the list, it was nonetheless an essential underlying component assuring integrity in the intent of discovering more about the experience of synchronicity.

Reflexivity. The role of reflexivity in any research is stated by Gilgun (2010) as, “awareness—that researchers are reflexive when they are aware of the multiple influences they have on research processes and on how research processes affect them” (p. 1). In this inquiry, reflexivity played a vital role in determining the area of exploration and the application of thematic analysis as a methodology. Exposure to and thought about the influences of what has been said about synchronicity has largely contributed to the creation of a more expansive context for recognizing and analyzing the contributions of the participants.

I kept a journal recording the evolution of my thinking regarding the topic of synchronicity, the methodology, and the interview questions. It was as a result of this reflection that I anticipated difficulty in relocating the codes because of their potential number that I opted to build a table to list them along with a short description or quote and a referral point in the transcripts. As I reviewed my analysis journey, the power of the

interviews as a tool of support for the participants stood out as having providing them an opportunity to explore further something of noted importance and relevance to them. I had not encountered this aspect in my readings on interviewing as a component of the analysis process.

One underlying contribution gained from reflecting on the writings of Jung and the other quantum physicists has been the existence of a growing sense of validation from within the Western scientific community and the need for further exploration of the phenomenon and its application in leadership.

The evaluation of the study also yielded areas of further interest and study for me, in particular synchronicity and leadership, which are presented further in this study.

Summary

It is my sincere desire, that this study should contribute in a small way to a greater awareness of another possible reality or worldview espoused by many cultures as the exploration of the experience of synchronicity highlights the flaw in the fabric of pre-existing Western scientific and generally accepted senses of reality, as mentioned by Peat (1987).

The path chosen to accomplish this was that of qualitative research and, more specifically, thematic analysis in order to bring forth the patterns of meaning presented by ordinary people who were kind enough to share their stories and perspectives on the phenomenon of synchronicity. The mindset, the research question, the research approach, the methodology, the ethical concerns, the interview methods, the data analysis, and the findings all flow down from one into the other exemplifying congruence, rigor, and validity. With all the elements in place resting on a solid philosophical foundation, a sense of excitement

moved through me as I ventured into the discovery of what was shared and revealed about the phenomenon of synchronicity.

Chapter Four: Results and Findings

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings derived from the analysis of the interviews with four people and their experience of synchronicity. The research question for this study on the experience of synchronicity for the mainstream person served as a beacon for the discussion of the topic. In addition to the direct focus on the experience of the phenomenon, anecdotes of the experience of the participants were related and any explanations they held were invited. The main themes that emerged from the data (see Figure 1, Analysis Flow Chart, p. 39) were grouped into three categories: (a) About Synchronicity; (b) Worldview; and (c) The Experience of Synchronicity.

About Synchronicity

This section explores how the participants define synchronicity. It is organized into four themes that came up from the data: (a) what synchronicity is; (b) its traits or characteristics; (c) how it occurs; and (d) how to make it occur.

What It Is. Though a question was asked of most participants regarding some explanation of the phenomenon, comments regarding the nature of synchronicity surfaced unsolicited throughout the process.

The most prevalent consideration regards synchronicity as an opening to another reality which now becomes visible as a result of its occurrence. This perspective surfaced seven times. The metaphor of a window was chosen on two separate occasions. It was stated, for example, when one goes beyond the mind a view of another world or universe can be grasped. One comment is particularly clear,

So, there is definitely something there, out there, an energy of some sort that's consistent, that I don't see, but these synchronistic acts are basically a nugget, or a

small window. Say looking through the looking glass [pause] this is a small little bit of that web that's underneath that connects us all.

Simply put, synchronicity tells us that there is something else out there and it is beyond what we see every day.

Participant statements reveal how they see synchronicity. Table 2 below lists some of these perspectives on synchronicity with a supporting participant quote in the adjacent column:

Table 2
Perspectives On Synchronicity

Perspective On Synchronicity	Participant Quotes
Objects do not follow expected patterns of behavior	"...just that moment something, a blind [window blind snapped up] that was going to do its thing"
Spiritual things at play	"...things that are maybe spiritual all meeting at one time and creating an event."
Composition of dependent multiple smaller events	"...just about every turn of that [longer story] feels like synchronicity";
Awareness of connecting events	"...it's just how we can become aware of interconnectedness because interconnectedness is there."
Part of life	"This is just part and parcel of how life is. It's sort of magical, all these coincidences or interconnections happen."
Things happen in a different way	"It is basically kind of like a paradox of life and that things are supposed to happen this way but we caught them happening in a different way."

In comparing coincidence to synchronicity, the participants emphasized on three occasions that the idea of events being coincidental dissolved in the light of synchronicity.

This was attributed by one participant to the fact that meaning is now assigned to what before was once seen as coincidental, “For me, none of this stuff is coincidence because it is meaningful.” Another perspective was that synchronicity took events beyond coincidence or out of the realm of randomness. These descriptions fit with the precepts of Jung (1973) and Van Manen (1990).

An interesting distinction and comparison between the implications of communicating synchronistic events using a Western-based language versus an Asian-based language was made by a participant, “I think you know that in English and in the Western way of thinking you cannot do without this duality, right? But in ...I think more in an Asian sense, you don’t need have this duality.” It was expressed that the use of ‘I’ in a Western language when in the process of making meaning creates a sense of duality, whereby the person makes an observation placing himself or herself at the center of the awareness. As reinforced by this same participant, this is not the case in an Asian based language,

If you start saying, ‘I am part of it, you have a duality.’ I think you know that in English and in the Western way of thinking you cannot do without this duality. I think more in an Asian sense, you don’t need to have this duality.

Thus I feel that the understanding of the nature of synchronicity can be impacted by the language used to communicate it.

One closing comment in particular opens a door to a desire for more exploration, which I found stimulating. “This synchronistic event is just a trailer to something, a trailer to the full movie. And it is going to play itself out over the next little while.”

Views on the nature of synchronicity, as expressed by the research participants, contain the main points made by Carl Jung (1973) in his definition of the phenomenon. These views reflect an openness to the existence of a reality beyond the traditional Western cause and

effect perspective. More can be discovered and extrapolated about the nature of synchronicity by exploring some of the traits and characteristics of the phenomenon as seen and experienced by the participants.

Traits and Characteristics. For the participants, describing synchronicity was much like trying to describe the wind, love, or forgiveness, something that can only be recognized by how it manifests and by its impact. This section will examine qualifiers or elements that can be attributed to synchronicity.

Comments on the traits and characteristics of synchronicity were amongst the most frequent throughout the transcripts. In Table 3 traits and characteristics of synchronicity are identified with participant comments in the adjacent column.

Table 3
Synchronicity Traits and Characteristics

Trait or Characteristic	Participant Comments
Easy	“And it was easy, it was so easy to do the banking.”
Magical	“And so the process itself, I feel is very magical”
Accessible to all people	“I absolutely believe it [the experience of synchronicity] is available to all.”
Mysterious since it cannot be easily explained	“It’s a mystery in the sense of something that we cannot easily explain with just the intellect or with words.”
Can result in healing	a. “...it’s [referring to synchronicity] healing connections.” b. “And through that [unfolding of synchronistic events] was a real healing process for me where I felt as though I was ready to be in a relationship.”

A blessing	"I think overall there is something bigger playing out there and I think we get glimpses of it, right? Or it's not that it is playing out but it's just another...there is a dimension there that we get a glimpse of every so often. And if we are lucky enough we can see those and be blessed."
Fun (It is also to be noted that participants found delight in sharing about the phenomenon.)	"Well this is fun! How much do I get to talk about what I love to do with someone? Or what I feel passionate about? Thank you for this opportunity!"
Joy	"I just felt so happy! And I thought, 'Aah! this [synchronistic event] is confirming!'"
Support from others for the coming together of a vision or dream	"And so, that feels like a synchronistic series of events in how my studio has come together with that kind of support and also the support of lots of people to make that happen."
Time seems to stop and new interpretations of time surface	"...[referring to synchronistic event] was one of those moments where time stopped...for seconds...for milliseconds...where time stopped being perceived as a linear thing and become more whole."
Some form of surprise is often a first response	"...synchronistic experiences, were...they still surprise me when they happened. Um...some were quite startling sometimes."
Unpredictable, on another rhythm	"You know, it [story with a series of synchronistic events] came about in very, in just ways that were unpredictable, on another rhythm than the logical, planning mind."
Common throughout life, not just at one point	"I think synchronicity happens quite common but people just don't pay attention or pick up on it."
Synchronicity is seen as constant or happening all the time	"It's [referring to synchronicity] going on all the time, it's just our awareness. And then if you talk in degrees of synchronicity, I think it's...because everything is like this, we are just not aware of it."

Discussion ensued around the topic of whether or not synchronistic events were positive or negative, “Regardless of this thing [synchronistic event] I can look at it in a negative light as happening, there is a positive effect that can overshadow that.”

Fundamentally, synchronicity was seen by all as a positive happening in and of itself. In a few instances, events surrounding the synchronistic phenomenon were seen as negative such as was the case of personal books disappearing or a bad fall down the stairs. In spite of these ‘negative’ happenings, one participant stated, “...regardless of this thing that I can look at it in a negative light as happening, there is a positive effect that can overshadow that.” One explanation for the occurrence of negative events resulting in positive outcomes was given as follows, “I think they happen because I turn away from the easy way, so then the difficult way gets presented.” Even the negative synchronistic occurrences contained an ‘opportunity’ that would otherwise never have presented itself. In closing, another participant saw such negative events “usually of my own doing” and characterized them as “stupid things that have resulted in other stupid things”.

One participant explained that the lives of non-believers of synchronicity are sometimes upset by projecting what would be going through their mind, “This is driving me nuts all this stuff happening. I don’t like it because it is throwing my balance off.”

The conjunction of different factors contributing to an experience of synchronicity is highlighted by a participant in the example of successful hunting, “...you have to have that element of synchronicity where you are there at the right time, with the right weapon, and this animal comes.”

Each of these traits and characteristics is a piece of a mosaic contributing to a better understanding of the whole. With an expanded sense of the phenomenon, the stage is set to explore the views of the participants on how synchronicity occurs.

How It Occurs. Many comments and even explanations on the manner in which synchronistic events occur were made by all four participants. In most cases the recognition of a connection between events in the occurrence of synchronicity was established; for instance, “. . . if we do focus on this one little aspect, then we see all these connections because I think the mind . . . works in such a way that it tends to naturally make connections.” In another interview, “I feel as though this series of events are connected.” The primary explanations of how the phenomenon occurs centered on the predisposition of the individual, the role of focus, types of people, negative events, and the variations in the intensity of the experience.

Predisposition of the Individual. Participants made comments about the attitudes and inner states of individuals about to encounter synchronistic events. In some cases a direct link between these predispositions and the occurrence of synchronicity is established. These predispositions are placed in the following table accompanied with a corresponding participant statement.

Table 4
Predispositions to Synchronicity

Predisposition	Participant Comments
A state of creativity	“And so, how I be in the world in terms of my creative self, in terms of encouraging that place in people to feel their creative essence, that is important to me, in that part of what I do with my life. And that is very much connected to how synchronicity

	happens, with how life has gone.”
The discomfort of the expansion	“But saying yes and turning towards it was...unh...it’s a little bit frightening, frankly. Yeah, it takes me just a little bit outside of my comfort zone and opens up possibilities and opportunities that push me past where I am at the moment. So, it’s a little bit about growth too, I suppose.”
The feeling of something missing	“I guess a meaningful coincidence that I was feeling like there was something missing for myself. And sure enough (person’s name) stumbles upon these books that are treasured possessions of mine.”
The anticipation of finding is a self-fulfilling prophecy as in research	“When I am doing research on things, I find that I can create what would normally just be considered coincidences to be possibly be more because I purposely set myself up to be... prone, prone to it.”
Having an open heart	“So, synchronicity is, I believe, is quite connected to our human potential to live more fully from our open-hearted place. And I think that when we live more in that place, that we know that synchronicity is happening in our lives. We are paying more attention because we are not in a logical framework, planning or dictating how our day should go.”
Having an open mind	“I think that [the ability to remember dreams] can sort of happen with synchronicity where if you allow yourself to be more open to the concept that you will be more prone to it happening to you.”
The role of intention	“When I have an intention of how to live my life, then I feel like I have an awareness of what is going on around me and the people I meet and the situations that come my way. And, events connect, synchronicity happens.”

The Role of Focus. According to several participants, an element that plays a role in the occurrence of the phenomenon is that of *focus*.

First Time Meeting. In the case of meeting a person for the first time and then running into them repeatedly, focusing on this person creates a heightened awareness and makes the

person easier to spot. Increased focus is seen as equivalent to the force of gravity that draws that person in. There is a predisposition to recognize the person again.

Connector to underlying web. In other instances, focus is the tool that makes contact with the underlying web, “it’s like a little hook onto part of this web and then you can pull the whole thing.”

Trigger. Focus of attention serves as a trigger and it reveals things we would otherwise miss along with their connections.

The following participant words sum up well the role of focus, “...synchronistic events become more prevalent when I focus on them. If I turn and look at them and respond to them, they become more and more prevalent in happening in my life. ”

Types of People. One participant felt that there was a relationship between certain types of people and the occurrence of the synchronistic phenomenon. According to this participant, some people are more prone to it happening, “I will add to this in it as well, it’s being a person of a certain type... has to play in the equation.” Elsewhere the participant states, “I think it is the person.” This is expanded upon by specifying,

The more the person is aware of connections, the more I think that can sort of happen with synchronicity where if you allow yourself to be more open to the concept that you will be more prone to it happening to you.

In response to a question about the existence of a relationship between synchronistic events and an expressed sense of *no separation* in reality, the participant stated, “I would say yes.” And further, the participant added, “The relationship is informing and causing the synchronistic events to take place, to move itself to wherever it must be going.” In the consideration of *no separation* is the implication of everything being connected or the

interconnectedness of all elements of reality. The reference to synchronicity being an it or *itself* points to something that has essence or an entity that is interacting with us.

Negative Events. The role played by negativity was seen in two different contexts. On the one hand it was felt that negativity did not interfere with synchronicity but rather only blocked one's awareness or ability to notice its occurrence, "I don't think that negativity [pause] synchronicity works with negativity. I think you are just not awake." Just prior to this, the participant stated, "I think that if people are negative, they just miss it." On the other hand, negative events can sometimes be associated with synchronicity. Regarding negative events, another participant stated, "I think they just happen because I turn away from the easy way so then the difficult way gets presented."

Variations in the Intensity of the Experience. Participants observed that there were different strengths or degrees of intensity related to their experiences of synchronistic events. Running into a person that one has just met is not seen as striking as the recovery of a personally meaningful book in unusual circumstances. One comment that stood out regarding the intensity of the experience was that it was related to the level of awareness or consciousness of the person involved. In response to a question about instances where synchronicity might be stronger than in other, a participant responded,

Yeah, you see, if I was more conscious for a longer period of time I would be able to answer that. But, because I just allow...it kind of just happened more randomly and I really wasn't taking as much note.

That some experiences of synchronicity are interpreted as 'stronger' than others is not likely to be disputed. However, attention to the fact that there may be a correlation between the strength of an experience and one's ability to pay attention or be conscious when looking at events is worthy of further exploration. Possibly the simplest reflection by a participant on

the occurrence of a very significant event encompasses most situations, “It just seemed to happen.” This sense is reiterated by Jaworski (2011) when he states, “In these dialogues, my key understanding that I attempted to explain to people was that ‘Synchronicity came through me and was not by me.’” (p. 202).

Almost all of the above explanations of how synchronicity occurs were volunteered by the participants and without deliberate focus. In most cases the points are made in passing and not explored in depth. A corollary to how synchronicity occurs is the query of what one can do to influence its occurrence.

How to Make It Occur. After reading Joseph Jaworski’s (2011) book on synchronicity, I was left in awe by the on-going sequence of almost unbelievable connections and events that made up the essence of his story. The ensuing consideration was whether or not there was a way to impact the occurrence of the phenomenon. Further exploration of this question with the participants was pursued as a result of their comments such as, “...if you allow yourself and open yourself up then you will be more prone to these things, these meaningful coincidences.”

Three of the research participants have alluded to conditions that predispose someone to the experience of synchronistic events.

In one case, the world is seen as having an implicate order that is always there. Tuning into this order is an access point for our experience of the phenomenon and some practices help us to connect to it; as in this participant’s experience, synchronicity is

...a practice with spiritual selves in connection to the earth that just made us pay attention to the process of how synchronicity occurs in our life. I see that in the Western world, we don’t really have a practice that makes us tune into the world around us.

In another instance, a participant advocates deliberately directing one's focus in a certain direction,

If you tune your energy a certain way you are going to be in tune with other things of that sort of energy, right? And it's almost as if you create a gravity, you know... your own gravity for certain things. It creates a bit of a magnetic field in which there's certain things that you are more prone to be in contact with.

This participant saw the gravitational aspect as part of the manifestation of synchronistic events as well.

In another instance, a participant lists three conditions for seeing the connections that exist and for opening the door to synchronicity. These are: a person must be persistent, want to know, and have an open mind.

One method mentioned pertains more to the recognition and a retrospective of synchronistic events rather than to actually fostering of them. It is indirectly relevant in that many such events may have already occurred but we've neglected to notice them because one has missed some of the connections involved. This method entails the recording of events such as in the case of journaling. One participant recalls, by examining past events, much reveals itself and "I started finding out by journaling [about the interconnectedness of all things], because if you journal you are recording events and then sometimes these events only become clear in retrospect."

In order to foster the occurrence of synchronicity, letting go of control was deemed an important condition by a third participant, "There is something about letting go but at the same time coming into the natural rhythms of the earth because there is a sense of order in the world." It was felt that it was our interference with this natural order could cut us off from multiple experiences of synchronicity. For example, "So it's letting go of control of my own desire to feel safe, to feel comfortable, to have it be exactly within my scheme of how

the world should work. So that letting go of control and at the same time understanding there is order.” If one is to espouse this approach in fostering the happening of synchronistic events in one’s life, it implies a taking on of an alternate worldview.

Worldview

When Peat (1987) refers to synchronicity as the “flaw in the fabric” (p. 2), he is alluding to the challenge posed to the Cartesian-Newtonian mechanistic worldview that advocates a reductionist cause and effect perspective. Leroy Littlebear (2009) challenges an inferred tenet of the widespread Western world view in that it considers itself the only accurate one when he states, “No matter how dominant a worldview is, there are always others ways of interpreting the world.” In the case of all four participants, synchronicity replicates this challenge and opens the way for the consideration of an *other reality* than the one that is insisted upon in their everyday environment. A primary element of this other reality that runs contrary to the prevalent concept of fragmentation and isolation is that of the existence of relationships or connections between existing components. This *interconnectedness* will be explored first and followed by a look at some of the other elements of this alternate perspective as presented by the participants.

Interconnectedness. In his book on synchronicity, Carl Jung (1973) juxtaposes the concept of acausal with that of interconnectedness as he concludes his elaboration, “For this reason synchronistic phenomena cannot in principle be associated with any conceptions of causality. Hence the interconnection of meaningfully coincident factors must necessarily be thought of as acausal” (p. 30). In the light of their acausal experiences, the participants made comments that emphasized their sense of connections and relationships between the parts of the whole shifting the spotlight onto the whole away from the part. In the following table,

these connections are highlighted and supported by a participant statement in the adjacent column.

Table 5
Perceptions of Interconnectedness

Perceptions of Interconnectedness	Participant Comments
Research, a quest for connections	"I am always looking and finding things that are related somehow. So, the way that we become related is by me looking through articles and findings relationships between people and articles, and things like that.
Map as a metaphor	"And it's almost as if there is this sort of [pause] it's like a map, like an unseen map that one can follow when you do some sort of research."
Connection of events	"I know it gets fuzzy in terms of synchronicity but I feel as though this series of events connect."
Feeling of connection	"[I (participant) feel] like I'm connected to something much larger than me or (name of person) or anything else";
Synchronicity and interconnectedness	"And I feel that our own inner wisdom and our intuitive selves is connected to the natural order and rhythm of the bigger world. And that is the area in which synchronistic ... synchronicity happens in our lives."
Connecting as a human process	"If we do focus on this one little aspect then we see all these connections because, I think, the mind works in such a way that it tends to naturally make connections."
Dreams and manifestation	"Maybe I would dream something and then a similar thing would take place the next day, or an object I would dream about would be there."
Concept of interconnectedness	"The experience of synchronicity has much to do with...everything is completely interconnected.

	Interconnected...there is another word for it...inter-causal, like all affect each other..."
Sense of awe and interconnection	"All of a sudden how everything is interconnected and that it can actually show itself to you, because we are normally not aware of all that's going on."

Although a predominant component of another worldview, the participants' acknowledgement of connections and relationships is but one facet of another reality.

Indicators of Another Reality. In an attempt to create a context for a better understanding of synchronicity, participants provided different metaphors and approaches to the existence of a different reality.

Much like Peat's (1987) view of synchronistic events as the "the jokers in nature's pack of cards" (p. 7) , one participant saw synchronicity as a doorway to other concepts that challenges our existing belief system,

How we perceive things is a direct result of society and how we view things, our own thoughts and feelings on things. But once in a while there is a break in those things where something happens. It's like, if the space-time continuum went in a straight line, everything you know [pause and shift to new thought] physically we are going in a straight line forward, and our thoughts are also going in that straight line linear. But think of it in an event of synchronicity that those lines break and that there is an event that cuts through those breaks. And it changes. It goes against everything that we believe.

In a few cases, participants referred directly to an *other reality*. Most of the references were made through a means of access to it, provided by the phenomenon of synchronicity; for example, a window, a looking glass, and a map, or a view of the underlying web. This other reality was recognized by the existence of an order, as in this statement, "There is an order." One participant saw the existence of *something else* stating, "I believe there is

something else, basically another...not another world, but another way of looking at what is happening here.”

In a couple of instances, participants spoke of the existence of *two worlds* and did so comparatively, the world we are familiar with and a spiritual one. “I think it is a cross between our physical side which we can quantify through science and something that is non-quantifiable, unquantifiable, something beyond us, something whether you want to say spiritual.” Another participant saw it as, “a reciprocity, a resonance of some sort between the two worlds, this one and the spiritual one.”

In one instance, a participant took the concept of interconnectedness a step further, “I have this belief that this idea of separation is an illusion and that me sitting on this chair...the only difference between me and the chair is energy vibration that is...one is faster than the other.”

In three instances comments reflecting an alternate worldview were leaning on a sense of beingness, such as, “That’s how I see things, that there is no separation. And that...like when I use the word ‘universe’ rather than ‘God’ or ‘Higher Power’ it’s including me and I tend to think that everything is just one being.” Another participant commented that the view of this being-ness was not seen as personalized yet bore a human trait. In response to a question about what might have triggered a meaningful event, the response was,

That’s the same thing that whatever does all this, I get so tempted to say that it is an intelligence in a sense in that it is an awareness, that the observer is also being observed. It’s not a personal god. I don’t believe in that, I don’t believe in that business. It’s definitely a benevolent thing.

A third participant also referred to a sense of the existence of a presence, “I think, or believe, that this presence wants only good things for all of us and what’s good for me is also good for everybody.”

Two concepts pertaining to another reality akin to that of quantum physics surfaced in the interviews, that of a *state of flux* and of *enfoldment*. In the first instance, everything was seen as changing,

Everything is just flux, constantly changing. And I think amidst this change we don't always see the continuity is there? Right? Because there is so much change there. But the continuity is there, it's like an underlying...um...structure, that's also not the right word, but it is like a structure almost which is this interconnectedness.

This second comment is a beautiful metaphor evoking the element of enfoldment as presented by David Bohm (1980),

Reality is like a net and where each of the threads of this net cross there is a jewel, and if you concentrate on one jewel, you see one jewel and you see all the other jewels reflected in this one jewel.

The closing comments of participants revealed an appreciation for the opportunity to express freely in a welcoming environment their views on an alternate reality. In one instance, a participant expressed a new found safety and assertiveness in claiming a dormant worldview supporting the existence of another reality. I believe this new sense of affirmation arose primarily from the depth of the experience of the phenomenon and the opportunity to explore it with another person more deeply and without bias.

The Experience of Synchronicity

This section highlights and describes the responses and the resulting events deemed to be synchronistic.

The abundance of descriptors of the phenomenon infers what the common person experiences. These descriptors reflect in most cases actual words used by the participants and they have been grouped by an element in common along with a quote in table 6 below. In

addition, each element sublists related words or phrases with a bracketed number indicating its frequency of use by the participants as it applies to the experience of synchronicity.

Table 6
Descriptors of the Experience of Synchronicity

Experience Category	Participant Comment	Descriptor	# of times
Unexpected	“All of my experiences of synchronicity have been stunning, astonishing, even shocking.”	Astonishing	4
		Surprise	5
		Stunning	1
A degree of disbelief	“I think no matter what would happen, I would still be in awe of it [synchronicity] happening.”	Shocking	1
		Amazement	3
		Awe	2
		Reverence	1
		Wonder	3
		Magical	3
		Marvel	1
		Bewildered	1
		Floored	1
Excitement	“I feel as though it is like those AHA moments when things make sense and you’re feeling alive and filled with energy, your heart is open, you’re, you know, connected.”	Excitement	4
		Alive	8
		Thrilled	1
Positive experience	“I just felt so really happy!”	Positive	5
		Happy	2
		Humorous	2
		Affirming	6
		Confirming	4
		Hope	2
		Gratitude	2
		Humility	1
		Informing	2
		Illuminating	1

No direct negative responses to synchronistic events were made though some of these events may have at outset been seen as negative. Comments on negative happenings have been discussed in detail in the above sections.

Conclusion

The focus of this section was to illustrate in a comprehensive and organized manner the comments made by the participants on their experience of synchronicity revealing their sense of what the phenomenon is, the worldview that it awakens, and of what their experience of it has been. One unique comment that did not fit in to the above groupings gives food for thought, “This is the thing of synchronicity to us, these coincidences at the time, you don’t recognize them and they come back again. Another event happens that says, ‘Thank you, I get the message!’” It suggests that a function of synchronicity is to impart a message. Many of the findings were best represented in context by giving the participant voice via direct quotation. This abundance of references to participants’ views about their experience of synchronicity provides a rich harvest from which to draw conclusions and explore some of their implications.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Implications

The process of drawing conclusions and exploring the implications of my findings on synchronicity utilizes a qualitative research approach and thematic analysis as a methodology. In approaching this section, it is good to remember that the sampling method used was a combination of purposive and accidental sampling. It also involved participants who, prior to being interviewed, believed in the phenomenon. This approach does not encourage the interpretation of results as representative of the larger population. This was not the objective of this research. The primary purpose was to give voice to these individuals and validate the uniqueness of their perspectives. The conclusions and implications focused on observations and responses of the participants and how this study might grant insight into the nature of the enigmatic phenomenon of synchronicity by focusing on their experience of it.

Study Conclusions

In my view, this research opens new possibilities of exploration and study, given the conclusions I have reached. These conclusions are highlighted and discussed below.

Cultural and Worldview Influences. In the light of existing literature on synchronicity, this inquiry was conducted with participants steeped in Western culture and thinking. Peat (1987) states, “The worldview that we all have inherited from an outmoded physics still has a profound effect on our whole lives; it permeates our attitudes to society, government and human relationships” (p. 5). The responses of the participants, with the exception of one steeped in the Buddhist tradition and who has lived extensively in Asia, may not be for the most part indicative of other cultures such as indicated by Jung’s (1973) interest in the *I Ching* and the Chinese culture. Jung posits that the worldview of the person encountering the phenomenon has a significant bearing on the resulting experience. Thus, the

findings shed some light on the present day degree of acceptance of the Western worldview of reality by people brought up and living under its influence. Though the participants espouse an alternate worldview they nonetheless did not want to alienate the dominant perspective of reality.

Evolution of Worldview. Edmund Bourne (2009) put forth ten points to illustrate a global shift in worldview,

These ten trends, among many others, point to the emergence of a far-reaching shift in humanity's perception of the world and of itself. Together they represent a movement away from ideas and institutions that embrace material values, reductionism, hierarchical control, and the supremacy of the personal ego toward a new paradigm that embraces spiritual values, wholeness, integration, cooperation, and the interrelationship of all human beings, regardless of their differences— indeed the interrelationship of all elements of the universe itself. (p. 65)

Similarly, from the data collected the participants' comments reflect that shift. All spoke of a worldview that reflected interconnectedness and acausality and did not dismiss or struggle with it. They did however use a choice of words such as “weird” or “hokey” to place it in the context of the mainstream worldview as to not be identified as part of it. My experience among Aboriginal peoples has been that they espoused a worldview based on interconnectedness and did not minimize their belief in the light of mainstream thinking.

I created a gradient to indicate a variation in the degree of belief in an alternate worldview upon which all participants based their experience and understanding of synchronicity (see Figure 1) placing them somewhere in between a worldview based on traditional Newtonian thinking and that based on an *implicate order* and interconnectedness.

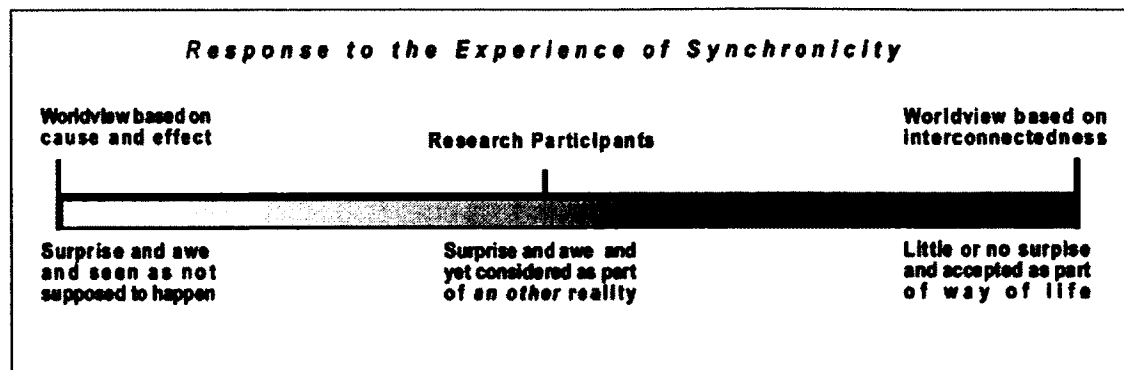


Figure 1. Gradient of Response to the Experience of Synchronicity

On the low end of the scale, one could place simple surprise and even awe as a typical response, if at all, to synchronicity, without any thought given to it or by dismissing it. However, in contrast to that, on the other end, the alternate worldview is so entrenched that it has become a way of life, such as the case in some of the afore-mentioned cultures. I would place the views shared by the participants somewhere in the middle, whereby this alternate worldview is readily accepted though expressed with a degree of self-consciousness because it is not readily supported mainstream thinking.

The opinions expressed by the participants exemplified a depth of thought, support for their thinking, and a relief at the opportunity to explore more deeply this realm without judgment, invalidation, or minimization.

An Opening. The views of the participants on synchronicity were interwoven into an existing alternate worldview as a result of their synchronistic experiences. As mentioned by a participant, these experiences provided a “window” into another reality. Therefore, the phenomenon of synchronicity served as a pretext to explore and to share this alternate worldview for themselves and with others.

A Positive Experience. Synchronicity was seen by the participants as a welcome, desirable experience. It is viewed primarily as a positive experience. Where synchronistic events were occasionally presented as a negative event, the outcome in all cases was later seen as positive, accompanied by a sense of gratitude and purposefulness.

Affirming Interconnectedness. “This participatory universe of Bohr and Heisenberg, this relativity of space and time, this interconnectedness of things, points to a very different worldview than that of Newtonian mechanism” (Peat, 1987, p. 4). Though not steeped in modern science, the basis for the experience of synchronicity for all participants nurtured an alternate worldview of reality based on the interconnectedness of all things and thoughts. Synchronicity was seen as the agent that allowed for a window and a brief glimpse of another more fundamental reality, which in some cases was attributed to consciousness. Even though it evokes a meaningful connection, uncertainty and mystery surrounded this sense of another reality reaching for an explanation based on interconnectedness.

Predisposition. Jaworski (2011) speaks of an attitude of readiness for the unexpected, “When we stand in this fundamentally open and interconnected state of being, we are like the Samurai warrior Varela mentioned, waiting expectantly with acute awareness for that cubic centimeter of chance to present itself” (p.185). Elements of a predisposed state of being to synchronicity for participants included focus, awareness, open heart, open mind, and a state of creativity. Though some thought was given on how to make it occur with a focus on predisposition, it is difficult to second guess the occurrence of synchronistic events since an essential component of the phenomenon is its unpredictability. Interestingly, the new trend in leadership training is based on developing a state of inner preparedness that fosters these same elements with the intent of being more in touch with what is coming, “All these

are examples of the third aspect of *presencing*—the sense of being present to, as Otto [Scharmer] puts it, ‘what is seeking to emerge through me’” (Senge et al., 2004, p. 104).

Sense of Spirituality. In her study of the experience of synchronicity, Karol Self (1990) observed a theme of spiritual awareness in her data which was based on an overall general sense of spirituality though one of her participants referred directly to God as cause. In this study, none of the participants could be referred to as religious. When speaking of their synchronistic experiences they demonstrated a sense of spirituality, of the sacred, and a sense of belonging or being part of a greater plan and order. This sense provided a most desirable experience for them.

A Source of Healing. The mystery of synchronicity may well extend beyond surprise and awe to the realm of personal growth and healing. In their article on synchronicity and healing, Beitman, Coleman and Celebi (2009) state, “Attention to synchrons [synchronistic events] both within and outside of psychotherapy can, like many other subjects in therapy, provide a fulcrum around which change can be created. Developing an awareness of synchrons can increase one’s sense of connectedness and spirituality” (p. 478). The “healing connections” or healing results referred to by participants of this study resulted from a dissolution of their sense of isolation and the experience of a greater sense of connection to the world and to people.

Being on the Outside. In his foreword to Edmund Bourne’s book on the present global shift in thinking, Matthew Gilbert states, “While changing paradigms is never easy, an evolutionary acceleration seems to have been unleashed, and worldview is at the center of it” (Bourne, 2009, Introduction para. 9). The degree of self-consciousness of the participants in stating an alternate worldview appearing to be outside of mainstream thinking was notable.

On sixteen occasions, all participants used terms such as *flaky*, *weird*, *hokey*, *flighty*, *fuzzy*, and in the *twilight zone* which served to minimize their statements and themselves. This suggests to me that, for the most part, the need to be seen as part of mainstream thinking was still prevalent and important.

Nonetheless, the tipping point in the shift to an alternate world view in our Western world thinking may be closer than we realize. The fact that one participant verbally claimed her shift in perspective and ceased to apologize for it in the process of the interview, opting for a reality that substantiated synchronicity, is significant. I also see this declaration as an affirmation of the safety of the research environment.

Daring to be Different. Considerable thought was given overall to how this phenomenon occurs and what synchronicity is. These views demonstrated dissatisfaction with the commonly held mainstream worldview based on cause and effect and exclusive rationality. The taboo of daring to question the mainstream perspective is waning.

A Chance to Explore. It is important to note that three participants acknowledged that synchronicity was not at the forefront of their thinking though the impacts of the events were significant. One participant stated, "I never really paid much attention to it, really the term and the concept itself is relatively new to me because I never put a name to it. I didn't anchor it to a specific concept." The opportunity granted by the research interviews to explore synchronicity more fully, in a non-challenging environment, revealed the magnitude of the experience of the phenomenon for them. One participant saw it as fun, declaring, "Well, this is fun! How much do I get to talk about what I love to do with someone? Or what I feel passionate about? Thank you for this opportunity!" For the one participant for whom

paying attention to synchronistic experiences and familiarity with Jung was evident for years, the opportunity to ponder on the subject with someone else was seen as uncommon.

A Point of Action. The literature suggests that life transitions are ripe with meaningful coincidences and synchronicity can become the basis for decision-making, “Often these [meaningful] coincidences occur at critical points in a person’s life and can be interpreted as containing the seeds of future growth” (Peat, 1987, p. 81). This is supported in the cases of the participants who made a decision to either join an organization or decide to collaborate with someone on a project because of the occurrence of synchronistic events.

Implications

After having explored what has been said on the topic of synchronicity, interviewed people who are fascinated by the experience, and analyzed their comments, the findings are of considerable interest to me and perhaps to others. These findings stimulate and provoke new and various considerations and thoughts stemming from the experiential journey of these participants.

Having personally discussed and explored topics pertaining to our Western reality and other realities for five decades, I can say that there has been a considerable shift in what people consider to be reality. As my participants confirmed, there is a noticeable openness to other realities or at the very least a questioning and observation of the one we are in.

Synchronistic events occurred when I was young too in the early 1950s and 1960s; however, at that point the label, *synchronicity* had been barely coined by Jung. In that era, the average mainstream person was very much at the beginning of the gradient of belief (Figure 7, page 67), not inclusive of an alternate reality and focused primarily on the experience of the awe or some other emotion when confronted by such events. In those days and in my

farming-community surroundings, the step to understanding such events leaned more towards a religious explanation, attributing it to God's will, or conversely to some malevolent force and expedited accordingly.

Present day attitudes appear to be more open. New movies and television series, such as the one entitled *Touch* by Tim Kring (2012), according to Fox Publicity is, "A drama that blends science and spirituality to explore the hidden connections which bind together all of humanity." The reference to quantum physics is particularly strong when one considers that the family name of the primary character is Bohm. The proliferation of dialogue amongst people and the new paradigms of thought and possibility being explored are unprecedented the world over through person-to-person dialogue, news, media, communication devices, the internet, and social-networking.

Based on my findings, I have been witness to people who experienced synchronistic events and who made an attempt to reveal a worldview that provides a plausible context for such events. Some of these worldviews appear to be in a dormant state awaiting something, like synchronicity, to come along and affirm them. These events have provided a context which appears to have granted permission for the expression of these beliefs in an alternate reality. One possible application that can follow is the creation of opportunities for people to further explore the phenomenon and this *other reality* that is suggested and may in fact be latent in mainstream population. Such an opportunity could come in the form of a discussion group, a talking circle, the *kiva* method as suggested by Middlebrooks (2008). Based on this research interview experience, it is my sense that these opportunities would, for the most part, be welcomed, participants would be highly motivated and grateful, and doors to possibilities would be opened.

This exploration of the experience of synchronicity has revealed several areas in which further research would be of interest to me. One in particular has garnered my attention for some time, that of the relationship between synchronicity and leadership. The connection between the two would never have occurred to me had I not stumbled upon Jaworski's (2011) book entitled, *Synchronicity, The Inner Path of Leadership*. The shift in modern day leadership perspective has incorporated the concept of synchronicity. The experts of the past, those exploring the past to determine what is anticipated, particular in large corporations, are overwhelmed by information overload and the rapidity of change to the extent that their projections are no longer reliable. As a result, a new approach of moving with the unexpected has been called upon. U-Theory as presented by Otto Scharmer (2009), shows how one leads into the future as it emerges by drawing from within. In his foreword to Scharmer's book, Peter Senge sums it up, "We do not attend to the subtle forces shaping what happens because we are too busy reacting to these forces" (Prologue, para. 8). The new approach is about the process of tapping into the *implicate order* basic our approach on the premise of *enfoldment*, the fact that the whole is contained in the parts as well as the parts being part of the whole. Now, we are in the realm of synchronicity, the domain of meaningful coincidences. It would appear, as in the case of Joseph Jaworski, that the more one is tapped into the flow of the upcoming future, the more synchronistic events become part and parcel of the journey.

In this broad relationship between leadership and synchronicity what peaks my curiosity is the question of whether or not there is a relationship between the frequency of the occurrence of synchronistic phenomena and effective leadership dealing with the ever increasing uncertainties of the future.

In the process of completing this inquiry on the meaning of synchronicity, several other topics for further study teased my curiosity and I offer the following expanded examples.

Synchronicity and other worldviews. The experience of the phenomenon for populations with different worldviews, in particular that of Aboriginal peoples. The degree of surprise at the occurrence of synchronistic events for cultures whose worldview does not hold synchronicity as a *flaw in the fabric* but rather as an integral part of daily reality merits attention. Two such cultures are noted, Jung's (1973) considerable interest in the Chinese culture and the *I Ching*, and Peat's (1996) experience of the Aboriginal scientific worldview in his book *Blackfoot Physics* that is based on reality being in a state of flux and built on relationships and interconnectedness. How is the occurrence of synchronicity experienced for cultures with a radically different worldview?

Synchronicity and gender. The question of whether or not there are different levels of interest for women and men in the phenomenon of synchronicity and how that expresses itself surfaced as a result of this inquiry. I noticed that most of my forays into this community resulted with a much larger number of women than men showing interest in the topic. I began to wonder also if there might be different approaches to the topic based on gender as well.

Triggering synchronicity. It was primarily the book by Jaworski that peaked my interest in the question of whether or not there was a predisposition to the frequency of occurrence of the phenomenon. His story suggested one of two things, either he was just a plain "lucky" guy or he had unwittingly stumbled on a precondition to the occurrence of the

phenomenon. The fact that this point surfaced in the interviews with the participants and their thoughts on the subject reinforced that state of inquisitiveness.

Focus, commitment, and synchronicity. In the context of the conversation on the predisposition to synchronicity, the elements of focus and commitment surfaced from the interviews with the participants. This would provide a narrower field of discovery in exploring the question of what, if anything, impacts the occurrence of synchronicity.

Personal transformation and synchronicity. The impact of synchronicity on personal transformation, particularly in the light of Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformation and the role of the *disorienting dilemma*¹¹, deserve some attention. The phenomenon, as mentioned by one of the participants, can push individuals out of their comfort zone and create an environment for growth.

In concluding this section on implications, the strongest consideration is that the participants are reaching for an alternate sense of reality. Various questions are emerging. Are they reaching beyond an explanation that is being offered by their daily worldview? Do they sense something that deserves more attention? Does the excitement demonstrated by the participants, when relating their synchronistic events, reveal something of importance in the nature of synchronicity?

It is my hope that the conclusions and implications considered in this chapter can engender deeper thought about synchronicity and its place in our present day world. This topic has certainly been cause for keen study, deep consideration, discovery, and the

¹¹ The process of transformation as seen by Mezirow (1991) often begins as a result of a crisis or events experienced by an individual that challenge existing assumptions. This is considered a *disorienting dilemma* and is seen as the first of his ten phases of perspective transformation.

uncovering of possibilities throughout my personal journey in the exploration of synchronicity and meaningfulness.

Chapter 6 – Observations

This chapter is like pausing for a moment to examine some of the waypoints in my personal meanderings throughout this research. Three areas will be focussed upon: (a) the research method used; (b) my personal learning journey; and (c) my personal discoveries about synchronicity.

Method Used – Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis proved to be for me the most manageable and revealing of approaches. It was particularly appealing to me because of the focus on the value of each individual participant's voice and it encouraged a willingness to be surprised by the significance of their experience and their perspective. Unknown to me at the offset and with few models to refer to, it struck me that for this approach to yield findings of importance that it would be crucial to reflect as accurately as possible the views expressed by the participants. It became clear that I would need to devise a method of tracking codes and themes in such a way that quick and constant referral to their original text would be the best assurance of a high degree of accuracy in interpretation. With the research question in print before me for all the steps of the process, I remained fully engaged and focused on the purpose of the study and my participants.

Interviews. The pre-interview meetings not only afforded the participants an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the process as laid out by the research and ethics process; it also helped refine the core questions that would underpin the actual interview session. From the technological perspective, I was most pleased with the recording capabilities and discreet results of the iPod™ and the SmartPen™. The SmartPen™ also

afforded me an excellent transcription tool through the Livescribe™ application allowing me to click on a button for a two to three second replay position, which I used continuously. It also provided me with a setting to slow the speech down considerably. This allowed for easier deciphering of the comments and for my typing speed to match the oral delivery.

The interest in the topic demonstrated by the participants, which on occasion escalated to passion, freed me to focus on going for depth. All of the interviews were punctuated by laughter and humor. I was particularly inspired by the willingness of the participants to go beyond any of their thinking to explore more profoundly the meaning and the implications of what they had experienced. I felt humbled and privileged to have a glimpse into their personal worlds that were not, by their own account, readily shared.

All three of the core questions were adhered to and followed by subsequent questions that varied for the most part. By the fourth interview, similarities in the questions began to reveal themselves. All the questions posed were recorded and given a descriptor and a margin for codes was added to the four interview transcripts. Though the transcribing process was tedious for the most part, I found myself reliving the interactions with the participants with more attention and walking away with a deeper understanding of what they had imparted.

The interviews were for me one of the most enjoyable parts of the research journey. Not only did I experience the satisfaction of having received so much from the participants, but I left the interview room in each case with a sense of having contributed to them just through the interview process itself.

Codes. The sense that the development of codes was the key to the integrity of the analysis, dominated the process. It was time consuming because of the two-fold process of

adding it to the transcript and then inserting it into the table of codes with all its corresponding information for quick relocation in the transcript. Each code seemed like a rallying point, and metaphorically-speaking, for all the instruments of a quintet playing all at once, to create one unique sound. The elements included the core content of the text itself, the question being asked, the voice tonalities, the context of the delivery as in the case of a story or that of the explanation of a theory, gestures, and the feeling state of the participant. This journey required discipline and consistency.

Themes. The emergence of the themes was a dynamic process and is more easily described in metaphors. I could compare the experience to that of the vibration of a pitch fork causing all the codes in harmony with it to begin vibrating. I found the morphing of the themes to be fascinating whether it was in the modifying of the list of themes multiple times, the changing of names on occasion and the reclassification of themes based on a better sense of congruence or some codes. This process was the point of greatest excitement for me, reminding me of how when placing exposed photographic paper in a solution in a darkroom one watches the photo emerge in the glow of the red light.

My Personal Learning Journey

My motivations for working on a thesis were twofold: the new experience of the process and my love for the topic. Both have sustained me. I have allowed the process to unfold from the choice of the topic, to the method of analysis, the identification of the findings, the drawing of the conclusions, and the pondering of the implications. Once I became clear about the question, everything unfolded with ease like the falling of dominoes. My main task was to remain aware of the timing and to be conscious when each element presented itself.

The biggest learning happened at the offset of the project when, stressed out and blinded in a whirlwind of possibilities pertaining to a topic and approaches, my co-supervisor, Dr. Linda O'Neill said to me, "Don't drive this thing, Bob!" I dropped everything. I took on a new attitude and immersed myself in the research for the literature review of my projected topic on vision and leadership. Stress made way for joy, excitement, and passion. Within days, I stumbled on Jaworski's (2011) book, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership* and as a result, I set my new heading to discover the experience of synchronicity for the mainstream person. The rest is a smooth unfolding of what I would term to be synchronistic events that contributed to a most delightful journey.

Another learning for me was the discovery of the marvel of interviews. I found the process humbling. I am in awe at how personal, surprising, precious, and I will say sacred, the inner world of people is. I had the privilege of working with people who loved the topic, were keen to share, and were very candid about their sense of reality. It was the sharing of the stories of synchronicity that opened doors to innermost areas within the participants. This is why I feel that such a great quantity of information regarding synchronicity surfaced in such a short time with so few participants. I did not expect the participants to experience so much appreciation for the opportunity to explore and share something so close to their heart. In some cases, they too were surprised by the importance of the topic for them. They stated that the process was a contribution to them.

In the final analysis, though I engaged in the project knowing what I wanted to research, ultimately I am now more of the view that the topic of synchronicity found me. Once the hook was in, everything I needed to complete it unraveled itself before me. My task was but to keep moving forward in the direction of my passion. This process is very akin to

the Aboriginal approach to vision and leadership where vision finds you and brings with it all the required resources to fulfill the leadership journey for the people. It is also in harmony with David Bohm's (1980) sense of an *implicate order*. Though it might seem that I moved away from my original topic of vision and leadership, an argument can be made for it being the true nature of leadership as proposed by Scharmer (2009) in his *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*.

My research and study of the phenomenon of synchronicity has deepened my awe for the mystery of life and reality. I am more ready, willing, and committed than ever to live my life and approach my dreams and visions with less driving force and a greater yielding to the process of unfolding.

Synchronicity and This Project

As implied, synchronicity has played a role in the evolution of this project. At first, I was tempted to attribute the fortuitous coming together of events to serendipity because of the beneficial outcomes of the events. I now see these events more as synchronistic because of the way they interweave with each other and create a complete whole that is most meaningful to me and fuels my passion. The most notable areas of the project to harbour synchronistic events were (a) the coming of the topic; (b) the finding of a name for the thesis; (c) the coming together of my thesis committee; (d) the choice of methodology; (e) the selection of the participants; and (f) the timing of the interviews.

The process of the selection of the participants was the only area to be deliberately approached in a manner welcoming synchronicity. By simply speaking to people who I randomly encountered about my project and my quest for participants, I allowed the word to spread on its own like dandelion seeds. I made a point of not inviting anyone I spoke to

directly to participate. The surfacing of names occurred erratically over the period of a month. This process was meaningful for me because of its ease, simplicity, and the sense that something so much bigger than me was unfolding the process. The end result of the quality of the interviews was for me a confirmation of that.

My research on synchronicity keeps bringing me back to leadership, particularly as it is presently evolving. I have a greater understanding for Jaworski's choice of book title, *Synchronicity, The Inner Path of Leadership*. The present focus of leadership is on the nature of reality as supported by quantum physics and Aboriginal worldviews and as spearheaded by Peter Senge and Claus Otto Scharmer of MIT in Boston. There is a call to connect with this *implicate order* referred to by David Bohm (1980). The shift to systems thinking in the last thirty years reinforces this sense of interconnectedness. Jaworski (2011) provides us with a powerful model of a leadership journey interlaced with synchronicity. The witnessing of this relationship between synchronicity and leadership contributes to its acceptance. However, it is far from being understood and is ripe for discovery.

Indeed, this project was not pre-planned neither in its choice nor in its method. It was a response, a step towards coming to a point where one "listens to what is emerging from himself, to the course of being in the world; not in order to be supported by it, but in order to bring it to reality as it desires" (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004).

Conclusion

The experience of synchronicity for the four participants interviewed reflected the initial moments of surprise, awe and wonder commonly attributed to the phenomenon. Their experience went far beyond this initial response, it revealed the *flaw in the fabric* of Western thinking and presented the elements of an *other reality*, one that is supported by

contemporary science and the traditional worldviews of ancient cultures. The relating of these experiences of synchronicity served to reveal the extent of the belief in an alternate worldview much like the injected smoke in a wind tunnel showing the true currents and flow of air.

The unfolding of this research project followed a movement aligned with that of synchronicity through its meaningful coincidences and journey of discovery for this researcher. The amount of unknown on the topic of synchronicity seems to cry out for more attention. The research methodology flowed smoothly from the research question throughout. What can be said about the experience of synchronicity for the mainstream person? I give the last word to one of the participants who, when asked to comment on the experience of synchronicity, stated, “I feel as though it is like those *aha* moments when things make sense and you’re feeling alive and filled with energy, your heart is open, you’re connected.” This learning journey closes another chapter for me, thereby opening new pathways of discovery to come.

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Appendix A – Additional Examples of Synchronicity

Jaworski Meets His Wife

Joseph Jaworski was running with his son Joey to catch a plane in O'Hare Airport in Chicago. He noticed a beautiful woman coming towards them. As he came within a few feet of her, he looked into her eyes, stopped dead in his tracks, turned around as she went by and said to himself, "I've got to get to her. I know her from somewhere" (Jaworski, 2011). He told his son to keep going and catch his plane. He had to do what he had to do. He then proceeded to run after her and finally reached her at the boarding gate of her airplane where he asked her directly if she was married. She responded no and asked if he was. He asked for her number and the rest is history. Interestingly, she was just visiting Chicago and returning to Texas. The night before leaving for Chicago, she had had a dream and a premonition of meeting someone that would play a significant part in her life.

Doubly Exposed Film

The following example is quoted directly from Jung (1973):

The writer Wilhelm von Sholz has collected a number of stories showing the strange ways in which lost or stolen objects come back to their owners. Among other things, he tells the story of a mother who took a photograph of her small son in the Black Forest [Germany]. She left the film to be developed in Strasburg. But, owing to the outbreak of the war, she was unable to fetch it and gave it up for lost. In 1916 she bought a film in Frankfurt in order to take a photograph of her daughter, who had been born in the meantime. When the film was developed it was found to be doubly exposed: the picture underneath was the photograph she had taken of her son in 1914! The old film had not been developed and had somehow got into circulation again among new films. (p. 15)

Plum Pudding

The following example, quoted from *Wikipedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synchronicity>), is drawn from Emile Deschamps works:

The French writer Émile Deschamps claims in his memoirs that, in 1805, he was treated to some plum pudding by a stranger named Monsieur de Fontgibu. Ten years later, the writer encountered plum pudding on the menu of a Paris restaurant and wanted to order some, but the waiter told him that the last dish had already been served to another customer, who turned out to be de Fontgibu. Many years later, in 1832, Deschamps was at a dinner and once again ordered plum pudding. He recalled the earlier incident and told his friends that only de Fontgibu was missing to make the setting complete — and in the same instant, the now senile de Fontgibu entered the room.

Appendix B – Participant Information Sheet

Making Sense of Synchronicity

Dear Participant:

Thank you for your interest in this research project and for your potential willingness to answer questions pertaining to your experience of synchronicity.

This research project is for a MEd Thesis at the University of Northern British Columbia. The primary and sole researcher will be myself Robert (Bob) Laval.

Here are the main points of information that I want to convey:

1. The purpose of this research is to explore how different people experience synchronicity, what it means to them, what they feel about it, how they explain it and to hear some accounts of how the phenomenon has happened in their lives. Since synchronicity is difficult to predict and to reproduce, the accounts of the ordinary person are seen as the most valuable source of information.
2. Two factors guided the process of your selection. First it was essential to select someone who believed in synchronicity as something more than mere coincidence or chance and second your selection was based on your availability.
3. Your participation in this study should take approximately 1 hour. It will take the form of an interview which can take place at the university or another public area designated by you. For the purpose of transcription, this interview will be recorded. It will involve discussions focusing on the three following core questions:
 - a. What is your definition of synchronicity?
 - b. Can you relate any experiences of synchronicity in your life?
 - c. How do you explain the phenomenon of synchronicity?
4. Access to the points discussed in the interview will be limited to myself as researcher and to my thesis co-supervisors, Dr. Linda O'Neill and Dr. John Sherry. I alone will be doing the transcription and the analysis of your comments and anecdotes.
5. Your participation is entirely voluntary, so if you need to withdraw at any time, you may do so without prejudice. Should you withdraw from the study, any information and data pertaining to your interview will also be withdrawn and destroyed. You may decline to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable with.
6. The benefit of this research is that your lived experience of synchronicity will give insights into the phenomenon that are otherwise difficult to come by since it is not a predictable or replicable event. A small honorarium of \$25 will be given to acknowledge your time and contribution to this research.
7. There is no known risk to you associated with this research.
8. Your responses will be kept confidential and best efforts will be used to ensure your identity is not revealed. The information you provide will be reflected in the final thesis; however, anonymity will be maintained. Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in the interview. You will be given the option to choose a pseudonym or your own name for the transcription of the interview recordings and notes. I will offer both options accompanied by your written permission

confirming their choice before the interview. Because the interview will involve the relating of personal stories and events reflecting the phenomenon of synchronicity, any identifiers in the data that might compromise your anonymity and that of people in the story will be removed or substituted with generic names or terms.

9. The data will be stored in a locked container or locked filing cabinet in the office or administrative area at the UNBC Terrace Campus. All digital files of data and pertaining to the transcripts will be kept in a password protected folder on my computer and encrypted where possible. All physical recordings and written documents pertaining to the data will be destroyed by fire in a wood stove within six months of completion of the thesis. All digital copies will be erased at that time.
10. If you have any questions about the interview, please contact the researcher, Robert (Bob) Laval at laval@unbc.ca or 250-635-3037.
11. The final report will be available after completion of the research (approximately March 2013). If at that time you would like a copy, please do not hesitate to contact me, Bob at the phone number or email above.
12. If you have any concerns or complaints about this research, please direct them to the UNBC Office of Research at reb@unbc.ca or 250-960-6735.

As part of this process, a copy of your consent form must be given to you. Whether or not you choose to participate in this interview, I would like to thank you for your time spent in reading over the above information.

With warm regards,

Robert (Bob) Laval
1230 Kalum Lake Road,
Terrace, BC V8G 0C4
Phone: 250-635-3037
Email: laval@unbc.ca

Appendix C – Participant Consent Form

Making Sense of Synchronicity

I understand that Robert (Bob) Laval, who is a graduate student in Masters of Education Program at the University of British Columbia, is conducting a research study on the experience of synchronicity.

I understand that the purpose of this research is to gain insight and understanding regarding the experience of synchronicity for those who believe it is more than mere coincidence.

I understand I was chosen because I believe in synchronicity as a mysterious phenomenon that is reveals that something is at work that is beyond pure coincidence and that I am interested in sharing my experiences and thoughts on the subject. I will be interviewed by the researcher, Robert (Bob) Laval based on three core questions or points regarding synchronicity.

1. This consent is given on the understanding that I have the option to choose a pseudonym or my own name to be used for the transcription of the interview recordings and notes. This option is inserted below:

Pseudonym: _____ or, Real Name:

2. I give my consent freely and I understand that I may end the interview at any point and withdraw from the research process at any time.
3. I understand and agree that the information that I have given to Robert (Bob) Laval in our interview will be treated in the following manner:
 - a. The interview will be digitally recorded and hand-written notes will be taken during our discussion.
 - b. This data will be securely stored by Robert (Bob) Laval, only in a secure location in his private residence. All digital data will be stored in either an encrypted area on his computer or in a password protected folder.
 - c. This data will be used only by Robert (Bob) Laval and only for his thesis project.
 - d. The data will be burned in a wood stove by fire at the end of the thesis project.
4. I understand that if I have any comments or concerns, I can contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-5820 or reb@unbc.ca.

PARTICIPANT: _____ SIGNED: _____ DATE: _____
 RESEARCHER: _____ SIGNED: _____ DATE: _____

Appendix D – Interview Questions

Making Sense of Synchronicity

Core Questions

The semi-structured interview process will focus on the following three core questions:

1. Can you relate any experiences of synchronicity in your life?
2. What is it like to experience a synchronistic event?
3. How do you explain the phenomenon of synchronicity?

Sample Sub-questions

Sub-questions will serve to draw out more information in the various realms of experience emphasized by the participants. The following examples are only meant to provide a sample of potential follow-up questions:

1. When you recognized that you had had a synchronistic event, did you experience any notable physical sensations?
2. Looking back on your experience of synchronicity, do you see any spiritual or religious connections?
3. When you relate your story of the synchronistic event, how do your friends or family members react?
4. When you think about your synchronistic event, does your mind become calmer or more agitated?

Appendix E – Actual Interview Questions

Making Sense of Synchronicity

Table E1 provides a sample of the actual interview questions and how they were listed in the project code book for reference to be included in the code list table.

Table E1
Sample of Actual Interview Questions

Abbreviated	Question
N-Q1: share story	Can you share a story of a synchronistic experience?
N-Q2: how is it synchronicity	How is that a story of synchronicity for you?
N-Q3: associated feelings	What are some of the feelings associated with the synchronistic parts?

Note. Abbreviated = N-Q1: The letter “N” identifies the transcript and “Q1” identifies the number of the question in that transcript. This identifier is also listed next to the question in the left column of the transcript.