THE EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY OF WOMEN WHO PRACTICE DISTANCE RUNNING IN NATURE:

"I RUN IN THE COMPANY OF TREES AND OF CERTAIN FRIENDS"

by

Stephanie Ludwig

A dissertation submitted

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Psychology

Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

Palo Alto, California

May 23, 2011

I certify that I have read and approved the content and presentation of this dissertation:

_____	_____
Rosemarie Anderson, Ph.D., Committee Chairperson	Date
_____	_____
Mark Brady, Ph.D., Committee Member	Date
_____	_____
Tina Amorok, Psy.D., Committee Member	Date

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In recent decades, the West has witnessed increased interest in running as a popular form of exercise and a topic of physiological and psychological research. With the Title IX education amendment of 1972, women in the United States gained more equal access to school-based athletics and became increasingly visible participants in recreational and competitive American running and as research subjects. However, the history of women's running confirms it is not solely a contemporary exercise and personal development phenomenon.

Running among Western women has roots in ancient Greece where running and fertility were culturally connected as evidenced by a statue of the fertility goddess Demeter at the entrance of the Olympia stadium. Spartan women competed in state-sponsored races intended to perfect them as mothers and citizens, and girls in Delphi participated in the Heraea, a race honoring the goddess Hera (Mills, 1994). Mythic stories of the Greek goddesses Atalanta and Artemis reveal they were honored for being swift runners.

Many North American indigenous peoples have ancient running traditions that served their communication, warfare, and hunting needs prior to modernity, and still serve "to enact their myths and to create a bridge between themselves and the forces of the universe" (Nabokov, 1987, p. 9). In contemporary Navajo culture, adolescent girls participate in Kinaalda, a multiple-day coming-of-age ceremony that includes a sacred morning run (Frisbee, 1993; Ryan, 1988; Toledo-Benalli, 2003).

In both ancient Greece and modern Navajo culture, running served spiritual purposes while promoting physical health and stamina. Higdon (1993) similarly suggested that Western runners often experience a form of spiritual awakening as a result of running, leave their old

nonrunning world behind to become proselytizers for their new "faith," and create a system of running conduct ritually comparable to traditional religious behavior. An increasing body of anecdotal and popular literature exploring personal running experiences or running and spirituality (Battista, 2004; Joslin, 2003; Kay, 2007; Lynch & Scott, 1999; McDougall, 2009), including literature that focuses on women's experiences (Lin, 2006; Reti, 2001; Sosienski, 2006), confirm the relationship between running and spirituality are of increasing personal, cultural, and research interest.

This section of the Literature Review discusses empirical research and theoretical literature in psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, and related disciplines that I reviewed prior to the start of this study. This literature provided insight into four dominant themes in this study, from a female embodied perspective: running, transformation, embodiment, and psychospiritual development. Each section of this review focuses on literature from a theme area that I identified as having particular relevance for this study exploring women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature from the perspectives of embodiment and psychospiritual development. The first section highlights current neuroscience research on the physiological effects of running on neural plasticity, a study that compared the hormonal effects of running and sitting meditation, and a body of psychological research that addressed the clinical effects of therapeutic running on women, and the ways in which distance running promotes psychological change and growth among women. The second section includes philosophical considerations of the nature of transformation and current research on transformative states of consciousness and processes as related to women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature. The third section highlights philosophical considerations of mind-body dualism in Western culture, the impact

of this dualism on female embodiment, and theories that explored embodiment in human development. The final section considers theories of psychospiritual development that provided a context for understanding where women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature and embodied spirituality intersect.

Running

The physiological effects of running on neural plasticity. In this decade, neuroscientists became very interested in how physical activity affects the structures and function of the brain, given the brain's apparent lifelong capacity for plasticity. This capacity, or "fundamental brain property," is referred to as "neuroplasticity" and describes "changeable, malleable and modifiable" (Doidge, 2007, p. xv) response of brain nerve cells, or neurons, to experience and environment. Most empirical research measuring the impact of physical activity on brain plasticity has utilized laboratory mice engaged in forced and voluntary running on treadmills and wheels. It is not known how generalizable these findings are to understanding human brain plasticity, however.

Greenwood and Fleshner (2008) asserted that exercise in mice produces a stress-resistant brain by stimulating "adaptations in several neural circuits and brain regions that are both stress sensitive and involved in learned helplessness" (p. 92). Further, they speculated that exercise increases the brain's capacity for plasticity, especially in the areas of the brain that generate behavioral responses to environmental demands. Fabel and Kempermann (2008), like Greenwood and Fleshner (2008), likewise proposed that running signals to the brain that neural development is needed to respond to environmental "situations rich in complexity and novelty that presumably benefit from more new neurons" (p. 59). These findings are consistent with a more recent study that demonstrated the effect of physical activity on cognitive performance and

memory (Pontifex, Hillman, Fernhall, Thompson, & Valentini, 2009). Van Praag (2008) noted that most studies of neurogenesis demonstrate the beneficial effects of physical exercise on improved learning and memory, and attribute those effects to changes in the "function of neurotransmitter systems in the brain" (p. 133) specifically the expression of hippocampal proteins in genes related to plasticity. In short, most neuroscience research confirms that when mice voluntarily exercise on a wheel the result is increased neurogenesis in the hippocampus. An exception is when mice are subject to the stressor of social isolation, which may delay or reverse the positive effects of running on the brain (Stranahan, Khalil, & Gould, 2006).

A study by Liu et al. (2009) found that forced treadmill running produced observable effects in the amygdala of mice in addition to the hippocampus, whereas voluntary wheel running affected only the hippocampus in their mice. Their study demonstrated for the first time that "in mice, only moderate treadmill exercise improves aversive memory, although both treadmill and wheel running exercise can improve spatial learning and memory" (p. 3229). In the researchers' view, "repeated mild stresses, such as those encountered, in our treadmill exercise protocol, may be necessary to alter the amygdala in a favorable way for aversive learning and memory" (p. 3229). This suggests that running may also directly alter the amygdala, site of our fear memories often resulting from psychologically traumatic experiences (LeDoux, 1998, 2003; Nader, Schafe, & Le Doux, 2000).

Research comparing the physiological and psychological effects of running and sitting meditation suggested they shared similar benefits. Techniques of slow, distance running and transcendental meditation can be combined to stimulate an altered state of consciousness that enhances the outcomes of formal individual and group therapy (Solomon & Bumpus, 1978). Studies comparing hormone production in control groups of elite runners following running and

highly trained yogic meditators following meditation demonstrated that running, like meditation, increased levels of corticotropin-releasing hormone and cortisol, in addition to beta-endorphin, which all correlate with positive mood changes (Harte, 1992; Harte, Eifert, & Smith, 1995). While these studies established that running and sitting meditation result in comparable positive mood changes, despite metabolic differences in the two activities, the control groups were limited to males with mean ages of 31.3 years (runners) and 31.6 (meditators) who the researchers identified as advanced in their training. Thus, it is not known what effects running might have on female runners of differing ages and training levels.

These studies, and further research, addressing the physiological effects of running on neural plasticity confirmed that running impacts the body in observable ways. What these studies did not address is how these physiological changes within the body are experienced psychologically and spirituality, or interpreted by human beings, and, specifically, by women. By exploring women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature through their embodied narratives, this study provided connections between physiological changes within the body, transformation, embodiment, and psychospiritual development.

The psychological effects of running on women. Running has been a topic of research interest and used as a therapeutic intervention since the 1970s (Kostrubala, 1976, 1978, 1984; Sachs & Buffone, 1984), yet few studies have included women as primary participants or carefully considered the impact of running on women's lives. However, such studies have increased and begun to provide rich psychological insight into the effects of running and distance running on women. Women's personal narratives about running, including transformative experiences, in popular books and journals (Barker, 2004; Lin, 2006; Ryan, 1988; Sosienski, 2006) have also become more commercially available. Yet, no formal research study to date has

explored the topic of this study, women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature from the perspectives of embodiment and psychospiritual development.

Three quantitative studies from the 1980s addressed women and running by focusing on the therapeutic or clinical benefits of using running as a form of aerobic exercise. They demonstrated that clinically depressed women experienced a significant reduction in depressive symptoms while participating in a short-term running program and significant improvements in self-concept when they continued to run from 1-12 months upon completion of the program (Doyne, Chambless, & Beutler, 1983; Doyne et al., 1987; Ossip-Klein et al., 1989). These studies demonstrated that running is an effective clinical intervention for depressed women, but did not situate the treatment of psychopathology within a wider transpersonal context of transformation or spiritual development. We do not know if women for whom running is an effective therapeutic intervention might also experience a transformation of consciousness or spiritual growth through continued voluntary distance running in nature. We also do not know how many of the benefits demonstrated by these studies are due to running or attuned association with the clinician or other people in the programs.

Grant (1987) conducted a quasiexperimental study in which 623 women participating in a 10K run in Boston were tested for self-esteem and attributional style and compared with control groups of women identified as athletic but not runners, and as nonathletic. The results showed that the group of running women demonstrated significantly higher self-esteem and happiness than the other two groups. However, this study was limited to participants in a road race, did not provide the participants the opportunity to narrate their experiences, and did not consider possible transpersonal dimensions of their running.

Leedy (2009) used case method analysis to study the narratives of five "white middle- to upper-middle-class women who live in small towns in a north central state and had completed races of at least 13.1 miles (half marathon)" (p. 90). They reported that during periods of emotional stress distance running had helped them cope. The participants attributed increases in self-efficacy and self-worth with their use of running to cope with stressful life circumstances, including arrest for drunk driving, alcohol use, adoption of a child, death of family members, and marital problems. Their narratives revealed that running also served as a self-administered therapeutic activity for managing their moods and energy levels. The study considered the psychological and physiological results of women choosing to use running to cope while their lives were functioning well enough, rather than focusing on how clinicians might use running to treat women for depression or anxiety. It also expanded our understanding of women's experiences of running by starting with the participants' personal narratives. Both Grant (1987) and Leedy (2009) identified psychological benefits of running for women; however, neither of them specifically explored distance running in nature or the spiritual benefits.

Majcen (2007) studied the psychosocial effects of participation in a marathon-training program, and completion of an urban marathon (26.2 miles), among 27 women between the ages of 40 and 64 in the Washington DC area. Using an interview series and grounded theory, she classified both "perceived effects during marathon training" and "perceived effects resulting from marathon completion across the domains of physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and daily life changes" (p. iv). When asked about the spiritual effects of their training, a portion of the participants associated spirituality with their experience, and Majcen categorized their responses as "connecting with a higher being" (p. 65), "connecting with inner self" (p. 66), "connecting with others" (p. 68), and "appreciation/connecting with nature" (p. 69). Upon

completion of the training and marathon, several participants experienced notable changes within themselves that Majcen categorized as "transformation through the process" (p. 87). The key finding of the study is that marathon training and completion provides women in middle age with an opportunity for empowerment and transformation through the achievement of a challenging goal with group support. This study began to consider the women's distance running beyond the psychological through limited identification of four spiritual effects on selected women who trained for and ran an urban marathon. However, participation was limited to women over 40 registered for an urban marathon-training program and race, so we do not know how the findings are applicable to adult women under 40, to women who do not choose to participate in a group marathon training, or who live and run in rural areas. None of the women were identified as having engaged in a long-term practice of distance running in nature, nor considered it a central part of their spiritual lives. Data was collected solely through interviews and analyzed using grounded theory, so we do not have insight into women's transformative experiences, as written by them, from the perspective of the body, nor through the transformative process of the researcher.

Boudreau (2009) conducted a hermeneutical phenomenological study on the benefits of distance trail running among seven experienced women runners who were also employees. The research found that distance trail running positively impacted their productivity in the workplace and "increased job stress relief," through "increased self-efficacy at work, more positive attitude, enhanced performance, better time management and organization skills, greater discipline and mental focus with career goals, and increased problem-solving" (p. iii), among other changes. A secondary finding of the study was that trail running contributed to the women feeling connected to nature through the meditative quality of their running and the experience of being "in the

moment" (p. 120). While this study provided insight into the workplace benefits of trail running, or running outdoors in nature, and to secondary meditative benefits, the study did not intentionally focus on distance running in nature as a spiritual practice, transformative experiences, embodiment, or psychospiritual development. The seven participants in that study had completed a road marathon and trail race but did not identify their running as a spiritual practice. Data was gathered through semistructured interviews and analyzed using a research method that invites the researcher to gain understanding of what a participant's experience is like. However, women did not have the opportunity to write about their experiences, or consider them from the perspective of the body. Of the seven women included in the study, four shared all of the effects identified.

A phenomenological study by Boudreau and Giorgi (2010) described the "extraordinary mental change and self-discovery" (p. 234) experienced by two female athletes who ran marathons at the novice level. The six constituents identified by the researchers through participant interviews were

> Participants' Perception of an Enhancing Outdoor Environment, Life-Style Changes Resulting in More Openness to Others and Self, Life-Style Changes Resulting in More Openness to Others and Self, Discoveries Concerning Self-Improvements, Sustaining a Desired Mental Disposition, Empowerment in Considering New Possibilities, and Supporting for Encountering Future Challenges. (p. 234)

The authors described the progressive relationship between constituents as follows:

> The start of the women's lived experience began while they were long-distance trail running in what they perceived as an enjoyable outdoor setting (constituent 1). The tranquil, spiritual and physically challenging wilderness experience gave the women private time to reflect, which prompted more openness to others and themselves, thus resulting in life changes at home and work (constituent 2). The women discovered self-improvements that occurred from marathon running (see constituent 3), and they were sustaining a desired mental disposition (constituent 4). The women had empowerment in considering new possibilities for personal or career goals (constituent 5), and felt support for encountering future unknown challenges (constituent 6). (p. 251)

The women experienced both emotional and mental changes in the process of being "inadvertently swept away with their body-spirit-mind awakening in connection with marathon running" (Boudreau & Giorgi, 2010, p. 256), and the result was increased self-efficacy and self-awareness. This swept away state was described in meditative terms, as quiet, peaceful, inward, relaxed, unaware of the environment, but as more than meditative, as "it encompasses her entire core, in a very whole and 'spiritual' manner" (p. 258). Eventually the driver (the woman running) of the car (body) returned to the car, "a woman awakens from her peaceful and spiritual state, her mind, body and spirit have been rejuvenated" (p. 259), the environment reappeared, and she experienced positive physical and mental changes. Those changes included valuing time for herself, greater balance in her life, less emotional pain, and a sense of inward connection, and renewed relationships. The authors used the image of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon to describe the transformation, and the metaphor of "the journey from birth to death" (p. 260) to convey the ways in which running symbolized the process of life. They concluded the described phenomena are possible and suggested that future research could verify the commonality of these and other changes. An obvious limitation of this study, also noted by the authors, is that the phenomena described are based upon interviews with only two women who, again, have completed road marathons, and so may not fully reflect the experiences, including those identified as transformative, of women who practice distance running in nature and may have never completed a road race or marathon. We also do not gain in-depth insight into the dynamics of transformative experiences, embodiment, or psychospiritual development.

Boudreau's research was the first to begin considering the spiritual impact of distance running, and of running outdoors on trails, on women's lives. In the process of conducting her dissertation research, Boudreau (2009) learned secondarily that trail running has a spiritual

quality about it for some women. In her next study, she offered a rich description of how distance running outdoors might facilitate women's psychological growth through self-discovery and significant mental changes, which are recognizable aspects of women's psychospiritual development. She also described a shifting connection between mind, body, and spirit in the distance running phenomena experienced by the two women included in the study. Like the Majcen (2007) study, it was not evident that the women in Boudreau's studies identified their distance running, with intentionality, as a spiritual practice or central to their spiritual lives. While being outdoors was described as enhancing their experience of running, and contributing to the psychological changes observed, the primacy of nature to their running was also not apparent.

In the study reported here, I expounded transpersonally upon this existing psychological research. I explored 23 women's transformative experiences while engaging in a spiritual practice of distance running in nature, and the processes of embodiment and psychospiritual development that might be catalyzed by such experiences.

Transformation

Hart (2000) writes

> To transform is to go beyond current form. Transformation manifests as both an outcome and a process; it is the push and the pulse that drives self-organization and self-transcendence, a movement pushing simultaneously toward increasing unity and toward diversity. In human development, it is the process by which we become more uniquely who we are, and through which we recognize how much we have in common with the universe and even recognize that, in a sense, we are the universe. (p. 157)

The varieties of transformative experience are abundant (Metzner, 2010). Each of the world's ancient wisdom traditions explicated practices for use in the quest for transformative experience, and theological terms to describe and make meaning of those processes (Mijares, 2003). A study of self-transformation among the traditions revealed that, regardless of place and

time, the fruits of the transformative journey can be recognized through 10 common, yet mysterious, "metaphors for the transformation of human consciousness" (Metzner, 1980, p. 49). These metaphors point toward transformations of thought, emotions, heart, perception, and function through a change process that may be fundamental to human experience, but elusive to description. They may also be useful in conveying transformative experiences that arise outside of the context of traditional religious belief and practice.

For a contemporary exploration of women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature from the perspectives of embodiment and psychospiritual development, two bodies of transformation research that honor the mysterious and metaphorical nature of transformation were most relevant. The first body of literature addressed the transformation of emotions, and the second, the transformation of consciousness. Both bodies of literature left significant room for the further development of insight into women's transformative experiences and processes outside of traditional religious practice through this study.

Emotional transformation through accelerated experiential dynamic psychotherapy. Through ongoing clinical research using accelerated experiential dynamic psychotherapy (AEDP), Fosha (2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) and her colleagues developed a phenomenology of an emotion-based transformation process that revealed itself within that clinical context. "We discovered that not only does the processing of emotions release the adaptational resources contained within them, but also that the exploration of the *experience* of transformation activates a nonlinear, nonfinite *transformational spiral*" (2009a, p. 173). Fosha (2009a) described the spiral as having four states: "Stress, Distress, and Symptoms," "The Processing of Core Affective Experience," "The Metaprocessing of Transformational Experience," and "Core State" (p. 184). The states are bridged by three state transformations

during which safety in the dyadic therapeutic relationship is first cocreated, resilience then emerges, and finally a positive valuation of the self emerges through successful secure attachment. Each transformational state is accompanied by specific emotions, beginning with the state characterized as defensive (e.g., shame, fear, anxiety), and arriving at those positive affects I would call transpersonal including calm or flow, clarity, connection, exuberance, hope, bliss, and others (Fosha, 2008).

The effectiveness of AEDP is based upon the presupposition that "people have a fundamental need for transformation. We are wired for growth, healing, and self-righting, that is, resuming impeded growth" (Fosha, 2008, p. 290). This need is met through overcoming internal resistance to activate *transformance*, "the overarching motivational force, operating in both development and therapy that strives toward maximally adaptive organization, vitality, authenticity, and connection" (2008, p. 292) and "thus leads to growth and transformation" (Fosha, 2009a, p. 175). It is a force "driven by hope and the search for the vitalizing positive experience" (2009a, p. 175). Additionally, "crisis and intense emotional suffering, *when experienced in conditions of safety,* can be a great boon to transformative strivings. The alchemy of transformative strivings together with the drive to relieve distress is an unbeatable mix for change" (Fosha, 2009a, p. 176).

The value of AEDP research for this study was that it offered a transformational process model that provided insight into profound emotional changes which occurred during women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature. The neuroscience research on running presented earlier suggested structural changes to the amygdala and hippocampal regions of the brain might occur as a result of regular running. The AEDP research explicated the profound emotional changes occurring simultaneously, while also suggesting that further

reflection on those emotionally transformative experiences may result in additional brain changes to "the corpus callosum, the prefrontal cortex, (especially the right prefrontal cortex shown to mediate emotionally loaded autobiographical narrative), the insula and the anterior cingulate" (Fosha, 2003, p. 275; Siegel, 1999, 2003). The affective results of each state, particularly those positive affects arising through the metaprocessing of transformational experience and arrival in core state, were also useful for contextualizing the powerful emotions and emotional changes described in women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature.

Two limitations of this research for this study was that AEDP is a therapeutic process that "recruits the transformational power of dyadic relational processes" (Fosha, 2009b, p. 255), and is contained by the therapeutic relationship. There were limitations in applying the model to processes that arise through seemingly individual experiences like running, including running with friends and partners who were not trained to provide clinical therapeutic support, rather than within the context of a formal therapeutic relationship and process. The ongoing clinical research also included men and women, with no differentiation of gender made in the model, suggesting the transformational process described was equally applicable to men and women. However, the results of this study provided insight into how clinicians might integrate distance running in nature into the therapeutic process.

Transformation of consciousness through traditional spiritual practice. A second body of research on transformation valuable for this study was conducted as the Transformation Project through the Institute of Noetic Sciences. The research team (Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2007; Vietan, Amorok, & Schlitz, 2006) conducted interviews with 47 teachers and scholars of religious and spiritual traditions to learn how transformations of consciousness arise and how

they are integrated into an individual's life as sustained change. They learned that through transformative spiritual practice, defined as "any set of internal or external activities you engage in with the intention of fostering long-lasting shifts in the way you experience and relate to yourself and others" (Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2007, p. 93), humans "create the ideal conditions for natural transformation to flourish" (Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2007, p. 67). Such practices result in transformative experience, or "experience that results in a lasting change of worldview, as opposed to an extreme, extraordinary, peak, or spiritual experience that doesn't necessarily translate into long-term changes in your way of being" (Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2007, p. 20). These changes result in "profound internal shifts that result in long-lasting changes in the way you experience and relate to yourself, others, and the world" (Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2007, p. 15) and "a dramatic restructuring of core values" that "appears to be universal" (Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2007, p. 25). Changes in core values include the development of compassion and altruism, among other qualities (Vietan, Amorok, & Schlitz, 2006). Like Fosha (2009), this research suggested that suffering also invites transformation.

> In fact, some transformations seem to *require* the kind of vulnerability that accompanies extreme loss or grief. This is what separates transformation from more linear processes of psychological development as typically understood. Transformation often asks for something to die so that something new can be born. (Schlitz, Vieten, & Amorok, 2007, p. 30)

The Transformation Project at the Institute of Noetic Sciences focused on the process of transforming consciousness through transformative spiritual practice, and by their definition, distance running in nature functions as a form of spiritual practice under the right conditions. The research also proved helpful in this study for understanding, generally, how changed states of consciousness (James, 1902/2009; Tart, 2000) arose and were integrated into a woman's life. Tronick (2009) writes, "A state of consciousness is a dynamically changing biopsychological

state integrating biological and psychological meaning, purposiveness, and intentions made at every level and site of operation in the organism, from physiology to awareness" (p. 94). This expansive definition of a state of consciousness further substantiated the transformative potential of distance running in nature as spiritual practice. What remained unknown from the IONS Transformation research that this study provided insight into, is how gendered differences impact the transformation of consciousness, and if there were particular barriers and/or catalysts/facilitators women experienced in transformations of consciousness.

In light of these two bodies of research, it was clear that the primary value, for this study, of Hart's (2000) juxtaposition of process and paradox as inherent within transformation, and Metzner's use of classical metaphors to describe transformational processes and experiences (1980, 2010), was to provide a qualitative description of, and possible metaphors for, the mysterious experience and process of transformation. However, I was cautious about uncritically applying these metaphors directly to women's transformative experiences of distance running in nature, as most traditional metaphors for transformation reinforce a problematic mind-body dualism by emphasizing the transformation of consciousness with little or no consideration of the body. Cohen (2000) offered the most embodied metaphor of transformation I had encountered in describing her personal journey from alienation to connection. To ensure, however, the most accurate representation of women's transformative experiences of distance running in nature, new metaphors, terms, and definitions for the transformational process were identified in the course of this study.

Embodiment

In an essay exploring her embodied journey from alienation to connection, Cohen (2000), a Zen priest wrote, "while the feeling of alienation may be one's greatest suffering, its opposite,

connection, a sense of union, or intimacy, may be one's greatest comfort and joy" (p. 35). "Reestablishing these primal, healing connections" (p. 35) with her body allowed Cohen to move from knowing her body only from the outside, "how it looked in a mirror" (p. 35), to being unable to separate her body from what she refers to as "I" (p. 35). She moved from participating in her own objectification as a body to defining her subjectivity as a living body. Becoming and living as a connected body served as the starting point for deepening connection with her yearnings and needs, her feelings, other people and relationships, the activity of daily life, and suffering, and, thus, became definitive of her spirituality. Cohen's description of moving from alienation to connection, first in body, and then beyond, serves as a powerful metaphor for what this study sought to explore of women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature from the perspectives of embodiment and spiritual development, but was not definitive of the experiences explored. Despite its power, this metaphor was derived solely from Cohen's personal journey, articulated in a first person narrative, and could not be universally applied to the embodied experiences or spiritual journeys of women in this study.

Ettling (1994) described embodiment as "the felt experience of being in one's own body or more deeply connected to one's body in a way that promotes awareness of feelings and intuitions and results in a greater sense of wholeness and integration" (p. 8). Schlitz, Vieten, and Amorok (2007) provided further explication: "Embodiment involves giving concrete form to an abstract concept (e.g., love or unity or belonging). When you embody something, you take what you've learned—the insights you've gained through your direct experience—and you give it form" (p. 155). For women, embodiment is often experienced as deeply relational, not something that can be fully known or experienced outside of relationship to others and the world, and nearly impossible to consider apart from sexuality and spirituality. However, living in a culture shaped

by Cartesian mind-body dualism, and the devaluation of the feminine and female body, often requires that women undergo a process of transformation, a healing and transcending of trauma to that relational self, to live as fully embodied beings with the capacity to develop spiritually. Given this reality, literature explicating Cartesian mind-body dualism in Western culture, the impact of this dualism including trauma and attachment disturbances on female embodiment, and theories that consider embodiment in human development were valuable for understanding women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature.

The philosophical problem of mind-body dualism in Western culture. Scholars have soundly established that women born into and living in Western patriarchal cultures influenced by Cartesian mind-body dualism may encounter external and internal barriers to becoming fully embodied adults (Bordo, 2003; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Welton, 1999). Descartes' "well known separation of the thinking mind, or subject, from the material world of things, or objects" (as cited in Abram, 1996, pp. 31-32) including the human body and nature, was based upon a "fundamental division between two independent and separate realms—that of mind, the 'thinking thing' (*res cogitans*), and that of matter, the 'extended thing' (*res extensa*)" (as cited in Capra, 2002, p. 33). In the process of sorting mind from matter, Descartes divided all of reality "into conscious subjects and mere bodies (*res extensa*)" (as cited in Bordo, 2003, p. 73). He finally established that "the whole range of human passions and moods, as well as the determinations of the will, are nothing more than the effects of the mechanical interactions of the fluid and parts of the body" (as cited in Weldon, 1999, p. 3).

Lakoff and Johnson (1999), and Damasio (1999), drawing upon data from cognitive science, argued the a priori claims upon which Descartes' dualistic worldview was built were empirically unfounded. Descartes (as cited in Lakoff & Johnson) wrongly assumed that human

reason "is the capacity of the human mind to use transcendent reason" (p. 21), that "human concepts are the concepts of transcendent reason" (p. 21), and that "human concepts therefore characterize the objective categories of mind-, brain- and body-free reality" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 21). Neural structures clearly pattern our experiences and shape human reason so that "our conceptual systems draw largely upon the commonalities of our bodies and of the environments we live in" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 6). As Abram (1996) wrote,

> The human mind is not some otherworldly essence that comes to house itself inside our physiology. Rather, it is instilled and provoked by the sensorial field itself, induced by the tensions and participations between the human body and the animate earth. The invisible shapes of smells, rhythms of cricketsong, and the movement of shadows all, in a sense, provide the subtle body of our thoughts. Our own reflections, we might say, are a part of the play of light and *its* reflections. (p. 262)

Yet, however wrong Descartes' argument was, the "psychic legacy" (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 2) of Descartes' "mechanistic view of the body" (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 7) continues to be seen and felt, often as shame (Pearce, 2002), in Western culture and sciences. Psychology has been modeled on "the positivism of the 'hard' sciences, a science wherein the psyche had itself been reified into an 'object,' a thing to be studied like any other thing in the determinate, objective world" (Abram, 1998, p. 35). Bordo (2003) observed that the central features of Cartesian dualism are markedly similar to the images and associations presented by anorectic women who experience deep conflict about their female bodies and sexuality: "the body is experienced as *alien,* as the not-self, the not-me" (p. 144), "as *confinement* and *limitation*" (p. 144), and as "the *enemy*" (p. 145). Adams (1993), Plumwood (1993), and Warren (1996) argued that women, the poor, children, animals, and nature have paid a hefty social and spiritual price for their confinement to a lower, material status. Sports and exercise are thought of as purely physical activities, whereas education and contemplation are the domains of the mind (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The valuing of the mental and spiritual over the seeming separate bodily or material also served as an experiential foundation for many of the world's religions that inform transpersonal thought (Ferrer, 2002). The transcendental-vertical-ascending "dominant zeitgeist" (p. 78) of transpersonal psychology is dualistic and most notably represented by religion's emphasis on hierarchical spiritual advancement and heightened consciousness through separation from the body, sexuality, and other senses and the mundane (Daniels, 2005). However, another "immanent-horizontal-descending position argues that transformation is to be sought through greater connection to the world of nature, to other people, the body, the feminine, or the dynamic ground of the unconscious" (Daniels, 2005, p. 27).

The impact of mind-body dualism on women's lives. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft wrote "the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilded cage, only seeks to adorn its prison" (as cited in Bordo, 2003, p. 18). She recognized in the cognitive impairment of women in her time the inherent unity of mind and body that is empirically verifiable today. She also recognized that our particular environments and experiences shape our embodiment. Although social, political, and religious realities of Western women's lives have changed since the late 18th century, Western girls and women still undergo mind-body split enculturation in societies that persist in the philosophical and institutional objectification and commoditization of women's bodies, and the enactment of this split is gendered (Bordo, 1996). By embodying masculine qualities of "detachment, self-containment, self-mastery, control" (Bordo, 1996, p. 209), women are empowered in the public sphere, yet the effects on the psychological and moral development of women and girls are often detrimental to their development of whole, authentic selves (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Gilligan, 1993; Hinshaw & Kranz, 2009; Miller, 1987; Pipher, 1994; Woodman, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1990, 1992, 1996).

Women writers have suggested that coming home to the fully inhabited female body is necessary for women to awaken spiritually in patriarchal culture (Borysenko, 1996, 1999; Harris, 1989; Kidd, 1996; Murdock, 1990; Perera, 1981; Ryan, 1998; Woodman, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1990, 1992, 1996). Kidd (1996) described how this process may be experienced and expressed.

> Waking to the sacredness of the female body will cause a woman to "enter into" her body in a new way, be at home in it, honor it, nurture it, listen to it, delight in its sensual music. She will experience her female flesh as beautiful and holy, as a vessel of the sacred. She will live from her gut and feet and hands and instincts and not entirely in her head. Such a woman conveys a formidable presence because power resides *in* her body. The bodies of such women, instead of being groomed to some external standard, are penetrated with soul quickened from the inside. (pp. 161-162)

As women experience transformation from mind-body dualism to embodiment, the preoccupation with body image, being sexually attractive and desirable to observers (or not), and food, often gives way to desire for full sensual experience, for experiencing oneself as an embodied subject connected to self, others, and the world. In listening deeply to women's experiences of the sacred, researchers have discovered that the body often serves as a doorway or vehicle to spiritual growth for women, whether through childbirth, illness, or sexuality (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991; Borysenko, 1996; Esbjörn, 2003). The permeable nature of women's bodies "shapes how we perceive reality, how we act, how we create, and what we value" (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991, p. 183).

A study of 50 women who survived childhood violence (Ryan, 1998), a disturbingly common female experience, revealed that physical and sexual violations during childhood had initially negative effects on their spirituality, but that the effects were transformed over time. While the violence against them caused many to "have had negative feelings toward religion, God and/or spirituality" (p. 96) at points in their lives, "addressing painful wounds from

childhood violence involved the development of deep, personal spirituality. Through healing work, spirituality appeared, and through spiritual seeking, healing occurred" (p. 96). Between the periods of negative feelings and healing, "most of the women went through a stage of doing whatever they could to avoid feeling the pain, during which they often experienced very little spiritual connection" (p. 96). The disembodiment experienced through abuse resulted in spiritual disconnection and the process of becoming more fully embodied was integral in their healing and spiritual growth.

These findings were consistent with a growing body of research that substantiates childhood trauma and violence may negatively impact women's embodiment (Cohen, 2000; Levine & Kline, 2007; Ryan, 1998; Scaer, 2005; Siegel, 1999; Siegel & Solomon, 2003). Similarly, early attachment disturbances may manifest in the body as "procedurally learned physical tendencies" (Ogden, 2009, p. 205) that may be healed through therapeutic and intimate relationships in which secure attachment is developed through mindfulness, movement, safe touch, and trust. This trauma and attachment research can be helpful for women and those who care for them in understanding how early experiences may impact development and the experience of embodiment. However, it may also contribute to reductionistic assumptions about women's lives and bodies, including that traumatic experiences impact all women similarly, and that the complexity of women's lives and personal narratives can be fully explained by brain function.

Writers on women's spirituality have often claimed that a journey of descent is necessary for women to embrace their female embodiment, especially those who have experienced abuse or appropriated the values of a masculine-oriented society (Bordo, 1996; Woodman, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1990, 1992). For Perera (1981), the Sumarian poem of goddess Inanna's descent into the

underworld served as a modern initiation myth for the woman who must descend into her own deepest, unconscious, feminine ground in order to claim her embodied feminine Self. In what Murdock (1990) calls the "heroine's journey" (p. 3), the woman who has rejected the feminine, her "instinctual body wisdom" (p. 24), "loses the ability to recognize her body's limitations, incurring pain and illness as the split grows between body and mind" (p. 24). Her spirituality is inhibited by this bodily denial. In order to recover what is lost, to make this journey of descent into the depths of reclaiming her split-off self, she "puts aside her fascination with the intellect and games of the cultural mind, and acquaints herself, perhaps for the first time, with *her* body, *her* emotions, *her* sexuality, *her* intuition, *her* images, *her* values, and *her* mind" (p. 90). Through the descent process a woman often remembers that her mind and body are one, and when she emerges she is prepared to embark on a path toward embodiment, of uniting body and spirit.

Esbjörn (2003) used intuitive inquiry, the research method I used in this study, to explore the relationship between body and spirit among contemporary women mystics. Her central finding emerged through interviews with 12 women mystics and multiple cycles of interpretation, and was valuable for understanding what many women experience on the other side of the initial descent, on a lifelong spiritual path. Esbjörn wrote

> Women who have devoted their lives to God, to a path of spiritual inquiry, tend to go through a process of misidentification and re-identification with the body. This process on first sight may appear to be sequential in nature, but upon further inquiry this process reveals itself as a dialectic between identification with emptiness and re-identification with form, taking place over and over, deepening throughout one's lifetime. (p. 214)

Many of the women in the study described their reluctance toward embodiment, or desire to disidentify from the body early on, in and at various points during their spiritual development. Esbjörn attributed this tendency to multiple contributing factors, including "a painful childhood,

an intuition or memory of a transcendent realm, the religious doctrine which one was immersed in, cultural messages that led to self-negation of the body, or a simple preference for spiritual realms over human realms" (2003, p. 218). While some of the women experienced disengagement from the body as freeing, others experienced it as "disconnection or dissociation from the body" (p. 220). However, as the women in Esbjörn's study each journeyed toward nondual embodiment they felt "a growing capacity for self-acceptance in relation to one's body and oneself" (p. 223) that "seemed to be a necessary feature for many women in their spiritual maturation" (p. 223). Esbjörn speculated that women "who are notoriously critical of our bodies" (p. 224) might first need "to love our bodies before we consider an authentic movement toward transcendence" (p. 224). Otherwise, women risk leaving the body behind before becoming fully embodied and, ultimately, integrated.

The most compelling aspect of Esbjörn's (2003) study was that her participants traversed beyond loving the body and early transpersonal development into what she described as a dialectic of initial disidentification from the often painful material body, reidentification with a loved body, and further nondual, disidentification with the body that may represent women's ongoing, cyclical pattern of transpersonal development. As women in her study entered into the "vibrant, fleshy, spacious existence" (p. 231) of nondual embodiment, they experienced bringing "an expanded awareness, a sense of the divine into every aspect of life including relationships; sexuality; the cells and bone and blood and breath of our bodies; parenting; and even politics" (p. 231). This nondual embodiment was an awakening and transformation of the body at a cellular level that resonated with the experience of permeability described by Anderson and Hopkins (1991). Esbjörn (2003) demonstrated that body, sexuality, and spirituality are inextricably interconnected for women and unfold coextensively as women develop transpersonally.

Women may need to recover their connectedness to the senses and alienated nature, and, through that connectedness, deepen into embodied existence (Abram, 1996; Adams, 1993). While the literature of embodiment pointed to the direction that is needed for women to become fully embodied, consideration of the means by which that process might be undertaken often focused on authentic movement, dance, and other forms of creative movement (Stromsted, 1999, 2001; Woodman, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1990, 1992, 1996) or traditional forms of spiritual practice (Daniels, 2005). Stromsted (1999, 2001) demonstrated that "Authentic Movement can assist women in reinhabiting themselves, bringing them back into contact with their instinctual wisdom, their sense of self and, in the process, teach them to value their embodied sense of knowing" (2001, p. 40). However, there were no studies that considered distance running in nature as a catalyst or facilitator of transformative experience, and thus potential ongoing, embodied spiritual practice, for women.

Psychospiritual Development

Linear, stage theories of spiritual development had not adequately addressed the body or embodiment in women's lives, when in fact the transformation from disembodiment to full embodiment may be essential for full spiritual development (Washburn 1995, 2003). Fowler's (1995, 2001) well-known stages of faith identified six developmental stages that require completion of each stage before moving closer toward a rarely achieved universalizing faith that transcends religious and cultural categories. Fowler universalized the stages of faith themselves, suggesting that all humans develop along this trajectory. Slee (2004) revisited Fowler's (1995, 2001) stage theory from the perspective of women's lived experiences through interviews with 30 women who identified as either Christian or marginally Christian. She delineated three patterns in women's faith development—alienation, awakening, and relationality—that offer

insight into the particular spiritual experiences of women influenced by Christianity. Slee's findings did not, however, address the body, embodiment, or nontraditional spiritual practice in women's development.

Wilber (2000, 2006) also presented a stage theory of development that suggested gender identity and norms are important variables in the early developmental structures but are later transcended. By the vision-logic stage of adulthood gender androgyny develops, followed by archetypal union of gender and finally transcendence beyond gender. While Wilber's consideration of gender in his developmental model suggests that women in patriarchal culture must work through barriers imposed from within and without by the gender binary system, the relationship between women's embodiment and psychospiritual development is not specifically addressed.

The clear pattern in the literature on women's psychospiritual development was that of a cycling or spiraling dynamic or process of transformation that is reflected in other transpersonal approaches to psychospiritual development, not focused on women's particular experiences, but applicable to women's development (Hart, 2000; Ruumet, 1997, 2006; Washburn, 1995, 2003). Washburn (2003) presented an especially strong case for embodiment in transpersonal development through his spiral model. On the spiral path, mental ego and experiential body coevolve through prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal stages. As the infant moves into childhood,

> the ego ceases *being* the body and becomes a mental ego that *has* a body. This differentiation is not a Cartesian dissociation of the mind from the body, for the body remains a dimension of self. The body is still part of what the ego is, but it is now an extension rather than the whole of what the ego is. (2003, p. 153)

For healthy ego development, the child must then transform from body ego to mental ego, becoming primarily a mental being, until ego development is complete and "the ego begins to experience a need to restore what has been sacrificed" (2003, p. 156).

What was significant about the spiral model for this study was the proposition that mind-body integration is fundamental to transpersonal development. The spiritually maturing adult moves through a time of disembodied mind that is necessary for transpersonal development, but then returns "home" (Washburn, 2003, p. 168) to an awakened, fleshly body in which Spirit is known. The adult entering the final stage of Ego-Ground integration returns to the unbounded physical existence with the universe experienced by the infant at a much higher, subtler level. While the spiral model is not gender specific, it offers a model of transpersonal development that becomes possible when women transcend the gendered mind-body dualism of Western culture in becoming and living as whole, embodied beings.

Unlike Fowler and Wilber, Anderson (1999, 2008) articulated awareness and knowing of embodied being, and her Body Map model provided a bridge between embodiment and human development through nuanced description of embodied growth. In this model, the increasingly embodied being moves through 10 axes and five return cycles of development, resolving trauma and completing what remains incomplete from earlier embodied states, toward greater integration and wholeness. The first five axes focus on early stages of bodily development often seen in infants, children, and adolescents. During Axis 5, *Competence Body*, an individual develops bodily "mastery, skill, and competence" (Anderson, 2008, p. 8), that becomes a doorway for further levels of transpersonal development. Later stages, *Compassion Body, Presence Body, Awareness Body, Awakening Body,* and *Enlightenment Body* (Anderson, 2008), parallel the mature, and possibly transpersonal, stages of ego-development seen in the theory of

Cook-Greuter (2005). The strength of the Body Map for my study was its specific focus on human development from the lived perspective of the body. However, acknowledging that other developmental theories articulate whole person development, Anderson does not situate bodily development within the wider context of human development nor that it must be applied concurrent with other developmental theories. Nevertheless, the Body Map provides a valuable starting point for exploring embodied development through women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature.

In sum, the literature reviewed revealed space for the exploration of women's transformative experiences while distance running in nature from the perspectives of embodiment and psychospiritual development, and the opportunity for this study to contribute to our current understandings of transformation, embodiment, and psychospiritual development. Most of the literature reviewed had explored women's experiences using qualitative methods, and I anticipated this study would add to the richness of those narratives and understandings.

Cycle 2: Developing the Preliminary Interpretive Lenses

During Cycle 2 of an intuitive inquiry, the researcher attempts to articulate her "personal values, assumptions and understanding of the research topic as preliminary interpretive lenses *prior* to data gathering" (Anderson, 2011a, p. 39). She again engages the research topic through imaginal dialogue with a set of texts directly related to the topic, seeking to illuminate and clarify the existing hermeneutical lenses with which she is knowingly approaching the study. In Cycle 4, she will return to these identified lenses to consider how her perspective has changed in light of the findings.

In August, as I was completing the proposal for this study, I decided to join the charity running team for *Girls on the Run of Northern Arizona*, the organization I serve as director of, to

train for an urban marathon with fellow women runners, the first I would run in 5 years. Still struggling with posttraumatic stress related fatigue, I intuited that the intensity of the training process would generate renewed physical and emotional strength for the dissertation journey and offer unexpected insight into the research. I was drawn to the opportunity to focus on running a challenging distance once again, to share in the community of runners, and to witness the physical, emotional, and other likely changes within me that often accompany marathon preparation.

While immersed in the literature of trauma for the proposal literature review, my own lived experience of the impact of trauma on the whole person, the long familiar pendulum-like swinging between chaos and rigidity within my own mind and body, came clearly into view and called me to approach my own body as a reflective "text" in the formation of my initial hermeneutical lenses. In recent months, I had become aware of, and been closely observing, the ways in which my own history of traumatic experience had left its residual presence on my physical movement and biorhythms, emotional reactions, and resonance with other humans, animals, landscapes, and even the elements. The dualistic tension between my childhood view of running alone as potentially dangerous for women with my adult experience of distance running in nature as deeply transformative was indicative of this traumatized self, a self I knew intimately, from the inside out.

As the training progressed, I developed a much more subtle level of attunement to energy moving through my body, the ways in which food, weather, landscape, people, and all that I engaged with or within, either served as sources of regenerative energy, or stimulated what I called "the slow leak" of depletion that could operate at nearly imperceptible levels at times. I also noticed shifts in the way my body physiologically "registered" resonance and communicated

its meaning. The sensitivity that had once been essential for survival, the somatic reactivity accompanied by fright and feelings of entrapment that becomes the mark of prey (Levine, 1997, 2010; Levine & Kline, 2007), was now remaking itself into a new, healing form of sensing, a source of quiet, perceptive embodied wisdom for receiving and interpreting the world. This transformed awareness had been bubbling within me for some time, but now the quality of my attunement was perceptively richer and more textured, freed somehow from my prior need to guard my own vulnerable permeability. As fall shifted into early winter in the mountainous, high elevation landscape where I live, I continued to run long distances on forest roads and trails alone and with my training partners, and continued to read and reflect upon my own transforming embodiment. In dialogue with many of the texts on trauma discussed earlier in this literature review, the development of my Cycle 2 hermeneutical lenses occurred in two phases.

The first phase followed a brief period of feeling stuck, during which I exerted great effort trying to rationally extract lenses from the proposal rather than allow them to emerge from a deeper knowing. I had finalized my proposal literature review a month early and had been reading and reflecting closely upon the trauma and transformation literature, with a particular attention to how processes of change take place, the movement of change.

When I gave up the effort, 17 lenses related to the substance of my topic flowed forth onto paper within 45 minutes. Weeks later, on a frosty cold October morning after an overnight rain that turned into ice on the back porch, I moved from tending to pets, to washing dishes, to finally eating a bowl of warm cereal before a planned run. My laptop computer was sitting on the kitchen counter, and as I turned it in on to get a weather update before heading outside, 9 lenses related to the research method and procedural steps presented themselves to my mind, in nearly

complete form. I spent about 25 minutes crafting them and then headed outdoors for my usual morning run with Cycle 2 feeling complete.

The substantive lenses were:

1. Distance running in nature can serve as a deeply meaningful embodied spiritual practice for women, especially those developing feminine spiritual consciousness outside of traditional religious communities and practices.
2. Running generates a sense of trust within the body that is fundamental to psychospiritual development.
3. Deepening our connection to, and relationship with, nature through the body can facilitate the healing of insecure attachment or difficulty in human relationships.
4. Female embodiment is a process of moving from alienation from the body, often experienced as numbness, or lack of awareness, care, or appreciation for the body, to becoming and living as a fully sensing, feeling, connected, relational female body.
5. In patriarchal, dualistic cultures that split mind and body, and denigrate the female body, women's experiences of being bodies are commonly impacted by interpersonal trauma and insecure attachment.
6. In Western culture, embodiment is necessary for women's psychospiritual development and may require the healing trauma or insecure attachment to overcome barriers to growth.
7. Distance running in nature cultivates women's capacity to transform and transcend barriers to embodiment, including trauma and insecure attachment, by facilitating awareness of movement, instincts, senses, and feelings.

8. Distance running in nature can potentiate transformative experiences and processes in women's lives by engaging the meditative and contemplative capacities of the body and mind.
9. Transformative experiences while running will shift a woman's relationship to her body and running from that of an "object" needing to be exercised, altered, or improved, to being a "subject" motivated by a desire to engage in a practice of running defined in spiritual terms.
10. Processes of transformation, embodiment, and psychospiritual development, occur in spiraling cycles throughout women's lifespan, and must be described with words and images like interconnection, interrelationship, and interdependence, which point to the subtle and complex relationship between and among processes.
11. Transformative experiences are those that significantly deepen or expand a woman's awareness of, and connection to, her self, others, the world, or the sacred, or are spiritual in some other life-changing way.
12. Transformative experiences arise spontaneously from within the body when the conditions of a woman's life support their arising, rather than as a result of effort or will.
13. The conditions that support the arising of transformative experience while distance running in nature include altered states of physiology and consciousness, solitude, loss, life transitions, and changes in attachment relationships.
14. Sudden and gradual transformative experiences that occur while distance running in nature must be integrated into daily life through a regular spiritual running practice to cultivate deepening embodiment and psychospiritual growth.

15. The transformative experiences and processes of embodiment and psychospiritual development explored in this study will reflect both the particularities of individual lives and patterns of commonality among women.
16. The transformative experiences of women 28 and older will likely occur before or during periods of developmental transition, and provide inner resources for navigating life transitions.
17. If a woman began running for reasons related to poor body image, exercise, or competition, a transformative experience will likely shift her motivation for running to reasons related to psychological well-being or spirituality.

The *Methodological and Procedural Lenses* were:

1. Women who experience significant resonance in response to the topic of this study, and the process of participating in writing, will feel as though they must participate for a known or unknown reason.
2. My bodily and emotional resonance with women's experiences shared during the screening interview will ensure the selection of participants who will contribute meaningful experiences to the study.
3. Writing about transformative experiences in solitude, using embodied writing, will allow women to feel their experiences more fully and deeply than if they were to describe them to me in a face-to-face interview.
4. Engaging in a three-step writing process of responding to background questions that contextualize their experience, recollecting and describing their experience, and responding to interview questions that encourage reflection on the meaning of the

experience will facilitate women's further insight into, and integration of, their experience.

5. Approaching and interpreting women's writings as sacred texts will allow me to intuit deeper levels of complexity and meaning than I might in response to an interview or reading a transcript.
6. My own regular practices of distance running in nature and dream work will prepare me to serve as a researcher "instrument," allowing me to gain intuitive insight into women's experiences.
7. Interpreting a woman's embodied writings about her experiences within the context of her life, provided by her responses to the background and interview questions, will both illuminate the particular significance of the experience for her life and point to shared patterns in women's embodiment and psychospiritual development.
8. Working with women's writings will provide further insight into, and integration of, my own transformative experiences, facilitating my own deepening embodiment and psychospiritual growth in the process of completing this study.
9. Self-reported transformation during the reported experience, following the experience, or while participating in this study confirms the validity of findings that the identified experience contributed to a women's embodiment and psychospiritual development.