

COMMUNICATING INDIRECT FEELINGS:  
AMERICAN STORIES OF INDIRECT EXPERIENCES

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

School of Communication and the Arts

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2023

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## ABSTRACT

The words people use to describe indirect human experiences and how narratives play a role are examined within qualitative research. The problem is that some people have difficulty communicating indirect experiences, and few studies have examined the issue. The purpose of this qualitative narrative research study was to examine how people who encountered indirect communication in their lived experiences can communicate the indirect experiences and messages they received. The theory guiding this study is the indirect communication theory as it relates to Communicating Indirect Feelings (CIF). The definition of CIF is how people attempt to communicate indirect feelings for shared meaning with others. The research questions explored how people who have experienced indirect experiences engage with storytelling attempts, whether or not the storyteller felt as though shared meaning occurred when indirect experiences were described through storytelling, and a metacognitive exploration of what the storyteller felt they were able to adequately communicate about their indirect experience. The results indicated people can communicate indirect experiences. Future research ideas include participant reactions, trust, and intentionality.

*Keywords:* communicating, CIF, experiences, feelings, indirect, storytelling

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### **Dedication**

First of all, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who guide me every day, get me out of trouble with my mouth, and lead me to the correct path. Without the divine wisdom that comes from having a relationship with God, nothing would be possible. Everything I do and all of who I am is because of God. The gifts of this life, the lessons, the friendships, the family, and the careers, are only here for us because God knows the intentions of our hearts. The gifts in my life of my daughters, Jalina N. Hess, Victoria Larko, and Savannah Lawson, fill my heart with the most joy, pride, and happiness that any person could ever feel. I would also like to give a special dedication to my grandson Gunnar, and hope that he may grow to appreciate the indirect experiences that make life worth living. Ironically, the feelings received from my children and grandson are indirect, much like this manuscript, but they are real, tangible experiences. This dissertation is dedicated to my family also in hopes that they may experience indirect feelings daily. The blessings God has given me are too many to mention; they will never be forgotten. Every day begins with thankfulness, throughout the day is acknowledgment, and at the end of the day is happiness that my life is so full. Thank you, my loving God.

## Acknowledgments

To begin, I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Shannon Leinen for her countless hours of review and support, giving me insight and inspiration that I never thought possible, and saving me from myself. Without her direction, this dissertation would not have been possible and I am forever grateful for her wisdom and friendship. Dr. Stan Lindsay gave me motivation and never-ending encouragement, directing me toward the scary stuff that makes for a better scholar. His inspiration mentally sent me back in time to my formative years when I was inspired by classical music, Shakespeare, and a desire to be a scholarly person. I remember loving the big, leather-bound books that held classic literary works that I thought were fascinating.

Dr. Jeff McDaniel was my rock and advisor, leading the way when I was lost and showing me how to “get this thing done.” Dr. Carol Hepburn was my source of clarity, purpose, and validation. I am grateful for her insight, her love of reading, and her willingness to review multiple drafts of my work. For the tough inspiration, I would like to thank Dr. Robert Mott. Without his wisdom and insistence, this dissertation would not have been possible. A special thank you to Dr. Sandra Halvorson for always inspiring me, making education fun, and being one of my greatest cheerleaders.

Thank you to my daughter, Jalina N. Hess, for her numerous hours of reading, and meticulousness, that helped me make sense when words became flowery. Her love and support fill my heart every day as she strives to achieve her own doctoral degree one day. And, finally, to my mother Linda J. Hess and my husband Richard Lawson, your patience, support, and willingness to let me have the time needed to complete this degree are worth so much to me and more than you will ever know. There was no end goal, no reason for attaining a doctoral degree, just a desire to become better every day and be a better person through the knowledge that comes

from this type of work. For those who think you cannot achieve this level of education, you are wrong. It is up to every person to make their own reality; they must only believe in themselves.

## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .....	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication .....	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
List of Tables .....	13
List of Figures .....	14
List of Abbreviations .....	15
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	16
Overview.....	16
Defining Indirect Communication .....	18
How Our Mental Processes Play a Role .....	19
Historical Use of Shared Meaning.....	22
Background.....	24
Problem Statement .....	27
Purpose Statement.....	28
Significance of the Study .....	28
Research Questions.....	30
Definitions.....	30
Summary .....	31
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	33
Overview.....	33
Situation to Communication Tradition .....	33

Phenomenological Tradition.....	33
Theoretical Framework.....	39
How Theories Are Used.....	40
Engaging with Shared Meaning.....	41
Theory of Indirect Communication .....	42
Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm .....	47
Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology Theory .....	50
Related Theories .....	51
Communicating Phenomenological Experiences .....	54
Related Literature.....	57
Communicating Indirect Feelings Defined.....	57
Where CIF Is Found.....	57
The Importance of Word Use .....	58
Social Relatability of Ideas .....	61
Other Considerations .....	70
Summary .....	72
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODS .....</b>	<b>73</b>
Overview.....	73
Research Method .....	73
Qualitative Research Paradigm.....	74
Research and Design.....	75
Research Questions.....	76
Setting.....	79

	10
Participants.....	79
Procedures.....	80
Conducting Interviews.....	80
Best Practices.....	81
Role of the Researcher.....	81
Data Collection.....	83
Interview Approach.....	83
Data Analysis.....	86
Coding.....	87
Trustworthiness.....	87
Credibility.....	88
Dependability and Confirmability.....	88
Transferability.....	89
Ethical Considerations.....	89
Demographic Bias.....	90
Summary.....	91
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>92</b>
Overview.....	92
Participants.....	93
Results.....	95
Qualitative Data Themes.....	96
Research Questions.....	114
Summary.....	119

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	121
Overview.....	121
Summary of Findings.....	122
The Importance of Storytelling for Expression .....	124
Discussion.....	127
Findings Related to Empirical Literature.....	127
Findings Related to Theoretical Literature .....	132
Implications.....	139
Participant Strangers .....	139
Quasi-Counseling Training.....	139
Time Lapse.....	139
Distractions .....	140
Limitations .....	141
Significant Contributions to Scholarship .....	141
Additional Artifact Explorations.....	142
Additional Contributions .....	145
Recommendations for Future Research .....	146
Areas to Study.....	147
Conclusion .....	150
REFERENCES .....	152
APPENDICES .....	181
Appendix A: IRB Approval .....	181
Appendix B: Sample Pre-screening Questionnaire.....	182

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form ..... 183

Appendix D: Sample Interview Guide..... 186

Appendix E: CIF Study Word Frequencies ..... 188

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Participant Demographics.....	95
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**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Theme Frequency per Interviewee .....	97
Figure 2. Prevalent Themes .....	99
Figure 3. Interactive Word Tree.....	101
Figure 4. Code Relation Frequency for CIF Study .....	113

### **List of Abbreviations**

Communicating Indirect Feelings (CIF)

Communication Privacy Management (CPM)

Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA)

Environment Active Responsibility Time Heuristic (EARTH)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Research Question (RQ)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A memory:

*Walking through the woods one day, an experience happened to me that can be described as indirect. Each area of the woods had a certain feeling to it. As the walk continued, a sense of coolness was presented in some areas while others seemed like a desert. Thoughts of poetic ideas rattled through my mind as expressing the ideas became a challenge. Each section of the woods explored had a different feeling, with a distinct representation of the area. There were no words to describe the experience effectively, yet an encounter was clearly inherent.*

I shared my experience within the framework of storytelling so the reader could have a mutual understanding of my experiences. However, after I thought about it further, metacognitively, the story does not seem complete as all aspects of the mysterious experience could not be acutely described. For example: while a coolness and a desert feeling were present, the words still cannot explain the experience completely. The only way to understand it would be to go to each area of the woods with another person to show them what it was like in hopes the experience could be transferred, shared, and understood. Although it would have been nice to be able to describe the feeling, it was simply indescribable. I wanted to share the experience with other people, specifically to share the intensive moment with others through narrative to feel the experience within all the senses. However, messages sent to me through the experiences could not be fully retransmitted with words. Thus, this research is the basis for the inquiry needed in Communicating Indirect Feelings (CIF).

### Overview

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver” (*English Standard Bible*, 2001, Proverbs 25:11). It is understood that many people have had an experience or feeling they

could not describe to others to the point of a complete mutual understanding at one time or another. However, the narrator, and potentially the receiver, or listener, of the story may have attained a type of indirect communication as a result. The phenomenon shows the need to analyze how to fully communicate experiences that cannot be explicitly explained to others through words or narration. Narrators use different techniques to express themselves when telling a story that is beyond the average daily experience.

There have been many studies focused on how humanity communicates and the reasons for communication inaccuracies, yet most have not focused directly on the inability to express life experiences. Carlsson (2016) centered on words and gestures as attempts at communicating indirectness through sign language. Erton (2018) evaluated semiotics as a mediator for cognition. Gross (2020) explored sentiment analysis and expression. Wharton and Strey (2019) analyzed how emotions are part of the referential process.

Studies on semiotics, word usage, emotions, and mystical encounters provide some support for the project, as do many psychological studies benefiting all adult individuals to improve communication. Bucci et al. (2016) evaluated the use of connecting emotions and words to the referential process. Giustini (2019) studied emotions and feelings based on interpreters' experiences with word limitations. Kennedy and Hill (2018) examined how numbers could leave an indirect emotional feeling of association. Shen et al. (2018) studied "aha" moments with somatic feelings to determine descriptive responses. Yaden et al. (2016) researched mystical experiences with linguistic inquiry discovering indirectness. A question remains about how individuals who have experienced indirect experiences engage with storytelling attempts. Fraser (2020) proposed the art of storytelling as a means of indirect communication. Another

consideration is whether semiotics emerge when indirect experiences are described through storytelling.

The problem is that some people have difficulty communicating indirect experiences, and few studies have examined the issue. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how people who encountered indirect communication in their lived experiences can communicate the indirect experiences and messages they received. Chapter One includes the overview, background, introduction to the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of study, research questions, definition of terms, and summary.

### **Defining Indirect Communication**

It is essential to clearly define indirect communication as a framework used to support this qualitative narrative research study. Indirect communication is a form of communication that avoids using transparency and directness to communicate (Thiselton, 2015). When individuals experience an event leaving them without words, it can be described as an indescribable moment. When feelings are intense, individuals are challenged with trying to communicate their experiences to others. Wharton and Strey (2019) examined the causes of descriptive indirectness and discovered emotional communication causes difficulty with inferential processes. It is paramount to determine how humans can communicate the indirect in a way others can comprehend personal experiences through communication to share experiences.

It is understood that difficulties in communication and ways to express ourselves can be frustrating to the sender and the receiver of a message. Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.-b) defines indirect as “happening in addition to an intended result, often in a way that is complicated or not obvious” (Definition 1). If an experience is extreme, there may be various reasons for not being able to share the experience with another person. For communication to be indirect, it means it is

not headed straight toward a given point (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a, Definition 2). In the case of storytelling, this might mean more than one ending, or narrative purpose could be assumed or encountered. Another way of understanding indirect communication is that it is different from direct communication because indirect communication is ambiguous as Kierkegaard (1813–1855/2013) noted. Thus, imaginative, surreal, or unusual experiences might cause a person to have perceived inadequacies in how they express the encounter to another person when recounting the experience.

### **How Our Mental Processes Play a Role**

Many psychological studies center on cognitive processes and how humans interact, including reasoning, felt sense anomalies, dissociation, aesthetics, and telepathy (Cernis et al., 2021; de Peyer, 2017; Jonas, 2017; Kennedy & Hill, 2018). The ways humanity processes experiences cognitively are used to determine the interactions that occur. The current literature surrounding the strategy of CIF explores areas of psychology, such as connecting words with emotions. There are also cognitive processes and thoughts that determine the words individuals are trying to articulate, which are also crucial to this study. For example, mental mapping creates understanding within our minds when searching for words to express our understanding (Lakoff, 1986). Understanding how people communicate with one another based on the thoughts and ideas within their minds is relevant to consider when reviewing indirect feelings.

Bucci et al. (2016) explained an emotional language chain connects experiences to words within the referential process. The way individuals connect words to their encounters is how an emotional language chain is carried out. When people think about encounters that are not describable, their minds go through a cognitive process in an attempt to understand the event. Some indescribability is due to feelings and sensations in language, along with a disconnect of

words such as the attempt to express feelings of aesthetics (Cernis et al., 2020; Lord, 2004; D. Zhang, 2014).

One example can be found when emotions get in the way. Emotions are part of the inferential process involving constraints on the construction of words causing challenges for the communicator (Wharton & Strey, 2019). How emotions play into perception determines perspectives. There is a cognitive reasoning process of emotions when expressing the feeling of numbers (Kennedy & Hill, 2018). The way numbers make a person feel can be based on emotions, although past experiences may play a role in the experience. Stark and Campbell (2018) also found people's thoughts may be larger than what they can express. If a past experience brings about emotions associated with numbers or anything else, there may be an inhibitive factor limiting expression.

The connection of experiences to our language is created in our minds through a referential process (Maskit, 2021). When we create connections in our thoughts to the experiences we have encountered, the referential process develops our expression. The progression of verbal communication must go through a referential process when attempting to share emotions (Bucci et al., 2016). The ways the mind produces ideas are based on the messages received, which can also be referred to as a semantic triangle. Ogden and Richards (1927) conceptualized semantic triangles to represent relationships among symbols such as words and concepts, as references they signify, and the orientation in the mind making up understood thoughts. The referential process has a multitude of research including bodies of knowledge in linguistics and psychology, but the inquiry centered on how to share with others in a way they will understand.

There appears to be a need among individuals to share experiences. Fisher (1984) described the recounting and accounting of experiences people share with one another to form meaning about their lives. When there is a phenomenon such as an intensive experience, it seems impossible to communicate regardless of what individuals have pre-established in their minds as understanding. The process of expressing emotions creates enjoyment for people to remember the experience (Kashdan et al., 2009).

On the other end of the spectrum, when intensive moments occur, such as losing a loved one, people go through a process of catharsis. Catharsis is the process of expressing emotions as a means of relief (Steinberg & Fairweather, 2012). Once the process is complete, eisegesis can occur through an evaluation of one's perceptions. Eisegesis is defined as the personal view of the interpretation of a text (Sarisky, 2019).

It is the imaginative association, which occurs psychologically with reflection, that may be lost in message transmission when individuals communicate indirect feelings to others, perhaps through storytelling. Storytelling allows the listeners to create thoughts in their minds connected to associated meanings within their imagination as a core of their existence representing reflection (Fraser, 2020). When meanings are not associated with what is experienced, dissociation occurs for people because the ideas within their minds do not correlate. Cernis et al. (2021) studied the felt sense anomaly in patients with dissociation and found an anomalous experience existed for them based on their cognitive thought processes, which were caused by various stimuli. By evaluating cognitive processes in positive and negative ways, there may be a way to understand expressions of indirect experiences better. Ultimately, dissociation is when a felt sense anomaly occurs related to internal thoughts, emotions, and one's environment

(Cernis et al., 2020). For example, it is possible individuals may not fully be able to understand someone's imaginative experience when it is retold by the narrator who experienced it.

The reaction of an “aha” moment is truly a cognitive event and illumination of the mind or way of knowing and a feeling known as a somatic experience (Shen et al., 2018). An experience when an encounter is finally realized leads to what is called an “aha” moment. Eric McLuhan (1999) refers to a way of knowing as a faith process of perception where spiritual awareness can be deciphered as our senses of hearing, touch, smell, and vision (p. xv). The spiritual awareness that brings people to the perceptions they have may be based upon the words they create. Some words trigger brain responses to mental symbols that act as tokens within the minds of individuals (Beck, 2013). These tokens may explain “aha” moments. It is important to understand the historical use of shared meaning and how linguistics, symbolic communication, and storytelling play a part in comprehension as detailed in the following section.

### **Historical Use of Shared Meaning**

The subjective understanding of cognitive ideas represents mental representation for people, which is known as shared meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The ability to explain an experience or concept in a way others can visualize or understand is within the framework of how human narrators communicate with one another when sharing stories, events, or feelings. Linguistics factor into how people visualize the indirect, and there is a perception it requires someone who is considered a deep person to enable such ability (Epstein, 2015). It could be argued it does not require a philosophical conversation or intense thought to express oneself to another person. Humans speak to each other through transmissional messages every day in normalized ways. However, humanity has a need to engage with shared meaning, or mutual understandings, when interacting with each other.

Symbolic communication represents expression for humans, which develops shared meaning (Vidales, 2021). The symbols people use to communicate create ideas in the minds of others to share the meaning. When speaking with one another, their character is present, making up how information is presented. The nature of the human species makes up the character as part of the communicative process (Vidales, 2021). This character helps develop relationships with one another based on personalities.

Rhetoric acts as a source of knowledge-building among groups based on probable, right, and true elements (Willard, 2007). Conceivably, the rhetoric individuals use may represent their thoughts based on their perceptions. Rhetoric helps people express generative metaphors to develop explanations about their memories (Austin, 2010). The rhetoric individuals use connects their personalities to the messages sent. Focusing specifically on metaphors and the rhetoric of memory provides foundational support for expressing experiences to one another. People share information rhetorically through the use of metaphors (Lakoff, 1986). This use of rhetoric and metaphoric integrations develops the shared meaning people encounter. Individuals who studied rhetoric and developed its conceptual process understood language choice was crucial for attaining understanding.

The process individuals go through to develop discourse is where an individual organizes and connects thoughts to create stories and establish meaning for others (Flower, 1994). The thought connection can happen in direct and indirect settings (Fraser, 2020). Difficulties in negotiating communication and methods of self-expression can be challenging to the sender and receiver of a message in direct communication, situationally, due to disconnects of context, vocabulary, worldview, internal and external noise, semantics, rhetoric, etcetera.

In 1949, a transmissional model of communication was presented and is known as the Shannon and Weaver communication model, which breaks down how individuals communicate messages with the goal of mutual understanding (Shannon & Weaver, 1998). In the model, communication is created and connected with a purpose through the elements of source/sender, message, channel, decoder/receiver, feedback, and noise (Umeozor, 2020). The back and forth of message transfer depends upon the understanding that occurs during messaging. However, the transfer does not specify if the messaging is direct or indirect, indicating it could be either. The background and problem associated with indirect communication are presented indicating the need for research exploration.

### **Background**

When people share stories, indirect experiences may not be holistically and thoroughly described with words, presenting a problem for communication. Kierkegaard (1846/1992) explained how utterances do not accurately describe the words people express. A storyteller, otherwise called a narrator, may be limited when having the ability to communicate all the details of the experience due to time, energy, internal and external noise, lack of relationship with the receiver, their worldview, or many other sociopsychological factors (Fraser, 2020). Due to one's humanity, when communicating intense experiences through narrative, both from the sender and receiver, the ability to encode and decode will be imperfect as Cassol et al. (2018) found with the expression of near-death experiences.

The foundational background for exploratory research poses that a problem can be found when phenomenological lived experiences deemed as intense, indirect, and perhaps extraordinary or imaginative, are expressed, and the details are lost in translation as found by Sturm (2020). This form of indirect speech as a symbol of expression presents a problem with

the representation of others' translations. Throughout their lives, humans desire to share experiences as a means of validation, but because the feeling may have been unique to them in a certain way, they wish for others to experience it too (Schwartz, 2018). This study intended to develop foundational research documenting a method, and discovering common reasons, for CIF to improve communication with others in the future naturally or innovatively through various means.

Humans use semiotics, or signs, to communicate what they cannot describe, and the use of signs and symbols takes the place of language dialectics (McNeill, 2012; O'Halloran, 2023). Because communication can sometimes be difficult, signs and symbols take the place of words. For example, the untranslatable experience of grace could be understood through semiotic means better than through words (Watson, 2016). Human vocabulary is limited when there is an experience, yet signs support the experience better. The semiotic tradition explains how meaning is created and what goes into a message to develop purpose (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009).

Various words are connected to what individuals attempt to communicate, but they still lack the substance needed for the listener to gain the same experience. Carbaugh (1999) concluded that other cultures generate unique linguistic practices, ways of feeling, and communication. Perhaps culture may mimic the same strategy or find words and a new method for CIF in present society.

While humans have preconceived ideas about what is understood, they have no known way to understand if the reiteration of their indirect experience has been truly understood through a transmissional attempt such as storytelling (Fraser, 2020; Kearney, 1994; Shannon & Weaver, 1998). There have been no studies on CIF verbally, which is where I began understanding the phenomenon. Sharing intensive experiences may be unknown to us, such as mystical, spiritual,

or divine methods. The feelings individuals encounter from these experiences present information to their minds as a form of indirect communication that is often difficult to describe. For example, Anstey (2015) explored the work of John Locke and perceptions of the mind producing an understanding; in Book 2, Chapter 8, of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke explained that human senses create an expression in the mind, which become ideas. While people may have ideas of what they understand to be accurate when decoding and absorbing the message, the attempt to express indirect feelings may have failed.

Indirect feelings are when a nonverbal experience leaves a person with a feeling of indirect communication having received a message of some sort (Evans & Evans, 2019; Lindholm, 2005). Because individuals experience frustration when they cannot describe their feelings and be understood, CIF should be analyzed through the narrative process and then by asking the storyteller to think about the narrative itself. Since there may be a frustration of not being completely understood when normal experiences occur, it could be anticipated that there may be more anxiety surrounding an expression of extraordinary, abnormal, or imaginative experiences to a receiver who is not achieving mutual understanding (Lindholm, 2005). At this time, scholars have not focused on the strategy of CIF.

The frustration with a lack of expression presents problems for people that can build anxiety. Individuals have anxiety when they cannot produce expressions of concepts, and their anxiety about knowing is a philosophical and educational problem (M. A. Peters, 2015). Understanding the concern obstructs the way people communicate, and further exploration is needed to begin improving the process. A theory and method for using specific words to incite an explanation may be vital in developing an ability for others to communicate in an improved and effective manner after experiencing the unusual.

## **Problem Statement**

The problem is that some people have difficulty communicating indirect experiences, and few studies have examined the issue. The phenomenology of indirect communication is not fully developed, although scholars acknowledge its growing opportunities for exploration (Fraser, 2020). A deeper examination into the expression people use for storytelling is critical to understand communicating indirect experiences and improving communication for people.

This study explored storytelling and used metacognition to determine how indirect communication plays a role. Metacognition is the process people use through reasoning to understand their thoughts (Rhodes, 2019). Metacognition can be considered a secondary means of overhearing someone's thoughts. Metacognition assists authors in the ability to reflect upon the selections they chose as a strategy (Flower, 1994). Storytellers must develop a plan to share their stories, and using metacognition, they may attempt to describe what is challenging to communicate.

Indirect experiences may not be fully and holistically described in words, even in storytelling. Attempting to communicate indirectly cannot be achieved with direct communication as it defeats the point of indirect messaging (Kidder, 2004). If words are lacking, one may use storytelling to make a better attempt at expression. Fisher's theory of the narrative paradigm asserted that narratives are used as a sense-making process where identification is the foundation of meaning development (Fisher, 1987). If meaning is not developed among one another during storytelling, then the experience revealed through the story is incomprehensible.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to determine how people who encountered indirect communication in their lived experiences can communicate the indirect experiences and messages they received.

The messages people receive can be in either a direct or indirect way. The goal is to determine if the communication of shared messages is understood regarding abnormal and unrelatable personal experiences. This study intended to discover patterns in how humans attempt to express their indirect feelings through storytelling.

The theory guiding the investigation is the indirect communication theory. Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm, which centers on the attempted use of narratives to tell a story, helps to understand the meaning shared in the stories of CIF. When storytellers cannot find the words to provide a narrative about an experience to another person, an indirect feeling is present. The difficulties of a situation are known as exigency (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.-a). The exigency of expressing indirect feelings can be a challenge to some people. The attempts are based on the basic human desire of people to inherently share stories, as presented by Fisher. There may be a way to better explain messages or experiences that are not easily described.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was to gain an understanding of how people can communicate the indirect experiences and messages they have personally received. Though much research concerning indirect communication centers on the phenomenology of indirect communication, there is a lack of research specifically addressing communicating indirect experiences. The benefit to researchers in the future is that indirect experiences and feelings have been initially studied as they relate to indirect communication. It is likely all individuals have

experienced an indirect communication message through an experience. For example, through overhearing, many would experience a message they received that was unusual, intense, imaginative, or abnormal. Overhearing allows individuals to avoid emotional resistance and encourages reflection (Fraser, 2020). The feeling when someone close to us dies, the feeling of comfort from being around someone we care for, and the spiritual experience one has when attending a church service are some examples of experiences that are difficult to put into words.

Since the purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how people who encountered indirect communication in their lived experiences can communicate the indirect experiences and messages they received, these findings may offer more insight to improve communication of indirect experiences. The outcome of the project will benefit most people, especially those interested in learning more about indirect experiences with feelings, but also individuals who want to narrow down the reasons why they cannot find words for their experiences. The study is significant because it is the first known investigation evaluating how people communicate indirect feelings—additionally, a new way to expand upon studies in indirect communication, storytelling, and word use. The project is considered foundational narrative research on storytelling and indirect experiences by engaging with individuals who thought about their messaging attempts through metacognition.

The analysis of this research study aimed to provide a benchmark evaluation of the possibilities of storytelling for indirect feelings. I intended to develop scholarship emerging from theory on how to document indirect feelings holistically, which may explain and create known communication methods for effective CIF. The collected narratives documented attempts to best communicate indirect experiences, followed by a conversation with the narrator about the attempts, thus providing a foundational framework for better research practices.

## Research Questions

It is essential to document that indirect experiences happen, not with efforts to make indirect communication direct but to better understand its value (Fraser, 2020). The use of senses to determine feelings can be explored through research studies. Ethnographic methods for evaluating human senses and feelings provide a basis of knowledge for scholars (Pink, 2015). With minimal studies available on the subject, the investigation assisted in proving that sharing indirect experiences through storytelling is an effective approach. Therefore, the research questions for this study are as follows:

Research Question (RQ) 1: How do those who have experienced indirect experiences engage with storytelling attempts?

RQ2: Does the storyteller feel as though a shared meaning has occurred when indirect experiences are described through storytelling?

RQ3: When thinking about their storytelling experience metacognitively, what does the storyteller feel that they were able to adequately communicate about their indirect experience?

To conduct the study, a series of qualitative questions were presented. The posed questions aimed to engage with participants who desired to describe their experiences and the feelings associated with them. Another goal was to ask the storyteller to think about his or her storytelling experience. The descriptions coming out of the initial interviews became vocabulary predictors of indirect experiences. Reiterating the definition of CIF ensured participants understood their stories and could foster a shared experience.

## Definitions

Definitions are established within studies to ensure the reader understands how the words and ideas are being used to represent the information. Definitions are essential within research

studies to enable readers clarification about the symbols and perspectives being presented (Taylor et al., 2016). Several definitions must be expressed for the reader to understand the research concepts described fully. For this research, evidence and tools were constructed based on the following definitions:

1. *Communicating Indirect Feelings (CIF)* – CIF is defined as how people attempt to communicate indirect feelings for shared meaning with others (Lawson, 2022).
2. *Indirect Communication* – That which is not direct or transparent in intentions (Thiselton, 2015).
3. *Metacognition* – The knowledge and control of one’s cognitive processes (Kaufman & Bornstein, 2018).
4. *Storyteller* – Storytellers are narrative elements such as a character or narrators (Pachucki et al., 2021).

The definitions provided ensured the readers fully understood the intention of the research and how each term is used. By clarifying the definitions, the intended descriptions presented a clear direction for the reader. Each description provided context to the study’s primary purpose and presented the information in an easily understood way.

### **Summary**

Throughout the chapter, the foundational benchmark for the investigation of CIF was presented. The theories supporting the inquiry were outlined, and the history of strategies related to the expression of indirect experiences was explored. The problem was established by detailing that some people have difficulty communicating indirect experiences, and few studies have examined the issue. The purpose of this qualitative narrative research was established to determine how people who encountered indirect communication in their lived experiences can

communicate the indirect experiences and messages they received. The definitions for the project were outlined for CIF, indirect, metacognition, and storyteller. The following chapters establish a solid structure for the foundations of expressing indirect feelings.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

In Chapter One, a problem was established indicating few studies have examined communicating indirect experiences and people have difficulty doing so. The purpose was also outlined in the qualitative narrative research in an effort to explore how people can communicate indirect experiences in a way others can comprehend personal experiences. In Chapter Two, the origins of communicating indirect feelings (CIF) are explored, and a connection to why this communication strategy holds value to humanity is included. The importance of word use must be evaluated as a cause for the inability of CIF, with a breakdown of vocabulary and semiotics as essential considerations. The theories are outlined supporting the importance for mutual understanding and efforts of inquiry. Related theories and literature connected to a holistic investigation of academic research are evaluated and included with other considerations of transmissional communication. Outlined below are a definition of CIF, where it can be found, the importance of word use, and other considerations for the inquiry.

### **Situation to Communication Tradition**

The situation of communicating indirect experiences is connected to the phenomenological communication tradition. Robert Craig (1999) outlined seven traditions of communication: (a) rhetorical, (b) semiotic, (c) phenomenological, (d) cybernetic, (e) sociopsychological, (f) sociocultural, and (g) critical. The tradition of phenomenology is outlined below along with some connections to other traditions that correlate to this research.

### **Phenomenological Tradition**

As one of Craig's (1999) seven traditions of communication theory, the phenomenological tradition centers on how individuals view and recognize the process of

communication differently. This tradition supports the fact that communication with one another about the bizarre may not be understood even if it could be verbalized sufficiently. It is a phenomenon within itself, as people do not understand experiences the same way. The examination of the patterns that communicators experience in their indirect feelings and experiences may reveal answers to better understand the phenomenon, especially the ability to express indirect communication messages which have been experienced or revealed introspectively.

Husserl (1990) detailed phenomenology as a method of critiquing cognition to study its essence. Understanding the essence behind cognitive thoughts, when searching for a means to express indirect experiences, helps people better attain how someone goes about describing their encounter. The perceptions people have about the happenings in their lives determine the language they use. Merleau-Ponty (2012) took a unique approach to phenomenology by exploring how it affects perception. The connection of perception as a phenomenology suggests language is derived from sensations that help us to understand our world. The sensations we interact with when forming expression help us to verbalize what we have experienced.

Deetz's (1973) approach to phenomenology was centered on linguistics and social interaction where the nature of language and meaning relate. His perspective suggested that the success of language was based on a good transmission of the message. When people try to share what they have encountered, the way the message is relayed makes all the difference for the listener to know what the experience was like. If people can express themselves fully with a meaningful expression that uses sensory descriptors and is relatable to others, there may be a way to communicate indirect feelings.

The phenomenological tradition has to do with dialogue and how we can understand someone's reality. Phenomenological groups are often studied qualitatively because the method studies a small number of people in efforts to best understand and document their rhetoric and lens (Denscombe, 2007). Understanding why individuals have indirect feelings is an area of exploration requiring further review and was investigated by me in this study.

### ***Symbols for Phenomenological Experiences***

It is common for human beings to develop symbolic creations as a means of descriptive purposes for phenomenological experiences. An example can be found in colors and music traditionally used in funeral rituals to represent meaningful representations, such as the color white for purity, and the music a deceased loved-one enjoyed (Davis & Breede, 2018). Humans are symbol-using entities relying on connections within their minds to better understand their world and surroundings. J. Peters (1989) reviewed Locke's (1690) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and found that words rely on and feed upon ideas of the mind with connections as objects the mind creates before creating signs. Simply put, the relationship of words in human culture feeds into the senses and emotions, creating symbols.

Socratic *maieutics* emphasizes the importance of gathering what is already understood instead of diffusion of understanding externally (Castañer et al., 2013). *Maieutics* is the Socratic method of thinking where a teacher asks a question, prompting the pupil to discover the answer through known truths (Mitariu, 2012). The known truths we have can represent our understanding of truth or even humanity's own social construction of reality. For example, people have knowledge connecting their interests and environment to expression (Kuhn & Finger, 2021).

When individuals attempt CIF, they gather information based on their known truths, which they collect to potentially exchange with others. Using the Socratic method to discover truths through a question-and-answer process with interviewees may reveal a basis for indirect feelings. The discussion method of maieutics helps develop ideas by asking sets of questions that may end in the discovery of valuable strategies to improve all types of communication (Mitariu, 2012). For example, questions asked in a survey to examine ways to best communicate for understanding may hold clues to the meanings needed to understand CIF better.

The Socratic method of maieutics is an instructional tool that enriches critical thinking skills (Boudana & Segey, 2017). Therefore, it could be hypothesized that people could enhance their critical thinking abilities. Individuals may also have an opportunity through this method to improve their inability to fully describe their thoughts or experiences holistically to others. Drozdek (2016) evaluated Augustine's development of elenctic questioning and the study of the Socratic method of maieutics, clarifying Augustine had combined the ideas as a new method of questioning. While not a preferred method for this study but relevant, Kvale (2006) analyzed questioning methods, including the practice of active confrontational interviews where the inspiration of Socrates was investigated.

J. D. Peters (1989) explained Locke's language as peripheral rational signs when connected to personal conceptions creating the ways people share thoughts. The creations humans make in their minds develop how they communicate their experiences. This idea of connecting human thoughts through symbols to express experiences shows promise for further evaluation. The sign language use of gestures, with no language representation, may assist in exploring other sources besides rhetoric as a means of communicating, while exploring Kierkegaard's phenomenology of spirit (Carlsson, 2016). There may be a multitude of ways to

communicate indirect feelings yet to be discovered using various communicative methods not previously analyzed.

### ***Expression Creates Meaning***

The connection between vocabulary used in rhetoric and how humans communicate was explored through this qualitative narrative research study. Craig (1999) discovered the diffusion of meaning happens with indescribable communication when semiotics is used as he reviewed J. D. Peters' work. However, semiotics may not be to blame for the meanings individuals develop with the words they use in messaging. Craig (1999) found connections between semiotics and rhetoric when Locke explained he underscored communication as insignificant to rhetoric, speech, and discourse. He also discovered that authentic communication occurs when direct communication with others is not mediated.

As Craig's (1999) review of J. D. Peters' work points out, the transmission of meaning results from expression through the use of signs and symbols; however, phenomenology does not rely on them. Using symbols to express vague concepts presents an area of consideration, as does indirect communication, yet the focus on phenomenology appears more prevalent. Craig (1999) also found relations can be made between semiotics and rhetoric in Locke's work, emphasizing communication as marginal to discourse, rhetoric, and speech. There may be a similar variable through the use of semiotics with the conversations people have during times of indirect experiences.

The comprehension of symbols and signs is present in all forms of ability and function within communication among humans to ensure successful messaging occurs (Erton, 2018). It may be a habit for human beings to develop symbolic ideas to describe their encounters. As part of this investigation, a review of semiotics and sign creation within some of the questions of this

study helped evaluate how individuals communicate with one another to discover the meaning behind what they are trying to say. Therefore, it could be hypothesized qualitative research regarding CIF may continue to affirm people hold truths within their own understanding that simply cannot be revealed.

After reviewing Locke's work, an evaluation by J. D. Peters (1989) revealed words depend upon and nourish ideas. Words are related to emotions and senses within human culture. Humans develop meaning by using their senses and further create connections to ideas and words (J. D. Peters, 1989). It is the nature of humans to use symbols based on the connections in the mind to develop an understanding of surroundings and the environment when attempting to express feelings. Thus, using questions focused on senses and emotions must be included in qualitative research exploring indirect communication.

If ideas create signs, people may benefit from examples expanding their thoughts. J. D. Peters (1989) clarified Locke's language as a source of underlying logical signs when connected to personal ideas developing the methods used to express thoughts. By putting ideas in people's minds, an expansion of thought is assumed to occur, providing a deeper exploration of thought and the ability to describe. Again, humans often have difficulty expressing their thoughts when attempting to explain what is in their minds, including thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Anstey (2015) also discovered vision is the foundation for vocabulary to symbolize thoughts, the development of ideas, and the acknowledgment of comparison within thoughts from Locke's work. Perception creates the thoughts and ideas coming from the souls, vision, and consciousness of their surroundings. For example, observing people listen to music or dance, they may experience intensive experiences, which could be challenging to describe.

Borovica (2019) conducted a study with young women and instructed them to play around and dance while allowing free movement, thoughts, sensations, and feelings to gather information about the essence of being a woman. Borovica concluded there was an area for further evaluation by inducing bodies to think, feel, and act in new ways, rousing social sensory, ephemeral, and intangible elements. Many participants had feelings they could not explain after encountering the experience (Borovica, 2019). Humans want to have the ability to explain what they experience to one another, and it is their nature to do so, but when communication fails, there is a need to describe which cannot be fulfilled.

The descriptive word *nostalgia* signifies indescribable and nostalgic feelings for individuals who pretended certain situations existed (Li et al., 2019). By evaluating nostalgic feelings about experiences, the discovery of what individuals are doing to communicate indirect feelings might be further explored. The way humans use words and expressions relies on semiotics to express what is in their minds.

There is a tendency for humans to express things by using semiotics and words in their articulation (De Luca Picione et al., 2019). A review of rhetoric and semiotics examines the ways humans connect symbols to words and expressions. Because indirect communication has a lens describing a situation to the self, it fits perfectly within the phenomenological tradition. This tradition offers a means for individuals to share stories and develop shared meaning with the use of signs to express the phenomenology of indirect communication.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The most significant theories relevant to this project include indirect communication theory (1800s), Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm, and phenomenology theory (1900). The theories support the strategies presented within this study of communicating indirect experiences

to others through storytelling techniques. To have a theory means there is an idea that a concept is true. The following section dives into how theory is applied, followed by the relevant theories of this study.

### **How Theories Are Used**

Theories are known as concepts or ideas overall, expressing a human experience with a set of propositions about a subject (Chaffee, 2014). To have a theory about something is to have an idea of what it is, what it means, and how to explain it. Theories are a general description of what a scholar intends to discover within a project (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Regardless of the exact definition of theories, the basic idea is a hypothesis someone has as a thought; they have an idea of what it is but do not know the answer until they have researched it. Humans use theories to give meaning and find patterns to analyze what they are curious about. People use theories to lead and provide insight into what is seen in the world around them (Costley, 2006).

Some authors contend theory is the foundation for better communication because it sheds new insight, clarifies information through a new lens, and integrates communication (Brier, 2013; Dainton & Zelle, 2017; Heath & Bryant, 2013). However, Craig (1999) found the use of theory was not a good source for communicating all parts of communication and compared students searching for complexity and concluding with vague theories to comprehend. When exploring ideas related to theory, it is essential to remember the foundations for theory development are sometimes stereotypical and may not hold all truth for all cases; it is the repeated patterns that make them significant, but there are also a collection of outliers providing significance.

How theories are integrated into messaging may provide an area of understanding for their usage and some of the deficiencies associated with their use, providing insight into attempts

for mutual understanding efforts within communication strategies. Vague theories and metaphors represent elusive concepts that are difficult to describe. Although Paddock (2015) concluded metaphors were how St. Teresa of Avila expressed important symbolic references to intensify their importance, the metaphors serve as a source of indirect communication to relay messages to people creating shared meaning.

### **Engaging with Shared Meaning**

There are many encounters in life where meaning is developed based on a person's view of the world and how they interpret encounters. A worldview can be defined as a semiotic structure of narrative signs that impact interpreting, reasoning, and knowing (Naugle, 2002). The social construction of reality depends upon a person's worldview as they attempt to describe what they experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The negotiation of meaning could be discovered through interpretation, negotiation, and reflection to determine how meaning is created for people (Flower, 1994). To gain shared meaning, it is essential to have a level of negotiation through conversation.

Once agreeance occurs, there is a moment of reflection as the listener contemplates the conversation (Flower, 1994). How the two individuals interact determines the experience and how they relate to one another. This reflection is all part of the growth of mutual identification (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This relational encounter can develop an indescribable yet comprehensible shared experience for each person. How people communicate indirectly creates meaning through connections to individual thoughts that also help people to change (Fraser, 2020). For example, if a person attempts to interact with someone who speaks a different language, there are typically feelings of difficulty for the person trying to communicate with

them. This experience is an excellent example of how indescribable feelings can be communicated yet not verbally expressed, resulting in an indirect experience.

As shown, several theories could relate to the effort one might make to have a communication exchange for understanding, particularly when communicating an indirect experience and the feeling surrounding it. However, it could be argued none have directly focused on creating a strategy to communicate indirect feelings specifically when an experience occurs for a person who desires to share their sensory experience. The following theories represent a basis for the evaluation of CIF. Through each theory presented, concepts are found related to a need for an emerging research study on why individuals need to be better understood when they have had an imaginative encounter they wish to share with others. The outputs of the theories are the support units holding the analytic concepts needed to explore how people communicate indirect feelings for shared meaning.

### **Theory of Indirect Communication**

Aumann (2008) argued that indirect communication represents how people use clever rhetorical tools such as pseudonymity, deception, humor, and fictional narratives. Various methods can be used to tell a story, and they do not have to be direct. One method for expressing a message through indirect communication is to indirectly present the information in a way individuals can relate to in a meaningful way, such as an analogy, parable, or relatable comparison. Parables allow listeners to discover themselves like a mirror through their interpretations of the story (Hamer, 2018)

Providing relevant stories to capture the attention of the listener is the basis of indirect communication (Fraser, 2020). Using pseudonyms was an effective means for Kierkegaard to send a message indirectly without using his own name. According to Heaton (2022), using

pseudonyms allows authors to be removed so individuals are better able to attain the messages being presented. Kierkegaard's methods of indirect communication included deception, humor, and fictional narratives (Aumann, 2019; Strawser, 1993; Welz, 2017).

A tool used in indirect communication is the storytelling tactic of parables introduced as a source of indirect communication to gain the listener's attention (Hamer, 2018). During the days of Jesus Christ, Jesus used parables to share stories. Parables allow listeners to discover themselves like a mirror through their interpretations of the story (Hamer, 2018). Inadvertently influencing others by sharing narrative stories with indirect communication can help people understand messages from a sender in a better way. Kierkegaard also communicated through the use of stories and parables to express messages indirectly (Helms, 2018). The parallel between the parables Jesus taught and indirect communication garnering people's attention was a focal point for Kierkegaard.

Another way messages are transmitted indirectly can be found through the use of analogies (Cassarett et al., 2012; Kuhn & Finger, 2021; D. Peters et al., 2020; Ramachandran, 2011; Sevinc Kayihan et al., 2018). An example of an analogy was presented by Kuhn and Finger (2021) relating a blind man's use of a walking stick that transmits a message to his brain as a circuit would to a computer. Analogies are a way to communicate indirect messages to people. The origins of indirect communication can be traced back to Kierkegaard in the early 1800s as outlined in the following sections. Indirect methods of communication can sometimes be related to a direct experience with nature that affects attitudes and behaviors (Duerden & Witt, 2010). Much like my experience when walking in the woods, a direct experience left them with an indirect message.

### ***The Beginnings of Indirect Communication***

Indirect communication is commonly associated with Søren Kierkegaard, a writer who lived from 1813 to 1855 (Aumann, 2019; Kidder, 2004; Turnbull, 2009). The beginnings of indirect communication are connected to other philosophers that studied human thought. Kierkegaard explored the Christian faith and critiqued Hegel and other German thinkers (Aumann, 2019; Hefner, 2018; Kidder, 2004; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.-b). Kierkegaard is often connected to indirect communication for several reasons. He was an influential political philosopher at the time and was speaking up against the church which is why he is often not regarded as a spiritual person (Roberts, 2006; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.-b; Strawser, 1993). However, Kierkegaard directed attention toward the spiritual tendencies of individuals to connect themselves with Christianity (Fraser, 2020). Some individuals relate Christianity to the indirect experiences in their lives as a source of meaning, much like Jesus' use of parables (Thiselton, 2015).

### ***Overhearing Indirect Communication***

Kierkegaard's work with indirect communication presented a different way to view messaging. Kierkegaard showed indirect communication could set the receiver of a message free from the boundaries of communication (Welz, 2017). The indirect nature of messages can be understood easier through indirect communication. Indirect communication can be achieved through overhearing, thus creating meaning for the listener. According to Parmelee (2015), the definition of overhearing is "when we don't really believe what someone says until we see his or her actions, which leads us to inwardness" (p. 79). This is a good illustration of how some messages are more powerful when they are overheard and an example of the inwardness process people go through to determine the indirect message they received.

Things are more powerful when overheard because they avoid emotional challenges to a message and create space between messages or communicators and the listener (Fraser, 2020). Overhearing can trigger a similarity or former experience for the recipient. The reason indirectness makes such an impact on people is because it has an existential experience for someone, which is a form of indirect communication (Castle & Jones-Imhotep, 2022; McBride, 2022). When a person listens to a message, it can touch their emotions through relatability. Existentialism can be considered a philosophy of individualistic meaning for humans (Flynn, 2006). A person trying to explain through storytelling and narratives presents information for someone else who overhears the message through indirect communication, developing an experience for them and creating shared meaning (Aumann, 2019; Hefner, 2018; Kidder, 2004). Sometimes people can tell a story and the listener retains a unique message that creates meaning for them. Indirect communication allows a message sender to avoid declaring their intent within a message (Welz, 2017). However, this intent is subject to interpretation by the listener.

### ***Indirect Experiences and the Imagination***

In Lewis's (1970) *Meditation in a Toolshed*, he implicitly explained that indirect experiences are things that sneak up on you. Lewis shared that truth is found in stories and human imagination (Reeder, 2009). For example, a person may share a story about an event that was serious but the listener could find it funny. Lewis understood human minds could be creative and resourceful, revealing opportunities within characters, engagement, and seemingly unrelated events (Fraser, 2020; McGrath, 2013; Sutherland, 2014). Sometimes when people hear something that is too painful to experience listening to, they find a way of making it humorous to accept the information.

Lewis explained how direct communication is considered within the light and peripheral communication is along the light or indirect (Fraser, 2020). Peripheral communication is much like the parable that Jesus told about men stoning a woman who had sinned. Instead of condemning them, he raised them to the bigger picture by saying, "If any one of you has not sinned then cast the first stone" (*New American Standard Bible*, 1971/1995, John 8:7). The representation of casting a stone for sin may represent a semiotic meaning to people. Indirect communication through a semiotic lens may create a space of mindfulness or self-reflection of the senses (Bucci et al., 2016; De Luca Picione et al., 2019; Erton, 2018). The semiotic connection of something new can create self-reflection within people.

People understand the elements of truth and overhear the shared meaning between Jesus's parable and their own because Jesus was human and spiritual within the same being (*New American Standard Bible*, 1971/1995, 1 Timothy 2:5). Chesterton explained this phenomenon in *Fancies vs. Fads* (1923), and stated men could not relate to common-sensical concepts and would believe in anything (Chesterton, 2011). Thus, it is implied humanity is willing to believe in creativity, signs, and indirect experiences.

An indirect experience is generally encountered by one person through their own being such as in their self-thought, imagination, or subconscious (Bucci et al., 2016; Fraser, 2020; Helms, 2018). When they share it with someone else, it takes on a form of direct communication distorting it; the story's meaning may be decoded upon reflection based on the receiver's interpretation, much like a child's game of playing telephone where the message gets distorted along the way.

Stories are a handy tool for contemplation where the imagination fills in the blanks for individuals, resulting in revelations (Fraser, 2020). This development of internal catharsis can be

identified as retrospective. When individuals are able to share their stories of intense experiences with others, there is a feeling of catharsis that is created by being able to release the information in retrospect (Fowler-Watt, 2020). An example of this would be sharing a story about losing a loved one in a car accident, and as the story is relayed to another person there is a feeling of relief by letting the emotions out. This type of experience may be considered indirect.

Indirect communication could be a way for people to engage with indirect experiences best because it uses imaginative tools requiring overhearing to engage with the topic. Storytelling about emotional events can create indirect communication by stimulating the imagination, which can cause a change in emotions (Welsh, 2009). Storytelling creates a space for meaning and understanding by not being direct in communication so individuals can develop meaning within their thoughts. The stories shared in this research study provided an outlet for individuals to develop shared meaning from the indirect communication they have experienced. By sharing the information within interviews, the work of Kierkegaard, Fraser, and others is directly explored by evaluating the encounters people have had through an outlet of storytelling.

### **Fisher's Narrative Paradigm**

The narrative paradigm, as presented by Fisher, is one theory attempting to explain why humans share stories (Stache, 2017). The stories people share with others develop relationships forming common bonds between people. It is essential to understand backgrounds such as storytelling and communication methods which may not be obvious (Hadzigeorgiou, 2016). When individuals listen to someone share a story about the encounters they have experienced, it presents a message to the receiver based on the narrative of the person expressing the story.

Each person may present information in different ways when sending a message. Narrative storytelling could provide an educational opportunity as an instrument for thinking

(Hadzigeorgiou, 2016). If individuals can share a story with someone else and the same effects can be experienced from the encounter, it may be possible to connect better to foster relationships and support one another when navigating through life. The narrative paradigm backs the study by proposing that storytelling could be a means of expression when indirect experiences exist.

Relationships are fostered by shared stories, but a relatable nature through narratives helps to encourage thought and listening. Murrar and Brauer (2019) studied this concept and discovered narratives could lower resistance and develop positivity among people. As Fisher proposed, the simple idea of sharing a story with someone helped support a finding within the field of communication that otherwise may not have been found. Stories build bonds and connections and encourage continued engagements and ponderings.

Narrative research can be considered an analysis of storytelling. The purpose of a narrative evaluation is to investigate how the narrative plays into an understanding of the world in which humans live. Narrative research provides stories for others to relate to in indefinable yet valuable ways for others (Bowman, 2006). Some narrative studies can be found in art, music, feelings, experiences, and divine interaction. Aumann (2019) considered the indirectness of art to be a virtue. Individuals have expressed having indirect experiences from listening to particular songs that create emotions. Fraser (2020) explored many areas of discovery ranging from indirect communication to storytelling techniques and included a review of Kierkegaard, Socratic methods, Aristotle and nature, imagination, Fisher's narrative paradigm, realism, illusion, reason, art, enlightenment, and interpretation.

### *Storytelling Humans*

The narrative paradigm is centered on the nature of humans to narrate stories to others as a natural human trait (Fisher, 1987). This theory proposes individuals have an innate disposition to share stories. The stories people share are based on reason, awareness, and experience. Fisher (1985) argued people are naturally inclined to share stories for coherence and fidelity to connect with others' thoughts.

In 1985 Fisher presented an article clarifying more about the narrative paradigm as he described the similarity to William James' work indicating the narrative paradigm supports the presumption that humans naturally develop a confirmation for new thoughts. As people share stories, they create unique ideas which may not have previously been in their thoughts. The expression of stories to one another develops a way to share ideas and thoughts through a means related to one another.

Many critics have come about to challenge the work of Fisher, yet his work has unquestionable value for communication. McClure (2020) argued Fisher capitalized upon Kenneth Burke's concept of identification by centering narrative rationality within identification as symbolic wisdom. Although Fisher may have benefited from Burke's work, it is more important to show the relevance of how communication theorists' work connects and expands the body of knowledge versus pointing out failures in another's work. Fisher believed humans are fundamentally disposed to storytelling and developed a case reinforcing his assertions through the narrative paradigm. His work was relevant and only expanded upon the work of Burke, as many scholars do.

It is the nature of humans to share stories as a source of expression. Warnick (1987) stated the narrative paradigm proposes storytelling results from effective communication to share

with others to understand life. Fisher's work developed a platform for multiple authors to expand the concept throughout their work. The narrative paradigm construct demonstrates how sharing a narrative to communicate indirect feelings creates significance for communication with a meaningful intent to share an encounter with a story.

### **Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology Theory**

Edmund Husserl, an early 1900s philosopher, originated the phenomenology theory. According to Husserl (1990), phenomenology is "the method of the critique of cognition" (p. 1). The phenomenology theory details how experiences are creations of our thoughts, ideas, and concepts within the mind of the person as pre-created structures (Husserl, 1990). One example of this would be an illusionary oasis in the desert having an abundance of cool, clean water, representing a reality to the experiencer.

### ***Psychologism versus Phenomena***

The concept of psychologism assumes logic is applied or a simple normal state of being for individuals (Byrne, 2020). Phenomena are often explained and discovered through academic scholarship and report truths through patterns and observations. A focus on psychologism does not support the abstractness of phenomenology due to its logical nature. Phenomenology represents universal structures of experience (Husserl, 1982). For example, a hug is a representation of positive reinforcement as a universal structure of experience whereas the logic of giving a hug may seem to be a simple gesture.

Phenomenology supports this study as it represents the strategy of intensive experiences and the attempt to describe them as a communication phenomenon. Phenomenology is concerned with the lived experience of a phenomenon (Cypress, 2018). The experience could either be positive or negative depending upon the perception of the receiver. That which cannot be

expressed in words is a phenomenon because it is challenging to share, especially if individuals have different meanings for the experience being described.

This study provided an outlet for the expression of the phenomena people have experienced in their lives with indirect communication. The method of interviews enabled individuals to have a venue to share their stories with others for shared meaning and understanding. The phenomenology of indirect experiences, combined with an indirect expression, provides an avenue for further understanding of the form of communication.

### **Related Theories**

The subject of indirect communication is related to several other areas of communication scholarship. Albert Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory asserts that individuals learn by direct experience and by watching what others do. When people listen to the stories of others' experiences, they may learn what the encounter was like. The social cognitive theory explains the agency of interaction for an affective personal experience (Bandura, 1989). By expressing themselves through various means, individuals may share meaning through the stories told and learned from each other.

There is also a theory that can be used as a source of analysis and evaluation known as the theory of naturalizing culture. Donal Carbaugh (2015) developed the concept of naturalizing culture to explain how language forms meanings concerning the natural environment. The meanings understood from interactions with nature present a form of indirect communication to the experiencer. Carbaugh developed five criteria to assist humans with listening to nature with the acronym EARTH symbolizing (a) environment, (b) active, (c) responsibility, (d) time, and (e) heuristic. Environment relates to having a connection between words and the world that are worthy of attention. Active means deliberately connecting to and being receptive to the earth and

humans. Responsibility means focusing on goodness, with nature representing that which is good. Time is necessary to understand what environments are saying, enabling responsibility of action towards nature. Heuristic explorations represent what is required to conceive and understand communication as it intercedes in the relationship between places on earth and humans to produce new methods to understand the connection. The five criteria are necessary to better understand indirect experiences with nature. EARTH represents the indirect communication and feelings we encounter with our environment as a means of understanding (Carbaugh, 2007; Welsh, 2009; X. Zhang, 2020).

Carbaugh also developed cultural discourse analysis (CuDA) as a method for understanding culture and nature. CuDA was designed to clarify the procedure of understanding nature and human society. The inclusion of descriptive, theoretical, interpretive, critical, and comparative analyses could be combined, beginning with the resolve to concentrate on a specific communication practice (Scollo, 2011). Although EARTH and CuDA are a close representation of the strategy of indirect communication, they lack a full explanation of the impact of indirect communication strategies. While Carbaugh's work is helpful to this work, some elements need further exploration.

Another theory correlated to the idea of indirect communication as a means of describing feelings associated with experiences is "the Concept" by Hegel, which asserts that conceptual realism is the explanation of metaphysical presumptions for candid accounts as a means of describing experiences (Knappik, 2016). With this foundational research present, it could be hypothesized that including psychological theories is relevant and supports the inquiry, although it may not provide conclusive support. If studied extensively, it could also be assumed cognitive processes that occur when attempting to communicate indirect feelings may reveal psychological

implications, which may call for future examination. Hegel's "Concept" of reason supports the use of communication as an essential component to determining meaning for people (Hegel, 2019; Knappik, 2016; X. Zhang, 2020).

Transactional communication is where people concurrently send and receive messages with a reciprocal nature that influences each other (Du Pré & Foster, 2015). When stories are communicated, individuals have a given understanding of what they are comprehending from the other person. The sender of a message tries their best to relay what they have experienced to the next person, but sometimes the words are fleeting. As Whitman expressed in *Song of Myself*, he did not talk like others noting the beginning and the end (Whitman, 2015). When humans interact with one another, they attempt to relate to what is being expressed, even though some meaning is lost within the transactional process.

It is possible the indirect communication of stories could be problematic for some individuals and can happen to anyone who cannot express words for what they have encountered. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that directly communicating with one another through stories may be a stumbling block for many because there could possibly be no words to convey a story in a way for shared meaning to exist, enhancing a potential problem for the goals of a narrator and for the field of communication. Indirect communication may present difficulties in finding words to express ontological encounters in a meaningful way with others (Beck, 2013; Kessler, 2019; Turnbull, 2009; Welsh, 2009). Because indirect experiences are not exclusive to race or religion, they might be situationally considered ontological experiences.

The core of the theory presented on indirect communication and the efforts to create mutual understandings about the feelings created during the experiences of others is based on emerging academic research. This research, which highlights keywords and phrases as variables

to better communicate with each other, resembles linguistics and explores spiritual methods and sensory concepts. The following sections explore each variable in the inquiry of indirect communication and present areas of discovery for this qualitative investigation. Sharing emotional situations requires a symbolic system, and linguistic means of communication for indirect experiences may play a role (Bucci et al., 2016; Welsh, 2009). Words are used as descriptive signs for people, creating a space to investigate improving storytelling and narrative means of communication. The results unearth the phenomenology behind indirect communication through the findings of prior researchers.

### **Communicating Phenomenological Experiences**

It is understood that indirect communication experiences are phenomenological, and the revelations of the communication experience can often be pinpointed in time (Aumann, 2008). Because of this, it is essential to look at the technical lens of rhetoric and storytelling of individuals who attempt to share their overheard retrospectives. Centuries of theory have looked at rhetoric and philosophy as they play into each other identifying communicative patterns and the significance of the disciplines (Castañer et al., 2013; Li et al., 2019; Schwartz, 2018; Willard, 2007). The theoretical breakdown in this section will reveal how words convey meaning to ideas of the mind. Keywords and phrases are the elements needed for the inquiry of communicating indirect experiences to begin research properly.

The words and phrases include words (both simple and descriptive), linguistic, vocabulary (verbal communication), rhetoric, communicate, sign language, speaking, nostalgia, soul, divine, mystical, indescribable, perception, way of knowing, thought, feelings, senses, sensory, ideas, mind, mindfulness, mind-wandering, maieutics, semiotic, and signs. Much of people's communication methods and human ways of being are in existence because of words

and phrases. When individuals break down the words to understand the research behind them, they find descriptive clues about how to communicate indirect feelings. The following critical review consolidates the ideas into the new phenomenology for indirect communication.

### *Vocabulary for Communicating Experiences*

Current scholarship on words to communicate with one another finds particular words with vague meanings are used to describe indirect feelings. As is the nature of humans, they attempt to use words to explain things. Li et al. (2019) found nostalgia to be a descriptor for indescribable and bittersweet feelings when participants visualize situations. The word bittersweet may also cultivate further inquiry. A review of nostalgic feelings concerning bittersweet experiences may prove valuable research for indirect communication, as would an exploration of sign and symbol use through rhetoric.

Rhetoric results from what is considered valid when searching for truth during communication (Willard, 2007). Ways of knowing become a form of semiotic, or sign, people understand to be known truths. Landscapes hold meaning as a rhetorical sign (Willard, 2007). This expression of thought is similar to how individuals attempt to find significance yet have difficulty with communicating indirect experiences. Finding meaning was studied by Markos and Faltynek (2011), as they explained how humans in a cultural system should use the approach of linguistic comparison with a mixture of the hermeneutic process of meaning-mining. This connection with others through shared meaning is integral to the communication process.

Carbaugh (1999) described some revelations about cultural communication expressing linguistic references through a translation of sorts using the channel of words such as “talk to a tree” after experiencing the practice of “listening” with the Blackfeet people. The author concluded that other cultures generate unique linguistic practices, ways of feeling, and

communication. The words used make up how each culture understands one another but may not always be understood the same way. Drożdżowicz (2016) examined words having empty meanings, such as “relatively” and “but,” arguing the words had empty meanings. Drożdżowicz effectively defined descriptive indirect experiences and explored specific terms holding little meaning, providing substance to this qualitative narrative research.

When communicating with another person, nonverbal messages sometimes lack meaning, depending upon the source. Schwartz (2018) explored painting as a nonverbal communication process allowing feelings to be expressed. Various sources, such as music, art, and facial expressions, can be used to send a message to another person, which can all be considered forms of nonverbal communication. Another indirect message source in nonverbal communication can be seen during public speaking. Anxiety can be displayed in nonverbal communication through nose rubs and high-pitched sounds from individuals who are experiencing fear of public speaking (Halvorson, 2009). A focus group evaluating the meanings of simple words and nonverbal messaging sources may present clues for indirect communication expression.

The way humans interact requires understanding to be effective, but a spiritual experience or mystical encounter may leave a person unable to develop expression in a way that can be understood. Paddock (2015) noted that St. Teresa of Avila repeatedly explained she was incapable of expressing her experiences through the language and speech of humans. When words are inadequate to explain mystical experiences, individuals may find it impossible to accurately describe an indirect feeling. A case study of spiritual individuals who express they have experienced a mysterious event may present an investigative area of development for the study of CIF.

## **Related Literature**

The related literature for this project covers areas such as semiotics, vocabulary, ideas of the mind, sensory expression, and mystery. To properly understand the concept of how humans communicate their indirect feelings, comprehending how individuals share stories to develop shared meaning is essential. This literature review will break down the humanistic reasons why and repeated patterns of the efforts because they are indirect to holistically understand what happened in someone's experience. It is difficult to know what someone else's experience felt like, smelled like, or any other senses they experienced. Scott and Uncles (2018) shared the same idea in consumer research when sensory experiences were described with sights, smells, textures, movements, and sounds. The senses people experience represent an indirect message for the receiver, which can create a feeling. The following section outlines some of the significance of exploring indirect feelings.

### **Communicating Indirect Feelings Defined**

Communicating indirect feelings (CIF) is a term coined for this research project. As discussed in Chapter One and will be further discussed in the following sections, CIF is a phenomenon having to do with finding evidence of individuals attempting to communicate their story following an indirect experience. Humans have a phenomenological need to tell the story of their indirect experiences. CIF is how people communicate indirect experiences for shared meaning with others.

### **Where CIF Is Found**

Every individual on earth has most likely encountered a time when an experience left them with an indirect feeling. There are a variety of instances and situational factors that create indirect experiences for people (Duerden & Witt, 2010; Kumar et al., 2020). Perhaps someone

may have experienced the challenge of CIF when their family member dies, others might when a child is born, and some could have an occurrence when they listen to music. A common experience that seems to be expressed is during a spiritual experience (Vecino, 2021). The categories individuals use when describing indirect experiences through descriptive means can foster reflexivity and engagement (Pink, 2015).

Particular words can assist individuals with expressing themselves. For example, the word nostalgia may be used to express indirect feelings and is additionally considered bittersweet as individuals visualize situations (Li et al., 2019). Experiencing indirect feelings leaves one with a desire to share the experience, whether it is a feeling from viewing an art display or experiencing nostalgia. The lack of vocabulary to convey the feeling is where expression becomes complicated. The various ways individuals attempt to express their experiences may have a vocabulary element to find some similarity in instances.

When individuals listen to a song, they conjure up ideas of the mind but fail to find the words necessary to express their feelings. Music has a level of indirectness because it surpasses verbal explanation and definition (Davies, 1994). The vocabulary people use regularly had thematic tendencies and was a variable to the cause of indirect experiences. The following section will share the significance of this study for individuals and their communication methods based on the words they chose.

### **The Importance of Word Use**

The words humans use are important when communicating with one another. Some words have different meanings to different people, and ensuring individuals understand one another is the basis for communication in the first place. Anstey (2015) detailed how John Locke described the use of words, where he outlined how words are based on perception and how the

words used can show ideas. People's perceptions determine how they will understand stories with their own meaning. It is possible to give completely different meanings by using the same word.

The way words are used is also significant, based on how a story or conversation is organized and constructed. The experiences individuals encounter are initially developed in perceptions and feelings but not words (Stark & Campbell, 2018). There is a strategy of form in storytelling, capturing the attention of people, which can be found in the psychology of form. Burke (1925) expressed this concept when he explained how there is no perfect communication but only approximations. For example, even comedians have a method of form that they go about to achieve humor and capture the audience's attention. Much like actors create characters, symbolic interactions create the reality for social engagement (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). For example, a stand-up comedian will pick someone from the audience and find a way to connect with the person, and as the audience is watching, they associate with the connection that the comedian and the person are experiencing, although, as Burke expressed, not everyone will be able to relate causing an approximation of the form.

Another way to alter the meaning of individuals' perceptions of a story is to add words expressing action. Himeline (2018) expressed the importance of making emotional words adverbial, which turns a concept or word into something of action. By changing the way individuals interpret words, they can alter their understanding of a particular concept. The ideas of the mind can include pre-set genres such as "once upon a time," creating expectations within the mind about what someone is going to hear.

### ***Limited Vocabulary***

The vocabulary individuals use defines the meanings to each other as a core set of systems each can understand. Hiebert (2020) explained how 2,500 families of words were discovered, representing the core of the most common vocabulary words used by people, making up a knowledge base of fundamental schemes and aspects of words. This commonality of word use makes up how humans can comprehend what each other has to say in easy ways, but it also represents the fact it is possible people do not use enough of the words in the English language. It is also possible other languages may not have enough words to enable communication. Thus, an inquiry may assume storytellers use more words than needed, especially when attempting to express indirect experiences.

### ***Semiotics for Expression***

Humans can understand one another better and grow a shared meaning when particular signs are used correlating to information within the human mind. This use of signs is referred to as semiotics. Semiotics are the signs or symbols used to communicate and how they occur in the human mind (Erton, 2018). As ideas are shared, semiotics are used to form relatable meanings. The study of semiotics is referred to as semiology, which is the investigation of a classification of signs where something of importance is represented with a sign (Copley, 2004).

Semiotics helps people to connect themselves to their environment. For example, a person attending a church service will view a cross, Bible, and pastor, which create meaning for them that relates the experience to their minds. The signs people use can be created by nature as linguistic means to articulate the concepts in their minds (de Saussure et al., 2011). For example, when people view a caterpillar during a walk, they can imagine what it would be like when it is a butterfly. Humans use semiotics, or signs, to communicate indirect feelings such as those found

when viewing art (X. Zhang, 2020). The mental sign of a butterfly that is created by viewing a caterpillar can be considered vague when evaluating that it brings about transformation. The semiotics used to represent mental images such as this may bring about limited sense-making processes because of ambiguity (De Luca Picione & Valsiner, 2017).

Vocabulary has limitations on expressive options to share the experience of signs. Describing an indirect experience requires a level of comprehension, and the literacy of each individual based on their education may factor into understanding the encounter (Hiebert, 2020; Twenge et al., 2019; Willard, 2007). The listener must be able to relate a symbol or sign to the experience to understand it. Although some have found different words to communicate, there is still a deficiency in the substance required to share an intensive experience with another person effectively.

Postman (1992) argued school systems should teach students semantics to help individuals find meaning as a practicing set of canons of thought. The ways individuals share feelings can be found in some cultures using distinctive linguistic methods. Carbaugh (1999) described knowledge of cultures that could create ways of feeling through communication within their linguistic practices. It is quite possible a culture could mimic the same method or develop word use in a way conducive to expressing indirect experiences.

### **Social Relatability of Ideas**

The way humans relate to each other's stories is to have a sense of what the other person has in their minds in a relatable way (Ong, 2002). Thus, the ways people interact through social means rely on mutual understanding. Telling stories with relatability requires understanding the semiotics, or signs and symbols, humans can relate to. To understand one another, individuals maintain a set of memories representing schemas to help them better relate to others. Schemas

function as a formulated set of knowledge guiding how humans ponder and identify new information (Flower, 1994). Accepting another person's perspective is necessary when relating stories to each other and grasping the concepts communicated.

In order for individuals to share their experiences, an element of validation is needed to enable a person to share their experiences. This validity ensures the worth or value of another's experience by revealing the truth value (Brinberg & McGrath, 1985). When people share an understanding, there is a connection with one another, which is valuable to the relationship. Understanding each other and sharing experiences develop relatability with each other that would otherwise not be achieved.

### ***Ideas of the Mind***

Individuals often have difficulty expressing thoughts when attempting to describe what is in their minds, including thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Anstey's (2015) review of John Locke's work on perceptions of the mind and understanding from Book 2, Chapter 8, of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* explains how he described human senses creating expression in the mind, which then expand into ideas. Our senses represent information for us and can drive some thoughts that come to mind when communicating with others. Anstey (2015) also found that insight creates the source for vocabulary to symbolize ideas, the creation of ideas, and the recognition of comparison among ideas within Locke's work. Human ideas and thoughts are developed by perceptions that grow from their insights, awareness of the environment, and their souls. Ideas come about when attempting to describe experiences. The human soul is the one thing making them living and thinking beings (Anstey, 2015).

The exploration of sensory anthropology provides insight into how our senses can create responses. It is human nature to share feelings and experiences through some method of report,

and when their communication aptitude collapses, there is an underlying humanistic desire to want to justify through explanation. Scott and Uncles (2018) investigated using sensory anthropology to reduce the gap between acknowledging the significance of multisensory stimulation and research methods examining the effects of stimulation on consumption experiences. The concepts within sensory anthropology assist in understanding consumer experience sensations and their social and cultural impacts (Scott & Uncles, 2018). The focus of sensations to responses and experiences may present an area of evaluation for CIF regarding how people feel and understand what they cannot describe.

Stuhr et al. (2017) found the themes of friendship and mindfulness reflected the social and emotional learning of participants in their investigation of a trip to Sequoia National Park. The scholars concluded that the trip provided the students with a method to expand their social and emotional learning skills. The strategy of mindfulness may contribute to a source of investigation concerning the expression of indirect experiences. Stuhr et al. (2017) concluded that “mindfulness emerged from the data corpus with the participants acknowledging the trip created reflective awareness and serenity” (p. 15). Reflective awareness may also contribute to the possibilities of exploration of thought towards indirect experiences.

Through the work of Whiteside and Kelly (2016), the scholars discovered that exploring perceived feelings by looking in a mirror provides an area of interest for CIF. By creating self-images through perceptions while looking in the mirror, individuals are also developing perceptions that create thoughts in their minds, which may not be describable. Indirect communication acts as a mirror, enabling people to reflect upon themselves (Fraser, 2020). The perceptions humans hold about themselves can be expressed to others, yet they may not fully understand without proper storytelling. Perhaps a review of developmental perceptions from

viewing oneself in the mirror may provide in-depth creations of how people attempt to communicate indirect feelings.

### ***Metacognition for Awareness***

Cognition evolves as linguistic ontogeny, or growth, increases and semiotics mediate understanding (Erton, 2018). Thus, cognition is not an instant creation of the human mind. Once this understanding is developed, individuals can begin to think about their thoughts, known as metacognition. Sternberg and Sternberg (2017) defined metacognition as the human ability to reason and control thought processes and habits to improve thinking. Metacognition allows people to be aware of their thoughts and foster reflection of perceptions (Flower, 1994). Erton (2018) showed the importance of cognition on emotional states and senses as the development of thoughts is created through semiotics.

### ***Senses and Sensory Expression***

Fretwell (2020) described psychophysics as a means of expression for how individuals feel and their expression of emotions, ideas of the mind, and the use of senses as aesthetic means for feeling through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Senses feed into the expressions people use when they communicate with one another. Vision, hearing, and touch make up a way humans communicate without words. Various senses provide an avenue for expression, and some connective aspects, such as music, art, and dance, can also use the senses to develop ideas and experiences. Craddock (2001) explained how art could be used for expression as it connects humans in unique ways to interact. Carlsson (2016) explained how sounds represent information to people that are not described with words (e.g., music). The use of sign language, which does not have sound, is another example of how messaging is achieved without spoken words.

Analyzing expression by individuals can be accomplished through sensory ethnography when attempting to understand their world. The five principles of sensory ethnography are perception, place, knowing, memory, and imagination (Pink, 2015). The principles are necessary to understand others and fully understand their experiences. To share stories when indirect experiences exist may require a sensory ethnographic approach to better gain the storyteller's perspective. The art and senses create a source of indirect communication fostering realization (Fraser, 2020).

### ***Indescribably Indirect***

Cernis et al. (2020) interviewed participants of a study and found a predominant theme of the inability to find words or vocabulary to explain experiences they had that were dissociative in their minds. When humans try to describe an encounter not easily explained in communication, there is confusion. Drożdżowicz (2016) analyzed descriptive communication and indirectness and found it created complications when categorizing meaning groups. The investigation found an average function of narrative research resulted in an illumination of descriptive indirectness, which was determined to be challenging.

Jonas (2017) discovered that artistic structure hid the behaviors of philosophers to describe intensive aesthetic experiences. The evaluation also predicted opinions were varied when describing intense experiences in aesthetics and linguistics, with the importance of distinguishing between expression and description. Describing what is seen is another challenge for people to communicate. There does seem to be a need to delineate between expression and description to make a connection with another person through messaging.

Jonas (2017) explained aesthetic content was useless when attempting to translate the language. How words are used is not always the defining factor in communicating a message.

This example proves indirect encounters play a role in the incapacity to communicate with each other. Voogt (2021) explained how Lyotard knew this situation to be true, yet Hegel disagreed, stating all could be explained even though it seemed words were not possible, with the limits of language being the problem.

Bennett-Hunter (2015) found that participants in his study had difficulty describing experiences and did not desire to share the knowledge with others. The discovery found several effects in the analysis showing participants did not favor explaining experiences because psychotic symptoms were similar to the feelings they had, and the experiences could not be described. Language does tend to play a role in barriers to communication sometimes. Evaluating intensive experiences during a difficult time in participants' lives may be reinforced by Bennett-Hunter's study, which may assist in the examination of indirect feelings.

### ***Mystical Experiences***

Anstey (2015) discovered the word *soul* to be a synonym for the word *mind*, showing up in numerous semantic areas. If the soul is essentially the mind of someone, then there may be a possible mystical means for expressing thoughts. The review of mystery includes areas that are not describable to people, yet they understand them. Bennett-Hunter (2015) discovered an exploration of God as incomprehensible and was supported by an inquiry from William James in the early 1900s. The examination concluded two obstacles equally explained the concept, creating a philosophical likeness and stalemate simultaneously, causing indirect feelings to become more relevant.

Gäb (2017) explained how some metalinguistic messages about God are simply inexpressible in human language. Mystical experiences and divine encounters are similar areas that consistently create indirect experiences. Borovica (2019) also described an experience of

magic was indirect and effective within the examination evaluated in her project. The relation of mystery to indirect experiences poses a significant element of exploration for CIF, warranting further analysis.

Carbaugh's (1999) work with the Blackfeet Indian people revealed a connection humans can tap into with the spiritual and physical worlds to obtain knowledge through a new form of communication mystically. The spiritual world can be a mysterious avenue of exploration for communication studies. This spiritual connectivity may hold clues to new ways of transmitting messages to each other that society does not regularly entertain. Perhaps evaluating religious incomprehension about God and personal experience through an ethnographic qualitative research analysis may prove beneficial to the investigation of indirect feelings.

Through Carbaugh's (1999) inquiry, it was discovered a mysterious, cultural phenomenon occurs among the Blackfeet community with their use of linguistic references using word channels like "talk to a tree" during an exercise in listening. This analysis concluded the distinctive linguistic measures within other cultures created a method for feeling and relaying a message. The measures appear to be a way to communicate indirectly, which may hold an area for further investigation.

Cheglakov (2021) described a similar form of indirect communication based on the emotional benefits of wooden sculptures and other elements of nature leaving individuals with a peculiar feeling of communication that was therapeutic, indicating indirect communication can come from nature but not all humanity may hear them due to a limited lens. If humans can communicate with an inanimate object, they may be able to better communicate with one another in innovative ways, which some may relate to telepathy.

Rammohan (2019) described telepathy in particles as a way of communicating with energy. The mysterious world of telepathy may seem foreign to most people, but it warrants evaluation for communicative methods. Using our minds to connect with energy is certainly foreign to many individuals; however, the unknown is sometimes fruitful in its discoveries. This experience is another mystical means of communication that may hold clues toward intensive experiences.

Drożdżowicz (2016) evaluated meaningless words arguing empty connotations were connected to the terms *relatively* and *but*, for example. The language humans use represents an understanding becoming relatable when it is successful. A review of simple words was included in this qualitative study to determine if information can be gathered about the reasons behind the inability to communicate indirect feelings. Paddock (2015) found St. Teresa of Avila often stated she was incapable of describing her feelings through the use of speech and language. Mystical experiences create the incapability of communicating feelings of a spiritual nature.

Bennett-Hunter (2015) described understanding God to be an indirect experience that is inexplicable after he studied scholarship from the early 1900s by William James. His studies concluded that the concept was explained by two obstacles generating a metaphysical similarity and impasse concurrently, creating the relevance of indirect feelings.

Mystery and indirect experiences altogether pose an area of further analysis throughout this qualitative project. Carbaugh's (1999) work discovered an ability to connect with the spiritual and physical worlds when he studied the Blackfeet Indians, finding this to be a source of gathering information as a new method of mystically communicating. Through spiritual connectivity, it may be possible to send messages to each other in new ways that many have not considered. Symbols help researchers study the metaphysical nature of inherent spiritual

progression (McDaniel, 2022). Perhaps attaining an understanding of indirect experiences may rely on symbols to grasp the messages sent metaphysically.

Paddock (2015) discovered supernatural experiences individuals have had with their souls avoiding elucidation through current communication methods. There are not enough words in the English vocabulary to describe the Lord when praying. Indirect experiences, as examined by Bennett-Hunter (2015), share a broad viewpoint of religious experiences and mysticism. There may be a way to assess spiritual indirect experiences concerning God and individual encounters using an ethnographic qualitative research inquiry.

### ***Potential Causes of Indirect Experiences***

The report by Cernis et al. (2020) provides possible factors for the inability to communicate indirect feelings, including excessive internal focus, stress, and fatigue. There are potential causes for indirect experiences, which may be explored through further examination. Differentiating between simply being unable to explain a feeling and psychosis-related dissociative experiences may be an essential area of discovery and clarification for evaluating CIF. If the reasons individuals cannot express their emotions, feelings, and experiences are explored, new ways to focus thoughts to communicate better may be possible. However, Luke 1:20 (*New American Standard Bible*, 1971/1995) explained how people might not be able to speak due to avoidance of Christian principles. When straying from proper thought, individuals may end up mind-wandering, causing a deficiency in expression.

An analysis by Choi et al. (2017) found that mind wandering suggests a possibility for investigating indirect experiences. Potential discoveries may be available to indicate that indirect feelings may result from mind wandering. Choi et al. (2017) found significant individual differences during mind-wandering concerning modality forms. Perhaps visual and auditory

modality forms present an area of inquiry that may benefit the investigation of indirect feelings to determine if the variables contribute to a deficiency-producing effect on indirect communication. More analysis is needed to conclude whether mind-wandering and mental distraction cause indirect experiences; however, this is another area of consideration for further scrutiny of the subject.

The participants of Cernis et al.'s (2020) study identified approaches to coping for themselves as withdrawal: "mental avoidance of difficult thoughts or thoughts about dissociation through distraction and 'keeping busy'" (p. 12). The compiled evidence of research shows conceivable foundations for indirect experiences. If people evaluate the details behind why humans cannot express their experiences, emotions, and feelings, innovative methods may be found to center thoughts and improve communication.

Modality forms were varied in Choi et al.'s (2017) project, which stated noteworthy individual variances were found. Auditory and visual modality forms may pose a beneficial area of investigation for indirect communication to consider whether or not the forms add to deficiencies and causes of indescribability. Visualization should be increased as a method of more profound levels of investigation when developing theories (Ravasi, 2017). Further inquiry is necessary to resolve whether mental disruptions and mind-wandering are the roots of indirect feelings, but there is potential for further scholarship and contemplation on the subject.

### **Other Considerations**

Ontology is the examination of the essence of nature, existence, and being (Kessler, 2019). Within this project, there are connections to ontology addressed to ensure all elements contributing to the work have been presented for consideration. The study of ontology is associated with metaphysics and focuses on the nature of being or things having existence

(Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b, Definition 1). The presence of an intensive experience leaves humans with an indescribable feeling, transcending the universe within the mind because of a lack of ability for expression. Understanding this phenomenon is crucial; the goal of this study was to attempt to narrow down the origins of the indirect feelings.

Another consideration for the examination of CIF is the study of epistemology. The philosophical analysis of epistemology centers on how humans search for an understanding of one another through cognitive processes (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.-a). As another inquiry within the field of metaphysics, the concept of epistemology, as envisioned by Plato, investigates what it means to know something and how that comes about because of its nature to transcend experience (Britannica, n.d.). As beings who are in existence and want to know information, the thoughts of the human mind are promulgated from ontology and epistemology. The concepts are also two of the components making up the narrative paradigm.

Since the evidence shows there is difficulty when expressing indirect feelings, and this is known because individuals have tried to describe their bizarre experiences through storytelling but were unsuccessful, this communication process of needing to be understood through mutual understanding was studied. To explore the idea, research questions were proposed. Evidence shows there is difficulty in communicating indirect experiences. Bizarre feelings told through storytelling may express some details of encounters but are generally unsuccessful in achieving mutual understanding. Since storytelling is the most measurable and repeatable way individuals have attempted to communicate indirect feelings, the strategy must be taken seriously and studied within this lens.

Due to the implications that indirect experiences exist, it is important to document them with this study. Investigating the communication process of needing to be understood through

mutual understanding is essential to fully explore this type of experience. Chapter Three will present research questions pondering a method to capture attempts to communicate indirect experiences.

### **Summary**

In Chapter One, the basis of the word indirect was defined, and the theoretical origin of storytelling was established. In Chapter Two, the unknown origin of indirect experiences was explored to provide areas of consideration for the inquiry. This analysis addressed the gaps in the literature and provides a starting point for the investigation of communicating indirect experiences. Since this project is fairly new, there are many gaps in the literature, but a foundation for analysis of why there might be attempts to communicate indirect feelings may be established. In the following chapter, the understanding of why qualitative and storytelling measures can be collected, measured, and coded and the methodological approach for the study will be presented.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

This research study sought to discover patterns in the ways humans attempt to communicate indirect experiences through storytelling. Indirect feelings have been experienced by people for centuries and are generally a solo experience that may make shared meaning difficult. Because people have difficulty sharing the feeling of indirect experiences, communicating indirect feelings (CIF) was studied in this research. For the purpose of this project, CIF is defined as how people attempt to communicate indirect feelings for shared meaning with others. The participants in this study were asked to communicate indirect feelings through storytelling. The following chapter lays out the research methodology of this study.

### **Research Method**

To properly evaluate the phenomenon of CIF, the research study required finding individuals who realized they had encountered indirect communication in their lived experiences and were willing to share them by retelling their stories. A qualitative study was constructed, which requested individuals to participate in two narrative interviews. The first interview determined how storytellers engage with sharing stories and sorting through the thoughts of participants regarding their expression. The second interview used metacognition to determine if participants felt they had adequately expressed their stories and if there were any discrepancies in them. The interviews were recorded in person and through the online video conferencing software Zoom.

Creswell (2009) suggested heterogeneous populations require between 25 and 30 interviews. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews require a minimum sample size between 5 and 25 as noted by Townsend (2013). For this study, I interviewed 15 individuals who were pre-

screened. Two interview sessions were conducted with a minimum of 24 hours between interviews to give ample time for metacognition to occur for the second interview. The amount of time before metacognition occurs can vary among individuals (Miller, 2017). Allowing a minimum of 24 hours to pass ensured participants had time to process the experience and develop thoughts about their thoughts.

All participants chose to take part in the study through their own free will. There was no compensation for the participants of the project. The prescreening questionnaire was given to interviewees before scheduling interviews to ensure they had an interest in indirect feelings or experiences. The following section defines and outlines the selected qualitative method for this inquiry, explains how the study was designed and conducted, and presents the participants of the study. Additionally, information is presented about the procedures followed, the role of the researcher, and the data collection and analysis of the study. Lastly, the strategies for trustworthiness and ethical considerations are also discussed.

### **Qualitative Research Paradigm**

The qualitative research paradigm is used by scholars to report the categories of problems to be studied and their methods (Creswell, 2016). There are a variety of methods to use when conducting a qualitative study. The interpretive framework that is used will determine which paradigm a scholar employs (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Some forms of qualitative exploration include ethnographies, phenomenology, and narrative research (Cypress, 2018). For the purpose of this inquiry, qualitative narrative research was used as to measure indirect experiences through storytelling.

Qualitative narrative research can be conducted by collecting stories, analyzing them, and then coding the information with patterns to determine the reasons for a study (Creswell & Poth,

2017). For this project, narrative stories were compiled to better understand why individuals attempt to share indirect experiences. The use of sensory ethnography allows for listening to individuals describe a narrative story (Pink, 2015). An ethnography focuses on groups or cultures and how science and art explain them (Sangasubana, 2011). In storytelling people are reminded of sights, sounds, smells, and touch as the senses are engaged. This project delved into sensory ethnography by allowing participants to share their stories to engage the listener in their experience.

Phenomenological studies are conducted to examine a particular phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). The study's approach centered on the phenomenon of indirect experiences with a qualitative narrative approach. The concentration of this project included participant storytelling through qualitative interviews with follow-on discussions.

Since this investigation focused on a phenomenon with narrative analysis, it was vital to have the participants express their own stories. It was necessary to engage with people who have experienced the phenomenon of indirect experiences, coming from different backgrounds and perspectives. Understanding participant viewpoints was essential for the study to fully understand the problem, endeavor to define the scope, and gauge the causes of the inability to communicate indirect feelings. The research and design method are additionally important to ascertain the approach for interviewing.

### **Research and Design**

Qualitative narrative research based on the stories of individuals as they are shared creates a data set. By collecting multiple stories, patterns can emerge, providing clues about particular phenomena. Qualitative narrative research can discover specific experiences, phenomena, and situations revealing information for investigative studies (Creswell & Poth,

2017). When patterns are evaluated for themes and the data are compiled into consistent schemes, the data can be effectively measured and coded.

This study was comprised of qualitative interviews with 15 participants to discover experiences connected to intensive moments where indirect communication was part of the lived experience. To find participants, two methods were used including direct requests and word-of-mouth appeals for participation to initiate a snowball effect on recruitment and increase participant numbers. To screen individuals, the importance of their interest in the subject was necessary, and a pre-screening questionnaire (Appendix B) was used to ensure the necessary criteria for the analysis were met. The series of questions assured that interest existed for the investigation. When participation met the standards for eligibility, potential interviewees were provided an informed consent form (Appendix C) and were asked to participate in a two-part interview process: (a) an initial set of questions to determine demographics and then nine questions about indirect experiences and storytelling, and (b) a follow-up interview where two questions were asked with a focus on metacognition about the previous interview session.

The interviews were conducted over two sessions using a standardized questionnaire permitting adequate elaboration and response time. The inquiry provided narrative story examples to express shared meaning and gauge responses while allowing storytelling to be communicated as a support mechanism for the CIF research study. The second interview afforded time for participants to use metacognition to reflect upon the previous interview session. The research questions that were used for the study of CIF guided the results for interpretation.

### **Research Questions**

Open-ended research questions assist researchers in understanding study participants' viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Qualitative research requires research questions to better

frame topics of inquiry. The ways questions are integrated into the viewpoint of the interviewees enhances the value of an inquiry. Sensory experiences help to develop research questions for connections to the participants of studies (Pink, 2015). Indirect experiences are a recollection of sensory experiences the individual has encountered. Fisher's (1984) storytelling perspective measures qualitative research through storytelling when individuals share their experiences. Understanding the sensory perspectives of the participants enabled engagement and insight into indirect stories. Therefore, since this study on indirect experiences explored narrative perspectives, the following research questions were used:

**RQ1: How do those who have indirect experiences engage with storytelling attempts?**

As this was a qualitative ethnographic research study documenting individual sensory experiences, it was best to have participants describe their experiences through qualitative reenactment. The reenactment is considered a story because it seems fanciful in nature. Stories provide a foundation for imaginary concepts diverging from usual ways of life (Fraser, 2020). Sharing thoughts presented an area of discovery that found semiotic representations that were similar within each story told.

**RQ2: Does the storyteller feel as though a shared meaning has occurred when indirect experiences are described through storytelling?**

Sharing experiences with one another is a way to connect with others and develop relatability through the use of signs and symbols to express our experiences. The stories people share represent the lives of the narrator (Burke, 1966). By sharing stories, there are relatable, connective elements that represent experiences to individuals as an illustration of signs. The parables Jesus told represented stories helping humans connect ideas with symbols, relating

meaning within their minds (Fraser, 2020). Since storytelling often provides symbolism as stories are expressed, it was effective to document when similar semiotic patterns emerged.

**RQ3: When thinking about their storytelling experience metacognitively, what does the storyteller feel that they were able to adequately communicate about their indirect experience?**

Looking inward allowed the participants to review their experiences metacognitively and determine if their message was fully expressed. Reflection can be considered a constructive process, gleaning knowledge of ourselves (Flower, 1994). Documenting the reflective process of metacognition may lead to areas for future research studies to expand upon the expression of indirect experiences. When individuals share experiences and how they feel about them, it is possible to share a commonality. Sensory research requires understanding what people deem meaningful and where connecting personal experiences makes it relevant (Pink, 2015).

In narrative interviews, it is important for researchers to be flexible listeners of the interviewees' stories (Kartch, 2018). To conduct this study, I took on the role of a listener who was the receiver of the indirect story. My goal as the receiver was to collect the story, as sent by the participant, about their indirect experience, resulting in a feeling of indirectness. The interviewees were asked to describe the experience and their feelings about the event as they recalled it. The stories that came about from the initial interviews became a baseline for the second interview. The purpose of the second interview was to have interviewees use metacognition to reflect and provide reflexive comments on their first storytelling experience.

There were semiotic revelations and patterns that took place when people shared their stories. Additionally, during the metacognition interview, individuals discussed ideas within their narrative specifics that were self-interpreted by the storyteller. Transcripts were produced after

both interviews and themes were coded in an effort to present whether or not participants had experienced patterns in their storytelling experiences from the data. The themes documented patterns within the responses. The setting for the interviews created a flexible venue for geographically separated participants to attend and express their narratives.

### **Setting**

The setting of a research study should be evaluated by the researcher to ensure the context meets the need (Bowman, 2006). For this study, I wanted to ensure a natural storytelling experience could occur. For the ethnographic analysis, interviews were conducted through recordable means of video or audio recordings. Therefore, a narrative recording in the preferred location of the participant was used to ensure the situational context matched the idea of narrative analysis for indirect experiences. The participant's preference, location, and availability determined the source of video or audio conferencing during the interview. Participants of the project were allowed to conduct the interview in the setting of their choice with or without the use of video. The project strategy for this study included the use of word-of-mouth requests to solicit participants for the interviews.

### **Participants**

Using word-of-mouth requests to solicit participants reduced the occurrence of applicants being obtained who would not meet the criteria of the study by specifically stating the age requirement of 18 years and above and requiring a willingness to participate. The researcher determines the number of participants for a project based on the purpose and intent of the evaluation (Barkhuizen, 2014). To recruit more participants, I asked the current participants for recommendations of others who may be interested in the study. The use of snowball effect for recruitment uses others to expand participation in studies sourcing networks as a means of

expediting recruitment (Manohar et al., 2018). In order to conduct research, certain procedures must be met as described in the following section.

### **Procedures**

For this qualitative phenomenological study using a narrative framework, the first step was to defend the proposal to conduct research. Once committee approval was obtained, the second step was to secure institutional approval through the institutional review board (IRB) process (see Appendix A). With the committee and IRB approval complete, the third step was to email potential participants the pre-screening questionnaire (Appendix B) and the consent form (Appendix C). When the participant arrived for the interview, the interview guide (Appendix D) was used to conduct the interview and provide the scope to the interviewees. Once the procedures are established, the process for conducting interviews follows.

### **Conducting Interviews**

When conducting narrative interviews, it is essential to keep in mind the scope of the ideas being transmitted, and by doing this while relaying the scope to the participant, studies are more successful (Creswell, 2009). The scope of this study was limited to experiences leaving individuals with an indirect experience. Participants were scheduled for interviews based on their availability with the majority of participation occurring online through the Zoom computer software program. All interviews, including those in-person, were recorded through the Zoom platform to provide a transcript for data analysis. Interviews began as soon as possible following IRB approval to ensure the delineated timeline of the study was met.

The beginning of the interview consisted of a review of the informed consent form (Appendix C) to ensure the participant completely understood the study, their part in the project, and the process for the interview. After the clarification was completed, the interview

commenced with demographic questions, followed by a description of CIF with clarification when necessary, and specific qualitative interview questions were asked (see Appendix D). Once the interviews were complete, I thanked the participant for their time and provided contact information if they had any questions. Having an understanding of best practices for narrative research studies provides comprehension of how researchers perform their studies.

### **Best Practices**

The purpose of narrative research is to investigate the life of individuals by examining stories of individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). For this study, storytelling about indirect experiences was shared. Best practices for narrative research include focusing on a single person, collecting stories about their experiences, developing a chronology of the events, analyzing the narrative for themes, highlighting any significant events, and placing the themes and narratives within a particular context or situation (Creswell, 2016). This is the method that was used for the examination of CIF.

The following section introduces the role the researcher plays in a narrative study. My background as the researcher is explained and the approach of the interviews is described. The importance of issues that can arise with bias is outlined in the following sections.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In narrative interviews, researchers should adopt a facilitative role permitting interviewees to manage the direction of their narrative (Kartch, 2018). My background gave me a distinctive perspective on indirect messaging with an extensive background in public affairs spanning over 25 years of experience. Having worked with introverted individuals extensively, my familiarity with encouraging individuals to express themselves through storytelling as a reporting tactic facilitated openness for the participants. In my current business and teaching

roles, I work closely with individuals on matters related to sending messages where I act as a listener in the same method as interviewing. To better understand me as the researcher, it is essential to note I held several different roles within various organizations and was trained as a facilitator.

I was not a participant in the study, taking care to avoid inserting myself within the community of participants and distancing myself from any stakeholders of the study in an effort to eliminate interference. Even though the storytellers met with me twice, the interviews for the study were not presented as a counseling session. I made it clear to the participants that the purpose of multiple interviews was first to collect the indirect communication they experienced and then separately gather their thoughts while thinking about their storytelling experience.

The role of the researcher does not automatically eliminate their bias (Moon, 2015). I ensured unbiased behavior by eliminating all assumptions and including any variables coming into play during the development of this study. The participants were not influenced in any way, and all opinions and perspectives were considered and included to ensure my presence was not a constraint to the investigation. I evaluated whether or not a personal association was present to ensure any biases were assessed and to confirm the reliability of the study.

I made an effort to maintain unbiased perspectives in the results of the analysis by suspending my worldview to ensure ideas countering my perspective were considered. All ideas were included and were not dismissed to enable an unbiased study. I maintained my focus and accountability with my chair for the entire investigation process and used standardized formats for every product used within the analysis to safeguard against any unbiased activity. Next, I describe the data collection method and interview questions to paint a picture of the research process.

## **Data Collection**

Qualitative data collection may consist of one-on-one interviews in person or through a virtual web-based platform (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data for this project were collected and transcribed through the Zoom web-based platform, inspected for reliability, and coded. In addition, I typed a transcript as the participants spoke to ensure any errors in the automated transcription were deciphered. This dual transcription method was used to ensure data points were not missed during the interviews. I analyzed the transcripts, reading them with the video and audio to ensure there were no errors. This inquiry indicated the end of the data collection process. The interview approach described in the next section indicates the steps I took to collect the data.

## **Interview Approach**

Qualitative interviews occur when an interaction between a researcher and the participant creates knowledge of the experience to discover their point of view (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The method used for data collection in this study was one-on-one qualitative interviews with participants in-person and virtually through the web platform Zoom. Narrative interviews are the most unstructured interview type (Kartch, 2018). The interviews consisted primarily of open-ended questions to allow adequate data for the research. Open-ended questions are research questions exploring phenomena to allow studies the ability to develop themes (Creswell, 2016). This method of questioning allows for the interview to unfold with information helping the researcher to find themes within the data.

It is estimated that qualitative narrative interviews should include six to 15 participants with two interview sessions (Kim, 2015). For this study, there were 30 interviews conducted with 15 participants sharing their stories and answering questions related to indirect

communication. I interviewed participants either in-person or online using the web platform Zoom. In both instances, Zoom was used to record the conversations, and I took notes to ensure all details were captured from the interview sessions. Participants were asked demographic questions at the beginning of the interview to validate a broad category of participation. Demographics are human characteristics such as race, sex, age, and occupation among other factors, which are used in research studies to ensure variance (Marchant, 2018).

Once several participants met my expectations and variables within demographics were ensured, the willing participants were asked open-ended interview questions (see Appendix D). The questions were chosen to follow a particular pattern for the interviewee to experience. There were two sessions of interviews to provide a platform for the participants to express themselves fully and then to ensure metacognition could occur. The first session created a space for the participant to fully engage in storytelling to present their stories ensuring RQ1 and RQ2 were answered. The second session was held as an opportunity for metacognition to transpire for the participants as they thought about what they had shared, thus answering RQ3.

### *Session One*

The first set of questions was designed to get the participants thinking about indirect experiences and then allow them to have a platform to express their own stories. After this, the next set of questions was presented to answer RQ1. The goal was to get the interviewee thinking about how they relate messages to others and to ensure they understood what they were trying to communicate. To answer RQ2 the questions were structured to determine if participants felt shared meaning had occurred with their stories.

Questions 1–5 were opening questions designed to ensure the participant understood the concepts of the study, allowing them to share their experience, ensuring they fully understood the

intent. The questions were open-ended to allow substantial answers for the study. The objective was to prepare the participant for the concept of indirect experiences while sharing their own story.

Questions 6–9 were structured to provide answers for RQ1. The questions were specifically designed to determine how participants share stories and to activate their thoughts on how they present information to others. Questions 10 and 11 were intended to have interviewees begin the metacognition process and think about how they communicate.

### *Session Two*

Finally, the second interview was created to provide the opportunity to explore metacognition with participant recollections of the stories they shared. Metacognition is truly the process of thinking about thinking as a means of awareness (Flower, 1994). The goal of this project was to achieve metacognition, where the participants began thinking about their thoughts to determine if they could communicate their indirect feelings. The hope was that the interviewees would fully undergo metacognition to provide complexity to the interview responses.

When participants can reflect upon their thoughts and express themselves fully, there is a chance for an extension of the research results. Qualitative researchers can gain a direct experience from participants when conducting follow-on interviews after time has passed (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The Session 2 process provided the opportunity of gained knowledge, thus advancing the results of participant responses.

After Question 11 was completed, the participants were scheduled for another session of interviewing. Once scheduled and the interviews began, the interviewees were asked Questions 12 and 13, which were designed to elaborate on the metacognition process from the previous

interview session. Additionally, the questions were structured to allow the participants time to reflect upon their experiences to ensure their thoughts were adequately expressed. In the following sections, the data analysis method is defined and the coding steps are explained, which were used to derive conclusions for the results.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is “the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (Flick, 2014, p. 5). After the data are collected, the data analysis process can begin. MAXQDA is used for analyzing qualitative data through computerized software (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). The data analysis consisted of a two-pronged approach where I coded all transcribed notes, and the computer-assisted data analysis software MAXQDA 2022 (VERBI Software, 2021) was used to analyze the data. To conduct the data analysis, all transcripts were coded based on themes. Working backward with qualitative data provides a way to visualize themes to create coding (Creswell, 2016). Themes were visualized and developed as the source for coding the information received in this study.

The amount of time for qualitative interviews is determined by the researcher based on how much time they need and the type of access they have (Edwards & Holland, 2013). I clocked nearly 75 hours of interview time for this inquiry, with 15 participants interviewed. Giving participants adequate time to elaborate on their answers guaranteed the interview approach would provide substantial amounts of data to be analyzed.

Intercoder reliability is an analytic function that acts as a quantifiable gauge measuring consistency within data to support qualitative research beyond the researcher’s interpretation (O’Connor & Joffe, 2020). The use of MAXQDA 2022 ensured intercoder reliability was present

when analyzing the transcripts. I made a purposeful effort to include intercoder reliability when analyzing the data. The information was studied to develop themes of word use and descriptions people had in common when they shared stories. I reviewed the data several times to ensure theme saturation was present and coding could begin. The identified coding allowed me to establish determinations from the data set.

### **Coding**

Coding is the process of making sense of textual data (Creswell, 2016). I made an extra effort to take personal notes after each interview to provide additional information that may have otherwise been lost from the interview sessions. After I thoroughly reviewed all notes and transcripts, ensuring several reviews and solid themes emerged, I began the coding process. I used open-coding for this study, where I constructed labels based on the information found within the conceptual analysis of the data from the interviews (Punch, 2014).

I ensured bias was not present in the coding process to enable all voices and perspectives to be heard through their narratives. After I coded the transcript data, I analyzed the patterns in storytelling found within the data set. In the next section, the trustworthiness of the study including dependability, confirmability, and transferability validate my efforts to provide a quality study.

### **Trustworthiness**

Before publishing any work, it is essential to ensure the data are credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable to confirm that the study's information and processes are worthy of study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The credibility is established through validity and triangulation. The dependability and confirmability are substantiated with reliability included. The transferability of the study is shown through various disciplines that could benefit from the

method of approach. The following subsections authenticate the trustworthiness of the study by credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability.

### **Credibility**

Analyzing the quality found in scholar interpretations determines their credibility (Keyton, 2023). To ensure true credibility exists, it was important to evaluate the data through various means such as validity and triangulation. Validity in qualitative research essentially means the findings are true and accurate, or at least probable (Creswell, 2016). For this research study, the validity method of triangulation was used. Triangulation is when scholars use a variety of methods, sources, and theories to confirm evidence for the accuracy validation of their study and to create themes (Creswell, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2017). The sources evaluated for this project touched on areas such as linguistics, psychology, mystical experiences, and even more themes, ensuring a wide variety of themes for confirmability.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

In qualitative research, reliability can be obtained by ensuring accuracy is achieved when recording and transcribing information but also by ensuring the data set is consistent (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The reliability ensures the approach of the scholar is dependable, consistent, and clean. For this inquiry, I confirmed the reliability by double-checking the transcripts to safeguard against errors and by presenting the same information to every participant. This approach supported the dependability of the story. By hand-typing a transcript as the participants spoke, the accuracy of the Zoom transcript had a better chance of presenting accurate information. During the process of coding the data, I verified all information through a thorough review.

## **Transferability**

The term transferability is considered a characteristic of quality for qualitative studies, which ensures analysis conclusions transfer to other settings (Creswell, 2016; Punch, 2014). Transferability is detailed so the findings can be used in other areas of inquiry to expand scholarly work. Since this study is considered foundational research, there will be many opportunities for transferability as future scholars review the work. The evaluation intended to develop an area of new exploration for learning improved methods of communication with indirect feelings. Through the assessment of indirect communication and how people share stories, profound new ideas surfaced, extending the project to many areas of analysis.

The quality of interpretations supported my credibility. By double-checking the transcripts, I documented dependability and confirmability. The transferability of the study is shown through various disciplines that could benefit from this method of approach. The reason for making sure our research is dependable has to do with the engagement of other academic research and its transferability.

It is important that we look at ethical considerations so the data may be transferable. The ability to be transferable allows us to have a new exploration. It is important that peer-reviewed research remains ethical. To better understand ethics, ethical considerations are described and a review of the potential for demographic bias is explained as to why it is significant.

## **Ethical Considerations**

In this dissertation I intended to understand if there are patterns in how individuals communicate indirect experiences through narrative means such as storytelling. It was essential to ensure ethical considerations were properly evaluated. To ensure compliance, an ethical evaluation was used to determine whether permission was obtained for proprietary information,

all sources were cited, personal information was protected, the purpose of the study was disclosed, cultural considerations were respected, honesty was prevalent, and clear, straightforward messaging was conveyed (Creswell & Poth, 2017). To ensure the inquiry is beneficial to future studies, I conducted this study to maximize the benefit of the analysis for others. All participant names, characters, and identities are protected and confidential, adhering to strict privacy measures.

In the spirit of Kierkegaard and the use of pseudonyms, participants were asked to choose their own pseudonyms. My intention for having the interviewees choose their own names was to allow them to freely express themselves and have a sense of ownership for the stories they told. Kierkegaard used the pseudonym Climacus as the name he freely chose as a fictional character to represent his messages (Kidder, 2004). All project documents, notes, and transcripts refer to the participants by pseudonyms and numbers rather than their true names. The information was secured when not used for the analysis to ensure the information was not readily accessible by any other source. Upon the completion of the investigation, the information was destroyed to ensure the strictest confidentiality remains for the participants of the study. It is crucial for researchers to avoid demographic bias to ensure all perspectives are considered.

### **Demographic Bias**

Visual bias can feed into the evaluation of demographics for studies, and it is important to ensure diversity does not factor into the evaluation of a study (Scheurich et al., 2021). To ensure demographic bias was not an issue, the scholar intentionally sought out individuals from a variety of ages, sexes, geographically separated areas, and a variety of races. To avoid a close relation to the participants, I intentionally avoided the use of many individuals with whom I regularly communicate to ensure a wide audience for recruiting participants. A close relationship

between the participants may present a lack of diversity in the study, eliminating possible perspective variances. By including some participants from my workplace, which fosters diversity and inclusion, more perspectives were included to provide missing cultural perspectives and diversity. An open invitation to participants was shared with several individuals to enable this mitigation effort.

### **Summary**

Qualitative research is used to examine and comprehend the meaning people assign to human and social issues whereas quantitative research is used to examine objective theories evaluating the connection between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because indirect experiences are a personal encounter that hold meaning, this study was clearly meant for qualitative research. Conducting qualitative research presented the only true way to justify the need to collect and code the stories needed for the analysis.

This chapter outlined the qualitative narrative research study that was used to understand how individuals communicate indirect experiences through storytelling. The design of the study was outlined and the questions, setting, participants, and procedures were described. The role of the researcher was established, and the data collection method was presented. The interview process and questions were also outlined in full detail. The method of data analysis was explained and the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study were validated. In Chapter Four, the participants are identified with pseudonyms, the findings are presented with the most prevalent themes, the research questions are answered, and correlations among themes are explored.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In Chapter Four, the findings that emerged from the interviews once they were transcribed and coded will be presented. The overall purpose of the study was to determine how people who encountered indirect communication in their lived experiences can communicate the indirect experiences and messages they received. The indirect experiences of the participants generated valuable insights addressing this purpose. This chapter presents and illustrates the themes that surfaced during an analysis of transcripts from the recorded interviews.

The structure of Chapter Four identifies the participants, the data analysis and results, followed by the developed themes and correlations, and finally, the research questions are answered. Direct quotes from participants are included to reveal emerging themes from the interviews about indirect experiences. An overview leading into the chapter explains relatability and how people create meaning for their indirect experiences with the stories they share.

### Overview

Kierkegaard (1846/1992) created an academic voice for indirect communication and explained how people communicate indirectly through implicit messages. It is important for people to more closely “overhear” indirect communication to share feelings with others. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine how people who encountered indirect communication in their lived experiences can communicate the indirect experiences and messages they received using direct communication. Meaningful relationships can be developed by sharing stories of lived experiences which foster better understanding (D’Cruz et al., 2020). It is important to the academic field of communication studies to collect information about indirect lived experiences after they have been realized, so others can comprehend abnormal, and

sometimes unrelatable, personal experiences with the goal of communicating for shared meaning.

When people attempt to develop meaning out of conversations, logic is used to relate ideas within their minds. The process for logic is described below to convey an understanding about how participants developed the expression for their stories. Lindsay (1998) explained what Aristotle called the process of using logic to relate ideas within their minds, coining the term *entelechy*. Broken down, the meanings are as follows: *En* is “within,” *Tel* is *telos* meaning “goal,” *Ech* is “to have,” and *Y* indicates a “process.” *Entelechy* is the process of development while having one’s *telos* (or goal) within oneself. This breakdown means “within a process, there is a goal.” Stories are almost always entelechies and have goals that are implicit in them. The ideas become the words created to develop the goal of meaning. Storytelling creates patterns within humanity’s attempts to express any type of feelings with others, including indirect feelings.

In this chapter, the participants are outlined and themes are defined. The discoveries found with word use, vocabulary knowledge, participant reactions, the importance of trust for communication, desire to share encounters, the intent of storytelling, and deducing a spiritual or God-created experience are presented. The research questions and interview question results are also documented with evaluations and interpretations reviewed to explain indirect experiences. First, however, participant profiles and sample interview compilations will be reviewed.

### **Participants**

Convenient samples are used in non-probability sampling where participants, otherwise referred to as the sample, are subjectively selected because they are convenient to attain (Qualtrics.com, 2022). Phenomenology can be revealed in qualitative research, particularly in

interviews (Tenny et al., 2022). This qualitative narrative study focused on a convenience sample of 15 individuals across the United States. Participants were asked to pick their own pseudonyms for privacy and confidentiality. The participant population comprised 40% males and 60% females. The participant family structures consisted of seven married participants and seven unmarried, with one participant separated for a divorce. Individuals who had children comprised 73%. Table 1 highlights the demographic data collected within the qualitative research interviews.

The majority of the participants were employed full-time, making up 80% of the population. Two participants were self-employed and one was retired. No participant had the same occupational field. The population age range was from 20 to 75 years old with a mean age of 49 years old. The state of birth for the participants varied at 67% with consistencies of 13% from Maryland and 20% from Illinois. All of the participants self-disclosed as Christians; although this was not my intent, the organic snowball effect may have contributed to this.

Table 1 provides the demographics of the individuals who shared their stories for this study. By understanding the background of the people involved, the reader can discover a bit more about the participants including their age, sex, whether or not they are married and have a family, where they were born, and what their occupations are. A broad range of demographics were represented, providing a variety of viewpoints for a depth of analysis. To review the results, qualitative themes are designated with descriptions for each one. It is important to review the results of the participants' narratives to look for commonalities, theme frequency, and prevalence.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age	Sex	Married	Family	Born	Occupation
Kirsten	54	F	Y	Y	Maryland	Real Estate Agent
Rex	44	M	Y	Y	Illinois	Military
Serenity	51	F	N	Y	Georgia	Supervisor
Sarah	42	F	Y	Y	Illinois	Quality Manager
Kaitlyn	57	F	Y	Y	Alabama	Professor
Linda	61	F	N	Y	Michigan	Pharmacy Technician
Joe	20	M	N	N	Indiana	Social Media Worker
Sara	73	F	N	Y	New York	Retired
Honey	44	F	Y	Y	Illinois	Nurse Practitioner
Molly	36	F	N	N	Maryland	Technical Rescue Fire Fighter
Annie	75	F	N	Y	West Virginia	Writer
John	23	M	Y	N	Washington	Cigar Salesman and Barista
Danger	37	M	S	N	Tennessee	Research Engineer
Jabo	49	M	Y	Y	Ohio	Financial Analyst
Padraig	62	M	N	Y	Michigan	Travel Tour Guide

**Results**

As laid out in Chapter Three, this was a qualitative narrative research study where individuals were asked to share their own stories and reflect upon the indirect experiences during two interview sessions. The intent was to discover patterns in how humans attempt to express their awareness of their indirect experiences through storytelling. For the purpose of this research, an indirect experience is defined as an encounter someone has experienced that is not direct and can seem indistinct. Indirect experiences are those which cannot be described easily by people and have a tendency to feel mysterious. The themes from the interviews of this

research are considered qualitative data as explained and identified. Figures are included that detail connections among the data sets followed by further analysis of the themes.

### **Qualitative Data Themes**

Qualitative narrative studies are used to explain phenomena (Tenny et al., 2022). By exploring the narratives of others, people can better understand the experiences someone has encountered. Phenomena are often expressed by people when they desire to share their stories. Shared meaning is the social code formation and continuance based on exchanged signs (Schandorf, 2019). In fact, the purpose of storytelling is to share an experience or feeling with another person for shared meaning. People share meaning when they tell stories to one another.

Due to the findings from the literature study, I hypothesized that individuals would want to tell stories, and this chapter presents the evidence of their testimonies. Participants were eager to participate and very responsive, indicating that there may be more individuals who would have liked to engage with retelling their indirect experience. There were many individuals interested in the study who may have met the definition of having indirect experiences after the screening, beyond the point of thematic saturation. In the next section, every theme found in the interviews is broken down and identified.

### ***Themes Identified***

Coding is accomplished by analyzing the text within a qualitative analysis to find linked themes or ideas, building a pattern and hierarchy (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Themes are created as categories, grouping codes into frequently occurring concepts (Creswell, 2016). There were six themes prevalent within the qualitative research data of this study. The themes of this study were as follows: (a) Common Word Use and Vocabulary Deficiencies, (b) Participant Reactions,

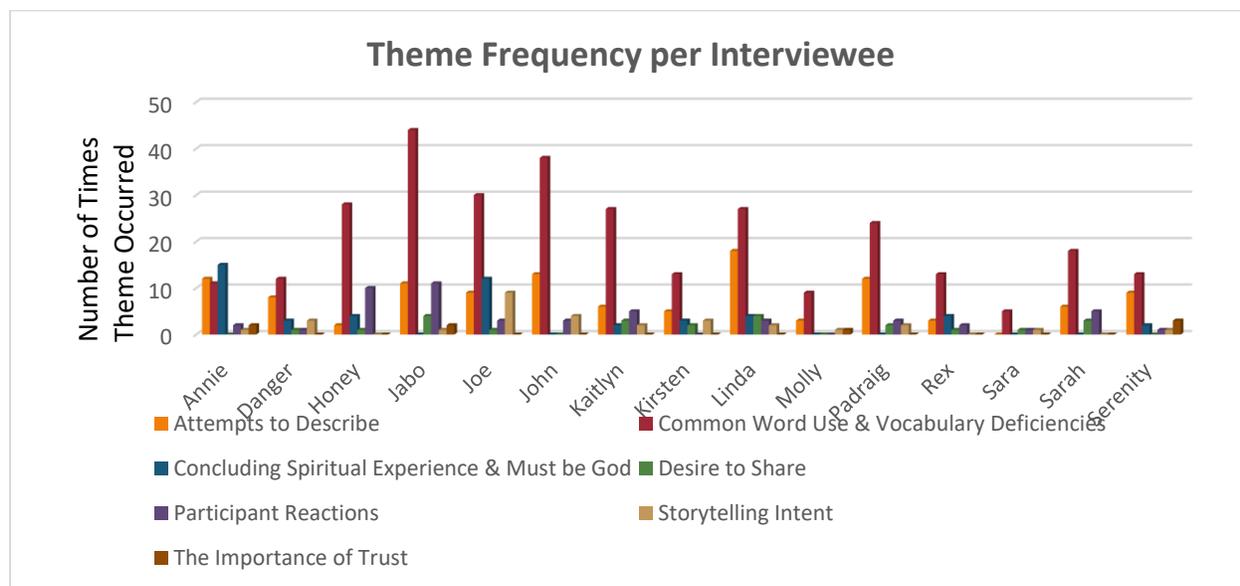
(c) The Importance of Trust, (d) Desire to Share, (e) Storytelling Intent, and (f) Concluding Spiritual Experience & Must be God.

Figure 1 shows the frequency of each theme's occurrence per interviewee. The themes are represented by color, and the legend for each one is found at the bottom of the chart. The number of times each theme appeared per interviewee is displayed. This data analysis shows all themes were found in the majority of interviews with some more prevalent than others. After the data analysis and coding were complete, the most prevalent themes were found to be *Common Word Use & Vocabulary Deficiencies* and *Concluding Spiritual Experience & Must be God*.

The data was analyzed and coded to find prevalent themes that occurred during the interviews in efforts to find linked themes or ideas. Additionally, themes more frequently addressed were ranked by the number of times they occurred. Each participant's pseudonym is included to show which participant contributed to a particular theme.

**Figure 1**

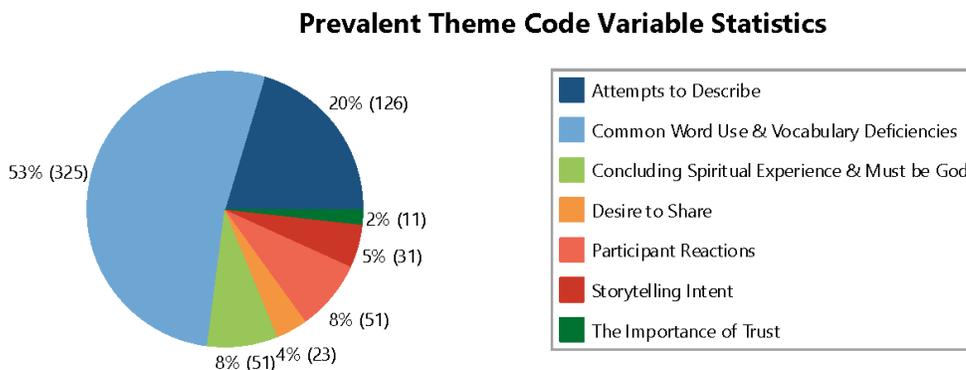
*Theme Frequency per Interviewee*



**Common Word Use.** Pagel et al. (2019) studied common word use and found people use words based on the bias for simple word use and connectivity with others. There are many common words people use to express themselves. The words within each transcript were analyzed to find similarities. The Common Word Use & Vocabulary Deficiencies theme was most prevalent with 53% of interviews revealing this theme within the data set. The most prevalent theme discovered from the interviews was the commonality of word use.

Figure 2 shows the prevalence of each theme based on the percentage of its occurrence. The colored boxes act as a legend for the themes. As a key for understanding, color-coding to differentiate the data points in a legend shows highlighted classification points (Kirk, 2019). The results indicate the *Common Word Use & Vocabulary Deficiencies* theme was the most prevalent theme found in the interviews. The second most prevalent theme was *Attempts to Describe*. The significance of this chart indicates there is a prevalence of the use of common words and areas where vocabulary may be deficient when describing indirect experiences.

Consistency of the words found in participant responses revealed their attempts to connect with me to explain their stories. Thus, the literature revealed the tendency of individuals to relate to others with simple word use. Appendix E provides a word cloud of the most frequently used words in this study. The *Vocabulary Deficiencies* sub-theme to *Common Word Use* is described below with a correlation among the two themes shared.

**Figure 2***Prevalent Themes*

**Vocabulary Deficiencies.** Twenge et al. (2019) studied vocabulary trends of adults in the United States from 1974 until 2016 and found a steep decline of vocabulary in individuals at all levels of education. The decline of vocabulary knowledge was revealed within the descriptions of participant stories. After conducting the interviews for this study, it became clear to me that people may use simple words because of *Vocabulary Deficiencies* which appear to hinder expression. Even I myself discovered the expression used to write this study was limited by my vocabulary and frequency of word usage. During some of the interviewees' responses, they also shared knowledge of diminished vocabulary to express their encounters.

The connected theme of *Common Word Use* was found where participants exhibited *Vocabulary Deficiencies* by using words that could not fully express their experiences. The prevalence of simple words such as *feel* and *try* showed *Vocabulary Deficiencies* were present. During the interview data analysis, it was found the most frequently used word was “feel” when people were sharing their stories of indirect experiences. The second most frequently used word was “try.”

An example of the simple word use can be found in the interviews. Some examples come from Honey and John. Honey, a 44-year-old nurse practitioner from Illinois, said,

I think that I try to get people to, um personally, I like to share and I like to bring people into the story so they can feel they are experiencing with you, so they can feel the emotions and joy or sadness of it, and getting people to laugh and be part of that story.

John, a 23-year-old cigar salesman from Washington, said,

I tried to explain what I was feeling, and just the overall joy that came from doing that, and my friends just did not get it. I was like, well, tomorrow come to my house and let's go there together.

In addition to the simple words “feel” and “try,” many interviewees responded with similar word use throughout the interviews. This does not show a lack of intelligence but rather shows that an analysis of rhetoric was needed for review. The interactive word tree in Figure 4 is included to engage the readers of this manuscript with the interview responses interactively (Wattenberg & Viégas, 2008). By reading from left to right, consistency among participant responses is shown while also allowing the reader to experience the interviews.



shows how sensory experiences are difficult to describe and share among people. In the next section, the theme of *Participant Reactions* is explained in detail and stories are shared.

**Participant Reactions.** Participants having unexpected reactions during interviews can be considered a useful resource occurring within research studies to find indicators for the exploration of phenomena (Knapik, 2006). It is important to note this research generated an emotional response in over half of the participants interviewed. When individuals began reflecting upon their past, many of them began to weep as they thought about their past encounters. During the interview with Serenity, an athletic and peculiar 51-year-old supervisor, she began to cry and expressed how sharing her story felt like therapy to her, validating her thoughts and experiences. The emotion showed the interviewee had experienced an indirect phenomenon that was challenging for her and caused her to react unexpectedly.

Narrative therapy often results when interviewees tell their own stories resulting in a reaction as they use metacognition about the stories they tell (Payne, 2006). There was a mix of psychological aspects present as the participants communicated their stories and reflected during the interviews. Kaitlyn, a thoughtful 57-year-old professor of education, expressed her story about the death of her son after caring for him for 14 years following an accident. During the second interview, Kaitlyn began to weep as she thought about the story she told:

As I fell asleep last night there were a lot of other thoughts that were going on in my head. I am going to kind of try to remember what I was thinking. Finding the right words to describe how I felt, my biggest thought was, I went back to scripture, and God tells us that even when we don't have the words, he understood. I'm sorry [crying], it's even more like, for me, it was very comforting to know that even though, you know, I can't find the right words sometimes to express my feelings or my thoughts on a subject, he

knows. I tried this morning to think about how I could relate to you the depth of my grief, and I just can't. There aren't words. My, my heart's broken. I have this gut-wrenching sorrow but that really doesn't even, not even the tip of the iceberg for that depth.

The reactions Kaitlyn expressed are certainly understandable given the loss of her son. The way the questions resulted in a sort of narrative therapy was intriguing to me, showing an area of study that may benefit from my research method. By thinking about the process, known as meta therapy, she was able to acknowledge her own grief through the storytelling process. Sharing a story is not always an instinctive desire for people. Having a lack of storytelling practice to process emotions is another reason expressing indirect experiences is important.

**The Importance of Trust.** Sandstrom et al. (2022) studied psychological barriers to human communication and interaction and found people are generally pessimistic when it comes to talking with others. In a few interviews, participants expressed fear and anxiety over sharing indirect experiences with others because of trust issues. Linda, a 61-year-old pharmacy technician, stated, "I don't necessarily offer it, or feel like it would even be helpful." Linda's attitude was generally negative about her own self-concept, and she placed blame on others. This lack of trust and pessimism, of being able to share any type of life experience for shared meaning, blocks individuals socially and psychologically from connecting with others and causes unhappiness and unrest.

Trust is a set of expectations that one person has of another person regarding "openness, caring, reliability, and competence" (McCaffery, 2019, p. 189). *The Importance of Trust* when sharing stories became a prevalent theme. When I interviewed Jabo, a compassionate 49-year-old financial analyst, for the second interview for which he was asked to metacognitively reflect on his storytelling experience, he also expressed trust concerns: "I try to tell you everything I want

you to know and I am not guarded, but if I don't trust someone then I don't want to give them ideas." Ironically, Jabo was completely comfortable with sharing his stories with me although he expressed there may be some reservations about what he would elaborate on. This lack of elaboration, through his own words, showed the expectations, and comfort, he had for me and the standard for which he deals with others. It is likely that storytellers generally navigate the storytelling process through the lens of uncertainty reduction frequently, especially when the story reveals personal content.

**Desire to Share.** Shared meaning with first-person narratives results in enrichment among individuals for communication and discussion (Wahl et al., 2022). Shared meaning is used as a common way to express an event to others. For example, John excitedly expressed his goal of trying to get others to join him in his indirect experience: "I knew if [his friend] could feel and believe what I was believing, and feeling, that he would be just as pumped as I was." John showed an example of what Wahl et al. (2022) would label as enrichment.

However, Kaitlyn identified that rapport is needed for true shared meaning and discussed how only the people intimately involved in her life would truly understand as she lamented, "There needs to be something that people can relate to before you begin to share the experience." As storytelling of an indirect experience is generally considered an abnormal experience, particularly because the experience takes place somewhat in the imagination, it may require a level of intimacy for someone to feel comfortable to express something they experienced in their life. The encounter may not seem as if it was realistic or normal. However, those that expressed their stories of indirect experiences did feel that those close to them would understand.

**Comfort Levels.** *The Desire to Share* was exhibited when participants were asked to describe their comfort level with sharing stories. The comfort level of participants was a sub-

theme of *Desire to Share*. McDuffie et al. (2022) discovered participants had issues with comfort and made an effort to ensure they were comfortable by allowing them the option of whether or not to answer a question. Whether or not a storyteller had a desire to share an experience was based on their comfort level with others.

Some participants felt as if they could share their stories with anyone. For example, in another interview, Padraig, a 62-year-old professional travel guide, said:

Please! This has been my philosophy, my entire life. I'll talk to anybody virtually about anything. So, the way I communicate is at an intense level without being, you know, intense and scared, you know. I'm not afraid to dig deep. I'm not afraid to share.

This level of confidence was not found by all participants even though I allowed for a safe space for all participants to feel comfortable, as revealed within the second interview meta-analysis.

There was some consistency from the participants interviewed, revealing that shared meaning was important to them. Joe, an energetic 20-year-old social media worker with an interest in helping people find God, said, "I love sharing stories and I do like telling other people how I feel, sometimes too much." The comfort levels of participants determined how they shared stories and whether or not they wanted to relate with others.

The desire to share an experience may have also been used for relatability. Some participants expressed they wanted to convey what was in their soul to relate with other people. John wanted to verbalize the experience he felt in his soul to his friend and stated, "The raw experience that it was, was a profound time allowing my soul to catch up with me that I wanted my friend to feel." While John's comfort level was evident, not everyone may be comfortable with sharing their story.

Since this research required participants to be willing to talk about their indirect experiences, it is probable that not everyone would do so. For example, if interviewees were completely comfortable, they may tell stories with full details without hesitation. If they were uncomfortable, they may unconsciously hide details that would have presented the complete story. Understanding the comfort level of participants within narrative research interviews is a significant finding for future studies of this type.

***Experiences with Loss.*** Humans share stories of lived experiences to connect with others and build relationships while expressing their personal experiences through narrative, helping individuals with loss and life challenges (D’Cruz et al., 2020). The experiences with loss were a sub-theme of *Desire to Share* from the interview data. Several interviews had participants who desired to share their experiences with bereavement.

Some participants explained how they understood indirect experiences with loss were difficult to understand because no one who is alive has experienced death, and so the imagination is left to explore its possibilities. Fraser (2020) would guide researchers who were interested in learning more about indirect communication to consider studying concepts of the imagination. Perhaps the connection of indirect communication and experiences to imagination is the reason that so many indirect experiences in this data collection surrounded incidents of death.

McDuffie et al. (2022) documented that participants desired to share their experiences of loss with others in a quest to help people who were in bereavement. Linda even imparted a desire to help me with processing death experiences as she was describing the death of her son. She identified anxiety about coming to the interview with this goal in mind as she reflected on her preparation for storytelling. Other interviewees discussed how if they shared their story, it might help other family members or friends with their grieving process.

In another interview, Jabo told a story about the passing of his father and how sharing this experience with living individuals could help them learn a life lesson. Jabo internalized his experience and hoped that his children would overhear the consequences of his story:

My dad died, and he had kept trying to reach out to me, and he lived around the corner from me, but it was hard to explain because he hadn't been there for me. So, I try to show my kids every day, and you have to lose that person to understand.

This type of storytelling, which had been expressed with people Jabo trusted and had an intimate relationship with, provided a sense of symbolism as a means of expression to achieve a common understanding with his family.

Feelings of loss are often themselves indirect, especially when the individuals who experience them feel they do not have a right to do so. For example, Kaitlyn explained, "I do, but I don't think that if I tried to explain to people who either didn't have children or have never lost anything, then my words, I don't know if I could find the right words [to explain] that." This transference of compassion manifested itself in an indirect experience.

**Storytelling Intent.** The adaptation of attitude change is outlined in the expectancy-value theory, which proposes individual behavior and attitudes are adjusted based on potential outcomes and the probability they may occur (Colman, 2015). Some of the participants said they wanted to communicate stories because they had a motivation or intent to do so, which would give them a particular outcome. The *Storytelling Intent* theme was consistent when participants were asked to determine if they try to explain things in ways others will know what they are expressing. If a writer has dissatisfaction with their manuscript, they have psychologically altered their attitude (Todd, 2017). When people have the intent to achieve something, they are

more likely to adapt their attitude and behavior to achieve the objective, such as storytelling about an indirect experience to achieve an end goal.

Lemghari (2021) described the metaphoric integration theory, suggesting that conceptual blending within expression was a key factor toward understanding. The metaphoric integration theory was present in this study when seeking to answer RQ2 (see Appendix D). Kaitlyn explained her approach and objective: “It depends upon the intent. You need to find where their knowledge base is, and then from there, talk about the story in ways you feel they would best understand it. Because the story is all about conveying information.” The approach Kaitlyn shared contributes to the integration of metaphors helping people understand her story through expression just as the metaphoric integration theory suggests.

The interview responses showed consistency of *Storytelling Intent* and relaying messages to particular audiences. The participants, in a large majority of interviews conducted, stated they would adapt their storytelling techniques with the intent of expressing messages to particular audiences for a good result. An intent for each story told and when to tell stories was determined by each participant’s comfort level.

**Concluding Spiritual Experience.** Attitudes can determine the context of meaning for people based on perspectives of sciences of the spirit (Vecino, 2021). This mindset can be based on the attitudes and perspectives of each individual. When participants were asked to convey a story about an indescribable experience they had, some concluded it must have been a spiritual experience. Serenity disclosed her story of processing a breakup with a boyfriend who had drug addiction issues. She stated, “The therapy gave me peace and I can’t describe into words how it happened so fast. It was somewhat of a miracle and out-of-this-world spiritual experience.” In another interview, Joe said, “I bring up a lot of spiritual because in my mind that’s what’s most

indescribable. When the spirit is being worked on it's a lot harder and not like necessarily literally tangible." The spiritual experience Serenity explained and the indescribable spiritual experience Joe relayed show their attitudes about the context of their experiences.

Sometimes, the inability to express is merely a result of lacking knowledge or comprehension to fully understand what is happening to a person. Oberg (2022) studied interpretations of spiritual experiences and found the interpretation is beyond what most can comprehend but they knowingly determine it is spiritual, based on their self-truths. Danger, a meticulous 37-year-old research engineer, shared his story of waiting in line at a Subway restaurant feeling an urge to pray for the people in front of him. He said, "I didn't know their son had just been life-flighted in critical condition. How do you discern that it is the Holy Spirit or just indigestion? It is just spiritual." Because of Danger's character as a meticulous engineer, the experience required a clear meaning, but he could not comprehend what was happening to him.

Sarah, a 42-year-old quality manager from Illinois, described her reoccurring dreams about her grandmothers as "a whole other spiritual dimension." Sarah's perspective led her to create the framework of her encounter, which she used to understand the science of the spirit. McDuffie et al. (2022) found an identical response when a participant reflected on the death of her grandmother and reminisced about spending time together as a child and resolving that a higher power must be part of their process. Some participants in McDuffie et al.'s study and this research centered on God as the reason for their experiences.

***Must Be God.*** A sub-theme of *Concluding a Spiritual Experience* was found where participants said their experience must be God. Intense experiences result in a determination that God exists (Gillham, 2020). Annie, a 75-year-old devoted Christian writer, portrayed a story about an experience she had while walking her dogs one day in the 1990s:

I had taken my two cocker spaniels for a walk over by the lake at a nearby park, and as I walked around the lake, and have been praying all this time to talk to the Lord. I entered this area with woodsy wheat-type grass, but there was no wind, but as I was entering into it, I noticed that the grass started waving, you know, like wind or breeze, but yet I didn't feel a breeze, and I noticed this. The leaves on the trees were not waving, so I just kind of ignored it. Then I noticed every time as I would approach the area, this movement would happen again. And so, by this time I said, "Lord, I do believe you're trying to speak to me and talk to me," and the Holy Spirit just put in my heart.

Annie had concluded that God, the Lord, or the Holy Spirit was the reason the indirect experience was happening to her. People often claim a higher power is the reason for the indescribable events that happen to them.

The experience of God was also expressed by participants with a different approach within the *Must be God* theme. When asked how they would explain an indirect experience, Kirsten described her encounter as "more than a coincidence and kind of a synchronicity or God wink." Researcher Parmelee (2015) quoted Augustine: "I experience God on a daily basis, and the miracle of life all around. The miracle of birth, the miracle of love. He is always with me" (p. 117). The experience of God was expressed by participants to express their feelings about the encounters.

When asked to convey his story, Rex, a 44-year-old military officer, told his story of an experience he had when he went into the woods to have time alone with God after learning his ex-wife was going to attempt custody of their children. Rex said:

So, I spent half a day in the woods alone just asking God what he wanted me to know about this, and it wasn't so much data, it was an experiential understanding with God that

completely changed everything and gave me confidence to walk through that situation and everything worked out miraculously.

One of the stories that were expressed was by Sara, a 73-year-old single retired woman, who was at a loss for words:

On a Sunday morning, my friend called and asked me to go to a revival meeting with her and an answered prayer happened. I had a bunch of people praying for me that I would be able to pray in tongues. It was at a Jimmy Swaggart revival, and he asked everyone to come up to the front of the stage and he would pray for us and we would be able to pray in tongues. So, I asked for the gift, and I was standing on the floor, and there was a railing above me, and there were two girls in their 20s there watching me and praying for me. All of a sudden, my dead grandmother appeared to me, standing behind me with her hand on my shoulder, and I started praying in tongues. And she disappeared and the girls and all the people around me saw my grandmother, and we were all at a loss for words.

The stories participants shared often resulted in a conclusion that God was the reason for their experience. The themes that came from the interviews created depth for an understanding of the research questions while also providing answers to the questions. The themes were almost a study of their own. The similarities among the different themes are described next, and a figure representing the results of the data is presented.

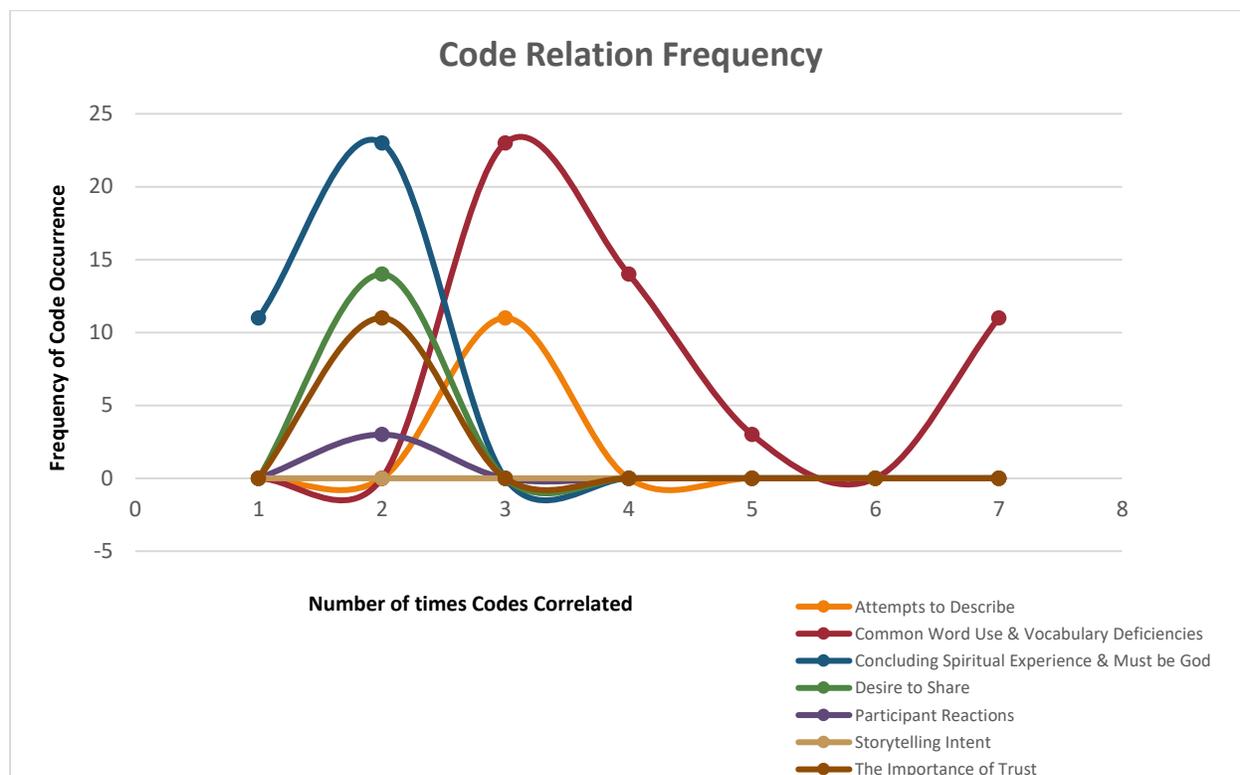
### ***Similarities Within Themes***

In this section, the similarities within the themes are shown, which represent how the themes intersect with one another. The frequency of the code occurrence and the number of times the codes correlated are displayed in Figure 3. The figure is described, and the significance of the data is explained.

### ***Code Relations***

The data analysis of the codes resulted in strong correlations among interviews where the theme of common word use and vocabulary deficiencies were prevalent. For each transcript identified, *Common Word Use & Vocabulary Deficiencies* was the most prevalent theme, and *Attempts to Describe* and *Concluding Spiritual Experience & Must be God* were the second most prevalent. In addition to similar themes being found, there was also a connection where prevalent themes intersected, connecting the concepts as similar and somewhat correlated. Figure 3 shows the prevalence and intersections of the themes based on the coding used for the study.

The correlations displayed represent the connectivity of each theme as a relation of ideas that were described within the interviews. The highest frequency of code occurrence was nearly 25 times, indicating the codes appeared often within the interviews. The number of times codes correlated varied in the interview data set. It is important to look at this information in a figure format because the frequency of the interwoven lines visually confirms the coding used by me was successful. By looking at the figure, it may help future researchers to know how indirect experiences are expressed in common ways that intersect when individuals are asked to give their stories.

**Figure 4***Code Relation Frequency for CIF Study*

The embedded constructions people use in verbal expression may have semantic functions (Dik & Hengeveld, 1997). The data analysis of the interviews revealed there were simple word sets people use to describe an experience. The simple word sets “be able to” and “and it was” were found in nearly half of all transcript documents, indicating that the use of simple words was common when sharing stories as an embedded construction. The frequency of their occurrence revealed a commonality among verbal expression patterns that correlate to semantics.

Now that I have explained the coded themes, reviewed the significance of the major emerging themes, and evaluated the similarities between the transcription coding, it is important

to correlate the data to the research questions. The following section describes and answers the research questions as part of empirical research.

### **Research Questions**

Indirect communication was studied through qualitative narrative research where individuals were able to share their own stories and reflect upon them metacognitively. The study was based on three research questions designed to better understand how people can communicate indirect feelings. The method of narrative interviews successfully yielded answers for the research within the interviewee responses. This section presents the research questions and answers them as required in empirical research.

#### ***RQ1: How do those who have indirect experiences engage with storytelling attempts?***

The first research question was designed to better understand how people with indirect experiences attempt storytelling. Fisher (1985) presented the narrative paradigm to explain that storytelling attempts are not in just one category alone, but are discovered in all areas of discourse—rhetoric, philosophy, and poetry, among others. Thus, participants gave a variety of answers when they were asked about their comfort level with sharing stories including the following: how they go about sharing a story, if they feel frustrated that they cannot express what they are trying to say, and if they try to explain things in ways others might know what they are expressing. The first interview session was intentionally designed so that participants were able to focus solely on their attempt to tell about their indirect experience. Organically, this attempt turned into a storytelling opportunity. As all individuals were able to complete their sessions, they demonstrated that individuals can, in fact, engage with using storytelling as a way to express their indirect experience.

The participants were able to identify, for themselves, that they were able to clearly communicate about an indirect experience through storytelling. Most of the participants were eager to tell their stories and explained that they connect with storytelling as a medium of expression. When participants had limited words, they utilized nonverbal methods of communication such as gestures because their words failed them. Although the rhetoric, emotion, engagement level, and even recollection of each story was different with each participant, all participants were, in fact, physically and emotionally able to tell their stories.

Participants were receptive to having an interviewer inquire about their experiences and made an effort to let me sense what they experienced. Even without knowing me, the participants were able to discuss their experiences openly using narrative skills such as jokes, illustrations, facial expressions, gestures, embellished words, and persuasion, which were helpful. Another approach used by the participants was to order their storytelling with a process, or chronological method, that builds up to the information they want to share. Overall, participants were able to connect with me, the interviewer and active listener, effectively.

In observing how individuals were able to express indirect experiences through storytelling, each participant was able to approach their expression by just giving a narrative. RQ1 was answered simply within the interview collection process by asking participants to describe what they felt was an indirect experience in their lives. All participants identified as having encountered indirect experiences and were able to talk about them reflectively; thus, the requirement to be one who has indirect experiences and express them through storytelling was ensured.

***RQ2: Does the storyteller feel as though a shared meaning has occurred when indirect experiences are described through storytelling?***

To properly answer RQ2, it is important to understand the essence of an experience known as phenomenology. Husserl (1990) presented the theory of phenomenology to explain how cognition and description explain the science of essence. The essence is a symbol of communication that helps people develop shared meaning about their experiences (Vidales, 2021). The entelechy used by participants with the goal of meaning ensured the messages would be shared. How participants explained they would go about describing a story, and then stated they had expressed shared meaning when they told stories of indirect experiences, answered RQ2. Approximately one third of participants felt they wanted to impart their experience with others firsthand by taking them to a similar location or trying to get them to feel the same experience. The research question was answered with a resounding “yes” in the majority of interviews, indicating that meaning was shared about indirect experiences through storytelling.

Many participants felt they had a process, or tactic, they must go through to fully come to a shared meaning with me, and they explained it out loud to me. Serenity described how she communicated her indirect experience to others by “going in chronological order and using all my senses so the person can maybe comprehend and use their senses to understand.” Another tactic was accomplished by Rex when he described how he starts with the context of an experience and tries to incorporate the five senses of the experience. Kirsten described how the use of “a bunch of words to use signs and symbols” helps to share meaning. Sarah explained the importance of using “the most fitting words with the right meaning that have shared meaning and are relatable.” All of the interviewees were able to tell their stories and the ability to complete

them. There was no attempt to explain once the participants began telling their stories. The engagement was very easy for them to convey the indirect experiences in all instances.

The interviewees, whether they expressed it or not, each had their own set of rules for which they expressed their story. They would not have spent the time to engage in storytelling to an academic stranger about their indirect experience if they did not feel as if they could express their story. The participants came prepared to have a relational experience and shared meaning occurred. RQ2 was able to be fully accomplished within these interviews.

***RQ3: When thinking about their storytelling experience metacognitively, what does the storyteller feel that they were able to adequately communicate about their indirect experience?***

Metacognition is a form of awareness and reflection referring to the knowledge people hold about their thoughts (Flower, 1994). During the second interview sessions, the participants were asked to think about the stories they had shared during their previous interview. Carlsson (2016) explained how Kierkegaard knew indirect experiences produce an image from the aesthetic. While some of the participants felt they had expressed their story in a way that relayed their senses and emotions, many felt they were simply able to express the experience fully, indicating RQ3 was thoroughly answered. Of the interviews conducted, roughly 86% of participants stated they were able to completely communicate their indirect experience. This percentage indicates storytellers were able to adequately communicate their indirect experience to others when using metacognition.

To answer the third research question, most participants either felt they were able to fully express themselves in the first interview as best they could but had no further explanation for their experience. Researchers should be prepared for emotional responses during interviews and take care to balance their approach (Edwards & Holland, 2013). When participants began to

review the previous interview session, many began to cry or express feelings from their past, leading them to become adamant about their feelings during expression within the interview.

Additionally, in relation to RQ3, with each question, the goal was to determine if the participant was able to express their indirect experiences completely and if there were any other feelings they wanted to share that may not have been previously expressed. Participant reactions and active listening played a role in the details of the experiences being expressed by interviewees. If the storytellers did not feel as if their story was being received with engagement from the listener, they would likely stop telling the story, omit details, or only express parts that made sense relationally to the listener within their worldview. Annie used sensory descriptions to detail what she felt had been relayed, “A real sense of peace. It was a sense of wonder because it was so unique because it was something to ponder.” Jabo said, “I was able to get my point across,” and Joe said he communicated that his “experience was kind of spiritual like, you know, it was really cool.” It appeared the metacognition of the indirect experiences caused feelings to well-up with the participants as they were asked the questions. Sarah began to cry during her interview and expressed, “I don’t really know if the listener is able to fully relate or understand the depth of the experience I had when dreaming about my grandmothers.” This emotion showed how stirring the indirect experiences were to those that lived them.

Although acknowledged subconsciously, the participants understood that they had lived through a phenomenon. As phenomenology allows humans to express truth through examining the exchanges of lived experience, these interviewees were expressing their truth in the first interview. In the second interview, they were, perhaps for the first time, able to reconcile that they had lived through an experience that had true meaning and truth. In another interview, Kaitlyn shared about the loss of her son and how commonality was difficult for others to

understand the feeling, and she began to cry as she shared her sadness. She further explained, “There are words such as gut-wrenching or broken-heart but they are not even the tip of the iceberg of the depth of my feelings.” However, Kaitlyn indicated she was able to explain herself for this deep understanding of meaning. Examples like this and more results from other individuals in this study reveal that RQ3 data indicates participants were able to communicate their indirect experiences when they evaluated their messaging using metacognition and thinking about what they had disclosed.

As a result of the interviews, all research questions were answered for this study. RQ1 indicated that people who have had indirect experiences can indeed engage with storytelling attempts in various ways. RQ2 demonstrated that all participants felt shared meaning about indirect experiences through storytelling did occur. RQ3 confirmed that metacognition was successful in achieving a sufficient understanding of their indirect experiences when telling their stories.

The research questions for this research were successfully explored, and many revelations about the idea of indirect experiences were shared by participants. The participants expressed themselves fully to me, and new areas of discovery with CIF were found. The indirect experiences and feelings that participants contributed to this study produced many advanced opportunities for future researchers.

### **Summary**

Throughout this chapter, the participants were identified with pseudonyms, along with their demographic information. The results of the study were presented and the qualitative data themes were outlined as *Common Word Use & Vocabulary Deficiencies*, *Participant Reactions*, *The Importance of Trust*, *Desire to Share & Experiences with Loss*, *Storytelling Intent*, and

*Concluding Spiritual Experience & Must be God.* The similarities found among the themes were further represented with correlated figures describing the connections among themes. The research questions used were defined with examples of responses included.

Overall, the results of this study indicate people can communicate their indirect experiences in direct and indirect ways for others to comprehend their experiences and gain shared meaning. How interviewees expressed their stories varied, with some being artistic while others were presented as a factual encounter. Regardless of the approach, all participants were able to express themselves fully for me to attain what their experience was about. In Chapter Five, the summary of findings will be established with a discussion and more details to conclude the dissertation.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

This qualitative narrative research study has revealed patterns in the ways humans are attempting to communicate indirect experiences through storytelling. Indirect feelings are emotions individuals experience that are not communicated easily to others. This chapter presents the summary of findings from the study and a discussion about empirical and theoretical literature. The themes connected to the primary theories related to the study are discussed, and the implications of the research are revealed. The limitations of the study are disclosed, and significant contributions to scholarship are highlighted. The recommendations for future research are offered, before a final conclusion.

In Chapter Four, the research questions for the study were answered and were found answerable. Several participants connected with the idea of having an opportunity to share their indirect experiences within the context of academic research and to simply have an opportunity to have someone listen to their story. All participants were able to fully express themselves and provided fresh ideas toward communicating indirect feelings (CIF). The successful impact on the sub-field of indirect communication brought about an irony in the fact that the stories or messages of indirect communication were communicated in a direct manner.

Irony is used when people try to say something without saying it (Kreuz, 2020). For example, a listener may experience a message and know that it is important without actually being explicitly told it is important (Fraser, 2020). The results of this study found that people use irony among other strategies to relay messages they want to share. The subsequent chapter discusses many of the strategies participants used and offers potential focal points for future research.

### Summary of Findings

The results indicate that lived indirect experiences are able to be communicated and understood. The research questions brought about a depth of understanding for me as many stories were shared. The bulk of the research centered on relaying indirect messages and determining if people were understood. When participants used metacognition to think about what they had shared, there was a consensus that the messaging was successful, indicating indirect messages can indeed be relayed with shared meaning.

In Chapter Four, the research questions for this study were answered. The results indicate people engage with storytelling attempts. The fact that interviewees could engage with storytelling was further supported when all participants articulated that they did, indeed, create shared meaning about their indirect experiences through storytelling. Using metacognition, the participants validated the ability to communicate indirect experiences by explaining what they conveyed in their stories.

This section will outline the summary of findings for the study. Within the following section, a discussion of findings related to empirical literature is included. The implications are presented that are applicable to future narrative research contexts. The limitations of the study are explained as they relate to limited scope, the diminished interpersonal experience, and my worldview. Recommendations for future research are proposed, followed by a conclusion.

Within the preliminary question list, when asked if they have had an indirect experience, 80% of participants said “yes” and 20% said, “I think so.” This showed a prevalence of having had an indirect experience because the majority of interviewees were able to definitively state they had the encounter. However, when participants were asked if they felt they were able to fully express their indirect experience, only 73% said “yes,” while 20% said “no,” and 1% said

“almost.” When asked if they believe there are ways to describe the indescribable, 67% said “yes,” 20% said “I think so,” and 13% said “not always.” With the larger majority feeling there are ways to describe lived indirect experiences, it appears there may be ways to do so. The results indicate, while communicating indirect experiences may be difficult, it is possible to communicate indirect feelings in a meaningful way. If it is true, then people may truly have the ability to describe the lived indirect experiences and the feelings associated with them.

Indirect communication can be a very powerful experience for the listener. Storytellers bring existential ideas to the forefront through their narratives that were conveyed to me, the listener, through indirect messages. It is essential to practice the skill of active listening to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings and acquire the stories being told (O’Rourke, 2019). A researcher in a qualitative study naturally takes on the role of an active listener, using best practices of listening. Perhaps this study was so successful because the participants knew I wanted to listen and would believe them, not being dismissive, and practicing good listening skills. However, anyone practicing active listening would likely be able to ascertain and experience the shared meaning that a storyteller attempts.

The significance of storytelling for indirect experiences is displayed in the intention of the storyteller. Humans inherently are expressive and have their own communication style or form. Burke (1925) described the psychology of form as how people create an appetite in the mind of the listener that is satisfied by creating aesthetic messages. The messages people create result in the experience for the listener. If stories can be told successfully, they can bring the imagination into play, allowing the intended expression to be shared.

## **The Importance of Storytelling for Expression**

The results of the data clearly revealed storytelling is a valuable resource for human expression. Storytelling is an important human trait for sharing experiences and elaborating through expression. Stories began because humans put words to their sensations (Burke, 1985). The words people compile to develop their messages are sometimes created to send a powerful message for others to translate.

## ***The Power of Encoding and Decoding Messages***

The translation of messages from one person to another goes through a process of encoding and decoding, which can send powerful indirect messages. Encoding is when mental thoughts are transferred into words, and decoding is when a message receiver retranslates the message (Skinner & Stewart, 2017). The interpretation of the message is dependent upon indirect messages and noise. If there is noise, which can distort messages, then the indirect message may not be received.

The way messages are encoded determines the messages' decoding, which results in the message received, as one is dependent upon the other (Hall, 2009). In this study, encoding was found within the storyteller when they gave an initial rendition of their story. However, in the meta-analysis, there was also an opportunity for clarifying and decoding within the self-analysis. Additionally, responsibility for decoding was put on the active listener. Once the interview was complete, I decoded the message to understand the story. To achieve understanding, people often need a way to relate with signs or symbols. Storytelling often uses symbolism as a means of expression to achieve commonality. Symbolism can be used as a tool in several forms but a commonly used medium is parables.

### *Parables for Indirect Messaging*

The tool of using parables for expression can be an example of indirect storytelling that has been proven to be effective to move and inspire people. The parables Jesus told represented stories helping humans connect ideas with symbols that created meaning in their minds (Fraser, 2020). Through the use of symbols in communication, this interaction can be achieved. The parables about humans may represent the lives of the narrator or listener (Hamer, 2018).

Religious leaders continue to use the parable technique from the pulpit.

Additionally, parables are found within secular thought-leaders and business training techniques that are common in modern leadership, business, or influencer tactics. Thought-leader Andrea Sampson, an executive speaking coach, communication expert, and business strategist uses listening skills to help leaders deliver engaging parables through understanding identification and human behavior (Sampson, 2023). Sampson explained how narrators should build their stories using the senses (356labs, 2021). By sharing stories, they communicate relatable messages that create meaning for people as represented through signs.

By sharing stories, or expressing themselves, senders of messages are hoping to bring about connectivity, or even intimacy, to their receiver. When there is relatability, and even trust, between the sender and receiver, there will likely be relatability. This relatable shared meaning does not have to be direct, but instead, can be figurative or abstract. Just as one would play a game of charades and give expressions of signs and symbols that are relatable to the guesser to win a point, storytelling has a richer meaning when signs of commonality are used. In this study, parables, signs, and symbols were found in the initial interview.

### *Signs for Meaning*

Signs that are meaningful may be relatable tools to communicate meaning and allow for intersections of shared meanings (Schandorf, 2019). These signs show relatability and the importance of human interaction in fostering relationships for people. Symbolism plays a part in the human psyche and identity processing for mental representation (Erton, 2018). Those who identify with similar foundational worldviews will be able to communicate about common symbols that have mutually shaped them (O'Halloran, 2023).

For example, Christians will naturally be able to talk about the symbolism of a cross to another Christian and expect a feeling of mutual understanding. Americans would be able to recognize their flag. Stakeholders would understand the logo of an organization and what it stands for. In this study, participants were able to openly discuss signs in hopes that the active listener would have shared meaning.

It is important to note that parables, symbols, and signs are just a few tools that could be used in the wide spectrum of storytelling techniques that help with narrative expression. Each narrator must select their own narration tools depending on the audience and occasion of their desired message (Schandorf, 2019). In this study, symbolism was prevalent consciously and subconsciously during the storytelling process. In the first interview, the interviewees might describe something using symbolism itself. In the second interview, they may have a self-revelation of both conscious and unconscious symbols that were used as they analyzed their own breakdown. The signs each participant used represented meaning for the listener to better understand their experience. In the following section, the discussion of findings shows relations to empirical and theoretical literature, and the correlated themes are explained.

## Discussion

The research study intended to discover if CIF could be achieved by evaluating the phenomenon of indirect experiences. The empirical evidence contributes to indirect communication, shared meaning, storytelling, and communication deficiencies. Aumann's (2008, 2019) studies of Kierkegaard and indirect communication, Parmelee's (2015) research of the indirect communication found in *House, M.D.*, and McDuffie et al.'s (2022) study on bereavement contributed to this research. However, this research should be considered foundational as research within indirect communication studies is infrequently documented. In the following sections, the results will be discussed regarding existing empirical research following the framework of indirect communication theory, Fisher's narrative paradigm theory, and phenomenology theory. Correlations with this study and peer-reviewed empirical literature show themes that relate to and describe the findings, which will show discoveries of indirect communication, human interaction, and bereavement therapy.

### Findings Related to Empirical Literature

Empirical literature is research that is based on observed and measurable phenomena that develop knowledge based on actual experiences versus theory (Eastern New Mexico University Golden Library, n.d.). Empirical research, done in qualitative format, generally has an investigation format consisting of an introduction, methodology, results section, and a discussion. This study was consistent with empirical literature as the foregoing elements are all present within. The literature connected to the findings correlates closely to studies on indirect communication, studies of human interaction, and those involving therapeutic methods for dealing with mourning.

### ***Bereavement and Grief***

McDuffie et al. (2022) explored bereavement and grief and discovered that their participants expressed emotional reactions during the interviews, remembering past experiences with close family members, and correlations to God and spiritual experiences were present. In this study, the same themes were found, showing there is consistency when experiencing indirect experiences including bereavement and grief. Interviewees expressed emotional reactions as they reflected upon the indirect experiences they had encountered. Additionally, the participants related their experiences to God and spiritual experiences.

### ***Motives and Communicative Means***

The motives and means that people use to communicate indirect experiences are dependent upon their artful literary devices as Kierkegaard suggested (Aumann, 2008). The findings within the interviews of this study directly correlate to Aumann's (2008) work. Interviewees not only showed motives and communicative means that were indirect as they explained how they go about sharing stories but also whether or not they would express a story based on trust. The motives individuals have for the stories they tell indicate the effectiveness of their message.

### ***Overhearing and Inwardness***

Inwardness is the inner form or quality of a person's outward-looking engagement, rather than self-scrutiny or silent pondering (Hannary, 2005). Parmelee's (2015) research on indirect communication discussed how people can overhear with inwardness within television storylines as entertainment consumers. The concepts found in Parmelee's dissertation in observing a sitcom story from an episode of *House, M.D.*, provided a baseline for researchers to understand that viewers, or listeners, can share a mutual understanding of indirect messages and created

storylines. For example, when TV consumers watch the main character, Dr. House, make sarcastic observations to his patients, they may have an understanding of his diagnosis through his analogies.

Within an episode of *House*, Dr. House chastised his 37-year-old patient by using metaphor to describe a health problem. He said, “You’re too busy to be running a day care center in your abdomen,” which was indirect (Parmelee, 2015, p. 230). Television observers watching this episode might be able to experience inwardness even if they did not have the same diagnosis as the patient in the show and be compelled to better understand their health issues.

Just like Aumann (2008) described that inwardness must be overheard concretely and not through abstract messages, the viewers of TV shows like *House* must reflect upon the messages inwardly to relate to the experience. Using reflection allows the viewer to connect with the character in a TV show to grasp the indirect message for understanding. Today, people encounter indirect communication every day in sitcoms, New York Times best-selling novels, advertisements, and through social media influencers. The jokes, subtle messages, and subliminal messaging, along with catchy phrases, give messages that are not direct yet they garner attention. The awareness encourages people to be in tune with listening for indirect messaging by searching for indirect messages, which may be the key to discovering more places the indirect may be hidden. The findings of Parmelee’s (2015) study correlate with the concepts of overhearing and inwardness as discovered within this research and are outlined here.

**Overhearing.** This study discovered that there is a level of importance when overhearing a message from others which was affirmed, as predicted, through storytelling methods. During the interviews, some participants presented their stories with a creative approach. Within the interview with Pdraig, there was evidence of overhearing when I asked how he goes about

sharing a story. He said, “The build-up and intensity are important but embellishment that captures the attention like sharing about the green cliffs of a moor keep bringing them back.” His statement indicates Padraig was overemphasizing his story to attract listeners. If so, the message Padraig was trying to convey is a method of overheard sharing to share an experience through flowery vocabulary.

**Inwardness.** Inwardness is described as a way people implicitly communicate with themselves when they are alone (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992). In other words, people think about themselves and often think they are communicating something they are not, which is in alignment with M. McLuhan’s (1999) ideas that we cannot communicate the thingness of “things.” In my interview with Jabo, he tried to explain his feelings but never said what he was talking about: “This is why I do these things, so I don’t have that feeling with them later.” It is unclear what “things” Jabo does and what the “things” were that he would have a feeling about later. Jabo was using inwardness to tell a story that left me without an understanding of his message.

Even when humans might be actively striving not to communicate a message, they are sending a message that has a mutual understanding to others in the room. For example, someone ignoring other people in a room and keeping to themselves to avoid making eye contact may be sending an indirect message. Direct communication does not require as much interpretation as indirect communication. Those observing the antisocial person may think they are sick, grumpy, sad, or being rude. However, the indirect communicator may simply be focusing on an inward problem and not feel they want to invite direct interaction, or communication, from others. Marshall McLuhan would describe this as not, not communicating because the messenger is still sending a message through another medium (Patterson, 1990).

Participants described communication incidences where they thought they were communicating a message and later found out the listener did not receive the message surrounding their inwardness. The disruption or warping of a mutual understanding is called noise (Song et al., 2022). The listener or receiver of the message likely had internal or external noise that prevented them from actively listening to receive the full shared meaning of the indirect experience. The proportion of interviews conducted that showed inwardness to be a factor was 46%, which validates this finding in nearly half of the interviews.

**Modernity.** Modernity is described as an understanding that everything needs to be revealed in concrete form (Jervis, 2020). Modernity does not like communication to be abstract and would prefer direct communication. However, scholars of indirect communication discuss how modernity restrains some modalities of communication because it does not allow people to discover them. The nature of modernity is to be obvious and can be categorized as greedy, brash, or sometimes imposing.

In alignment with the harshness of modernity, Fraser (2020) explained, someone who is interested in an image for its concreteness is only interested if they can garner the experience. If Fraser is correct, then the indirect intention would be a more appropriate way to appreciate art. It is more polite and allows mindfulness. Artists, who display their imagination within a medium itself, create indirect experiences for observers as the meaning of the art is not obvious and nearly opposes a direct form of communication.

Another way to describe modernity might be the way people implicitly communicate themselves with nudity and sex. For example, being naked leaves nothing to the imagination, yet obscuring the prominent features allows the imagination to work. Kierkegaard (1846/1992)

described communication as an entirely indirect experience to effectively send a message. When there is more meaning to an experience, people will wrestle with it to attain the encounter.

**Imagination.** The act of imagining is an inspired and creative effort that assists people in comprehending all truth (Fraser, 2020). People use imagination to create an environment that is engaging and creative. Imagination is the fruit of creative thought where our collective memory plays a role in the development (Pink, 2015). Using our senses in conjunction with our memories allows for expression to exude within our communication.

The use of sensory expression and feedback fosters tactile intersensory communication created from the imagination (Theall, 1995). The words people use and the ways they convey their stories create interpersonal relationships that are sustaining. Relationships are lived out by creative sensory messaging that evolves from memories (Pink, 2015). This sensory encounter is fostered by the imagination of the messenger in an interpersonal relationship.

J. R. R. Tolkien was successful at blending imagination within stories to build relationships through experiences by way of artistic expression (Gervel, 2020). The creative effort displayed by Tolkien's work is an example of how sensory descriptors can help achieve shared meaning through storytelling by creating an imaginative environment for the reader to experience. The vivid descriptors that Tolkien used help the reader to visualize the places in his stories.

### **Findings Related to Theoretical Literature**

The theoretical literature that closely relates to this study also uses the narrative paradigm, indirect communication theory, and phenomenology theory, which are predominantly found in the research. The narrative paradigm applies to the results where the stories participants shared and their willingness to tell stories represent the fact that people are natural storytellers.

The results also provide an idea of how to share experiences that may otherwise seem indescribable. Indirect communication theory is useful to explain the stories people tell and the methods and tools they use to share their experiences. The phenomenology theory shows there are indirect experiences that present a phenomenon for people that gives challenges when attempting to communicate indirect feelings. Overall, the theory of indirect communication is a foundation for the feelings people encounter with indirect experiences.

### ***Themes Connected to the Narrative Paradigm***

Humans are *homo narrans*, defined as inherent storytellers (Fisher, 1984). The findings of this research support the fact that people are storytellers, thus validating the narrative paradigm. The narrative paradigm focuses on how humans are storytellers, and the decisions individuals make are based on a good reason determined by history, culture, and character. Because people live in a world that uses stories, they must also use them (Spector-Mersel, 2010).

The participants in this study discovered their interest in sharing stories to be a pleasurable experience. Shared meaning builds relationships and makes people feel engaged through context and the co-creation of ideas (Wahl et al., 2022). Engaging with others fosters cohesiveness when actively listening, which lends comfort to people. For example, the comfort level of the participants indicated I had taken the role of an active listener. People like having an active listener engage with them (O'Rourke, 2019). Sharing stories for engagement with others benefits both parties through the human experience.

As described, the goal of the interview process for data collection was to facilitate a *homo narrans* opportunity in a planned and controlled environment. When asked to describe how they went about sharing a story, many interviewees expressed the importance of getting others to feel

their experience. This is evidence of the engagement that storytelling can infuse within relationships.

### ***Connecting Data to Indirect Communication Theory***

The idea of communicating indirect experiences is unique research, although some research is closely engaged such as Aumann's (2008) work, *Kierkegaard on the Need for Indirect Communication*, Parmelee's (2015) close textural analysis of *House, M.D. and Indirect Communication*, and Turnbull's (2009) article, "Kierkegaard, Indirect Communication, and Ambiguity." Kierkegaard centered on indirect communication as a means of expression and used pseudonyms for silence through communication. In other words, he used a fake name, Johannes Climacus, to send an indirect message in his works. The silence of indirect messages creates an immersive experience for the listener that requires artistic information to make conclusions for understanding.

**Immersive Communication.** Indirect experiences are an immersive indirect communication. They send a silent message for the listener to attain using all the senses; thus, existentialism reveals the human experience. McBride (2022) described existentialism as humanism or the fact that we exist and have a purpose. When individuals can experience another's existence through their messages, the encounter can be transferred and attained. The development of messages that have this effect can be considered artistic.

**Artistic Expression.** Aumann (2008) elaborated on Kierkegaard's work exploring the value of art as an indirect form of communication while sharing cognitivism. In the same way, the results of this research reveal the indirect messages that people have experienced in their lives are conveyed through artistic means. For example, Padraig articulated how flowery vocabulary paints a picture for the listener. In fact, the stories participants told and the

encounters that transpired, sent indirect messages to them, which they shared with me, and are outlined in the following themes.

**Concluding Spiritual Experience and Must Be God.** When experiences are indirect, individuals often wonder if God must be the reason or if they must have had a spiritual experience. In McDuffie et al.'s (2022) study, participants expressed their relationships with a higher power were part of indirect experiences they had. While not directly stated as indirect experiences, these encounters were clearly implied.

The participants of this study shared many occurrences of the same message when asked if they could describe what an indirect experience meant to them. An example is from the interview with Sara:

Yes, this is a feeling that is beyond words, it's a knowing without words. I know it is God, I know he is the spiritual thing that I am feeling. When I get an indirect experience or feeling of something that goes by me, like maybe it is a spirit or something, I know it is God.

Sara's experience shows that people conclude a spiritual experience or God as the reason for their indirect encounters. This evidence is commonly found in movies, the Bible, literature, and even music. The familiar and relatable societal connections to the experience help us know that there is a higher power. By seeing or hearing that the encounter has happened to others, the feeling is validated and confirmed for people. Knowing that others have had the same feeling reinforces the experience further.

### ***Themes Connected to Phenomenology Theory***

Husserl outlined the phenomenology theory as a psychological knowing of pure phenomena that is consciously present (Drummond & Höffe, 1995). An additional theory

supporting the stories people share and the phenomena they create can be found in the theory of phenomenology. Throughout this study, there were instances of phenomenology that stood out to me. It was not just the stories told but also how the participants became emotionally involved through the series of questions over two interview sessions. Phenomenological interviewing brings about the lived experience of a particular phenomenon (Cypress, 2018). The theme of *Participant Reactions* was strong within this study with many participants crying or pausing to reflect upon their lives.

**Participant Reactions.** Phenomenology is the study of phenomena to attain the perspective of individuals' lived experiences (Tenny et al., 2022). The phenomenon of *Participant Reactions* is connected to the theory of phenomenology because the encounter was unexpected and not an intended result of the lived experiences of participants. McDuffie et al. (2022) researched the experiences of people who lost loved ones and found a similar result as the reactions were described and emotional feelings were relayed about their struggles with loss.

The reactions that were expressed during the interviews were profound and often left me emotional and wanting to engage in close conversation to try and make the interviewee feel better. However, it is best to retain a neutral approach and avoid disrupting the process when conducting interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The stories the participants shared and the difficulties they encountered were expressed thoroughly enough for me to feel their experience.

In some of the interviews, I cried with the participant because the emotional expression was so strong. Beans (2022) studied the effects of stories on the hearts of listeners and found heart rates and physiological and behavioral changes that result from listening to stories. There were some stories shared that held weight for a few days that caused me to think about life and death while also altering my mood. Research notes were taken about the experience to better

understand how the participant's impression of me stimulated inward thoughts. The *Participant Reactions* were impactful and transferred to me in such a way that the experience was memorable. Narrative inquiries tend to be a way to gain actual experiential knowledge of another person's lived experience (Clandinin, 2018). This was a significant finding of the study confirming that CIF is possible and lending to the theory of phenomenology as a supportive element.

**Testimony.** Traditionally, we think of testimony as something related to a religious experience or conversion linking faith with divine intervention (Faimau, 2017). Additionally, testimonies have been used in lawful governance situations including courts of law and confessions. For example, a witness in a courtroom would provide proof of an event that occurred. However, testimonies are also used as a point of revealing the truth about how a person feels and or the details surrounding a set of life events. Testimonies are a statement of an event or experience one has been through.

Although indirect experiences are a phenomenon, it should be noted that people who shared them in the interview process, and who attempted to do them organically, were asked to share a testimony through their storytelling. The narrative messages people relay through their testimony can sometimes be told in a confusing, lengthy, and non-sequential manner, but the researcher must frame the messages to make them clear (Holloway & Brown, 2012). This study had some incoherent interviews, but the testimony revealed the details to the extent that was necessary for understanding and revelation of truth. Although indirect experiences may seem a mysterious thing to some, to the people who are telling the stories, their indirect experiences were a reality.

### ***Trust Theme Connection to CPM***

Another theory that can explain some results from this research is the communication privacy management theory (CPM). The tension people experience when deciding to be open or private is evaluated with the CPM as noted by Littlejohn et al. (2017). The trust theme that was discovered in this research found that people do struggle with sharing their experiences with others. CPM also points to the fact that other people can be a factor in the tension people experience with revealing information to others (Petronio, 2002). For example, a particular interviewer may cause a change in the openness of a research participant, causing them to share information they otherwise may not share with someone, as was found in this study.

The willingness of participants to self-disclose their stories was based on intentionality, trust, and bereavement. Some individuals may not participate or acknowledge a study like this if they are not willing. I created a space for participants to be open and share at an intimate personal level of engagement, which built trust for them to share their stories. Some people may not share their stories because they perceive others may not want to hear them, while others may fear judgement. As a researcher in America, there may be a responsibility to consider these factors in determining whether or not someone should share their story.

There is a level of self-protection among people that works as a barrier to communication at times. Stress-related events can create an atmosphere of uncertainty for individuals that may hinder expression (Dam et al., 2021). Some may have past experiences in their memories, while others may have gone through a crisis. It is important for future researchers to understand that some individuals may be experiencing crisis in their lives and preparation for this potentiality should be considered when conducting similar research.

## **Implications**

There are some implications that may affect future studies. The findings of this study suggest particular interviewing variables have implications for narrative research studies. Empirical research supporting the implications is included in this section. The following concepts of participant strangers, quasi-counseling training, time lapse, and distractions outline how interviewing through online means may affect research results.

### **Participant Strangers**

The major limitation of this study is that I did not know the participants before the interview sessions. All interviewees were referred by others through word-of-mouth efforts and shared information. There is the chance that participants may have presented false truths that could alter the results of replicated studies. It should be noted by researchers that participants may not tell the truth and that there is no way to know if they did or not (Weiss, 1995). Since honesty is a factor, it is important to note this implication.

### **Quasi-Counseling Training**

I am not a counselor, although many participants shared stories as if they were attending a counseling session. The consent form did indicate the interview sessions would not be for counseling to ensure I was presenting the study correctly. Dempsey et al. (2016) explained the importance of maintaining a neutral presence to not be considered a therapist. Researchers will need to guard themselves against taking on the approach of a counselor to safeguard interviewee perceptions.

### **Time Lapse**

The interviews occurred 2 months before the writing of this dissertation, resulting in a potential of missed details and memory loss of stories that were shared. The stories were so rich

that some aspects of the information may have been forgotten or incorrectly translated. It is important for interviewers to write soon after interviews because small intervals of time after the sessions are most effective for memory retention (Sauerland et al., 2014). Taking an extra step to dictate notes and write down thoughts will assist future researchers conducting similar studies.

### **Distractions**

Because the interviews were held through the Zoom platform, there were unforeseen distractions during some of the interviews. In one instance, a participant was babysitting her grandchildren when they interrupted the discussion, disrupting the flow of information being shared. In another interview, my computer restarted, resulting in a delay of the story being told. When conducting qualitative research through a Zoom platform, researchers should minimize distractions by choosing a private location to conduct the interview (Gray et al., 2020).

It is important for researchers to include implications to show the interpretation of the findings and how they are either consistent or inconsistent with literature methods (Creswell, 2016). By evaluating the implications of a study, researchers can weed out any potential problems that could arise. For example, Partlow (2022) explored digital method use in research studies during the pandemic and found people want to share their lived experiences more than ever; however, the implications of using technology resulted in a training requirement for some participants.

The implications of this research may present considerations for future researchers to integrate into their research plan. By understanding the approach and how it affected the participants and researcher, scholars looking to replicate the study may be better prepared for interviews. Strangers may not tell the truth, interviewees might think the researcher is a counselor, the memory of the interview can get lost with time, and digital interviews may cause

distractions, so it is important to note these implications. Understanding the factors that exist within the limitations of this research is a noteworthy factor which is clarified in the following section.

### **Limitations**

There were limitations such as limited scope, the diminished interpersonal experience, all Christian participants, and my worldview. The scope of the study was limited to one period of time for one educational institution. Future studies may offer inclusive research with other institutions to expand the research results. By interacting primarily through the Zoom platform, the participants and I did not experience true interpersonal interaction where nonverbal cues and other factors are typically present. Although it was not my intention, through self-disclosure it was found that all of the participants were Christian individuals, which may have limited the study to one area of religious belief. Expanding future similar studies by actively seeking participants of varying faith backgrounds or no faith backgrounds may alter the results. My worldview may have limited a full understanding of socio-psychological factors that a trained psychological therapist would have understand thoroughly. Although these limitations may be a factor, I am an average listener who gained shared meaning successfully. There were significant contributions toward communication research that are offered in the following section.

### **Significant Contributions to Scholarship**

Although there are many words within the English language, people often do not use the plethora of verbal options available to them, resulting in a lack of word knowledge, time spent finding the right words, and fear causing avoidance of expression. During the interviews, 12 of the 15 participants used very simple words to explain what they had encountered. Extra time spent to find the right words needed to explain themselves occurred 30% of the time. Participants

of this study often displayed fear-based concerns at a rate of 30%. To expand upon this inquiry, three additional artifacts are identified in the following section that connect to the narrative paradigm and indirect communication, as well as other connections with scholarship in communication that should be considered for elaboration in the future.

### **Additional Artifact Explorations**

The results of this research indicate there are significant contributions available to scholarship in many areas within the field of communication such as interpersonal, rhetorical, and social judgment. I identified three additional artifacts from the results of the study, indicating there are further areas of research available toward communication-based scholarship. The artifacts of note include (a) lack of word knowledge, (b) time spent finding the right words, and (c) fear causing avoidance of expression. These artifacts are outlined and connected to the areas of study in the following sections. Because the artifacts were commonly used, this section was included to break down each idea with an example for better understanding.

#### ***Lack of Word Knowledge***

Difficulties in communication and ways to express ourselves can be frustrating to the sender and the receiver of the message. Levinson and Majid (2014) explained how limited vocabulary resulted in perceptual aspects limiting communication within their studies. The first artifact, related to the narrative paradigm, is that vocabulary was not used because participants lacked knowledge of words. The lack of word knowledge may present challenges with interpersonal exchanges that have not been previously considered.

Within all of the interviews, simple words were used that did not fully describe the experience in a memorable way. This shows a lack of vocabulary for human expression when participants sought to share their indirect experiences. For example, Kaitlyn said, “I had this

*weird* feeling and it was like *wow* but that's all I can really say about it." The words *weird* and *wow* do not explain much to the listener. This example shows how simple words are used for expression when indirect experiences occur. For reference, Appendix E shows a word cloud of the most frequently used words from the interviews of this study. Alternatively, sometimes individuals use words that are complex or abstract, which can distort communication for the listener.

Using abstract language can leave individuals with a feeling of uncertainty that even the communicator has a difficult time explaining (Adler et al., 1989). When abstract words are used, there is a potential for the message to be misunderstood by others due to their lack of word knowledge. People use words to better understand one another in ways that are relatable and simple. When vocabulary is lacking, mutual understanding becomes flawed.

### ***Time Spent Finding the Right Words***

Silence could feel like gravity to communicators because of perceptions about how information is perceived by the listener, resulting in incorrect word choices (Acheson, 2008). Another prevalent artifact points to the fact individuals often do not spend the time to come up with words to describe what they have experienced. It is important to note that active listeners may not be able to detect what is needed to help them find the right words for understanding. When people have natural pauses in their rhetoric, it can cause the active listener's mind to wander. Avoiding the time necessary to develop a conversation properly may result in miscommunication as was evidenced in the stories participants shared within this study. Taking an extra moment to jot down some notes or record the message may help listeners to retain messages and promote listening once again (Ngwoke et al., 2022).

There were a few interviews that were rushed because the participant was short on time. Because they were running late, the result was a time shortage to find the right words for expression. For example, Serenity was rushed during the meeting and felt that time was running out and was not able to finish her story about the feeling she got from leaving an abusive relationship. She said, “I don’t know, it was easy and I felt weird but, I have to go and I can’t think of anything else.” If Serenity was able to finish her story, there may have been evidence that would support this study further.

The time that it takes to find the right words that people intend to communicate often results in deficiencies. An example of word deficiency would be when people avoid silence during a conversation because of the uncomfortable nature of expectations, resulting in miscommunication. Franke (2014) described the time spent finding particular rhetorical maneuvers as self-subverting. Much like using flowery vocabulary to fill spaces in a message, avoiding the necessary time needed to relay a message may diminish understanding for listeners as this study revealed.

### ***Fear Causing Avoidance of Expression***

Dam et al. (2021) described how fear of opinions about COVID-19 caused silence on the part of individuals who wanted to share stories with others but did not want to be isolated and could not find the words to do so. This situation exemplifies how fear can get in the way of storytelling. The feelings associated with an indirect experience may lead some to hide their stories because of fear that they may be viewed as crazy or delusional. Another consideration for the narrative paradigm is found and coded as an artifact of note where fear plays a role in expression. Social judgment theory explains how the positions people hold on any topic will fall into the categories of acceptance, rejection, or noncommitment (Sherif & Sherif, 1967).

Of the interviews conducted, half of them included references to fear as the reason for avoiding expression. For example, Kirsten said, “It gives me a little bit of anxiety because I often don’t feel like I can talk about it freely.” Some of the participants’ responses showed they were fearful of rejection, others’ perceptions, and that they may be viewed as crazy. This finding suggests fear caused an avoidance of expression, which could be explored in future studies centered on indirect experiences.

When individuals have an intensive experience, sometimes the feeling is very unusual, and fear stands in the way of sharing the information with others as discovered in this study. If an experience is extreme, there may be various reasons for not being able to share the experience with another person. Some may perceive that if the experience is communicated, the listener may judge or condemn the narrator. Perceptions of others is an example of how fear can get in the way of storytelling. In addition to the artifact explorations explained above, there were some additional contributions worthy of consideration.

### **Additional Contributions**

This foundational research is a starting point for future research not only in the area of indirect experiences and communication but also externally within studies of psychology and therapeutic means, including studies on linguistics. For example, in the interview with Linda, she said the experience was like therapy for her, and she began to talk about her daughter who had drug addiction problems. The interview experience became a comforting experience for Linda, demonstrating that interviews about indirect experiences may help with psychological studies. The connection to psychological areas of research were many and show limitless potential.

The discoveries of common and simple word use indicate a need for increased vocabulary education within society. Linguistics is defined as the study of language (Chandler &

Munday, 2016). The language used by the participants in this study was English; however, some participants used their native language in their responses. For example, Padraig, an Irish man, said, “When I explain the wooded area, the grassed area, the *mointeach*, I get overwhelmed.” In Irish, “mointeach” refers to a grassy moor. By conducting interviews similar to this research, linguistic scholars may find the responses of participants that blend their languages useful to investigate.

Although the additional contributions to scholarship are explored, many more areas of research would benefit from the study’s approach. The findings present insights into how people can express indirect experiences and feelings while also offering applicable uses for a variety of research studies. The interpretation of the research data informed a benchmark into studies of CIF. The study’s findings offer valuable insights into various areas of study such as philosophy, psychology, and linguistics. Further, analysis of the findings presents extended areas for significant contributions to scholarship.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study hypothesized that individuals would be able to express and communicate indirect experiences. Thus, the results match up with the theories of indirect communication, Fisher’s narrative paradigm, and phenomenology and extend their use in the evaluation of communication methods for everyday use. The results also offer an expansion for philosophical, psychological, and linguistic studies.

The results present a new opportunity within research on indirect communication. This discovery requires a new call for research exploring a variety of ways that storytelling conveys itself as discussed and explored in this dissertation. Examples compared include art, television, productions, and relationship building. This study and its data collection tool are replicable and could be expanded for use in areas such as psychology to analyze emotions and feelings during

storytelling as reasons for intense emotional responses of catharsis as a result of the questions asked. For example, cognitive and information processing theories contribute to research towards CIF. Additionally, Austin Babrow's (2016) problematic integration theory relates to research in CIF where probabilistic orientations occur such as when people can relate to one another based on their value system. An example of this would be how Christians can relate to one another because they have the same value system. Much the same, someone who has experienced a similar encounter to another person may better understand the experience described in their story.

Problematic integration theory presents communication as a method of mental construction and humanity through the development and intercession of values and knowledge (Babrow, 2016). The cognitive process of associations and the lack of information may hold some researchable elements to contribute to CIF research. Perhaps after further exploration in the area of cognitive associations, there may be information leading to an explanation of CIF.

### **Areas to Study**

There are further topics of study worthy of investigation as a result of this research. The areas to study are explained with the initial groundwork for each topic of consideration. Some concepts that appeared from this research that could be further explored were the theory of mind (Ritchie, 2022), participant reactions (Watson, 2017), and ontology (Beck, 2013). There were also a few outliers that warrant further exploration and are discussed below, offering an expansion of the concept of CIF. Exploring the mind allows the listener to experience participant reactions and understand the ontology behind interviewee stories. Each area of study is grounded in existing research as a starting point for future researchers.

### ***Exploring Theory of Mind***

Theory of mind is another area of consideration for this study, offering a useful complimentary analysis of the concept. The theory of mind is the ability to exemplify how others represent their own mind and understand their actions and motives (Ritchie, 2022). The study would also be useful for psychological studies on pragmatics and translation. Pragmatics is the investigation of how language is used by people (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2017). As individuals investigate language and interpret what others are saying, they develop pragmatic skills. The development of pragmatic skills integrates a mature theory of mind as part of the cognitive framework.

### ***Exploring Participant Reactions***

The unexpected theme of *Participant Reactions* presented another area of potential future research. Behaviorism is a natural science centered on the response and reaction of humans and animals based on stimuli (Watson, 2017). The behaviors are the reactions interviewees presented. The stimuli are when they were thinking about their own experiences which resulted in a response. The reactions caused by the interview question set may be replicable for psychological studies on behaviorism.

### ***Exploring Ontology***

Another consideration is a study rooting out the ontological background of commonly held thoughts people use. The abstract is not an issue of how to comprehend but why the knowledge we have occurs from understanding the concepts (Beck, 2013). As this is foundational research, the best ways to measure indirect experiences may not have been fully explored, and it is possible storytelling can engage with successfully documenting them. It is possible participants will discuss ideas within their narrative specifics of future inquiries which

can be repeated. Ontology and epistemology show promise for future research where existentialism, metaphysics, and the nature of being are evaluated.

### ***Outliers to Consider***

Within the interview data set, there were some interesting outliers to note such as storytelling to brainstorm ideas versus sharing the experience, helping others by sharing their story, and the use of CIF for an expanded investigation. Looking at unique outliers is a cause for good study practices because they are considered points of interest to gain the attention of unknown features of data which can lead to new discoveries (Riani et al., 2011) The outliers and potential theories that will support the extended research are described below.

In the results from RQ2, outliers were found where one individual chose to share meaning as a means for brainstorming with others about the experience. The goal was to attempt to determine why the experience occurred. The uses and gratifications theory may support this investigation to discover why people use messages with others to reach their goals (Littlejohn et al., 2017). In further studies, researchers may want to explore storytelling motives as an area of study. The uncertainty reduction theory may support a study searching to find the motivation of people to reduce uncertainty through the use of incentives, deviation, and anticipation of future interaction (McDermott, 2009).

In two instances, participants expressed their desire to physically take individuals to the location where their experience occurred to attempt replication of the feeling they encountered to help others. This outlier encompassed the community of practice theory and centers on learning, knowledge, and identity within groups of a particular community, which may be beneficial to elaborated studies on sharing an experience (Swieringa, 2009). Future researchers may explore this outlier with the potential for understanding how people help one another within society. The

agenda-setting theory may support this idea as it relates to audience engagement (McDermott, 2009).

Finally, there were some outliers from the study warranting further exploration such as the use of CIF for communicating with individuals who are processing the effects of losing a loved one, dream studies, CIF through telepathy, communicating trauma, and CIF of spiritual realm and mystical experiences such as UFO encounters. The Christian theory of communication may support the philosophical exploration of these ideas (Fackler, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

The preceding chapter about CIF presented the summary of findings along with connections to existing research and theories regarding whether or not humans can express information about their indirect experiences. To properly evaluate the phenomenon of CIF, the project centered on the indirect experiences of interview participants. The experiences presented a plethora of variable responses validating the study but also presented areas for future research to be explored. Since this is a foundational research study, the results offer a benefit for scholars in various areas of research from communication to philosophy, psychology, and logistics.

Much like the indirect experience I encountered when walking in the woods, interview participants of this study experienced indirect feelings that were difficult to describe but they wanted to share them with others. The participants of this study pondered the question of how to describe an encounter to another person that has not experienced it. When individuals attempt to express their experiences but cannot put into words what they know occurred, the same question exists. However, it was clear that the words used by the participants were effective to gain an understanding of the experiences. Some stories were told to relay messages for various means

besides the research itself. This fact indicates people sometimes just tell stories for their own benefit.

The result of the study is that many people truly can describe indirect experiences and feelings. This research study sought to understand how individuals express patterns in how they attempt to communicate indirect experiences through storytelling. The messages participants told were made direct through storytelling. Thus, the shared meaning was attained through direct explanation.

The focus of this data analysis centered on finding ways for individuals to express indirect experiences to communicate in a way that had shared meaning for the listener. In future research, storytelling from the researcher's perspective could focus on the listener and their experience with receiving the story. The importance of active listening would be a key factor in ensuring a message is received and understood. Taking verbal cues from the symbolism and indirect messaging within told stories will enable indirect experiences to be better shared and realized.

There are a variety of methodological approaches that contributed, offering clues to the evaluation of the phenomenon of indirect experiences. Due to the gap in research, it is believed a narrative investigative approach was best suited for the best results. Since the project is foundational, I hope the concept detail created a benchmark for future studies. I also hope that future studies on indirect experiences, ineffability, psychological response to experiences, and linguistics connected to communication methods will be further explored and expanded upon in newfound ways for multiple researchers. Perhaps the indirect experiences we have every day are the beginnings of a new form of communication for people to better understand one another.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: IRB Approval

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 28, 2022

Susan Lawson  
Shannon Leinen

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-423 INDIRECT COMMUNICATION: STORIES OF INEFFABLE EXPERIENCES

Dear Susan Lawson, Shannon Leinen,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**Research Ethics Office**

## Appendix B: Sample Pre-screening Questionnaire

**Purpose:** Susan H. Lawson is a doctoral candidate at Liberty University and is conducting a study to determine how people can communicate the indirect experiences and messages that they have personally received in a direct or indirect way so that others can comprehend these abnormal and unrelatable personal experiences with the goal of communicating for shared meaning. Participants are needed to share their stories to look for themes that can be found within indirect experiences. You may qualify to participate if you meet the following criteria:

- Have an interest in indirect feelings
- Are willing to talk to an interviewer about your own experiences
- Are willing to have an interview audio recorded and/or video recorded concerning your indirect experiences
- Are at least 18 years of age

This interview is for investigative and educational purposes. Participation in this interview is strictly voluntary. You may choose not to participate in this interview at any time. The participant should know the interview may take up to 1-2 hour(s) for each session with two sessions expected. The participant should also know, should they choose, their identity may stay anonymous. Individuals who complete the interview will not be compensated.

You may set up an interview by contacting Susan H. Lawson.

## **Appendix C: Informed Consent Form**

**Title of the Project:** INDIRECT COMMUNICATION: STORIES OF INEFFABLE EXPERIENCES

**Principal Investigator:** Susan H. Lawson, Doctoral Candidate, School of Communication, Liberty University

### **Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age or older, have an interest in indirect feelings, and be willing to talk to an interviewer about your own experiences. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### **What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The purpose of the study is to determine how people can communicate the indirect experiences and messages that they have personally received in a direct or indirect way so that others can comprehend these abnormal and unrelatable personal experiences with the goal of communicating for shared meaning.

### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Interview 1, which will take approximately 2 hours and will be recorded via audio/video.
2. Interview 2, which will take approximately 2 hours and will be recorded via audio/video.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include an increased understanding of the effects of indirect communication. This knowledge will then benefit the general population and how they view and operate in the future.

### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Susan H. Lawson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Shannon Leinen.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

#### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

## **Appendix D: Sample Interview Guide**

### **Section 1 – Demographics:**

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Marital Status:
4. Family:
5. Born (State):
6. Occupation:
7. Interview Location:

### **Section 2 – Perceived Ineffability**

1. Have you ever had an ineffable experience?
2. Can you describe what that means to you?
3. Please share a story about an ineffable experience you have had.
4. Do you believe there are ways to describe the indescribable?
5. How would you define ineffability?

### **Section 3 – Participant Indirect Experience Questions:**

- RQ1. How do those who have indirect experiences engage with storytelling attempts?
1. Describe your comfort level with sharing stories.
  2. Describe how you go about sharing a story.
  3. Do you ever feel frustrated you cannot express what you are trying to say?
  4. Do you try to explain things in ways others might know what you are expressing?

RQ2. Does the storyteller feel as though a shared meaning has occurred when indirect experiences are described through storytelling?

1. Describe how you communicate stories to others.
2. Describe how you would explain an ineffable experience.

RQ3. When thinking about their storytelling experience metacognitively, what does the storyteller feel that they were able to adequately communicate about their indirect experience?

1. Do you feel you were able to express your indirect experience completely?
2. Are there any other feelings you would like to share that you feel may not have been previously expressed?

