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Creating a Mythopoeic Graphic Novel To Expand Self-Understanding

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Creating a Mythopoeic Graphic Novel

To Expand Self-Understanding

by

Luis De La Lama

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Curriculum and Instruction
with a Concentration in Counselor Education
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career, and Higher Education
College of Education
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Abstract

This is a study about how I produced a graphic novel to introduce a model of the self that is informed by complexity theory to an audience of comic book and graphic novel enthusiasts. Because this model of the self has the potential to preserve, extend, and/or reinforce character strengths that are operationalized as virtuous behavior, and that also function as inner resources in times of adversity, my study explores storytelling by sequential art as a communication method that some counselors and educators might use to counsel and educate large segments of popular culture. Also, more generally, I explore the possibility that productions combining entertainment and preventive information might have commercial value on their own and also improve wellbeing and increase embodied social capital without the need of traditional institutional funding.

Under the theoretical frameworks of Complexity Theory and Poetic Logic, I combined Active Imagination, Narrative, Writing, Poetic, and Arts-based methods of inquiry, to research the literary and artistic forms by which I could create a compelling mythopoeic story to indirectly educate about the potential of the self. The results of this investigation show that the production of an instrument aiming at these goals can be completed, however, future studies are needed to assess the effectiveness of this production as a prevention tool and as a commercially viable product in the entertainment marketplace. While the results of this investigation are not generalizable, they may inspire other counselors and educators to communicate with larger audiences their expert knowledge of human nature as a form of preventive public counseling.
Chapter One:

Introduction

Ontological perspectives of the self are philosophical parameters by which we conceptualize our most fundamental unit of consciousness. These constitute coherent and distinctive sets of ideas about what humans are. In an oversimplified but illustrative form, we can compare them to the dissimilar and apparently contradictory descriptions of the blind men that touched a different part of the same elephant. The traditional story says that these blind men fought over their disagreements, however, it is reasonable to think that by combining their findings, the men could have been able to aggregate their knowledge to understand more of the elephant. Similarly, I believe that it is advantageous to study and understand the self from more than one ontological perspective. This dissertation pivots on this “the more eyes, the better” initiative, and with it I hope to elicit interest in an interdisciplinary and integrative approach to reach richer and more encompassing conceptualization the self in academia, as well as in the comic book and graphic novel enthusiasts subculture.

Personal Background

This investigation on how to enrich understandings of the self and motivate members of a particular subculture to cultivate an all-inclusive, multi-ontological sense of who they are, results from my experience in the arts and in various esoteric traditions, as well as from the orientation that I developed while studying for a B.A. in Graphic Design and a Ph.D. in Counselor Education with a concentration in Communications at USF.
My father was an artist in oils who also loved and collected comic books. He taught me how to draw and use the sable brush with india inks to render panels for visual narratives, and supported my studies in art and design, which culminated in a B.A. Thesis for the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México with a translated title of *Comic Books as Instruments of Social Conscientization*.

In my late teens, and in parallel to my studies to obtain the Bachelor of Arts degree in Graphic Design, I became a yoga teacher and developed an interest in ancient Eastern philosophy and Western metaphysics. My readings led me to Jung (1951), who believed that the core of our being actually encompasses and transcends our everyday awareness and prompts us to consciously reintegrate to the totality of the life. He also theorized that, while unfolding its own universality, this essential core of the self interprets its own being in the world through a range of archetypal constellations of meaning; one of which—the *hieros gamos*—I propose to visually and narratively investigate in this dissertation.

Jung’s views later helped me reconcile the beliefs of various mystic and esoteric Eastern and Western traditions, as well as shamanic beliefs that asserted that by systematic contemplative and imaginative inquiry into the essence of the traditional esoteric symbols, it was possible to develop, or intuit, more-inclusive orders of meaning leading to self-transcendence. In my thirties, after years of meditative practices, I began to experience bits of what these traditions describe, and felt my sense of being greatly amplified, invigorated, and infused with optimism.

Leveraging on my self-actualization experience, in my late thirties I lead workshops, coached, and counseled individuals and families of many cultures in 13 countries. Yet, when I returned to academic settings in my mid-forties, I found that I could not subsume my own intrasubjective perceptions of self within the theories of self prevalent in the behavioral and social disciplines, that is, with the views that the self is a neurobiological product and a social
construct by which we hold together various socially-constructed identities interconnected through our memories and our stories. This discrepancy made me study, in addition to traditional academic theories, other alternative and multicultural and models of the self. I even developed one of my own (De La Lama, 2011), and then directed my comprehensive exam towards the research and comparative analysis of four different ontological perspectives of the self.

**Theoretical Background**

In positive psychology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), human virtues are considered constructs constituted by groups of specific character strengths, which are in turn precursors of wellness, as well as psychological resources in times of adversity.

While writing my comprehensive exam, I found out that the four ontological perspectives of self that I considered (essentialist, naturalist, existentialist, and relativist) promote virtues and character strengths differently and in different degrees. For example, people who assume that the self is a product of culture and context (those with a relativist ontological perspective about self) would generally feel more tolerant of others, their cultures, and their individual pursuits, than people who believe that we all come from the same essential source (an essentialist perspective of the self), and that for this reason we deviate from the right path when not striving for unity of beliefs and for the same goals in life. Yet those holding this essentialist perspective of self, even when less tolerant of others, may have more courage, hope and optimism based on their belief in their inner alignment with an essential/fundamental truth, than those who see themselves as always shifting according to their contextual influences (See table below).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Originating Philosophical Orientation</th>
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<th>Naturalist</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ontology:</strong> What sort of thing is the self?</td>
<td>It is an essence which progressively manifests to consciousness in a top-down disclosure and actualization of its own potential.</td>
<td>A bottom-up aggregate of sensations and self-related notions (i.e., permanence of the body and of memories, self-concept, self-image, social identities, etc.)</td>
<td>The progressive condensation of meaning and conscious choices that make a life unique. Such self is fully capable of self-transformation by engineering its own meaning-making.</td>
<td>An inscrutable reference which may not even exist. Instead, the conversation should move to the social identities that together may or may not comprise a sense of self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin:</strong> The self arises from...</td>
<td>A transpersonal and metaphysical realm.</td>
<td>The brain’s biology. It processes sensorial experiences into a mental construct of self that explains who is having the sensorial experience.</td>
<td>The conscious resoluteness of its own existential orientation.</td>
<td>Nothing can be said about its origin; much can be interpreted, and deconstructed, from the myths about its origin and existence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teleology:</strong> The self moves toward...</td>
<td>Holism, and awareness of the unity of all life and identification with the Totality of Existence</td>
<td>Ongoing adaptations conducive to self-preservation and the achievement of evolutionary advantages</td>
<td>Increasingly inclusive meaning-formation leading to the pursuit of more global goals.</td>
<td>The up-keeping of social identities that appear to comprise a self, thriving inasmuch as they are highly visible and positively regarded in their social networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related research orientations</strong></td>
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<td>Courage Bravery Integrity Persistence Critical Thinking Fairness</td>
<td>Social Intelligence Curiosity Creativity Open-mindedness Humor</td>
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Assumptions

My discovery about the relations between ontological perspectives of self and character strengths led me to the following observations:

1. The capacity to integrate various ontological perspectives of self constitutes a psychological and social advantage.

2. The various ontological perspectives of self should be seen less as cultural trends that must become outdated when the cultural conditions that created them change and more as humanity’s developmental milestones which, like evolutionarily-developed brain layers, are still essential to our survival as a species and, in a constructivist-developmental sense, can continue to serve on their own merits as well as foundations for more advanced cultural constructs of self.

3. Following complexity theory’s postulate that proposes that forces applied during initial conditions can have big and unimaginable consequences, a robust self-system (a smart-network comprising various ontological conceptions of self) in each individual member of society, can not only promote a broader understanding of who we are, but also expand the vision of what we may be capable of as a species.

4. Various ontological perspectives of the self have become less common and less valued in contemporary academic and mainstream audiences.

5. Counselors and counselor educators could proactively and preventively revitalize the ontological perspectives of the self that have become less prevalent to help others discover more resources for innovation in self-authoring and self-determination. My dissertation investigates the creation of a tool to promote such revitalization in a segment of mainstream culture.
The Self as a Complex Evolving System

My research of the self led me to see it as a complex evolving system whose dynamics could be studied under the lens of Complexity Theory (Mason, 2008; Osberg and Biesta, 2010; Norberg & Cumming, 2008; Beaufemont, P. & Broenner, 2010). The four ontological perspectives of self can be considered strange attractors of self-awareness, that is, phase-states through which self-awareness chaotically moves through time. That is, once culturally primed to one or more of these ontological perspectives of the self, and depending on circumstances, needs and opportunities, most individuals conceptualize themselves from different ontological conception of self though time. For example, people may adopt a naturalist perspective of self when attempting to safely cross the street, gravitate to a relativist perspective when enacting professional roles or posting on social media or, pivot on the existential perspective of self when seeking long-lasting intimacy or readying themselves to make life-changing decisions, and find comfort in the essentialist perspective of self when experiencing the sublime or confronted with the unavoidable. During major decision processes, however, and alongside the consideration of the possible consequences of their choices, individuals may go back and forth between ontological perspectives of self in an effort to find congruence between who they think they are, who they think they should be, and who they will become once their decisions are made.

One unforeseen result from my immersion in complexity theory was that my consideration of three properties of complex evolving systems resulting from my studies in Leadership (Goldstein, Hazy & Lichtenstein, 2011), gave me the rationale to proceed as a complex evolving system myself and deviate from a more traditional research path.

- In complex adaptive systems, how a system’s agents relate to one another is critical to the preservation and evolution of the system (Fryer, 2014; Goldstein, Hazy & Lichtenstein, 2011). Thus, the dynamic relationships between the four ontologies
of the self are more important and urgent to attend than their direct contributions as constituents of the self. This consideration led me to investigate how to portray the relationships between the ontologies of self dynamically, by means of fictional storytelling.

- When complex adaptive systems reach the state of being good enough, they seek greater effectiveness instead of increased efficiency (Fryer, 2014; Goldstein, Hazy & Lichtenstein, 2011). That is, complex adaptive/evolving systems do not strive for perfection, but expand their field of action instead of doing the same more thoroughly and with less expense of energy. This consideration led me to assess that, instead of proceeding to accumulate evidence to reinforce my emerging theory of the self within the confines of academic world, as it is traditionally done at this stage of research, I would be more effective expanding my field of action by communicating my new understandings of the self (even in their incomplete state) not only within academia, but also to other segments of the general population.

- Greater variety within systems makes them stronger (Fryer, 2014; Goldstein, Hazy & Lichtenstein, 2011). Complex adaptive systems can work with their ambiguities, paradoxes, and contradictions, to produce new emerging properties and co-evolve with their environments. This consideration led me to think trans-disciplinarily and attempt to synthesize the professional differences of entertainment and counseling, and my various skills, into an emergent product that may advance both my research, and the self-understandings of my target audience.

**Statement of Opportunity**

Instead of framing my dissertation as a problem that I seek to investigate and/or resolve, I frame it as an investigation of how to communicate the opportunity for self-
authoring (Kegan, 2001), and for increasing inner strengths that may result from the conscious integration of four ontological perspectives of the self. I decided to use this positive approach after noting that the first model of the self that was introduced to psychology by William James (1890) was based on a single philosophical tradition that circumscribed the study of the self to the singular naturalistic ontology of the self. I also observed that in the last four decades the social and behavioral sciences have largely assimilated a relativist and social-constructionist epistemology (Gergen, 2009, 2011). Because these two philosophical approaches endorse their own definitions of what beings are and what kinds of beings can exist, the behavioral sciences, operating under the naturalist and relativist epistemologies, have tacitly endorsed their two corresponding perspectives of the self and inadvertently demoted the consideration of the less-prevalent, essentialist and existentialist ontologies of the self.

During my comprehensive exam, I came to appreciate the value of the less-considered existentialist and essentialist ontological perspectives of self when analyzing their potentiating effect on generalized courage, hope and optimism. The literature supports the view that courage, hope and optimism can significantly influence wellbeing, mental health, and psychotherapeutic outcomes. Positive Psychology considers that courage, defined as “…the ability to act for a meaningful (noble, good, or practical) cause, despite experiencing the fear associated with perceived threat exceeding the available resources” (Woodard, 2004, cited in Woodard & Pury, 2007, p. 136), is a buffer against mental illness and a primary outcome goal of psychotherapy (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Also, Yalom and Lecczc (2005) consider that the installation of hope is one of the eleven therapeutic factors, and Gallagher & Lopez (2009) conclude that hope and optimism are two distinct constructs which are highly correlated with all of the fourteen components of wellbeing included in their study.

In my comprehensive exam’s comparative analysis, I found out that the less-prevalent existentialist and essentialist ontologies of the self promoted self-generated courage, hope and
optimism better than the more-prevalent naturalistic and relativistic ontologies of self. This finding led me to discover the opportunity for proactively and preventively reinforcing virtues and their character strengths in society, by promoting the integration of prevalent and non-prevalent ontologies of the self in mainstream culture.

**Purpose of Study**

From first intending to increase courage, hope and optimism as cultural resources for mental health, I moved on to consider how to communicate to mainstream culture the importance of cultivating an all-inclusive, multi-ontological understanding of self as a necessary condition to develop a balanced array of virtues and character strengths. Finally, I set out to explore how can I portray and dynamically integrate the four perspectives of self that I explored in my previous research in a visual narrative designed to: a) attract and hold the attention of a specific subculture within mainstream Western culture, and b) promote the multi-ontological and integrative self-awareness of its members.

Promoting the understanding of the self as an ontological ecosystem, with the purpose of maintaining virtues and character strengths that comprise the moral resources of mainstream culture, is both a cultural and a public mental health challenge. I believe that we must meet this challenge at the nexus of politics, the humanities, and the social and behavioral disciplines. Sustainable solutions will require close interdisciplinary cooperation. Thus, the rationale for this study is that knowledge of my process of attempting to attract and hold the attention of a non-academic population, communicate to them abstract ontological notions, and elicit their motivation towards expansion of self-understanding through my illustrated storytelling skills, may inform other members of the scientific community of the possibility of trans-disciplinary counseling for other preventive public counseling projects.
Stories transform culture. People’s cognitive overload, and their never-ending digital entertainment opportunities, have greatly reduced their attention-span as well as their ability to recall, care about, and react to science-based declarative information (Baumeister & Tierney, 2012). Yet literature and the visual and performing arts can help science embody facts and abstract notions in memorable metaphors, command attention, and ignite people’s motivation for change. The goal of my research is to inspire the formation of networks of interdisciplinary innovation in which social and behavioral experts, local educators, and artists and storytellers encode preventive and remedial science-based information as entertainment, and rally different populations to more comprehensive self-understandings resulting in an increase of embodied social capital. I hope to inspire the creation of other story-based, engaging psycho-educational preventive interventions that disseminate positive attitudes and behaviors by using the media, metaphors, and communication styles that are common to their target populations.

**Exploring Preventive Public Counseling**

I believe that some counselors, and counselor educators as well, could apply their professional skills to steer cultural improvement through a processes that would be different from one-to-one counseling, the advocacy for social justice, the problem-based interventions of primary prevention in counseling and psychology (Albee, 1982, 2000; Romano & Hage, 2000; O’Byrne, Brammer, Davidson & Poston, 2002), and the educator-dependent changes brought about by deliberate psychological education (Dunlap et al, 1976; Bernier, 1980; Hatfield, 1984; Faubert et al, 1996; Schmidt, Davidson & Adkins, 2013).

Counselors in training learn to develop unique professional strengths. Counseling programs promote a culture of deep understanding, all-inclusiveness, and balance by embracing biomedical, developmental, constructivist, and multicultural perspectives.
Counselors train to increase their sensitivity to be able to understand their clients’ physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions in order to impact their worldviews, meanings, and spirituality, and to guide them to discover new ways of being and ignite their own potential for change.

Counselor’s depth of perception, humanistic scientific stance, and ability to denounce incongruence and limiting reductionistic beliefs in order to promote integration of behaviors, values, and worldviews, are rare and precious assets. Counselors are uniquely positioned to show others how to minimize cognitive dissonance and steer away from radical and obsolete beliefs and ideologies, consumeristic indoctrination, and short-sighted social trends by promoting metacognition, critical thinking, and self-reflection. Taking stock of these professional strengths would be the first step in considering the responsibilities of the counseling profession to a larger audience.

Counselors could now challenge themselves to assume roles of philosophers, critics of the times, and proponents of innovative thinking and lifestyles that can help our society transition across eras. Doing so, counselors could claim their place as ideological leaders and inspire society in ways that professional politicians, media moguls, and religious leaders tied to modernist mindsets cannot. This is particularly important because contemporary society is marked by turbulent economies, information overload, conflicting ideologies pitted against each other, and the near-obliteration of traditional cultural practices by fast-paced globalization. Before counseling was a profession circumscribed by standards of practice, shamans, prophets, and visionaries healed individuals and counseled their tribes by deriving knowledge from larger, more-abstract, and more-inclusive cognitive mindsets than those of their contemporaries. Following this tradition, counselors could continue to develop more-inclusive and trans-disciplinary professional mindsets, including space for intuition, as we imagine possible solutions to our contemporary dilemmas. One way to do this would be to
adopt the principles of positive psychology, and combine our knowledge of human
development and counseling with transformative learning strategies and storytelling skills to
promote personal and social development by positively influencing the subtext of stories
destined to the entertainment industry.

**Question Guiding this Inquiry**

My purpose of motivating a specific subculture within mainstream culture to develop a
conscious and multi-ontological self-system, led me to the following process-oriented
question:

How can I represent abstract ontological concepts and emergent pre-conceptual self
notions, and use these representations in a graphic story intended to engage my target
audience while also eliciting in them the integration of ontological perspectives of self that
appear to be fading from the social discourse (essentialist and existentialist) with those that
currently prevail in our cultural landscape (naturalist and relativist)?

**Conceptual Framework**

A research project interconnecting social science and the humanities requires a broad
describes two emerging theoretical perspectives that can provide frameworks for the rejection
of absolutes in knowledge, the inclusion of multiple ways of knowing, and the reduction of
barriers between social science and the humanities: one is complexity theory, the other is
poetic logic. I incorporated both theoretical perspectives in the present study.

**Complexity theory**

Defined in the next section of this chapter, complexity theory allowed me to begin
this study from a complex, multi-ontological, and trans-disciplinary perspective. My previous
research yielded a dynamic theory of the self that connects philosophy, complexity theory, and psychology. In it, the ontologies of the self are seen as both social constructs and strange attractors for the fluid contemporary sense of self. This theory became the foundation for this study, in which I also connect sciences and the humanities as I study myself attempting to orchestrate my creative and educational skills to communicate my emergent theory of self to a non-academic population. During this study, complexity theory helped me to see the need of integrating moral philosophy with positive psychology and transformational techniques from social constructionist, critical theory, and psychodynamic backgrounds to communicate a complex understanding of self. More importantly, complexity theory also motivated me to behave as a true complex evolving system, and decide on this study not as an efficient linear progression from my previous research, but as an effort to achieve more effectiveness as a human being by communicating more widely my vision of how it is possible to increase, balance, and sustain character strengths by developing deeper understandings of the self.

Poetic logic

Kim (1998/1999), cited by Wills (2007, p 337), describes poetic logic as “...a mode of signification and cognition that is variously, metaphorical, tropological, figurative, mythopoeic...poetic logic rescues contradiction, difference, silence, the everyday and its banality, along with ancient mysteries, the sacred, and the spiritual.” This conceptual framework validated the use of my active imagination, writing, and art-creation as research methods, with which I developed the story’s characters, metaphors, and other elements representing the abstract concepts that I wanted to communicate to my audience. Poetic Logic as an approach to knowledge also helped me validate the mythopoeic intention and fictional quality of my story, as well as my use of mythological material and the application of my art and design skills to this research project. Finally, Poetic Logic facilitated my emotional openness to the emerging content of the story as it unfolded in my mind, and this allowed
me to apply my creativity to sustain the story’s dramatic tension, the comicality, and the mystery that will hopefully engage my audience’s attention long enough to read the graphic novel until the end. Figure 1 shows how the disciplines, theories, professional skills, and research methods mentioned in this dissertation combined to produced the final work.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework map
Definitions

Hieros Gamos. To meet the challenge of motivating the interest in integrating various perspectives of self in my target population, I found that the *hieros gamos* (from the ancient Greek, divine marriage)—a cross-cultural motif that Jung took to signify the progressive harmonization of thoughts and emotions leading to self-integration (individuation)—summarily characterizes the drive to integrate different perspectives of being in the world. In Analytical psychology, the *hieros gamos* represents the mythic convergence of “masculine” Logos and “feminine” Eros. Analytic psychologists consider the *hieros gamos* the fundamental, cross-cultural psychic dynamics of the individuation process by which the potential of the self becomes actualized (Edinger & Blackmer, 1995; Jung, 1977). Therefore I surmised that the *hieros gamos* dynamics, actively represented in my story, could serve as conceptual umbrella to introduce to the public arena the four perspectives of the self while simultaneously making salient the value of the drive to interconnect them.

I used the motif of the *hieros gamos* as the central narrative device to communicate the importance of adopting an integrative and multidimensional understanding of the self. It played out the dynamic and ultimately integrative relationship of the dyad represented by god as bearer of reason/control/order/division/literalism vs. goddess as bearer of feeling/novelty/inclusiveness/multi-interpretivism, and trust in the dynamics of complex adaptive systems.

In my story, the *hieros gamos* becomes a fluid and free-flowing devise to intrigue, jolt, and keep entertained my chosen audience while the story introduces the various ontological perspectives of self as visual metaphors.

I see myself as capable of interpreting the *hieros gamos* from a contemporary perspective because, together with Luisa De La Lama, I have published papers and given various presentations on developmental meaning-making in long-term couple relationships.
which, according to Psychoanalytic theory, reflect the intrapsychic *hieros gamos* process. Also, the American Counseling Association Foundation awarded me the 1st place in a national writing competition for an essay in which I described how Counseling could be seen as a *hieros gamos* between the medical and the social aspects of our profession.

Yet, I also consider that the *hieros gamos* is not a simple and straightforward concept that I can apply in its original Jungian inception. From my contemporary perspective I believe that Jung—exemplifying the cultural bias of his time when gender roles were more insular, women were severely oppressed, and the abstract category of the feminine was significantly undervalued—interpreted the *hieros gamos* with a degree of mistrust for the “feminine” aspects of the psyche. Moreover, since Jung developed his conception of the self and that of the *hieros gamos*:

Two new conceptions of the self have appeared in society (existential and relativist).

In Western civilization, women, and to a lesser degree the feminine (which is half of the *hieros gamos*), are now considered with more respect and appreciation.

More opportunities for self-expression—both as a broader range of lifestyles and as ways to express the self through new communication technologies and the social media,—exist today.

After considering all these social changes, I believe that to effectively use the motif of the *hieros gamos* to characterize the intention to integrate the various perspectives of self in our own times and for my intended extra-academic audience, I need to recreate it mythopoeically to more accurately represent and promote the dynamic, emergent, expansive and transcendental nature of the self-integrative process it portrays.

*Mythopoesis*. The visual narrative that is central to this dissertation is intended to be mythopoeic literature, which is defined by the Mythopoeic Society as:
“...literature that creates a new and transformative mythology, or incorporates and transforms existing mythological material. Transformation is the key — mere static reference to mythological elements, invented or pre-existing, is not enough. The mythological elements must be of sufficient importance in the work to influence the spiritual, moral, and/or creative lives of the characters, and must reflect and support the author’s underlying themes. This type of work, at its best, should also inspire the reader to examine the importance of mythology in his or her own spiritual, moral, and creative development.” ("Mythopoeic Society")

**Science.** “The systematic observation of natural events and conditions to discover facts about them and to formulate laws and principles based on these facts.” (Academic Press Dictionary of Science and Technology, p. 1926). Among the various definitions of science, I chose one that clearly distinguishes it from philosophy and the arts to more clearly demarcate their importance in investigations of the self.

**Complexity theory.** Complexity theory encompasses many fields and for this reason defies a strict definition (Johnson, 2007), however, it can be thought of as “the study of the phenomena that emerges from a collection of interacting objects”(Johnson, 2007, p. 3). These objects do not need to be natural, but can be machines, distribution networks, markets, ecologies, social systems, civil services, belief systems, and others. Complex adaptive systems—like I believe the self is—exist at the edge of chaos, and are characterized by non-linearity, and exhibit emergent behaviors resulting from the interaction among its parts (Mason, 2008; Osberg and Biesta, 2010; Norberg & Cumming, 2008; Beaument, P. & Broenner, 2010). In this dissertation I use the concepts of chaos theory to illustrate the resemblance of my model of the self to the properties of other complex systems.

**Strange Attractor.** In complexity theory, an attractor is a state toward which a system tends to stabilize through time. Strange attractors are a specific kind of attractors that keep systems shifting chaotically through them.

**Transformative learning.** Transformative Learning is a body of knowledge based on the work of analytical psychologist Robert Boyd (1988), who described transformation as
"fundamental change in one's personality involving [together] the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration."


Elias (1987, p. 3) defined transformative learning as

“the expansion of consciousness through the transformation of basic worldview and specific capacities of the self; transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious and critically analyzing underlying premises."

**Ontological perspectives.** The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines Ontology as “the branch of metaphysics [itself a branch of Philosophyl concerned with the nature and relations of being”. Ontological perspectives are distinct and specific set of beliefs about the nature and possibilities of being, and of the things that are said to exist.

**Essentialist ontological perspective.** This ontological perspective considers the self as an essence progressively manifesting to our everyday consciousness in a top-down disclosure and actualization of its own potential.

**Naturalist ontological perspective.** This ontological perspective considers the self as a product of the brain and a bottom-up aggregate of sensations and self-related notions (i.e., permanence of the body and of memories, self-concept, self-image, social identities, etc.)

**Existentialist ontological perspective.** This ontological perspective considers the self as a progressive condensation of meaning derived from conscious choices that make a human life unique. Such self being fully capable of self-transformation by engineering its own meaning-making.

**Relativist ontological perspective.** Not a proper ontological perspective, but a consideration derived from an epistemological stance ultimately grounded on the always-shifting sociocultural context. This perspective considers the self as an inscrutable reference that may or may not exist. The relativist perspective instead attends to the existence of
multiple “selves” in each individual, or rather an array of social identities that together may or may not comprise a sense of self.

**Mainstream culture.** The most common and current ideas, opinions, and esthetic preferences of the majority of people within a given culture; usually disseminated by mass media. In this dissertation I use this term to refer to Western culture.

**Entertainment.** The act of providing enjoyment or amusement.

**Edutainment.** Entertainment that is designed to teach something.

**Positive Psychology.** The University of Pennsylvania’s Positive Psychology Center defines Positive Psychology as “…the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive.” (http://www.positivepsychology.org/index.html)

**Graphic Novel.** A graphic novel is a book telling a story (not necessarily fictional) in comic-book style. Graphic novels are distinguished from comic books when they go over the 24 to 32-page usual comic format, and are not sequential but include a story from start to end.

**Comic Book.** A 24 to 32-page publication that includes panels of sequential art and often words complementing a story’s narrative.

**Preventive Public Counseling.** I am proposing a form of preventive public counseling that would conceptualize its interventions from the frameworks of positive and strengths-based psychology, as well as from the arts, entertainment, and gaming industries. It would have the same general aims of primary prevention in counseling and psychology, as well as the same sense of urgency about focusing on early educational intervention to decrease the need of more costly, and more cost-ineffective future remediation interventions (Albee, 1982, 2000; Romano & Hage, 2000; O’Byrne, Brammer, Davidson & Poston, 2002). However, instead of merely creating awareness of the dangers of risky behaviors, as most preventive campaigns have done so far, preventive public counseling would aim at proactively enriching
the embodied social capital by promoting virtues, character strengths, and other resources for wellness and resilience in mainstream culture.

Additionally, and beyond promoting positive behavioral changes as precursors of mental health, preventive public counseling would follow the developmental guiding principles of deliberate psychological education by addressing the personal, ethical, aesthetic and philosophical development of its audiences (Dunlap et al, 1976; Bernier, 1980; Hatfield, 1984; Faubert et all, 1996; Schmidt, Davidson & Adkins, 2013). However, and unlike deliberate psychological education, counselors would not directly act like educators and instructors, nor focus on creating or refining educational curriculums. Instead, they would seek to mediate between the educational and health organizations on one side and the entertainment industries on the other. They would influence the subtext of T.V. series, movies, and digital games. They would catalyze personal and social development by working as advisors during the writing of scripts and the creation of character designs to produce edifying but commercially viable entertainment.

While it may appear that the entertainment industry only intends to produce ultimately satisfying emotional rollercoasters with no interest in the personal transformation of its audience, it should be noted that most blockbuster stories, to be believable, must demonstrate character growth based on human development principles and in the existentialist ontology of the self that considers that authenticity is achieved by congruently abiding by following moral principles despite adversity. This is especially important for movie studios specialized in children stories aiming at communicating to their audiences edifying moral perspectives. Counselors are skilled at helping real people progress through developmental stages and achieve personal congruence. It is not unreasonable to think that they could do it for fictional characters and in the context of stories too.
Already film production companies are hiring script consultants trained in depth psychology to ensure their movies' characters reveal human-like depth, for example, Catherine Ann Jones at http://wayofstory.com/, and Dara Marks at http://www.daramarks.com. Moreover, edutainment, an emerging field focused on creating video and board games for learning, is based on cognitive and developmental principles that counselors are familiar with. These entertainment fields continuously have projects in development in which counselors, already trained to understand and guide the human mind, could professionally collaborate.

**Delimitations**

This study is about the creative process of one male counselor educator producing a creative intervention designed to elicit reflections on the self of male members of a subculture of comic book and graphic novel enthusiasts that are between 18-30 years old. Even when in the novel the narrator of the story is a fictional female character, the study does not address the sense of self or the sensibilities of a female audience.

Because the first step needed to motivate an audience to pursue multi-ontological self-integration is to engage and sustain their attention, I sought to achieve this first step through the originality of my storytelling. Therefore, my research focused on the discovery of the quality of originality, and the authenticity from which this originality may come from, as they manifest themselves in my art and my storytelling for my audience. I favored this paradigm of discovery, but also included that of co-construction by facilitating feedback from both my audience and the counseling academic community. I posted online each page in a dedicated website as I created my graphic novel, and included a field for anyone to post comments that remained online for all to see, and also asked for feedback about my story in (a) a dedicated
online board for graphic story web-creators and their audiences, and (b) CESNET-L, an unmoderated listserv concerning counselor education & supervision.

However, because the visual story part of this dissertation was intended to successfully impact a targeted non-academic audience, the plot of the story only addressed academic concerns in a comedic, fictional, and non-academic literary style. My main goal was to keep the readers of my graphic novel engaged, even at the cost of clarity of exposition. From an academic point of view, my graphic novel may appear discontinuous, divergent, elliptical, unclear, and not tied together in the end. Yet from a literary and artistic point of view, those same features are seen as valid and necessary use of mystery, reversals and surprises, and even shock and scandal, to haunt the audience to make the story persist in their minds.

Despite these differences in perception and communication styles of the target and academic audiences, and of my use of a communication medium and style atypical in academia, my work remains anchored to my academic, preventive and educational concerns. The literary strategies that I use to capture and to sustain the audience’s attention in the story at times present the readers with ambiguity and disorienting dilemmas, which in Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) are considered the first phase of transformative experiences that prompt learners to become aware of their tacit assumptions and expectations, and to assess their relevance for making interpretations, critically self-reflect, and ultimately transform their concept of self. Thus, by noting how dramatic literature and Transformative Learning both value the effect of disorienting dilemmas, I reconcile the use of artistic and literary recourses to hold attention and advance the psycho-educational purpose of the story. Notwithstanding, in some cases and because of personal idiosyncrasies, my story may jolt too much the personal and deeply-held assumptions about the self, the story’s characters, or about how a story should be presented too. It could even be perceived as outrageous and offensive by some.
This study does not address the effects of my story on my intended audience or in the marketplace. Such studies would logically follow from the present one. My theoretical contribution to academia is the investigation of one instance in which the developmental outlook and some of the skills of a counselor educator can combine with the outlook and skills that are related to the entertainment industry to create a production intended to include both entertainment and preventive educational value. My adaptation of counseling and counselor education skills to a field not typically addressed by the counseling field is only one example of how other counselors and counselor educators could choose to expand their professional influence to other segments of the general population.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines the self as (a) “The total, essential, or particular being of a person; the individual.” that is, as a thing in itself; (b) “The essential qualities distinguishing one person from another; individuality.” in other words, as a particular phenomenological set; and (c) “One’s consciousness of one’s own being or identity; the ego.” that is, as what people think and feel about themselves. These different interpretations emerge from distinct ontological considerations, but in any case, what individuals are (either substantially, or as a bundle of qualities) and/or the notions that they hold relative to their own self, greatly determine their life-trajectories as well as their personal and collective wellbeing.

The concept of self “…influences the individual’s cognitions, emotions, and behaviors”, “…helps organize notions about reality”, and “…can influence the group to which a person belongs as well as the society as a whole (Owens, 2003, p. 210)”. More concretely, a series of studies about Core Self-Evaluation (CSE), which was defined by Judge, Erez & Bono as “…the fundamental premises that individuals hold about themselves and their functioning in the world” (1998, p. 168), have shown that individuals scoring high in CSE in their teens and early adulthood, report later in life being healthier, more motivated, performing better at work, and enjoying more their families, their jobs, and their lives in general. Additionally, high CSE was correlated to being perceived by others as socially desirable, and leading to higher-paid jobs across the life-span (Judge & Hurst, 2007, 2008; Judge, Hurst & Simon, 2009).
Core Self Evaluation studies clearly show the practical importance of the intrasubjective conceptions of self, yet they beg the question as to whether the four lower-order personality traits that Judge, Erez, Bono & Thoresen (2003) used to assemble and validate their CSE scale—self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control—sufficiently and accurately represent “…the fundamental premises that individuals hold about themselves and their functioning in the world” (Judge, Erez & Bono, 1998, p. 168). This question becomes even more relevant when Judge & Hurst have concluded that “Given evidence that CSE is a fairly stable trait (Judge et al., 2000), it may not seem worthwhile to attempt to change it.” (2007, p.1224).

In asserting that CSE is a fairly stable trait, Judge & Hurst appear to subscribe to the trait-and-factor theory (Parsons, 1909; Williamson, 1972). However, looking for a way out of this deterministic approach to the self, I first considered the fundamental premises about the self from outside counseling/psychology theories and in their larger, historical and philosophical context. I investigated alternative views about the self in their potential to constellate more-encompassing meaning-making and a stronger sense of personal agency.

An Historical and Philosophical Perspective of the Self

To understand the practice of conceptualizing the self as a collection of lower-order psychological constructs, as evidenced in the CES studies, and prevailing in the social and behavioral sciences today, it is important to look at the historical setting in which the concept of the self entered psychology for the first time. William James (1890) introduced a model of the self and boundaries for its study that, after a few changes in nomenclature, tacitly continues to function as the main paradigm for the studies of the self in the fields of counseling and psychology up to the present day. There were two previous books published under the name ‘The Principles of Psychology’, the first by Herbert Spencer (Spencer, 1855)
and the second by John Bascom (Bascom, 1869). However, although they elaborated on the nature of perception and the mind, they didn’t discuss the self.

William James (1890) divided the self into four “constituents” (p. 292), and briefly described the first two: The material self as including our notions about our body and belongings, and the social self (or selves, as individuals have different social selves according to the groups that recognize them—something now identified as social identities—as “…the recognition…la person] gets from his mates” (p.293). After writing about these two constituents of the self, James largely elaborated upon the last two. He named the third constituent ‘the spiritual self’, but described it as a “plurality of faculties” (p. 296), for example, “…the most enduring and intimate part of the self” (p. 296), “…our ability to argue and discriminate, of our moral sensibility and conscience, of our indomitable will” (p. 296), and our “… intellect, Moral and Religious Aspiration, Conscientiousness” (p. 329).

James (1890) also considered the spiritual self as a “…stream of consciousness” (p.298), a concept that he developed further when writing about the fourth aspect of the self, which he called the ‘pure ego’, ‘innermost Self’, or ‘self of selves’. James described this aspect of the self as actually made up of “… cephalic motions [which] are the portions of my innermost activity of which I am most distinctly aware” (p.301). For James these cephalic motions originated “pulses of thought” (p.338), each one recollecting the memories and feelings that together conform an impression of selfhood through time.

Towards the end of the chapter on the self, James openly declared the limits of his assumptions. “the reality of such pulses of thought, with their function of knowing, it will be remembered that we did not seek to deduce or explain, but simply assumed them as the ultimate kind of fact that the psychologist must admit to exist” (p. 338). Then, based on these self-imposed boundaries, he circumscribed the field of psychology by declaring that in matters of the essential self, “thought is itself the thinker, and psychology need not look beyond.” (p.
401). However, James’ delimitations raise the question: What was it that he didn’t want psychology to look at?

_The Principles of Psychology_ was a seminal book and appears to have established the conceptual filter by which the psychological worth of all other conceptions of self were evaluated. As an example of this tendency, and perhaps unintentionally but effectively following James’ paradigm and dictum, the studies about core self-evaluation led by Judge, Erez & Bono (1998, 2007, 2008) don’t look beyond their assumption that _thought itself is the thinker_ when they consider that the deeper premises people have about who they are and how they function in the world can be surmised by a composite of assumptions regarding their self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control.

**The Excised Worldview**

So, what was James (1890) proscribing from psychology? Continuing with my historical perspective of the self, and now placing James’ paradigm in the intellectual arena of his time and side by side with the other paradigms of the self that he contended with as he nurtured the seedlings of his new science and his own incipient pragmatist philosophy, I now turn to William James’ father, Henry James, who was a prolific writer and a noted Swedenborgian ("James, Henry (theologian)," 1920).

Swedenborg (1758) had been a physicist turned mystic who wrote, among other things, about life after the death of the physical body. He had also stated that: "The mind of man, which consists of will and understanding, is from creation, and therefore from birth, of three levels, so that man has a natural mind, a spiritual mind, and a celestial mind, and can thereby be elevated into and possess angelic wisdom while he lives in the world..." (Swedenborg (1793), cited in Douglas, 2011)

Having edited his father’s works (James & James, 1970), James was thoroughly familiar with Swedenborg’s ideas. Moreover, he knew how much Swedenborg had influenced the
Transcendental philosophical movement, a form of American Romanticism that promoted the inherent goodness of the individual will, and the sublimity of nature against excessive rationalism and institutionalized doctrine. The central figure of the Transcendentalist movement was James’ own godfather, Ralph Waldo Emerson (Wozniak, 1995).

Emerson (1841), had asserted that individuals mistakenly identify the self with their conscious ego, when in fact their true self is the soul. He had also said that the human soul is immortal, immensely vast, and wonderful to behold; that the souls of all people are connected at some level; and that God exists within us as the soul. In stating all this, Emerson was drawing not only from Swedenborg and from his own peak experiences (Maslow, 1971), but also from a philosophical tradition standing on historical pillars such as:

Plato (circa 450 C.E.), who argued that souls (psyche) are immortal and share a higher dimension with other absolute ‘forms’ who inform the qualities of this world (Plato, 2009).

Iamblichus (circa 300 C.E.), who wrote that individuals can, by theurgical methods, cultivate and assume their soul’s nature and partake of the wisdom and splendor of higher worlds (Iamblichus, 2011).

Plotinus (circa 250 C.E.), who extensively elaborated on the essence of the soul and also presented a complete cosmology of being, consciousness, life and matter, that supported the concept of the ‘great chain of being’ that was first introduced to the West by Plato and Aristotle (Plotinus, 1992).

Avicenna, who, in the middle ages—and while also advocating for science—through his “flying man” argument, proposed that consciousness could exist without the body. He also saw the perception and abstraction processes of the intellect as a bridge between the body which perceives the world of matter, and the soul which attends to universal and immaterial forms (Wisnovsky, 2003).
The views of these and other philosophers from the Neoplatonic tradition inspired mystics and metaphysicians through the centuries with the belief that the in-dwelling soul could become actualized during an individual’s lifetime. Differing from the mainstream Christian belief that only after death do souls receive their allotment from God, Neoplatonic philosophy affirmed that by a combination of personal effort and help coming from higher dimensions of existence, it was possible to infuse more and more of the soul essence into our ordinary consciousness to perceive, interact with, benefit from, and eventually become one of the wondrous beings who populate eternity. This hopeful view of our self-actualizing potential was disseminated through the ancient world, not only by contact with these philosophers’ books, but also through elaborate allegories about the process of elevating consciousness, allegories such as those of the alchemists laboring for the magical philosopher’s stone (Lévi, 1855-1938), the search for and resurrection of the lost wisdom of a deceased holy sage in rosicrucian ("Fama Fraternitatis," 1614) and freemasonic lore (Dermott, 1756), and the austerities and preparation necessary for the magical pursuit of the conversation with the guardian angel in Hermetic esotericism (von Worms, 1700-2006). Additionally, reported success stories from alchemists like Nicholas Flammel (Marshall, 2002), and mystic visionaries such as Jakob Boheme (Bailey, 1914) and Swedenborg, reinforced the beliefs in innate self-perfectibility up to James’ times.

There was also a line of German philosophers who directly and indirectly supported the belief in the existence of the innermost self as a thing in itself:

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a mathematician-philosopher who opposed Descartes’ mind-body dualism, and postulated the existence of an infinite number of irreducible final causes—the monads; each one having synchronous qualities that appeared to us as their properties in matter, energy, and consciousness (Leibniz, 1714-2005). Two years before The Principles of Psychology, the founder of the Theosophical Society credited Leibniz when
connecting his views with those of Vedic philosophy and declaring that at their core, humans were a particular kind of monads, gradually sedimenting their true exalted nature into the imperfect layers of self-awareness through a long reincarnation process that culminated in liberation from the constraints of the illusion of matter (Blavatsky, 1888).

Immanuel Kant observed that experience, reasoning, and the construction of objects in the mind, are all based on categories of understanding such as those of causality, substance, quantity, quality, relation, modality, and time and space. He stated that these categories arise spontaneously in all mature minds and are interconnect through fundamental a priori principles that we can use to assess, or intuit, the truth or falsehood of some synthetic propositions—for example those of simple mental arithmetic—without the need for reasoning based on empirical evidence. Taking these ideas a step further, and believing that nature intended reason in us to foster the highest aims in life (God, the soul, and freedom in his views), he asserted that these supra-sensible realities, existing beyond the categories of human reason, are nevertheless conceived in our minds as synthetic propositions, and that even when the ultimate reality of these synthetic propositions cannot be empirically proved or disproved, we should reasonably abide by the presupposition of their existence, and strive for them inasmuch as this striving fosters our collective moral and practical interests (Kant, 1781-2008).

Friedrich Schelling (1800-1933) affirmed that “…nothing is immediately certain save the proposition I exist” (p. 8), and that the proposition that there are things existing outside consciousness, is based on an innate primary prejudice because the mind accepts that things are real without truly understanding how they enter into consciousness. Transcendental philosophers, he said, move beyond this prejudice by observing that things appear to consciousness by becoming included in it, and that, for this reason, the subjectivity of consciousness necessarily has supremacy over the apparent and taken-for-granted objectivity
of the natural world. Schelling (1800-1993) also declared that individuals had an ‘inner sense’ that was a cognitive organ for transcendental philosophy.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1806-1977) considered that appearances (phenomena) partially reveal and conceal a higher reality (noumena). Consequently, all propositions about mental phenomena (such as what the self may be) have only degrees of truth in them. Yet, for him, consciousness as a whole existed through the universe and evolved through the ages via dialectical confrontations between opposing points of view that were eventually resolved in syntheses of understanding of an ever-increasing order. By proceeding this way, consciousness escalated through levels of self-understanding that culminated in the attainment of the noumenal dimension. Individualized consciousness was for him the place where consciousness as a whole had its higher developmental syntheses. Therefore human beings, being part of consciousness as a whole, while collectively advancing towards the higher reality of the noumenal dimension would realize that this progress of consciousness towards the absolute does not abstract us from the natural and social world, but results in progressive resolution, harmony, cooperation and peaceful coexistence that should be demonstrated in the rise of morality, wisdom, and conscious love

Hegel (1806-1977) also introduced phenomenology as a method for the study of consciousness. Instead of first establishing the nature and criteria of knowledge and then advancing arguments based on ulterior deductive reasoning, as previous philosophers had done, he recommended that we should look at the mind itself in the act of attempting to grasp reality, negotiating its own contradictions and synthesizing out of the more comprehensive structures of thought

**The Essentialist Ontological Perspective of the Self**

The innatist, metaphysical, and idealist orientation of these philosophers revolve around the proposition that our five senses, and our reasoning when based exclusively on
them, are not enough to fully perceive and understand the full spectrum and potential of our being. Using Plato’s cave analogy, they can only allow us to perceive the passing shadows of a brighter reality existing outside the underground chamber of matter where our yet incomplete consciousness dwells. The ontological perspective derived from this view considers that which creates the shadows outside the cave: the noumena, the essence, the soul, as more real—because of their preexistence, permanence and influence—than the body and the judgments, moods and mental states and constructs that we engage every day. The fundamental premises that individuals can derive about themselves and their functioning in the world from this ontological perspective are that at their root they are radiant and indestructible beings progressively bringing more and more of their glory to the world. Conversely, the personal evaluations about their self-efficacy, self-esteem, locus of control and emotional stability that individuals would derive from the essentialist view would be that their these evaluations are temporary byproducts of their eternal core as its unfolds its inherent greatness through time.

**The Philosophy Supporting the Scientific Conceptualizations of the Self**

William James, however, derived his understanding of the self from the ideas of a different group of philosophers:

Aristotle oriented philosophy towards examining the phenomena of the natural world and wrote about souls not as transcendental entities, but as organismic vital principles which allowed the performance of living functions (for example, reproduction in plants, motion in animals, and rationality in humans) in the physical universe (Aristotle & Lawson Tancred, 1986).

Francis Bacon observed that the mind tends to look for order and the confirmation of its beliefs to the point of disregarding what otherwise would clearly be seen as evidence to the contrary. Against this tendency, he proposed the empirical method, or the reasoning of general principles from known facts in the study of the natural world. Empiricism presupposes
that knowledge comes from experience and through the senses, that is, from the study of what is, and not of what may or may not be (Bacon, Ameriks, Clarke, Jardine & Silverthorne, 2000).

John Locke refuted the essentialist proposition that some principles are preexistent, and instead contended that our mind imagines that some principles are innate (such as the idea of the intrinsic self) because we cannot remember when we learned about them. His position was that the mind at birth was in total ignorance, and that it acquired knowledge about itself and the world only through sense and experience. Locke also believed that ideas are not only the product of reasoning, but can emerge directly from sensations and give us intuitive knowledge of our own existence. This knowledge, however, is for him ultimately based on the agreement of ideas that arise from nothing more than our own sensations (Chappell, 1998; Cranston, 1957; Lowe, 1995).

David Hume did not believe in Locke's intuitive sensations, nor in the power of causes to create new unified wholes. Instead, he saw all mental activity as depending on associations of basic mental events such as sensations and feelings. Also, he proposed the ontological bundle theory ("bundle theory," 2012), which posits that an object is nothing more than its properties bundled together. Turning these ideas towards the self, he argued that the self was a fiction created by a bundle of sensations that our mind collects into a notion of selfhood (Hume, 1739-2003).

As a side note, it can be observed that just as some of the idealist philosophers developed ideas about the self similar to those of the Atman—a term in Vedanta philosophy (Kahrs, 2005) that signifies both the individual essential self and the cosmic principle of consciousness behind all forms—Hume's understanding of the self resembles that of another ancient Eastern tradition, Buddhism, which in its Anatta doctrine, rejects the idea of a substantial and stable entity behind the conscious being. In contrast with Hume, however,
Buddhism includes the notion of imperfect souls that develop self-understanding through the process of reincarnation until they realize their own illusory existence by identifying themselves with the pure undifferentiated consciousness which is their ground of existence (Yao, 2012).

Johann Gottlieb Fichte refused the idea of an essential self by arguing that because the notion of consciousness is inseparable from the notion of a being experiencing consciousness, the consciousness of selfhood must arise simultaneously out of itself and as a product of human consciousness. Moreover, he proposed that the notion of selfhood comes about as consciousness goes on discovering its own finitude through the experience of its own freedom and limitations, for example, and especially, in its interactions with other selves (Fichte, 1796-2000).

Herbert Spencer, the author of the first book on the principles of psychology (Spencer, 1855), asserted that all the phenomena in the universe, including the human mind and its contents, would eventually be scientifically explained and understood in terms of the natural laws that govern them.

John Stuart Mill, a proponent of associationism considered that some chemical reactions cause emergent properties in their resulting substances, and postulated that higher cognitive notions such as that of selfhood could be formed through some form of mental chemistry from bottom-up experiences and sensations, that would end up being more than the sum of their parts (Mill, 1848).

Auguste Comte posited that humanity was socially evolving by shedding its layers of theological and metaphysical thinking to embrace a positivist philosophy that promoted the scientific understanding of the world. Additionally, he argued for the creation of sociology as a scientific discipline separated form the Humanities, that until then had been the academic disciplines defining the study of culture and society (Comte, 1865-2009).
Together, the ideas of these philosophers conformed the naturalist ontology of the self.

**The Naturalist Ontological Perspective of the Self**

Accepting only the objective data from natural phenomena as the building blocks for reasoning, and thus disavowing the notion of a noumenal category of being from the start, the ontological perspective of the self derived from the empiricist and analytic philosophical premises of these philosophers, necessarily categorizes the self as an epiphenomenon, that is, a byproduct of the phenomena of consciousness, which is in itself a biological product of nature.

As such, the self can be considered, just as most other natural agents are, not so much as a single unit, but as an aggregate that might be separated for study into its various hyphenated constituents: self-image, self-acceptance, self-esteem, self-consciousness, self-knowledge, self-denial, self-actualization, self-efficacy, self-deception, self-control, self-verification, and others. In practice, and according to this perspective, these hyphenated parts of the self do not need to be put back together in order to synthesize a holistic perspective of the self.

This way of going about understanding the self, based on materialist, pragmatic, and empiricist premises and biological and/or purely cognitive models to explain its sources and functioning, I am calling, for the purposes of this exam, the *naturalistic perspective of the self*.

After these considerations, and noting that James: (a) Named the higher constituents of his model of the self in terms that traditionally denoted parts of the self that were then believed to be substantial, (i.e. ‘the spiritual self’, conscience, “pure ego” innermost self” “self of selves”) but then declared them to be no more than a succession of ‘pulses of thought’ originated by ‘cephalic motions’. (b) Positioned his own model of the self against the deficiencies of what he called the Soul, Associationist, and Transcendentalist theories of the ego (James, 1890, pp. 342-373). And (c) concluded his chapter on the consciousness of self
by stating that psychology does not need to look beyond the idea that “...thought itself is the thinker” (p. 401).

I surmise that James not only endorsed the naturalistic ontological perspective of the self, but that he also intended to excise from psychology the nebulous and uncorroborated, but brighter and more august essentialist ontological conceptualization of the self.

*James’ Influence in Research of the Self*

Many investigations of the self can be traced back to James (1890) four-fold taxonomy. For example, James’ material self has been investigated as a physical self-concept, comprising physical fitness, physical attractiveness, physical ability and strength. Goño & Goñi (2008), for example, assert that the physical self-concept “…is the self-concept domain in which the most theoretical progress has been made over the last twenty years” that “…physical self-perceptions play a fundamental role in general self-concept”, and that the ‘psychological centrality’ of the physical self-concept “…plays a decisive role in social and personal development” (p.79). In consumer behavior research, it has long been established that our possessions are a major contributor to, and also as reflection, of our identities (Belk, 1988; Kamptner, 1991; Schultz, Kleine & Keman, 1989).

James’ (1890) original notion of the social self has been separated for further analysis into a series of various role, group, cultural, and online identities, and researched not only in various psychological fields, but also in disciplines that psychology has influenced, such as gender and culture studies in sociology and counseling. The social self has received much attention in the last few decades because, through the postmodern crises of power, ethics, values, and identity (Kirby, 2006), and in our age of multicultural and digital communications, it has emerged as one of the most salient aspects of the self in our culture.

The investigation of the personality’s most enduring aspects, which according to James are sustained by the ‘stream of consciousness’ or ‘cephalic motions’ that actually constitute the
notion of a spiritual self, appears to have taken two directions, one direction is its study as a ‘steam of consciousness’, what Damasio (2000) re-described as “...the core self, a transient entity, ceaselessly re-created for each and every object with which the brain interacts.” (p. 17), From this view, James’ third constituent of the self has been addressed by studying its more stable components such as personality traits, factors, intelligences, moral values, strengths, virtues and others. The studies on core self-evaluation described early in this writing also pertain to the ongoing research of this constituent of the self.

The second direction of study appears to take the view that the self is made of a series of ‘cephalic motions’, the self has been the subject of neurobiology-oriented research. For example, Rameson & Lieberman (2007) propose a model that correlates various neural networks with the different parallel streams of consciousness necessary for the processing of the self in consciousness. Attachment theories that are based on neurobiological research suggest that the core of the self persists via unconscious brain processes related to affect regulation, that are located in the right prefrontal cortex (Schore, 2003). Also, adding notions from informatics and evolutionary biology, Marvinac (2006) describes the self as an autonomous autopoietic system sustaining the same organization and network of processes from which it was produced, and recursively and actively maintaining its identity as independently as possible from its interactions with the environment.

In reviewing the general direction of neurobiology-informed research of the self, it appears that implicit in this approach there is a tendency to interpret the core of our being in terms of neural processes associated to primitive brain operations, which is exactly the direction indicated by James’ model of the self.

**How the Abandoned Worldview Reemerged in Psychology**

On the other side of the Atlantic, Wilhelm Wundt was also a strong proponent of developing psychology into a scientific discipline. However, unlike James, and as a product of
the German idealist school of philosophy, he considered that consciousness was an actuality (Blumenthal, 2001), and thus remained within an essentialist ontological perspective of the self.

Whereas James merely positioned his model of the self as a better explanation than that of the associationist perspective of Hume and J.S. Mill (1890, pp. 350-360), Wundt openly rejected associationism, established rules with regard to the use of introspection as one of psychology’s experimental methods, and considered that feeling, emotions and moods, that is, the mental states that might be conducive to inner perceptions of the numinous in the self, had primacy over sensations and thoughts in all mental activities (Blumenthal, 2001). Wundt, however, never developed an alternative model of the self, a task that Carl Gustav Jung, after incorporating aspects of Freud’s (1899, 2010) psychodynamic theory, would complete sixty years later.

Freud understood the psyche (a word that in ancient Greek denotes both soul and mind) as an interplay of semi-independent and often conflictive instinctual forces (i.e., Id vs. Superego, Eros vs. Thanatos). Jung, in contrast, saw more coherence, pervasiveness, and purposiveness in the psychodynamic forces. He believed that the comparative mythology and the international analysis of dreams showed that the psychodynamic forces operated across history and cross-culturally, and were, for this reason, archetypal (Jung, 1981). Moreover, he said that in the long run, these archetypal forces advance our self-understanding by promoting our individuation, that is, the concurrent emergence of our psychological uniqueness and the integration of our ego, or initially encapsulated sense of self (lower-cased), with the Self (capitalized) which paradoxically is not only our ultimate nature, but the totality of existence as well. What Hegel’s Phenomenology of the Spirit (1806-1977) had done for philosophy, Jung’s Aion: Researches in the phenomenology of the self (1951) did for psychology.
Notwithstanding Jung’s accomplishment—and perhaps because of Jung’s own psychological crisis and of his experience with psychoanalytic patients undergoing difficulties of various sorts—his theory of the greater emerging Self casts the everyday self (ego) as a weak mediator of the mighty archetypal drives that influence meaning-formations and may at times induce unnecessary and even harmful psychological projections. This interpretation of the everyday self, being antithetical to that of American individualism, may have limited Jung’s influence in American Psychology. Nevertheless, his individuation theory—after some refinements brought about by the post-Jungian and humanistic schools of psychology—eventually influenced American culture.

**Post-Jungian approaches to the self**

Post-Jungian psychological approaches such as Transpersonal Psychology ("ATP,"), Archetypal Psychology (Hillman, 2004), and Depth Psychology (Wyss, 1966) also promote the essentialist view of the self. Some of their theorists even interpret the word psyche not as mind but as soul in the platonic sense, and seek to study and promote ultimate states of consciousness ("ATP,"). Post-Jungian modalities often prescribe the creation of mandalas, which are representations of the primary psychic forces in the self that Jung found represented in the sacred artwork of many cultures and arising in the dreams, visions and artwork of those that he treated (Jung & von Franz, 1964), at different stages of the therapeutic process to promote the integration of their clients’ psyche. Yet, and unlike classic Jungian analysis, the Post-Jungian schools have partially shifted their research interests away from the self and its symbolic experience in dreams, towards topics such as arts-based interventions, alternative states of consciousness, the psychic influences of the individual archetypal forces (Samuels, 1995), and more recently, toward mythopoetic practices and perspectives that seek to promote ecological and cultural sustainability ("ATP,").
Despite the fact that the Post-Jungian psychologies have not demonstrated more effectiveness or more cost-efficiency than the psychotherapeutic treatments stemming from the naturalistic perspective, their approach to wellness continue to be offered in private professional practice and in wholeness-oriented group retreats. Additionally, they have promoted holistic values and an integrative vision of the self in our culture by inspiring pop psychology through books and magazines on personal development, as well as by informing professional storytelling and other artistic productions, including a few blockbuster Hollywood films (Kaplan, 2005).

The Post-Jungian schools took root on their own in America only after Humanistic psychology had prepared the way for them by combining some aspects of Jung’s idealist, phenomenological and developmental approach to the self with ontological premises from Existential philosophy.

**Existentialism and Self-actualization in Humanistic Psychology**

Existentialism, the prevalent philosophical stance in Humanistic Psychology, is based on a line of philosophers who proposed that concrete human experience must precede in importance over abstract thinking and any norms derived from it, this regardless of whether these abstractions are about ideals, or about the meaning of data presumed to be scientific facts (Guignon, 2004). Among these philosophers were:

Søren Kierkegaard, who stressed the subjectivity of truth and the importance of personal choice instead of acquiescence to cultural standards and collective beliefs (Kierkegaard, 2000).

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, who stated that humans had an innate will to power. After the stages of credulity and then disillusionment in the thought-structures imposed by states and religion, society would go through a phase of nihilism, after which individuals
would rise invigorated to pursue new and more advanced values than those that society could conceive in their days (Nietzsche, 1882-2006; F. Nietzsche, 1883-2007).

Gabriel Marcel, who advocated a direct relationship with existence by an intentional availability to experience, meeting it with attitudes of openness, wonder and astonishment, to bypass preconceptions and to advance in the development of one’s own faith (Marcel, 1983).

Martin Heidegger, who suggested that temporal beings could undertake the understanding of their own being-ness in action, by authentically striving to express the full spectrum of their being (Heidegger, 1962). However, for him, the full spectrum of being was ‘being as such’, or Being (capitalized) which he investigated as something that precedes consciousness, thought and historicity. He proposed that such understanding could only be approached phenomenologically, by attending in a most primal way, to how the primordial Being simultaneously discloses and conceals itself in its dispersion into a plurality of beings, one of them being the individual being, the Dasein, who undertakes this quest (Heidegger, 1977).

Simone de Beauvoir, who denounced the view that women’s identities were actually based on myths regarding various aspects of womanhood that had been created and were being sustained by the collective male abstractions about what women are and should be. She advanced the idea that gender (and perhaps other attributes that the self may identify with) was a cultural, and not a biologically-based phenomenon (Beauvoir, 1949-2011).

Jean Paul Sartre, who described existence as a conundrum between the nothingness of consciousness unconstrained by meaning, which is the cradle of our free will, and the self-limiting and often self-deceptive choices that we must inevitably make to define our lives in the world. He also said that the notion of an essential self is born from the reflecting back on lived experiences (Sartre, 1956).
Martin Buber, who advised that existential meaning is found through and in relationships, and that we could either choose between relating to the not-I as an “It”, an object to use or experience, or as a “Thou”, meaning another living being to which we extend positive regard (Buber, 1958).

Together, the propositions of the existentialist and essentialist traditions formed the philosophical foundations of Humanistic Philosophy. For example, Victor Frankl (1963), closely related to Existentialism, argued that the search for meaning is innate in humans, and that it is a task that can be pursued individually and independently of external circumstances. Search for meaning of an increasingly inclusive order was eventually seen as part of the self-actualization tendency, a theory of human development that is central to Humanistic Psychology.

Self-actualization was first described as a generalized biological tendency (Goldstein, 1939), but then Carl Rogers (1959), combining Heidegger’s existentialist stance and the essentialist developmental perspective, postulated that humans have an organismic pure real self that strives to manifest its full potential, as a tree seed is organically bent on becoming a tree. Rogers also postulated that many individuals are not aware of this real self because they identify with an idealized/false self that congeals in consciousness when the constraints of living and social indoctrination partially inhibit the self-actualizing tendencies of the real self. Additional to these two selves, Rogers theorized the self-concept, a fluid gestalt but nevertheless a real entity composed of perceptions and values about the “I” or the “me”, as well as their relationships to others and to various aspects of life. This self-concept could advance towards increased awareness of the real self and its self-actualization needs.

Abraham Maslow, who was, with Rogers, one of the founders of Humanistic Psychology, brought a developmental perspective to self-actualization by proposing a hierarchy of self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1954). He researched the changes in views and
values, and the positive characteristics emerging in individuals in the advanced stages of self-
actualization (Maslow, 1964). Then, in 1970, Maslow summarized his evolving views about
human nature as follows:

“If I had to condense the thesis of this book [Motivation and Personality] into a single
sentence, I would have said that, in addition to what the psychologies of the time
[1954] had to say about human nature, man also had a higher nature and that this
was instinctoid, i.e., part of his essence. And if I could have had a second sentence, I
would have stressed that profoundly holistic nature of human nature in contradiction
to the analytic-dissecting-atomistic-Newtonian approach of the behaviorisms and of
Freudian psychoanalysis.” (Maslow, 1970, p. ix)

By this time Maslow had moved closer to an essentialist conceptualization of the self
and had also become one of the founders of Transpersonal Psychology.

Outside Humanistic Psychology, the original arguments that Heidegger proposed for a
purely existential ontological perspective of the self continued to gain strength on their own.

**The Existentialist Ontological Perspective of the Self**

In her paper on Heidegger and the Self, Käufer (2012) shows that Heidegger
proposed a new ontology of the self when he departed from the foundations from which
both the idealists and empiricists constructed their notions of self. Unlike essentialists and
naturalists, Heidegger opposed conceptualizations of self as an occurrence, a substance, or a
subject, and critiqued the philosophical weaknesses of construing the self as consisting of
conjoined self-memories, or even of self-consciousness. Generally speaking, he opposed the
notion that the self was a status, and considered all previous ontological perspectives of self as
mere inventions of a theoretical unity, in an attempt to explain the linking of experiences in
consciousness.

Instead of the previous views, Heidegger developed a conceptualization of self with
the goal of explaining the “…extended constancy through which the Dasein […] already keeps
its birth and death and their “in between” integrated into its existence” (SZ, 390f, cited in
Käufer, 2012). Following this new direction, Heidegger argued for an understanding of self as
an existential ability, evidenced by its own tendency to stand for something, and its consistency in caring for the choices made. A self like this would be able to conceive its whole existence in the light of its own commitments to the world. In other words, Heidegger ontologically defined the self, not in terms of its persistence in time, but in terms of its steadfastness, meaning the resoluteness of its existential orientation.

To develop his argument, Heidegger compared the “anyone-self” of those that uncritically adopt the public consensus, something that would amount to an undifferentiated and empty self, with an originally individualized self, manifesting the ability to steadily press into the chosen possibilities of its own being in the world. In doing so, he sketched the idea that the self could develop authenticity by intending its own congruence of thought, feeling and action. However, he did not elaborate on the methods by which inauthentic selves could derive their individualized and authentic coherence to extricate themselves from institutionalized thinking, nor on any possible general features or orientation by which authentic and individualized selves may be recognized—two points that the older philosophical traditions have had ample time to elaborate upon. In the Transforming the Self-Concept section of this chapter that appears later, I show how after Heidegger, Narrative and Transformative Learning Theories have filled these gaps and contributed to make his existential ontology of the self even more robust.

The Relativist Perspective of the Self

As we have seen, Humanistic psychology tacitly adopted Heidegger’s existentialist ontological perspective of the self. However, outside this psychological orientation, and in the broader world of philosophy, the existentialist claim about the supremacy of individual experience soon mutated into the relativist claim that there is no absolute truth or validity, because everything depends on each viewer’s point of view. Philosophers such as Ludvic Wittgenstein (1979), Richard Rorty (1989), Michael Focault (1988), Jacques Derrida (Derrida
& Caputo, 1997), Peter Winch (2008), and Thomas Kuhn (1962), among others, went on to propose that the objects of their philosophizing (language, meaning, ethics, values, knowledge, etc.) had to be always considered as relative to particular cultural or idiosyncratic frameworks, and also that none of these frameworks needed to be privileged over the others (Westacott, 2005).

Relativism is actually an epistemological stance and not an ontological perspective. By its exclusive consideration of the relative, it discourages discourse about what could actually be, and therefore eschews ontology. However, in doing this, relativism tacitly casts the idea of the self as such, either as an inscrutable reference outside its scope of interest, or a as notion preempted with the premise that anything that could be said about it would be a meaning configuration among an infinite number of other possible meaning configurations, all based on shifting frameworks within frameworks of historicity, language and personal upbringing. Thus, by changing the nature of discourse, it indirectly minimizes the importance of the self as a unit of knowledge, and decreases its visibility when theorizing about the landscape of consciousness.

In moderate relativism, however, these multiple frames of reference are thought of as mostly subsumed by culture. This is the cultural relativism that was introduced to psychology through the social constructionist movement, preeminently represented by Kenneth Gergen, who presents the social constructionist orientation as a “…discourse about the world not as reflection of or map of the world, but as an artifact of communal interchange” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Following this orientation, he argues for the hidden plurality of the voices in the self, and the redemption of its historically-constructed insularity through the recognition of its relativity to and interdependence with the networks it belongs to (Gergen, 2009, 2011). The plurality of voices of the self have also been referred to as identities. For example, Owens (2003) defined the concept of self (only the concept of self because from this perspective
there is either no self to define, or all that can be done about it is to describe how human
networks may interpret it at any point in time) as:

“...an organized and interactive system of thoughts, feelings, identities, and motives that
(1) is born of self-reflectivity and language (2) people attribute to themselves, and (3)
characterizes human beings.” (p. 106).

Overall, the social constructionist movement conceptualizes the self notion as a
kaleidoscopic mental construct, bounded by, and continuously reshaped by, the culture which
provides language and the experiences that human beings need to reflect upon. However, the
relativist/social constructionist reluctance to approach the self as a thing in itself, or even as a
mental construct exhibiting the steadfastness alluded to by Heidegger, tacitly positions the self
as a functional and adaptive conglomerate of mental tendencies and events that appear to
coalesce—always differently—only when attention flows to it. This description of the self
resembles the bundle theory of some of the naturalist philosophers, with the distinction that
now the bundle is conceptualized as being more fluid.

**Towards Assessing the Value of Ontological Perspectives of Self**

We can begin to assess the value of the different ontological perspectives of self by
considering their global effects on wellness. Wellness has been defined as “the result of
personal initiative seeking a more optimal, holistic and balanced state of health”
(Wellness®.com, 2013), as well as “an active, lifelong process of becoming aware of choices
and making decisions toward a more balanced and fulfilling life.” (Washington Tacoma
University, 2013). As a state or a process, wellness is predicated on the basis of consciousness’
advancement towards successful existence. Ontological perspectives of self relate to wellness
because, functioning as matrixes for meaning-making, they guide (a) notions of what
constitutes the optimal existence predicated by wellness (b) evaluations of the feasibility of the
goals associated to it, and (c) motivations to achieve these goals based on the clarity of their
definitions and their potential feasibility.

The essentialist perspective of self contributes to wellness by proposing an atemporal
and irreducible self that is intrinsic to human nature, a belief that can instill a dignified and
hopeful view of the human condition. Also, postulating a developmentally-oriented self in a
universe which includes sentience above and below that of the human species, can provide
an overarching, wide-scope meaning to life that helps us connect our sense of individual and
collective destinies, imagine and ordered existence, and better life conditions emerging as we
unfolding of the potential of our higher nature. This philosophical perspective has the
potential to ignite our creative imagination and to make us feel that we can bring from within
much of what is needed for the actualization of our goals.

We have seen that without addressing the self as a whole, but focusing on cognitions
and behaviors associated to it, the naturalist perspective has contributed to wellbeing by
coming up with evidence-based methods for therapeutically modifying these cognitions and
behaviors in ways that lead to increased personal wellbeing and successful public health
outcomes. Increased knowledge of the brain’s functions will continue to yield advances in the
naturalistic approach to wellbeing. We could say that by keeping a narrow focus on the
physical and behavioral correlates of cognitions and emotions affecting self-functioning, and
on the self’s practical needs, the naturalistic method attends to a dimension of wellbeing that
is not sufficiently addressed by, and can complements, the essentialist perspective of the self.

With its focus on personal responsibility and the power of choice when facing the
givens of life, the existentialist perspective has positioned the self as a creator of meaning and
as a purposeful agent of change. With its emphasis on self-constructed meaning, it has
increased the importance, dignity and justifiability of our individual goals against those of the
social, political, cultural, and environmental factors that weight on, and often overshadow, the
singular human experience. Inasmuch as the essentialist perspective makes salient the all-encompassing potential of the self, and the naturalist perspective mostly attends to its comfort and physical preservation, the existentialist perspective vitalizes the self by calling attention to the decision-making power that makes each of us unique in our own way.

Finally, the relativist perspective has contributed to wellbeing by unmasking dominant cultural narratives that self-servingly frame and thus limit the expectations about what we can be and become. This has resulted in a cultural atmosphere of self-acceptance and increased tolerance and accommodation for other’s interests and lifestyles. The relativist perspective of self has also prepared us to use the global communications network in ways that bring us together as a species while learning how our planet brims with possibilities for the human experience. It has inspired us to consider our lifespan as a multiple-choice adventure with many opportunities for renewal.

Notwithstanding those wellness-promoting benefits, it is also important to analyze where these perspectives of the self have failed to promote wellness. The essentialist perspective of the self has been vulnerable to the infiltration of dogma and has served as a cradle for monopolizing and totalitarian ideologies as evidenced in religious extremism. The naturalistic perspective, while providing statistical data and analyses of the possible consequences of human actions, has been deficient in providing orienting values, and thus has indirectly contributed to biasing public attention with regard to the pursuit of increased personal comfort and in detriment to other possible avenues of human significance and expression. The existentialist perspective, despite its valuing of personal experience and its exhortation to live life with heroic determination, has nevertheless pointed to the inherently tragic aspects of the human condition and has shown us the terrifying existential void that engulfs the fragile convictions that sustain our inner life. Moreover, existentialism, on its own, has not shown us how we can cultivate the virtues it extolls, other than by squarely rising to
the occasion as we face life’s tribulations. And then, inasmuch as relativism has given us the right to be different, it has also contributed to making us neglect our core, and has implicitly sanctioned more superficial human connections. Living for our social identities, and role playing while competing for visibility, alienates us from each other as well as from the most central and relevant dimensions of self.

After recognizing the value and shortcomings of the four ontological perspectives of self, it is important to avoid their consideration from a single philosophical tradition. For example, a naturalist stance could lead us to think that because the ontologies of self compete for meaning-salience in the cultural arena, theirs is a Darwinian (survival of the fittest) fight for survival. A relativist stance could instead lead us to think that because ontologies of self are culture-bound products, they ought to become outdated when the conditions that created them change. To avoid oversimplifications like these, it is important to continue to investigate whether the conceptions of the self that are now less popular continue to enhance our lives up to this day.

**Transforming the Self-Concept**

We are fortunate to live in a culture that has the potential to integrate four amazingly distinctive conceptions of being, and that includes at least two bodies of knowledge that have the potential to foster a transformation of the self concept across the four ontologies of the self.

**The Narrative Reconstruction of the Self**

Narrative theory (Bruner, 1991; MacIntyre, 1984) stands on the premise that human beings construct meaning through stories, and act upon the stories they believe in. It posits that we understand ourselves and the world around us through shared stories that form and inform us, and that new stories can change us too. These premises, initially aligned to the
cultural relativist perspective, lead to narrative interventions that can also reinforce other philosophies of self. For example, when seeing Narrative Therapy’s co-founder Michael White in action during his 2008 Cocoa Beach two-day Narrative Therapy intensive, I noticed how, through his sophisticated system of questioning, he led the client-volunteers to link their memories and their feelings about them (what White (2007) calls the landscape of action) towards emerging notions of self (what he calls the landscape of identity) that ended up in new client’s self-conceptions which could not be distinguished from Heidegger’s description of the existential authentic self.

Narrative therapy (Payne, 2006; White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) directly pursues the task of unmasking wrong rationalizations of present or past injustices, something that is central to critical social theory (Corradetti, 2011). It includes specific processes by which the therapist, sometimes with the participation of reflecting teams, collaborates with clients in deconstructing cultural and personal narratives that negatively affect the clients’ sense of resources, efficacy and identity. Additionally, narrative therapy seeks to uncover and enrich positive, empowering and hopeful storylines that originate in the client’s own history, but may be currently overshadowed by disadvantageous and even pathology-inducing internalized discourses. By orienting clients to reinterpret their stories using a different philosophical lens, therapists and clients can together bring out the best in essentialist, naturalist, existential, and relativist perspectives of the clients’ self, according to their agreed-upon psychotherapeutic ends.

**Transformative Learning**

Differing from the traditional scientific view that the mind contains the self, Transformative Learning theorists (Cranton, 2006; Kegan, 2001; McAuliffe & Ericksen, 2002; Taylor, 2008) consider the mind as embedded in a holistic meaning-making organism, directed by an intrinsic, subjective, and partially inscrutable self-system that develops in non-
linear, emotionally laden, imaginal (Dirkx, 2006), and often mysterious leaps. From this view of the self, Transformative Learning aims at developing cognitively complex, emotionally integrated, and developmentally adaptive self-systems in adult learners.

To promote the transformation of self, Transformative Learning includes the Frankfurt philosophical school (Brookfield, 2005; Macey, 2000) critical theory practices, such as the critical reflection on the meanings and values in social ideologies embedded in cultural traditions. Additionally, Transformative Learning includes an extra step to criticality; that of critical self-reflection. For example, after presenting adult learners with complex issues involving a disorienting dilemma that may actually affect them, and asking them to imagine that they must take a stand and act based on it, Transformative Learning facilitators ask them to reflect on how the taking of that stance contributes to defining who they are, or who are they becoming by the choice they have made.

In my view, Narratively-oriented interventions and Transformative Learning educational practices can be used together and separately, not only to amplify self-understanding, but also to steer the self-concept toward more positive self-understandings that can lead individuals to dare to do more with their lives.
Chapter Three:
Design and Methodology

I investigated the process by which I conceived and produced a graphic novel intended to expand self-understanding and motivate self-integration in my target audience. This story represented the psychic forces in the self as characters, and through their interrelations, I explored the inner dynamics of the self as it acquires greater self-understanding to convey them, by way of symbol and metaphor, to my audience.

I artificially divided the single question guiding this inquiry in three interrelated sub-questions in order to describe an organized methodology and allow for the alignment between question, inquiry method, and answer. In practice, however, it often appeared to me that the creative process resisted organization because it tended to evolve more organically and on its own.

- How can I represent abstract ontological concepts, emergent pre-conceptual self-notions, and other internal dynamics related to the self for my intended audience?
- How can I use these representations in a story intended to be entertaining for my target audience while also eliciting the integration of the four ontological perspectives of self?
- How can I make this story graphically captivating and memorable for my audience?

I used a lightly-structured approach involving a combination of the following methods: 

Active Imagination Method. To access the data-sources for my story (its archetypal content, that of the hieros gamos) and answer the first sub-question, I used the method of
Active Imagination by which Jung developed his theory of the archetypes and the content for his Red Book (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009; Romanyszyn, 2007). This method involves the visualization of images and situations that characterize transcendental principles (the archetypes) while sufficiently abandoning the conscious mind, as if in between wakefulness and dream consciousness, to allow these characterizations to act spontaneously and develop new situations on their own. Using this method I hope to elicit the dynamic interaction of the symbolic characters that constitute the *hieros gamos*, and find out about “their” relationship to the various ontologies of self.

The Active Imagination method is based on the assumption that the archetypes have some sort of transcendental existence; primarily affect human experience as unconscious constellations of meaning that influence our dreams, passions, value-hierarchies, goals, and orientation in life; and can be engaged consciously through cultural and personal symbolism. Under this theoretical framework, I primarily investigated the *hieros gamos* phenomenologically as it unfolded in my imagination. By taking this approach I looked for emergent knowledge of an emotional and pre-rational nature that could be more directly and intensely communicated through my art to create a strong resonance in the psychodynamic dimensions of my audience.

**Narrative, Writing, and Poetic Inquiries.** To organize the output of my active and systematic imagination into a story plot, and to find the literary form for the educational concepts that I want to bring through the story’s script—that is, to answer the second sub-question—I combined the approaches of narrative (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Clandinin, 2007; Webster & Mertova, 2007), writing (Richardson, 2005), and poetic (Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009) inquiries. Together, these methods allow me to edit and elaborate the spontaneous content of my active imagination to craft a meaningful educational story that may be attractive to my intended audience as well.
**Arts-Based Inquiry.** In order to discover the visual imagery, the style, and the forms that combined with my story’s narrative, and to hopefully make my visual narrative memorable and even haunting as an artistic production as well—that is, to answer the third sub-question—I applied the Arts-based inquiry approach (Cahnam-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008), especially as described in Banks (2008).

These emergent research methods, especially in combination, permit a wide range of ontological and epistemological perspectives, can transcend conventional epistemic limits, greatly enrich research representations, and also have unique properties that support the investigation and representation of non-linear, liminal, emergent, and fluid understandings, such as those about the nature of the self (de Carteret, 2008; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Mitchell, 2011; Prendergast, et al., 2009; Reader, 2008; Rose, 2012).

Moreover, as an advocate and agent of change for self-empowerment in the public arena as defined in the ACA Advocacy Competencies literature (Ratts, Toporek, & Lewis, 2010, pp. 6-7), I tried to keep my research open-ended both analytically and emotionally to hopefully drive my graphic novel to transcend academic circles, communicate with a wider audience, and act on the public arena by jolting, intriguing, attracting, and ultimately inspiring my target audience to consider, and ultimately expand, their own sense of selfhood.

**About Validity**

Narrative researchers such as Pinnegard and Daynes (2007) state that Validity, originally intended for quantitative studies, implies a narrowing down of epistemology that implicitly denies ways of knowing other than that of the positivist research approach. Because my approach is not positivist, I, like most qualitative researchers, “turn towards establishing findings through authenticity, resonance, or trustworthiness (Clandini and Conelly, 2000; Denizen and Lincoln, 2005; both cited in Pinnegard and Daynes, 2007, p. 25).
Moreover, after turning toward these three criteria for goodness of research, I then situate my research within an emerging tendency within the qualitative research field, one which Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) have envisioned as “...an age of greater spirituality within research efforts. The emphasis on inquiry that reflects ecological values... inquiry into ‘human flourishing’ ... to... “reintegrate the sacred with the secular in ways that promote freedom and self-determination.” (p. 125). This emerging inquiry tendency would be one for which “expectations for competent work are still being developed” (Preissle, 2006, p. 691), were assessment will “depend on very general expectations, on criteria tailored to the subcategory of approach and on emergent expectations that vary in all areas as the methodology itself changes.” (Preissle, 2006, cited in Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011, p. 114). Therefore, I tailored the criteria of authenticity, resonance, and trustworthiness, to fit my specific research design and answer to the question: How can I (and others) know that I appropriately accomplished what I have set to investigate?

Lincoln and Guba (2005, 2011) elaborate on the quality of authenticity in a study as consisting of (a), ontological authenticity, or the capacity to elevate the researcher’s level of awareness; (b) educative authenticity, or the capacity to educate the critical capacities of others; (c) catalytic authenticity, or the capacity to motivate towards social involvement; and (d) tactical authenticity, or the capacity to promote positive social change. With the intention of producing a more original and outstanding graphic novel, I also attempted to abide by Heidegger’s existential definition of authenticity (Heidegger, 1977; Käufer, 2012), that is, as steadfastness in my personal internal vision, which I tried to keep by placing it over my concerns that academic or popular audiences different from my target population may not approve of my finished work. In practice, however, this last definition of authenticity presented more challenges than I anticipated. I describe these challenges in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.
Lincoln and Guba (2005, 2011) describe trustworthiness as balance, fairness, inclusiveness, and “attempts to prevent marginalization” (p. 122). These descriptors of trustworthiness are precisely the values that prompted my research. My story attempts to avoid the marginalization of conceptualizations of the self that appear to be fading out from public discourse, and includes four major ontological perspectives of the self to achieve a more balanced outlook of who we are and bring to salience the choices for being that we have today.

Cole (1996) describes narrative resonance as: “a development of self through interaction with others at an intimate level” (p. 299), “a way of seeing one experience in terms of another” (ibid), that occurs when “One narrative element in the trigger story becomes the source of another story. The one evokes the other like an echo, making us resonate with metaphorical connections...” (p. 305). She theorizes that, metapherein, a Greek word that translates as "doing of metaphor" is the key agent in resonance. (p. 311).

Agreeing with Cole’s interpretation of resonance, I attempted to foster it, and consequently to foster the development of self in my readers, by using a series of metaphors working together to constitute the mythopoeic quality of my story. Also, I attempted to elicit this future resonance by creating the graphic novel in a way that invites my audience to experience my characters and their world at a deeper, emotional, and intimate level, even if the readers’s reaction is not always a positive one.

**Intended Audience**

I researched my own creative process while creating a graphic novel for an audience that is already inclined to read in this medium. Although this intended audience does not constitute a research population, I clearly defined it here to better-target my creative process and my communication efforts to them.
Stating that there is limited demographic information about adult readers of graphic novels, Pyles (2013) summarized it as follows:

“In 2003, Diamond Distributors, the company that distributes all comic books from all publishers, found that the average graphic story reader was twenty-nine years old. Ryan Searles, graphic novel enthusiast, estimates that in 2012 that number is still relatively accurate, with most graphic story readers and purchasers being between the ages of twenty-five and forty.”

Pyles also cited Schenker, who in 2011 used his social networking site to look at the demographic information of 1,215,960 self-identifying comic book fans. He found that approximately 75% identified as male and 25% as female, and also divided them by age as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 and under</td>
<td>168,280</td>
<td>118,920</td>
<td>49,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>771,340</td>
<td>558,340</td>
<td>208,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-45</td>
<td>233,240</td>
<td>195,200</td>
<td>36,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46+</td>
<td>43,080</td>
<td>32,600</td>
<td>10,060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the information on this table is about comic book and not graphic novel readers, it closely aligns with the data from Searless and Diamond Distributors. Therefore, and wishing to speak to the largest audience of graphic novels readers, *I intended my graphic novel for a male audience between 18-30 years old*. This population has access to a wide range of visually stimulating entertainment. They quickly identify messages that are surprising, edgy, fast-paced, and visually stimulating, as part of their own culture, and tend to turn their attention away from those that they deem were produced in a top-down manner (for example, most educational material such as those of drug awareness campaigns). The message
I wanted to convey should ideally fit the communication and visual styles that are preferred by this group, and for this reason I followed some of the stylistic preferences of contemporary young men to create a dramatic but decidedly irreverent, visually rich, often funny, and overall entertaining mythopoeic graphic novel containing my message.

**Medium**

I encoded my preventive educational and inspirational message in a fictional graphic story. Graphic stories strongly influenced American youth generations from 1930 to 1960 (Wright, 2003), however, their influence decreased as the television industry took prominence over all other media, and slumped when videogames became their preferred entertainment. Currently, however, graphic stories have returned to popularity because of (a) cross-fertilization with Hollywood, which each year releases several movies based on comic book stories, (b) bestseller authors such as Stephen King who are now writing for comic books, (c) the maturity and originality of longer-format graphic novels, and (d) the successful introduction of *Manga*, the Japanese comic books, to America. Moreover, graphic stories are now released in electronic formats directly to cell phone screens, ipods, and the web.

I intended to capitalize on the current popularity of graphic novels to persuade and educate without appearing preachy or pedantic. With mine, I hope to communicate values and sway opinions not through obvert exposition of the message, but through theme, points of view, metaphors and their associations, characters’ representations, graphic emphasis, and plot outcomes.

**Procedure**

I produced the graphic novel by:

- Writing its screenplay
• Sketching, drawing, inking, and toning the artwork
• Typesetting the text and text balloons
• Integrating text and images and compiling the work as an e-book
• On average, each page took me about five days to complete.
Chapter Four:
Findings and Results

Findings

In order to answer the question guiding my inquiry—a question requiring a process-oriented answer—I developed a blog about the process of creating my graphic novel. In this blog I recorded my findings, which were my most salient thoughts about my experiences, observations, analyses, interpretations, and reflections during the creation of the script and the production of the graphic novel. In the blog I also captured the flow between the various methods, which I applied to produce the graphic novel.

This chapter also includes the finished pages of the graphic novel, presented here as the graphic representation of my findings.

As I created the blog, I changed the name of the story several times. From its original name of Hieros Gamos, I first changed it to Divine Intercourse, the most accurate translation of this anthropological motif that I thought would be clear for readers who did not know the meaning of the Greek words. Later, noticing that my story was taking a strong comedic bent while proposing the emergence of a new and more benevolent myth out from an older Biblical one, I changed the name of my story to that of Good Superstitions. Finally, I returned to the original name of Hieros Gamos when I realized that my story, despite being a comedy, in the end included other anthropological references that gave it an intellectual flair. For these reasons, my blog, reproduced here in chronological order, refers to the story under all these names.

The blog included a fixed page describing the scope of my work as follows:
This story is about:

Plot. God determines that the human souls are decaying, and the Goddess and Mr. Alighieri must stop Him from unleashing Apocalypse upon the world.

At maddening speed through Heaven, Hell, and the dimensions in between—while Jesus refuses his Father’s Will, Babylon the Great Harlot plots with Satan, humanity’s historical notions of being take a life of their own to strive for survival, and Alighieri achieves enlightenment through cosmic tantra—the story introduces a cosmogony of the self and an upbeat prophecy about the destiny of humankind.

Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? – This book will show it all.

Philosophy. Good Superstitions is part of is my dissertation to become a Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of South Florida. The story introduces a new philosophical perspective about the self and the sacred, showing how the historical essentialist, naturalist, existentialist, and relativist ontological perspectives of self have guided humanity’s advances, but also caused social harm. Good Superstitions also shows how these cultural agreements about who we are and what we can become, compete for supremacy in the meaning-making of our lives, and how by establishing a conscious self-network with them we might activate greater self-potential to hopefully recast our species’ destiny as that of superintendents of life for all creatures on Earth.

To get to this stage, however, we must relinquish apocalyptic narratives and transcend obsolete understandings about the invisible powers that shape our lives. Good Superstitions shows how by doing this, we can expand our understanding of what it means to be a human being of our times.

Social Action. Good Superstitions has also a social objective: to reinforce the existentialist and essentialist understandings of self that are being progressively marginalized in our increasingly relativist society. These older conceptions of the self are in actuality the bedrock of specific virtues and character strengths that are currently in decline. Virtues and character strengths, in turn, constitute our greatest cultural capital and are precursors of mental
health and sources of resilience in times of adversity. Preserving Virtues and strengths in our cultural landscape implies caring for the historical interpretations of selfhood that sustain them.

**Academics.** I would like my graphic novel to become an example in connecting preventive social counseling and entertainment in the marketplace. I want to inspire other academics and mental health professionals to broaden their audiences by establishing their own creative dialogues with different segments of mainstream culture.

My first post included the following declaration of intent:

I will be blogging about the making of a graphic story to promote deeper understanding of who we are and what we might become. In this project I will try to combine my experience in:

- the fine and graphic arts
- various esoteric traditions
- the narrative and strengths-based orientation to wellbeing that I developed while studying for a Ph. D. in Counselor Education, with a concentration in Communications, at the University of South Florida.

_March 8, 2013_

After this introduction, I blogged a series of posts in which I described the academic reasons which led me the creation of the blog in the first place. In these series, I conveyed information that appears in the first chapter of this dissertation and is not reproduced here to avoid duplication.

Next, I blogged a series of posts about my considerations regarding the creation of the story and the characters’ development as follows:

**Divine characters.** To continue with my dissertation, I am now researching the symbols, the visual metaphors, the narrative style, the storyline, and the artistic representations that can best convey in a graphic story the importance of integrating, or at least keeping in mind, four perspectives of the self as a step to reinforce virtues and character strengths, as well as to expand the views about who we are and what we can be. Now is when this blog should really kick in.
I have condensed my thinking processes while coming up with the main characters for my story as follows.

In creating a story about the Hieros Gamos dynamics (the divine marriage of complementary opposites), the most important characters in the story could directly be a god and a goddess that struggle to unify their disjointed perspectives about the human self. But then, why not make it about “the” God and “the” Goddess? This could enrich (or transgress, according to view) monotheism by bringing a goddess into the Biblical mythological universe. Jehovah calls himself “I am that I am”—one of the most recursive and stagnant ways to describe one’s self. If He is what He is; she can be everything that he is not. Indeed, Jehovah will find his match in my story.

![Figure 2. Asherah](image)

While researching the Semitic goddesses that preceded the Jehovah’s cult, I found Asherah, a mother goddess. Asherah reclaiming her place beside god, as a metaphor of the intention to reintegrate fading conceptions of self, could be a start, but a weak one. What about Asherah fighting for humanity, while God, more critical of the loss of virtue, is disenchanted with it? More specifically: God can’t stand the relativist conception of the self (where the soul loses its meaning) that is taking over our humanity, but she wants to make allowances for it. That’s ideological conflict. Now, if God is ready for Apocalypse, and Asherah wants to prevent it, that is big stakes!
Incidentally, Asherah could also be mad because Jehovah’s cult banished her, but as a mother goddess, she must be nice to humanity… Nah, too bidimensional. Instead, to make her a more complex character, and visually deal with her multiple aspects, why don’t I give her her own holy trinity? Just like that of God, but because of her repression over the centuries, functioning more like 3 split-personalities. Asherah will be the nice aspect of her trinity, her darker personality will be Lilith—Adam’s first wife who turned demonic in some Talmudic accounts—the shadow of the eternal feminine, wanting to avenge her historical destitution.

As for the third aspect of the feminine trinity, I could create the character of Shekhinah—a nice-sounding Jewish word meaning the presence of the divine force, much like the Hindu Shakti. She could also be represented as the Sophia (from the Gnostic texts and with strong Greek connotations) which for Jung represented the highest aspect of the feminine…. I will try to stay within the Semitic pantheon, so I will use Shekhinah, but make her wise like Sophia.

This is as far as I want to go in defining these characters for now. Now I want to meet them in the space of my mind (the active imagination research method) to make them more real.

August 21, 2013

Can God develop? If in my story God is about to unleash Apocalypse, I need to show all his might to make Him credible. I need Fire and Brimstone. There is a great description of the throne room of heaven in revelation 4 that I might use to set the stage. However, soon his divine magnificence should be threatened by events that fall out of his control. How can God lose control, if he is by definition all-wise and all-powerful? Because God in my story will be, basically, the Jehovah of the Old testament—a very thought cookie, but a social construction nevertheless. He will be, unknowingly, half of a god without the goddess. He will represent the (almost) immutable ideas that we form about ourselves. She will represent the flow of existence that necessarily transforms us all.

There may be another reason why Jehovah has an inflated view of himself. Over the centuries, he might have been unknowingly assumed to be what his believers have thought of him, just like their sports-fans worshiping can contribute to the corruption of athletes that have
achieved fame and fortune. This would be an extreme form of social conditioning affecting the spiritual realms, one going in the opposite direction than that thought by J. M. Barrie’s (Peter Pan) who in one of his plays wrote that fairies will go out of existence when everybody stops believing in them.

Let’s see if I can combine these ideas to tell the story of a god that can evolve.

August 22, 2013

**Human characters.** I will also need human characters to keep readers interested in my story. A conflict of gods might be too abstract to clearly show what’s at stake. God should turn really scary in front of humans to make credible his intention to end the world. So I’ll make him come to earth to interview people, and become very frustrated because souls are not doing what they are supposed to do. Actually, I can make it worse. Souls could be decaying, at least in his view.

I also need to put at least one human character alongside the Goddess. To stop Armageddon, she will need some help. A human sidekick can help her, someone proficient in mythical history—someone like me. I’ll think this over a bit more, but I may make this character slightly autobiographic, having some of my own psychological makeup. Let’s call him De La Garza. *Later I saw that my story, a comedy about the gods including visions of what may lie beyond the physical senses, could be obliquely related to Dante’s Divine Comedy. For this reason I changed the name of this character to that of Dante Alighieri.* He could become the soapbox for my theories of the self without being too preachy. Also, in the story, my active imagination method can become a form of esoteric/occult practice such as the Skrying in the Spirit, Astral Projection, or Rising in the Planes, which could take my character into the midst of the divine conflict.

Now, by being on the side of humans, De La Garza would be in a path of conflict with God. Perhaps he will not be a sidekick anymore, but a more active player. What kind of human can dream of opposing God? Only one with a messianic complex… but turned around—not a messenger of God, but of the goddess. My plot is getting sufficiently twisted. I’m happy with it, and I can hardly wait to start with the script.

August 23, 2013

65
**Figure 3.** Divine characters

**First characters study.** These drawings are my first take at representing the divine characters in my story. My idea for God comes from the Sixtine Chapel—an easy reference. For the goddess triad, I envision Asherah as the most human, a go-getter, attractive and inspiring. The Kabbalistic tradition sees Lilith as a succubus, living in the depths of the Great Abyss. So I am taking these clues to make her the vengeful and lustful shadow side of the Goddess. To counterbalance Lilith, I am drawing Sekinah as to incarnate mystical purity; she can bring the sacred back into the world.

August 27
**First pages.** Here are a few pages of dialogue. *This dialogue appears in the Results section of this dissertation and is omitted here for reasons of redundancy.* Synthesizing my writing process, I should say that I started by following the ideas that I developed for the images in my poster presentation for the American Psychological Association in Honolulu, on the first of this month. For the poster, I made a mock first page where God considers that human souls are getting out of control because they have turned nimble and slippery. However, I reconsidered this view.

![Image of God over the planet](image)

**Figure 4.** God over the planet

Nimble and slippery could have been an appropriate description before digital communications interconnected people that previously were “Bowling Alone”. Nowadays, under the age of rampant social media, I thought that it would more accurate to present souls as sick because of gunk-y-fying together, and losing their critical thinking in the process. God finds about this problem through his sentinel angels, which on the first page remind viewers of how tough God can be. During my free-flow writing, the angel’s dialogue came out quite un-
angelic. I thought that was good because it shows at the onset that the story will be a funny one. Comedic is better, because if biased by my mythopoeic intent I were to frame the story as an epic, I would be in danger of tilting it to the preachy and corny.

August 31, 2013

De La Garza meets the Goddess. By briefly knowing De La Garza in his academic environment, I’m hoping that readers will have an anchoring point for the rest of the story, which will happen in the higher dimensions of his imaginary realm. I also showed him in his academic environment to prepare readers for the intellectual nature of the story, and I made this environment oppositional and comic to create drama, and to continue with the humorous slant that will preclude readers from expecting a story of the epic genre, something that would be very difficult to achieve when subverting the Bible’s mythology the way my story does.

September 5, 2013

The four I-Ams. The four I-Ams characterize the four ontological perspectives of the self considered in my dissertation. I made them to look not too far from the Japanese chibi that populate many manga stories. They are the product of the collective human mind and will play the role of God’s grandchildren in my story. They are, after all, children of mankind, right?

I wrote a scene were De La Garza—human after all—extolls the virtues of the 4 I-Ams before God, while Babylon, the new name I have chosen for Lilith, deprecates their shortcomings.

I am using Screenwriter software for the script, and I am writing it in all in capital letters. When I cut script sections and paste it to this post, it comes with lowercase and capital letters all mixed up. So the capitalized words you see in the dialogue are not intentional.

DE LA GARZA. I-transcend helps us humans sustain a dignified and hopeful view of OUR natures and our destiny. It has helped us imagine better lives for ourselves and motivated us to work for the unfolding of potential. it HAS EXPANDED our meaning-making, made us citizens of a rich and wondrous universe and inheritors of greatness!

BABYLON. You know God, your children are not that great after all. This one has brought dogma, totalitarianism, and extremisms of all kind that resulted in hate and violence all over the world.
DE LA GARZA. If it were not for I-control, we would have never come up with medicine, technology, laws, and other ways to make our lives longer, more peaceful, and more comfortable. He helped us learn from the beautiful universe you created for us and showed us how to fructify in it.

BABYLON. Nah! This one trapped people in their intellect, made them live for their bodies only, and pursue their comfort no matter how much destruction they create on their way.

DE LA GARZA. I was saying, I-become shows us the merits of our singularities, and how we shape them with the decision power that is inherent in us. He made us see that we, like you, should be free, willful, and responsible creatures, and that we should strive for wisdom to guide the forging of our own precious individual selves as we squarely face the challenges of life.

BABYLON. Singularities my ass! This mixed up self-development with self-aggrandizement, many bought into it just to escape the terror of their own existential isolation! Human convictions are so fragile in the cosmic meaninglessness that surrounds them!

DE LA GARZA. I-glide has freed humanity from many bad scripts, made us more accepting of each other, and gifted us with the lightness of being that motivates us to explore new lifestyles and creeds. He inspired us to tighten our global communications network, and is showing us how to realize ourselves throughout it.

BABYLON. This one, dear lord, is the culprit for all those gooey souls! It made people opportunistic jokers with no core of their own.

September 7, 2013

Layers of meaning. I’ve been working on the script’s first draft at great speed.

Initially my plot was very lose. I knew that to conform to the Hieros Gamos structure, god and goddess, standing for mind and feeling, had to meet, quarrel, and finally merge as one. I also knew that their reconciliation would pivot on the balance of the four ontological conceptions of the self. Additionally, I wanted to show these four ontological perspectives as framed under a bigger pattern encompassing them all, something that could point to a cosmogony of the self.

My first take was to engage imaginatively with my story’s characters. As expected, I felt them contributing on their own to a good degree. I engaged with them in a sequence-by-sequence fashion, but not along the story’s time-continuum, and without exactly knowing how
things were going to turn out in the end. I then ascribed those imaginary encounters to De La Garza, my alter-ego for the story.

After tying-in the different sequences together, and imagining and writing more scenes where necessary, I’m close to having a finished first draft. It surprised me that during my writing, my intention to motivate readers towards expansion of self-awareness was layered under a more obvious layer of subtext; that which subverts the Judeo-Christian dogma. I came to confront the monotheistic dogma as a result of my intention to (a) create a mythopoeic story and scaffold my new myth with one that is already well-known, (b) to show that we must rise above institutional beliefs to expand self-understanding, and (c) to create dramatic tension to sustain my reader’s attention. In any case, the drama of an impending Apocalypse fuels much of the story’s tension and at this point it cannot do without it.

Then, on the surface and above subtext, the story became one of two interlocked Hero’s journeys. One is Jehova, who I present as a tragic hero who by merging first with Beltzebub and then with the Goddess loses his regional characteristics and truly becomes the totality of Life and Consciousness. The other hero is De La Garza (a provisional name, I think), who in his trajectory to become an academic becomes enlightened by keeping his self-respect among the gods and by consistently defending a positive vision for humankind.

These two heroes are never as colorful and and inspirational as Asherah—one third of the goddess trinity—she is the one with the most foresight and agency, and will get what she wants in the end.

I am satisfied with the way the story is about to gel. Next, I will write about the dialogues and of my literary stylistic considerations.

September 12, 2013

**Considerations about my story’s literary style.** How to write about dealings between Gods and humans for my intended audience? Indian comic books, for example, use an epic style stemming from a rich literary tradition that greatly respects this topic. Japanese manga represent the gods of Shinto less heroically, yet they retain a measure of “realism” that works well when intending to exalt the values that those gods represent. None of that would be appropriate for my story.
My intention of expanding self-understandings leads me to show some of the deficiencies of the dominant religious narrative in the Western world. Also, I want to speak to a fairly liberal group that would not stomach saccharinose descriptions of the spiritual realms. Moreover, I want to present my theories of the self in metaphors and a minimum of theoretical exposition or diatribe that would alienate my audience. For these reasons, my writing spontaneously gravitated towards comedy, while still retaining the drama found in epic stories (the world is about to end!). However, to have the postmodern freedom of moving between drama and comedy in my story, my divine characters will need to be slightly cartoonish.

During my active imagination research to write the script, the divine characters spoke right away as if they were fully-formed in my mind. I was surprised by the intrusion of the picaresque that surfaced whenever Satan and Babylon got to speak. I even wondered if this literary bent came from my Spanish ancestry, since the picaresque first appeared in that country and has been most successfully used there.

September 19, 2013

![Figure 5. Asherah study](image)

**Asherah.** I am developing my characters visually. This is one of my studies for Asherah. I aimed at classical but approachable beauty: dignified, soft, uplifting and friendly. I was thinking of Botticelli’s model when I worked on the drawing below.

October 2, 2013
Alighieri. I first imagined this character as De La Garza, Hispanic, and draw him as such in the study below. Now I am going back to my first idea of making the story somehow resemble Dante’s Divine Comedy. And for that reason I think that he should now be called Alighieri, have a thinner frame, and of course, look more Italian. He will be an intellectual, usually poised and a little arrogant. He should be good looking enough prevent readers from becoming alienated from him because of his character traits.

October 3, 2013

Figure 6. Alighieri study

Figure 7. The Devil study
The Devil. Here’s a study for the devil. In my script he is modernized, but I want to show him with some of his traditional attire. The wings in this drawing, however, are too cartoonish. Next time I will draw him with long, thin, and straight wings.

October 3, 2013

Fitting artwork to script. Last week I finished the script and emailed it to TheScriptJoint.com for line-editing. While I wait for it, I am learning Manga Studio EX 5, the software that I will use for the graphic part of the novel. I created a template that will help me draw on electronic pages that can be printed at the standard comic book size and at the proper print resolution. Also, I took a webinar on how to create organic brushes with this software, and made a few of my own for special effects.

While developing the characters, I am also trying to feel my way into the graphic style that will fit my script. In most sequential art characters look somewhere in between cartoon and reality, and along that continuum, I feel I need to find the spot for mine. My story-structure is more of a comedy, something that calls for cartoonish drawings, yet I tend to draw them towards the realistic side. I worry that if they turn out to look too cartoonish that will detracts from the gravity of the topics they have to deal with.

Alongside with fitting the characters’ representation to the story genre, I would also like my artwork to have a dreamy/surrealistic/psychedelic look. I feel that an intense and voluptuous style reminiscent of the 60’s will better represent the imaginal landscape where most of my story takes place.

October 7, 2013
Choosing a font family. Computers come equipped with one or two fonts that can be used for comic books, but they don’t look as good as those that are designed specifically for them. Most of these professional fonts are based on handwritten capital letters, but even at this level of specificity, the characters on each font can convey very different feelings, such as those of speed, grunginess, comicality, naiveness, distinction, etc. Then, I have to consider the issue of legibility: Is the one I like one that can be read quickly?

I thoroughly researched the many font families that are made for comic books and graphic stories. From among all of them, and after purchasing several that I didn’t feel quite right for my story in the end, I choose Collector Comic Pro, issued by Canada Type. I choose it because it is very legible, playful but not too comical, slightly chubby and with rounded ends, characteristics that work towards a visual opulence that resembles the fonts used in the posters for rock concerts of the late 60’s. I believe this font will subliminally inform readers that my story is supposed to be a light-hearted fantasy, even at the times it dips into dramatic tension.

October 8, 2013

The edited script. My script returned from an editing round with a professional scrip editor in California. She corrected my grammar and syntax in only about 10 places, and this made me think that either my writing is really good, or that my editor did a sloppy job.

To find out which is true, after I pencil in all the pages and integrate them with the text balloons, I will ask at least two college graduates that are also graphic novel fans to check for grammatical mistakes again.
I have been breaking the script into pages and panels, sketching all this while looking for continuity and page-impact. This process is concentration-intensive, because I imagine my characters in expressive poses in the appropriate settings and then visualize each frozen scene from various camera angles to choose one with strong visual impact which at the same time allows for positioning of the text balloons in the right reading sequence.

At this point my page sketches are very basic. They will go through many changes and refinements before I commit to draw each actual page. I’m up to sketching page 50. I believe my story will be told in about 80 pages.

October 29, 2013

Figure 9. Guy Peellaert’s graphic novel art sample

Graphic inspiration. Since my last post, I worked on the global look of my novel. I wanted it to be slightly comedic, but showing elegant and good-looking characters. After various trials I found my inspiration in the work of Guy Peellaert, a Belgian artist who combined the fluidity of French Art Noveau with the intensity of the American Pop-Art in two graphic novels, The Adventures of Jodelle (1966), and Pravda (1968).
My father bought The Adventures of Jodelle for me in the Eighties, when I was doing research for my thesis on comic books as instruments of conscientization. The story, somewhere between comedy and burlesque, was postmodern before its time. It juxtaposed in flat saturated colors the decadence of the Roman empire and the excesses of the modern era. It didn’t make a point because it was only made to excite the senses and gratify the eye.

Why do I find it inspirational for my work? Because it represented the classical and the contemporary mixed together; something that will happen in my story too, in which ancient gods interact in the mind of a contemporary man. Also, I believe my story should evoke the senses as much as possible to sustain the readers’s attention and balance the abstract nature of the concepts it attempts to convey.

December 28, 2013

**Last Post Before Webcomic.** This is the last post of the series about the conception, script-writing, characters design, and style development for Divine Intercourse. From now on my posts will either be about art in progress, unattached to any page, or about my reflections on the production and meaning of each finished pages, and will be attached to them.

Ready… Set… Go!

December 28, 2013

After this point in the development of my story, I changed the blogging format. The blog now included a main field were readers could see each page of the story, and a secondary field were I wrote my thoughts about the progression of my artwork for each of the pages that elicited such considerations. However, not all pages elicited such considerations.

Because the creation of the pages did not follow a linear way, but new pages were intercalated and other pages changed order as the graphic novel took shape, and because the programming of the WordPress template used to create the blog only permitted a sequence of posts based on a chronological order, the date of each post had to be omitted from the posts and is thus omitted from here on. These pages were created between January 1st, 2014,
and August 14, 2014. The number preceding the title of each post refers to the page number of the finished graphic novel. The finished pages are displayed in the results section of this chapter.

![Image of ancient alchemical illustration with two figures]

**Figure 10.** The *hieros gamos* in alchemy

1. **Cover page. The gods face each other.** For this cover, I first thought of the old alchemical images about of the *hieros gamos*, the process of the conjunction of opposites as the union of the eternal masculine and feminine (Atalanta Fugiens, Rosarium Philosophorum). Antropologists see this allegory as related to fertility cults. Jungian/Transpersonal/Depth psychologists, however, consider that it also alludes to the union of Eros and Logos, the principles of human feeling and reason—a convergence that can lead to more-encompassing states of consciousness.

When showing the early stages of the *hieros gamos*, these alchemical images depict a royal or celestial couple (Queen and King, or Sun and Moon) facing each other, as individuals in their own rights. At one point I thought about simply using one of those images on the cover of my novel to show that the graphic novel will have some roots in the thought processes of the alchemical philosophers, but then decided that an alchemical image would not prepare readers for its comical bent and outlandish plot.
I then made this cover, showing a divine couple as in the old alchemical plates but more in sync with our times. They are surrounded by brilliant fluid colors and a playful title that are reminiscent of psychedelic art, which I am using as an stylistic allegory for the outer-limits nature of the story and to reflect Eros.

The holy relic that resembles the Ten Commandments, and the serious promise I make in the text encased in it, all represent the Logos in the story. These elements appear in the blaze of a revelation which, just like the firm footing of the male god, limits the excess of Eros.

I believe that I playfully increased the polar tension in the cover by showing it in the differences between the characters and the graphical and stylistic elements that surround them. At the same time, the art appropriately reflects the quirkiness of the story that is about to unfold.

3. New dispensation. In this page I both connect my story to existing mythological material, and fully disclose the comical and over-the-top of the story.

4. Meeting god face to face. The story opens with a view of the hall leading to the Throne Room of Heaven. I wanted a grandiose and elaborate decoration. I was thinking Vatican… Baroque… profuse gold ornamentation such as that of Churriguera’s style, so I set to create the rich columns and gate. They took me so long, that the walls and ceiling of the hallway ended up being more monastic and austere.

I stick to a more-or-less classic representation of heaven. Yet through dialogue show that in this blissful atmosphere there is bureaucracy and God is feared and revered for his volatile temperament and his power. Even in heaven unpredictability and time-constraints exist. This shows the limits of God’s realm, so I can evenly play it against what will come next.

5. Meeting with god. This page is about the power and dignity of the male god. First I sketched him three times bigger than the angels, but because I would later have to justify his shrinking between this scene and the next—in which he will interact with young adults at a tailgate party—I decided to not show him titanic at the start.

There is an elaborate and dramatic description of the throne room of heaven in Revelation 4:1-11. My first sketch was a wide-angle shot based on it, but surrounded by so many creatures, god was losing relevance in the scene. I then developed this medium shot that
is partly based on a painting of Zeus by Ingres. It makes God look at his best, and hopefully focuses attention on the story’s flow.

6. **God receives the news.** I wanted god to dominate this page even though he only speaks once. That’s why I spread his presence all over the background and then framed the angels on it.

   The angels describe the new state of the human souls from two slightly different ethereal perspectives. They are seeing with spiritual eyes, since the merging of human souls they describe is happening even when the human bodies stay miles apart. The last balloon of this page foreshadows the conflict between the relativist and essentialist worldviews that create the rift between god and humanity.

   Three things on this page foreshadow god’s temperament.
   
   His yellow radiance—bordering on the uncomfortable and relentlessly falling on the angels on every frame—points to his unbending nature.
   
   His single question exemplifies his one-pointed nature.
   
   In the last panels the angels look very small. This is because god is already flying—something that will be clear on the next page—to investigate the problem on his own—shows his immediate reactions. He doesn’t reason. He acts.

7. **God sets out to investigate.** The two messages in the first panel are that (a) god is all action and too quick to judge, and (b) not everything is perfect in heaven—the sentinel angels are confused when god blames them for a celestial bureaucracy problem.

   On the second panel, the jarring colors surrounding our beautiful planet give us a glimpse of what God is seeing with his spiritual eye.

8. **God crashes a tailgate party.** Beginning with this page, the second scene in my story will show a confrontation between, on one side, the essentialist and existentialist perspectives of the self that are assumed by god, and on the other the relativist and naturalist/materialist perspectives that will be evidenced by the people he meets at the tailgate party. The rift between their worldviews is so vast that the encounter can only end in disaster.

   The clashing swirling colors of the general background connect this page to the previous one, and represent the “pond scum” planetary aura that god observes during his approach to Earth. Significantly enough, the organic pattern in which the green and orange
meet comes from a photo that I took of debris floating on stagnated water, one that I later manipulated in Photoshop.

9. Philosophical rift. God asks questions that are relevant to the Essentialist (Have you looked into your souls? and the Existentialist (What have you done for others?) philosophical perspectives. By their answers, the young adults show that they only understand those questions from a worldview that is more concrete and less introspective. First, they frame their encounter with the supernatural from their reality-show, media-imbued experience. Then, when god addresses them to gauge their moral stance, they can’t even relate to the question—by applying standard social formulas they bypass the need to consider their own moral stance. This unconscious evasive strategy is also reflected in their pet-spoiling, which can indicate a narrowing-down of affection to avoid having to deal with the suffering of other people with more relevant and pressing needs.

In this page god probes with questions that mostly arise from humanistic concerns addressed in the works of Existentialist philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard and Emmanuel Levinas, and psychologist/philosophers such as Erich Fromm and Rollo May. In the next page, god will probe from a metaphysical perspective, one that is older, and even more rare today.

10. Before the storm. This page continues to show the enormous gap between worldviews rooted in either substantial or trans-substantial definitions of self. Each worldview develops its own ideas about what is possible to us and its own definitions of right and wrong. In this example, they can’t even communicate with each other. Canned thinking, except that of the reflexion about the dying grandmother, dominates the conversation.

In the background, the blackness increasing to the right forecast god’s increasing irritation, which will burst as a full dimensional change in a full spread next week.

11-12. The Eye in the Triangle. In this spread, the polarization of two different worldviews turns extreme. On one side we have the young adults who, assuming that they merely exist in a physical and social context, can only understand their own lives by objectively and comparatively evaluating their performances in it. These characters enact the externalizing, bottom-up relativist and naturalist philosophical perspectives that, left on on their own, can result in conformity, compromise, compliance, and loss of authenticity (soul).
On the other side, god represents the top-down essentialist and existentialist philosophical perspectives that consider the self as intrinsic to being, internally generated, and developmental. In the case of god, his position cannot be more extreme. Because he made the universe, he assumes that he also owns its meaning—a meaning that his creatures must sooner or later internalize as well. On the human sphere, this philosophical stance has resulted in all kinds of authoritarian and imperialistic tendencies, and in this story it leads god to see the human philosophical dissidence as an intolerable affront to his perceived wholeness. One that he must end.

Yet, their philosophical gap is so vast that it prevents effective communication. The young couples do not even comprehend what is about to happen to them.

I have used the motif of the eye in the triangle to show god’s exclusivist point of view. From within the abiding perfection of the triangle, his “all knowing eye” can judge and imperialistically enforce the singularity of his vision across all of his creation. Or, can he?…

13. **Questioning research methods.** What I am showing here is a cartoon of extreme academic positions resembling “horror stories” that I have heard during my graduate student life. Just for the record, my dissertation committee is nothing like this. They encouraged my creativity and helped me frame my dissertation in a way that justifies the creation of my graphic story as a cutting-edge qualitative research project.

Divine Intercourse has a comedic, farcical, slightly satirical literary style; not unusual in comic books and graphic stories, but alien to most academics. I hope its novelty does not estrange professors and social scientists from its core integrative goal.

What happened in the last panel?

Hint. The goddess is about to make her entrance.

14. **The goddess makes her entrance.** When first thinking about writing a story showing the potential of the Hieros Gamos (the sacred marriage of complementary opposites) as an intrapsychic force tending towards self-integration, I first thought that the main characters could be a god and a goddess struggling to unify their different worldviews. Then, I thought that showing them as “the” God and “the” Goddess I could hopefully elicit more sense of immediacy and relevance in readers, even if their actions were to transgress traditional notions associated to them.
Asherah, or Athirat, the goddess of motherhood, fertility, and the sea, was worshiped in the Semitic region previous to the advent of the Jehova cult. In my story Asherah comes from the past to defend our species because she has hope in us. Her protective, integrative and harmonizing drive exemplifies the capacity I would like my story to catalyze in my readers: to foresee the potential in us, and to preserve and integrate our different notions of who we are as a means to unfold this potential.

15. Jesus refuses his father’s will. The conflict within holy trinity members shown in this two-page scene advances the exposition of the laws that govern the story’s universe. It is also essential to the story because it foreshadows the plot’s final resolution. More I shouldn’t say for the story to continue to surprise.

I worried about offending religious fundamentalists, and sought the advice of my brother, a successful dramaturge and actor who also directs a prominent scenic arts school in Mexico City. He first asked me was whether my intention was confrontational. It is not. When he heard my answer, he said that readers can sense when authors provoke their audiences just to call for attention, and that they rate sensationalist works as inferior and their authors as inauthentic. After exonerating me from this angle, he then warned me that is usually futile to show the downside of an irreducible philosophical position to people which are firmly entrenched in one.

I also consulted with a webcomic creators and readers forum at www.thewebcomicslist.com. Respondents for the most part encouraged me to remain “true to the story”, and “remember that although some may feel offended by my story, they always have the option of clicking away from it.”

16. Holy trinity conflict. In this page I foreshadow the single law of this imaginary universe that will allow for a resolution of the story’s drama.

17. Visions of the goddess. In this page Alighieri resists the goddess but succumbs to her enchantment and is led to the imaginal in the end. I used the continuity of the long balloon tail connecting the goddess’ words to represent the fluidity of his visions.

18. Discussing philosophy with the goddess. This page turns the story toward the philosophical issues (ontological perspectives of self) that will be addressed through it. I am using sex to sell philosophy. Does the end justify the means?
19. **God in hell.** God appears as the apocalyptic rider on the white horse. But things won’t go according to prophecy.

25. **Alighieri’s weakness.** Alighieri is an atypical hero. Instead of muscles and a big heart, he is smart, knowledgeable, and greatly flawed by arrogance, fear, opportunism, and his own unstable mind.

26. **Alighieri’s mission.** Despite his increasing sense of greatness, he is entrusted with a critical mission. One he may as well pursue for his own selfish reasons.


In Western mysticism, these four dimensions have been depicted as four (tetra) creatures—a man, a bull, an eagle, and a lion—that correspond to cardinal principles of creation and can coalesce (morph) into a greater entity. As a biblical motif, the tetramorph recurs in visions of the old-testament prophets, in the creatures accompanying the four evangelists, and surrounding the throne of god in the Book of Revelations. In Kabbalah, the four creatures conform the Merkabah, a living chariot that can elevate consciousness to divine heights. In Hermetical philosophy these creatures relate to the four powers of the Sphinx (to Know, to Will, to Dare, and to Keep Silent) that Initiates must cultivate to progress through the Great Chain of Being.

The idea of the four dimensions of being was also known in ancient Greece. Empedocles of Agrigentum (c. 504-433 B.C.E.) theorized that the whole universe was constituted from four elemental/metaphysical forces (Earth, Water, Air, and Fire). Hippocratic medicine asserted that these elemental forces manifested in human beings as the sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic humors.

Soon my story will piggy-back on the Hippocratic idea that these four dimensions of being—the tetramorphs—can influence humanity. In Divine Intercourse, they will set into motion four directions of self-understanding, or four different ontological perspectives of self, that in turn transform civilization. Yet I am not claiming that the transculturality of the
tetramorph motif derives into trueness; I simply use this motif as a cultural scaffold to facilitate
the communication of the four different ontological perspectives of self.

29. God before the Face of the Deep. The Face Of the Deep, the original Chaos (in
the Greek sense of “void” or “chasm”) that preceded Creation, knows the full back story and
can point to God’s past and present faults: self-absorbed in his own universe, he has cut links
with all others. Now his own power and eternity inhibit any further transformation. In humans,
that would mean neuroticism. But, what happens to a god who has reached this state?

30. Literary and artistic considerations after one-third of the story. I am about
one third into the story and it feels like a good time to look back and analyze my work. This
post is about my literary and artistic considerations; the next will be about the message and its
delivery.

I am pleased with the combination of my literary and artistic stylistic approaches. In
my view, the quick succession of scenes, the frequent twists and turns in the plot and dialogue,
the uneasy combination of rigidity and fluidity in my drawings and page designs, the intense
and strongly contrasted colors, and the lack of margins in the pages, all conspire to make my
story loud, somewhat confusing, and mildly jarring. It seems to me that I came up with a
moderately-shrill style, an irreverent but profound tone, and a comical/metaphysical
atmosphere that are distinctive. I hope that all this expressive radioactivity makes my artistic
voice stand out in the graphic novels field.

This achievement of an original literary/graphic stance, a potential asset when seeking
acceptance with my first (popular) audience, provokes an important question about my
secondary (academic) audience: Will they “get it”? Pierre Bourdieu said that artistic “tastes”
constitute “markers of ‘class.’” Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argued that shared
aesthetic preferences reinforce class divisions. If all this is true, then the bonds between class
members are formed and reinforced by—among other things—shared esthetic tastes. Now that
my art has become part of my academic dissertation, and that with my dissertation I am tacitly
requesting membership to a professorial academic rank, how will my introducing of an
esthetics that is for the most part foreign to University professors influence my membership
request? On a first analysis, introducing an esthetics that is alien to the class I am trying to
belong to, looks like a dangerous move. But then, I am hoping that something in the “universal”
language of the arts (Yes, I am placing my hope in modernist aesthetics), and in the value of what I add to the art—for example, this analysis—will hedge any differences in esthetic taste.

31. Considerations about my story’s message. In this page and the next Thoth, the Ibis headed god of the ancient Egyptians who in Hermetic lore is the keeper of the records of time, graciously acquiesces to all of Alighieri’s exaggerated demands.

About the story’s message.

My story will deliver three interrelated messages, and only the first one has come out to light at this point. So far, by using comedy and satire to turn a well-know eschatological myth upside down, I have pitted negative and positive futurism against each other, gained story-momentum, and hopefully created sufficient curiosity to keep the readers’ attention all the way to the end. The next section of my story will deliver most of its philosophical content. The last part of the story will address how the information presented in the story can promote self-understanding and positively influence humanity’s future.

More specifically, the three main messages in my story are as follows:

1. My comic satire attempts to distance readers from traditional apocalyptic eschatology to make them more receptive to the positive futuristic concepts contained in my third and last message. I believe that apocalyptic eschatology is bad because it disenchants from life, demotivates, and can contribute to existential isolation and social apathy—all forerunners of mental dysfunctions. It may be thought that in ridiculing traditional eschatology I have ridiculed the religious doctrines that uphold it. However, as an author with the purpose of communicating a positive vision, I have ridiculed only one war-mongering, potentially detrimental story (from among the thousands of for the most part benign and positive stories) recounted in three of the world-religions that still influence political ideology and action around the globe.

The second message is about my theory of the self: Cultural understandings of who we are are based on four distinct historical ontological perspectives of self that promote different but complementary sets of virtues and character strengths. Disjointed and unconscious, these ontologies of self lead to underachievement at both individual and social levels; consciously addressed, they can make us flourish and help us choose who we want to be. This second message precipitated the creation of the story, and is the only one that was
clear to me when I started this project. For the most part, my story delivers this message in its mid-section, which starts at this point.

3. The third message, coming up in the last part of the story, is an emergent and mytopoeically-promoted vision that historic, cultural, developmental, and transcendental forces are transforming our personal and collective sense of self towards a more meaningful, holistic, integrative, hopeful and proactive vision of our worth and evolutionary destiny. This positive futuristic proposition includes the premise that awareness of the various ontological perspectives of the self, and the decision to act on this awareness--what my second message is about--is one of the steps towards this psychological and cultural transformation.

32. Alighieri searches for a new mythos. This page inaugurates Alighieri’s mythos-search. I follow William Grassie’s recommendation and use the original Greek term mythos to differentiate something that has the potential to inform, articulate, and mobilize a culture, from myth, a word that more commonly denotes idle fancy, fiction, or falsehood.

33. A cosmogony of the self. This is what Alighieri is watching now. With this pompous title, which I tone down a bit with a funny comic typeface, I begin the central message of the story: the historical emergence of four ontologies of self and their effects on civilization. This message is mythopoeically presented as a cosmogony because, reaching across astronomy’s appropriation of the term, I use it in its basic etymological sense. The Greek root word, kosmogonia, indicates kosmos ‘order’ and gonia ‘begetting’, that is, the origin of some sort of order. Moreover, just like in the ancient accounts of creation, my cosmogony traces the origin of a phenomenon (that of the self) to the cosmic forces that contributed to shape it.

34. Philosophers of the Essential Self. Some of the thinkers that promoted the idea of an essential self appear in this page. While most of them belong to the Western philosophical tradition, I included an example of a Native American and a Hindu philosopher to point to the pan-cultural nature of this conception.

35. The Age of I-transcend. I-Transcend represents the essentialist ontological perspective of the self. There will be four I-am creatures in the story, each representing a different ontological perspective. In my story, these I-ams presided over scopes of time, "ages" or "eons" when their respective conceptions of self prevailed, and also continue to play an important role in our current understandings of self. Even though the idea of an essential I-am
lends itself to a more noble and refined representation, I decided to picture this and the other three aspects of the self in a cartoonish and even slightly ridiculous way to show that on their own, they are incomplete and fallible interpretations of who we are.

36. The fall of the first age. This page shows the downside of upholding essentialist beliefs with nothing else to restrain them. It also shows the tetramorph that will bring a new vision for humanity.

37-42. Between these pages, my story breaks down into three concurrent subplots. In the first subplot, Mr. Alighieri is learning about the ages of the self, their instigators, and the resulting I-am creatures; in the second sub-plot, Asherah meets with the other two goddess-aspects of her trinity (even when readers cannot know who these two other female characters are) and then visits the I-ams to invite them to the party. To keep the narrative tension going through this mytho-historical account, the third subplot is about the clash between God and Babylon, the Great Whore of the Book of Revelations.

43. God-Babylon fight. Babylon’s harsh criticism towards the Semitic god surprised me when I wrote the dialogue that appears in this page. This writing came out through a period of imaginative stream-of-consciousness writing similar to what Jung calls Active Imagination Research, and Romanyszyn calls Alchemical Hermeneutics. When drawing this page, I worried that religious fundamentalists may misinterpret my narrative intentions, but after dealing with these worries in previous controversial scenes, I have exhausted my interest in elaborating on them any further.

48. Interrupted cosmogony. This page merges the first two subplots into one. When Asherah returns to pull Alighieri out of his instruction, she connects the mytho/historical account of the emergence of the human selves with present narrative time, making all that relevant for what is to come.

One of my committee members offered me personal input. She said that she was hooked to the story and liked the artwork, but she also said she did not like my representation of the goddess, she felt that my work was sexist, and wondered whether because this, and the fact that I am representing the young relativist perspective too superficially in the first few pages, I may alienate my target population.
Her comments made me think that I had to up-mote the comical/satirical presentation of the story at the onset, so readers would not expect politically correct or accurate representations in it. To this end I inserted a 2nd page that brings down the brainy definition of mythopoeia that appears on page 1.

I thought further on the global presentation of my work, and considered that a direct translation of Hieros Gamos—the title that I have used until now, can misrepresent my work as intended to tackle gender/sexual issues. So I looked for a lighter, more comical title, and came up with Good Superstitions. This name is less intriguing, but is also lighter and more in tune with my story’s treatment.

49-50. Arriving at the Garden of the Deep. This page spread shows Ashera’s world. The fertility Goddess hosts an array of loving creatures. I am hoping that this children picture-book scene, contrasting with Asherah’s vulgar language and the view of Babylon and the Devil that appear to have fallen under the spell of this enchanted place, will provoke enough confusion and irritation to increase the story’s narrative tension without baffling and/or offending my readers. I trust that my knowledge of my target audience will keep me right on the edge where novelty and controversy lead to the increased curiosity and suspense that contribute to an ultimately satisfying reading experience.

51. Almost a cat-fight. This page merges the two remaining subplots into one: God is about to join the scene. Also, for the second time in the story, I foreshadow the single law of this imaginary universe that will allow for a surprising final, but not complete, resolution of the conflict in the end.

52. Divine fury. The words that god speaks when projecting the thunderbolts on all the party-goers are directly taken from Deuteronomy 10:20, King James Bible "Authorized Version", Cambridge Edition.

53. Who’s divine will? When planning this page, I had not anticipated that Asherah would end up using the rainbow against god’s thunderbolts. This was a direct resultant of having placed the rainbow in the first garden vignette, and that it coincided with the area in between the two gods. Moreover, the way Asherah addresses god during this intense confrontation affirms the comedic in the story.
55. **Buddhic selves.** In this page I attempted to evoke the balanced look of a Tibetan Thangka Painting. This mandala representation of the I-ams, implicit in their placement in the first vignette, represents their complementarity.

56. **Sixtine I-ams.** Here I depicted the I-ams supporting god like in Michelangelo’s Sixtine Chapel fresco. By doing this I can make god say “this feels strangely familiar” and get him to begin accepting the idea that the I-ams are indeed his grandchildren.

**Pages 56-59.** These pages communicate a broad understanding of the pros and cons of the four ontologies of the self, and sketch the possibility that in the future we may consciously use them as a smart self-network to avoid the gaps in self-understanding that could produce deficient life-choices.

**Pages 61-65.** On these pages my story combines the hope of the Human Potential movement of the seventies with some of the eco-feminist/global feminist environmental justice ideals as a counterbalance to the apocalyptic vision of a failing world. Without being an expert on these ideological positions, I wrote Asherah’s dialogue during a bout of artistic inspiration. Only afterwards I noticed how I was able to convey her perspective on life with an intensity that matched god’s stubborn determination to end the world, one that could feel to readers like an equally-strong polar opposite to the traditional/masculine discourse, and could neutralize the traditional discourse in their surprising final merge.

Using the recourse of holy trinity syndrome to merge the moral opposites of God and the Devil, and then the energetic attraction of the disembodied (at least unrepresented due to the darkness in the cave) masculine-feminine dichotomy, helped me to temporarily neutralize all ideological concerns presented in the story to precipitate the Hieros Gamos.
Figure 11. The alchemical hermaphrodite

The alchemical hermaphrodite. I adapted a wonderful drawing by Leonardo DaVinci to represent the synthesis of opposites. The divine hermaphrodite is an alchemical motif signifying the last stage of spiritual realization; a perfect precursor for the amplification and integration of Dante’s self-system in the last two pages of the story.

Results

The next 70 pages of artwork resulted from this investigation.
Figure 12. Hieros Gamos: a 70-page graphic novel
MYTHOPOEIC LITERATURE...

"...creates... a new and transformative mythology, or incorporates and transforms existing mythological material. Transformation is the key."

"This type of work, at its best, should also inspire the reader to examine the importance of mythology in his or her own spiritual, moral, and creative development."

--MYTHOPOEIC SOCIETY
LISTEN WELL, HUMANITY...
AT EVERY STEP ALONG YOUR LONG EVOLUTIONARY JOURNEY, SACRED TEXTS HAVE SHOWN YOU HOW YOU HAVE COME TO BE WHERE YOU ARE, HOW LIFE WORKS, AND HOW YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR EXISTENCE... RIGHT?

WELL... THEN, TAKE HEED, HERE'S THE LATEST VOLUME FOR YOUR COLLECTON.

WHAT THE HELL!!!?

PLEASE GET COMFORTABLE, AND ENJOY YOUR READING.

NOW, AS USUAL IN THESE SERIES, OUR STORY BEGINS AT A VERY EXALTED PLACE...
NOT FAR FROM TODAY...

WILL HE GET MAD?

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN EDDOY? SOMEBODY. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I WASN'T TALKING ABOUT THEM.

OHH... YEAH!

THEY AGENDA WAS FULL.

IT'S NOT OUR FAULT

WE CRIED OUT FOR HELP BEFORE.

NEITHER DO I.

I DON'T WANT TO END UP LIKE LUCIFER EITHER.

SENTINEL ANGELS, YOUR TURN!

ISN'T HE MAGNIFICENT?

BREATHE DEEP, AND GLOW. HERE WE GO.
SPEAK, MY BELOVED!

DEAR LORD, IT HAS COME TO OUR ATTENTION THAT THE SOULS OF ADAM'S DESCENDANTS HAVE BEEN CHANGING.

YEAH, LORD! THE NEW SOULS ARE GLORIFYING!
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SOULS ARE LOST AND THEMSELVES, THROUGH DECAY AND... AND THEN THEY TEND TO AGGREGATE AND FUSE TOGETHER, EVEN WHEN THEIR HUMAN BODIES REMAIN APART...

IT'S LIKE... HELPLESS CLUMPING BACK INTO FROST BROWN, RATHER THAN GROWING UP TO BREATHE AIR...

THE SOULS STOP SIZING, AND JUST SQUEEZE AROUND AS IF ENJOYING THEIR MELTING...

ARE THEY BEING GOOD?

THAT'S THE THING, LORD... WE CAN'T TELL ANYMORE...

AS THEY SAY TODAY, IT ALL DEPENDS...
WHAT INCOMPETENCE! YOU SHOULD HAVE RUSHED TO TELL ME!!

MICHAEL, KEEP WATCH!

AT YOUR SERVITUDE, SIR?

BUT, YOUR SECRETARY SAID...

PLEASE FORGIVE US, MY LORD

AND VERY SOON, AT THE SPEED OF DIVINE THOUGHT...

IT LOOKS LIKE POND-SCUM FROM HERE!

I MUST TAKE A CLOSER LOOK.
WE NEED TO TALK.

SURE, ARE YOU LOOKING FOR THE RENAISSANCE FAIR?

HOW DO YOU DECIDE ON YOUR ACTIONS?

HMM?

I MUST FIND OUT WHETHER YOU CAN STILL RECOGNIZE RIGHT FROM WRONG.

BIBLE THUMPERS CREEPING, TIRED OF PARTIES, THAT’S ME!

IT’S ONE OF THE SIGNS, THE END IS NEAR, YOU KNOW?

WE ARE ALL BUDDHISTS HERE DUDER, GET LOST.

YEEH!!! F**K OFF, OR WE’LL SCREAM!!
YOU ARE CONFUSED. I AM THE HEAVENLY FATHER.

SO, YOU WERE ASKING, HOW DO WE CHOOSE WHAT TO DO? WE LOOK UP RATINGS AND REVIEWS ON YELP. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASK ME, STEPHANIE?

HAVE YOU LOOKED INTO YOUR SOULS? WHAT FOR? TO FIND YOURSELVES.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR OTHERS? WELL, MY RAVEN RUGGED VIDEOS WENT VIRAL FOR A FEW DAYS. THAT WAS COOL.

I MEAN, HOW DO YOU EXPRESS LOVE FOR THOSE AROUND YOU? BY SENDING THANK YOU CARDS, GET-WELL CARDS, BIRTHDAY CARDS, DUN!

WE BUY TREATS FOR OUR DOGGE TOO.
WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOUL?

SOUL MUSIC WAS BEFORE BOOK, RIGHT?

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE WILL HAPPEN TO YOU WHEN YOU DIE?

YOU SAW HER SPIRIT?

NO, IN HOSPITAL, SHE USED TO TALK ABOUT REALMS, BUT AFTER THEY BANNED HER WITH HOMELANDS, SHE DIDN'T CARE WHERE SHE WAS GOING ANYMORE.

I'M SURE THEY'LL HAVE STRONGER STUFF BY THE TIME I DIE.

HEY GUI, CAN YOU WORK OUT MORE MIRACLES?

YES! WE ON AMERICAN IDOL! PLEASE!

OH MY POOR SOULS, WHEN DID YOU LOSE THE COURAGE TO FACE EXISTENCE ON YOUR OWN?

WHAT?

WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
WHAT'S WRONG WITH CONNECTING WITH OTHERS?

GOD LOVES US, RIGHT?
HE WANT US TO LOVE EACH OTHER, RIGHT?

THAT'S EXACTLY WHY
WE ARE DRIVING OUT OUR PARENTS' SAVINGS
AND MAKING OUR CREDIT CARDS FOR OUR FUTUR
WEDDING IN HAWAII.

YEAH, YEAH.
COOL IT OFF.
ANYWAY, WHAT
CHANNEL IS THAT
SHOW ON?

SOULS ARE DECAYING.
I MUST RECALL THEM ALL.

BET LIKE THIS, TOO.
YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO RISE UP TO MY
KINGDOM, LIKE SMALLEST MOUNTAIN.

WITH WINGS OF LOVE.
YOU SHOULD HAVE RISEN UP TO MY
KINGDOM, LIKE SMALLEST MOUNTAIN.

YOU WERE NEVER MADE
FOR SUCH DEGRADATION!

YOU DON'T KNOW
LOVE.

YOU SELL
YOUR SOUL TO
EACH OTHER TO
SHUT THE WINDS
THAT STORM YOUR
ABSENTED, ESSENTIAL
LONE, THERE CALLS
YOU TO MY
HEIGHT.

YOU FLED
TOGETHER TO
ESCAPE THE TERROR
OF YOUR OWN
COSMIC
ISOLATION.
THIS YOU HAVE REJECTED YOUR HEAVENLY LINEN, EXTINGUISHED THE ELIXIR SARK, THAT I, LOYALLY, PLACED ON EACH ONE OF YOU, AND CHASEN TO SUFFOCATE TOGETHER IN YOUR OWN SLIME.

YOUR GUTTURAL AGGRAVATIONS ARE ALREADY PUTRID—NEXUSALLY DISINTERTHING INTO OBLIVION.

WHEREVER MY EYE RESTS, I FIND PESTILENT WRECKS OF SKULLS LIKE YOURS, CLATTERING AWAY, DECODING INTO THE HOLE THEY EXCUTE.

YOUR SPECIES HAS FAILED.

YOUR SPECIES WILL BE NO MORE!

I SEE HOW YOUR TITLINGS UNDOED YOU.

DID SOMEONE PUT SOMETHING IN YOUR RISK TOOK?

HOLY SHIT! HE'S BETTER THAN DAVID COPPERFIELD!

ARE YOU USING US TO TEST A NEW VACCINE?

THE GAME'S NEW IMMUNOLOGIC TECHNOLOGY KICK ASS!

YOU HAVE ALL SPEWED THE RUNK THAT SEIZED OFF YOUR DEEPEST FEELINGS AND FERMENTEUR, JAMMED TOGETHER YOUR CONVOLVING SCALES.

IT WAS ONLY AFTER SUCH UNFORTUNATE.Typed. EVENTS THAT I FELT COMPELLING TO INTERROGATE.
15 MINUTES LATER, AT A PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY.

**ACTIVE IMAGINATION METHOD**
NEVER HEARD OF THAT. WITHOUT STRESS, HOW IS HE SUPPOSED TO CORRELATE ANYTHING?

**SELF-DESCRIPTION ADVANCING SOCIAL SCIENCES**: NOT IN THIS COLLEGE!

**NO WAY**: AT ANY POINT DOES THE RESEARCH OF VICTORS TURN INTO FICTIVE RESEARCH?

**LIMINALITY**: AHH THAT'S CUTTING-EDGE!

---

...BUT, WITHOUT A META-INTERPRETATION OF THE SUBVERSIVITIES PROBLEMATIZING THE CONFLICT AND INFERIORITY POLITICS THAT UNERLIE THE BAREST INFERENCES OF DISCRIMINATORY, ACADEMIC CONFLICT PRESENT IN THE PERIODS' UNDERP.-

**DID HE IMPLY THAT**
SCIENTISTS DESPISE THE ACADEMIC LANDSCAPE WHEN WE PRIVILEGE NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL AND CONSTRUCTIVE DEFINITIONS OF THE SELF?

**YOU ARE NOT DRESSED HE'S GETTING THE HAND THAT WOULD WEAR RING**

**HE ALWAYS APPEARS TO BE TOO TALENTED**

---

**AND ON TOP OF**
ALL THAT, HE WANTS TO PRESENT HIS INVESTIGATION AS A GRAPHIC NOVEL. CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?

**PREPAREDNESS**
The academic community would hold us responsible for our depictions of sex and violence!

**VERY WELL** I'LL CALL MR. AUSHER. IN WELCOMING HIS INTRODUCTION TO HIS DISSEMINATION PROPOSAL FROM A MULTICULTURAL AND SUBLIMINAL INFLUENCE!

**HE MOLDED OUR INNOCENT EMPATHETICAL COALITION TO CRUSH HIS SMILE AND UNSUPPORTED ASSUMPTIONS**

---

**JUST APPROVE IT. OKAY?**
THANK YOU FOR WRITING, MR. ESHELAR!

YOUR NOTION THAT A STORY TOLD FROM AN INTERSUBJECTIVE HEROS GROUP PROMOTES A LATER INTEREST IN SELF-INTEGRATION IS... INTERESTING. THAT'S WHY WE HAVE APPROVED YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT.

YOU CAN COME IN NOW. I CHI. THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

NEW ARE WELLCOME, DAVE! NO, EVERYONE HAS YOUR SPECIES!

UH?

CONSIDER THIS THE START OF THE RESEARCH. YOUR ACTUAL IMAGINATION IS DISCOVERING ME...

STOP FOR PROOF THAT'S CARE!!

REALLY? THAT’S WHAT COMES WITH THE PERSEUS COMPLEX IN YOU?

IT JUST COMES WITH THE PERSEUS COMPLEX IN YOU...

I'M AFRAID THE GODDESS NICE TO ME. SHE MIGHT LIKE YOU TOO.

EEEEEEHHH

AHHH!

STOP FOR PROOF THAT'S CARE!!
Meanwhile, back in heaven...

The time has come.

It is written, my Son. You, the Lamb of God, will reveal these seals to unleash the four Apocalyptic Horsemen...

Can you at least say hi to my friends?

Then you will ride with my heavenly hosts to wage the final war against evil in the world.

Your vibes are worrisome, isn't it, Son?

Jesus! Break the damned seals right now!!!

First you sent me to save their souls and now you want me to kill them. Doesn't make sense.

You whipped the temple merchants once. Remember?

Sorry, Dad. I don't want the job. Can you find another way to deal with your frustration?
I'M ON SABBATHICAL DED! I EARNED IT!

I UNDERSTAND? I'LL MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND!!!

JUST PART OF "I DON'T DO IT" DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?

DON'T EVEN THINK OF IT, YOU KNOW OUR CONDITION. YOU TOUCH ME AND WE BECOME ONE.

ARRRGGHHH!!!

DAMNED HOLY TRINITY!!!

I WAS 33 YEARS OLD. YOU KNOW? I HAVE MY OWN ISSUES NOW.

IF YOU WANT A JOB WELL DONE...

Ifos Game Story - Page 16
WHILE AT THE UNIVERSITY, IT DIDN'T TAKE ME LONG TO ENROLL DANTES HELP.

YOU SAY YOU SAW ME A NECESSARY COMPLEX, AND YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE THE GODDESS. WHO IS DELUSIONAL HERE?

I'M THE GODDESS. YOU CAN'T WATCH ME!

WOAH! BUT, ISN'T THAT A SCENE?

INSTEAD, I FOUND THIS ONE, CONVINCED NOW!

I CAN'T FIND ANY SONIC GODDESSES IN YOUR IMAGINATION!

NOW WHAT'S A COMPOSITE OF TWO GODDESSES?

CAN YOU DROP THE UNREALISTIC AND KEEP THE REALISTIC?

OH, WE'RE GOING BACKwards BEFORE THE JENKINS CULT!

WE Left TIME OUT GREAT 5000 YEARS AGO, BUT NOW...

I'M STIRRING YOUR IMMATURE TOATIVITY OF THE POLY-PEANUT... NOT MUCH IN IT, THOUGH.

OKAY, NOW HURRY UP.

THE WORLD HAS VERY LITTLE TIME LEFT.

AREN'T MESSIAHIC DELUSIONS SUPPOSED TO TELL YOU GOD IS ON YOUR SIDE?

UH-HUH, THE GODDESS!

THAT'S NOT! I MEAN, I'M COOL WITH YOU ON MY SIDE!
I had no idea my active imagination was that good!

What happened? Did you have imaginary friends?

I'm dead serious right now. We're doing a countdown.

I slowed him down a bit, but I'm counting on you to change his mind.

This is the weirdest thing I ever imagined happening.

What? I haven't done that. I only know how to create a more advanced form of human consciousness by merging four understandings of the self.

I haven't done that. I only know how to create a more advanced form of human consciousness by merging four understandings of the self.

Aren't you researching how to create a more advanced form of human consciousness by merging four understandings of the self?

You also said that by integrating different self-perspectives, people can expand their ideas about what they might be capable of, right?

Yeah. If they interconnect historical and current understandings of self.

You influenced my professors. I think you can't even pay me back.

Good grief. You were in love with my kid. If I had let your professors crush your theories.

You should be listening. I just told you how.
SATAN-LUCIFER-BEELZEBUB! APOCALYPSE IS AT HAND! BRING OUT YOUR LEGIONS AND FIGHT TO THE END!

NO WARNING? WHAT'S YOUR EXCUSE?
WE AREN'T READY FOR WAR.

LET'S TAKE THEM DOWN NOW BEFORE THEY DEVS OF YOUR WEAPONS OF SPIRITUAL DESTRUCTION.

YOU'RE PARANOID, MICHAEL. THERE'S NOTHING DOWN ON PAPER. COME ON, YOU'RE IN A HURRY IF YOU WANT.

SHOULD I SEND A DELEGATION?
NO. I SHAUL SEE FOR MYSELF.
WE CAN'T DO ADVANCED DOOM NOW. WE ARE CLOSED FOR SUMMER. SOMEONE FROZE BELL.

HOW YOU HAVE TWO PROBLEMS WE STAY HERE TOMORROW.

I DON'T THINK SO. YOUR HOLY BOOK SAYS THAT AT THE END OF DAYS YOU'LL MAKE WAR AGAINST THE BEAST OF REVELATIONS. RIGHT?

DEAR GOD WENT INTO Hibernation WITH THE Freeze.

CAN'T FULFILL YOUR PROPHECY NOW IF YOU STICK THE BIBLE. I MEAN THE WORD OF GOD WILL BE A Joke.

ZZZZ ZZZZ ZZZ
Vengeance is Mine. Save Thy Lord.

As soon as this beast awakes, I'll punish you for Ruining the Human Souls.

You made them in your Image and Likeness, and now that you can't handle them, it's My Fault.

Is that what this is about?

You are wrong.

Anyone who threatens the power of My Beast, that you and I established together since the great rebellion, exiles My enemy.

Those souls are now worthless for Me.

Dear God,

You are invited to a party at the Garden of the Deep.

Casual attire.

--For both of us!
AND THAT CAN ONLY MEAN THAT YOUR POE, OUR POE, IS NOT FROM HELL BUT FROM THE FACE OF THE DEEP.

IF THIS IS TRUE, YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED.

WE ARE GOING TO KICK AOLS AND TODAY, RIGHT BOSS?

GO HOME. I HAVE SOMETHING TO DO.

THE CAT'S AWAY. NOW WE CAN PLAY.

LOVELY, MY MORN. I MEAN, MY MARRIED ONE!
{

"C'mon, partner. Your personal fantasies end here. You're coming to the transpersonal, dealing with us.

"Nice ovary!

"To defend your species against gods will you trust the nerve endings of the collective unconscious?

"It's going to be a little bumpy.

"I use wormholes like this every time I sneak into his universe.

"Ah-h-h-h-h!!

"Man up! We're almost there.

"It all started during the seventh day of creation. So to keep with your times, about 5,000 years ago.

"God intended individuation for your species, supposedly it is his spice and likeness.

"God! I can see my eyes rolling inside my head. Are we really like this?

"A little bit, but that's nothing to be proud of.

"Anyway, he was quantum-leaping your minds out of the other perimeters when Michael nudged him to go touch one of those rebellions in heaven. God never returned to stabilize your self-awareness in a new crop.

"The totentosmos found your ancestors huddling in cries confused by their own self-deceptions.

"What?"}
SHIT!!! I'M GONNA NEED MEDICATION!

HERE THEY ARRE. THEY MRRFH STUFF, THEY EXPAND THE POSSIBILITIES OF CREATION.

THEY INTEGRATE MURTHE SELF-AWARENESS TO HELP YOUR SCIENCE.

GUYS, CAN YOU PLEASE TURN MURTHANE OFF SOMETHING? MY GUEST IS DROWSY, WE DON'T WANT HIM TO MISS HIS PANTS TOO!
You may as well say it aloud, your horn is so imitated that he can hear your thoughts.

We are not snappy, we are famous.

Besides, you're the one that will be hitchhiking. Have you heard about Edik?

You mean the prophet who had the vision of the Heavenly Carrot?

That's us too. The things with wrong things in that they become outdated.

That's why every few centuries we take someone to see the picture, so we can deliver a fresh vision to humanity.

As always, choice you for this round.

I bet she'll be impressed by my image Außerdem!

She won't. You look like a cult leader.

— only a vision powerful enough to convince such that your species is worth keeping and worth their heart.
READY FOR THE LIFT?

Can you please stop morphing? You are doing all sorts again.

A WHUMP OR A PAGAN?

IF YOU ASK ME.
Why does Amanda want to save the world? Does she represent the same consciousness? Is she my unconscious entity? Could she be trying to deceive me?

Stop your psychobabble. Those old notions won't help you find the one you need.

You just need to know that Adeon is the heart of the Yea.

Indeed, the Kython and the Librarian can sit on our nerves!

Are you showing me Heaven, live with Ezekiel?

We were going to put you are uncerety.

No, actually showing you Heaven was never our plan.

Step down and follow instructions. If I were you, I would be reaching for my silvers utility.
Looking for his enemy, God had reached the end of his universe...

Those that hide in your folks will taste the wine of my wrath!

"And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep..."

Devin Wilkes?

Remember the day you created the light? It was a fine night, you know?

You stepped into some toxic darkness. You were a clumsy dancer.

They have been growing at the futilities of your universe ever since. Haven't you noticed?

I care to punish. Not to talk.

It's not about replication. It's about remembering. Do you remember who you are?

I am who I am.

Not exactly. And that is your problem.

Eternity is your problem. It appears to take care of your past.

I said I wasn't here to talk.

... ...

... ...?

And that... is the word of God.
Welcome, Mr. Alshere!

You lost this instrument along the way. You will need it to assemble the new myths with data from the fossil records of human consciousness buried here in the Pit of Nature's Original Past.

Okay. I hate heights. I'm not going into that pit.

Why repeat the archaeological metaphor? That's so... Victorian.

Would you prefer to use clairvoyance to extract your data from the arcane archives, or, if you want, I could transform the Pit into the Ultimate Ethereal Library for you.

No Steampunk, please.

Sure, take four of these Mind Enhancers. Wear my 6th-dimensional, holomorphic, and the oversoul's database will graft the laws of the human are into your DNA.

Okay, that sounds fancy. Can we step it down a bit?

As you wish.
WARNING:
AFTER WATCHING THIS

COSMOGONY
OF THE SELF

YOU WILL NEVER BE
THE SAME AGAIN.

I SEE A CORE OF WHOLENESS
IN EACH OF THESE CREATURES,
YET THEY HARDLY RECOGNIZE
THEMSELVES!

WITH A MORE ADVANCED
SENSE OF SELF, THEY
COULD MORE EFFICIENTLY
CHOOSE WHAT IS RELEVANT
TO THEIR WELLBEING.

I WILL GIVE THEM VISIONS
THAT WILL FOSTER THEIR
NOTIONS OF SELF.

IN TIME, THEY WILL STRIKE
THEIR USUAL TOY STORIES ABOUT
WHO THEY ARE WHERE DO THEY
COME FROM, AND WHERE ARE THEY GOING.

SO, AZULA TETRARCH+
WENT TO WORK...
...and as the years passed, many humans learned to look into the sky of the mind for answers.

In such fragments, what they ultimately found defined expression. However, right before the inevitable, seekers of inner knowledge felt an ethereal, pristine, abiding, blissful, and loving sense of transcendence. They called it soul, spirit, Jesus in the lotus, philosopher's stone, and other names.

Philosophers of the Essential Self

Plato
Jesus
Plotinus
Black Elk
Leibniz
Ratanjali
Kant
Schelling
Hegel

Those who rose to the highest levels of abstraction, universality, and connectedness, projected the age of 'i-transcend'.
BIRTHED BY THE HUMAN COLLECTIVE, I-TRANSCEND ABSTRUSE EXISTENTIAL TERROR AND INSPIRED VISIONS OF AMORTY AS A SYMBOL OF RELATIONSHIPS TO GREATER GROUPS OF BEINGS.

THIS IS HOW I-TRANSCEND HELPED PEOPLE IMAGINE THE POTENTIAL OF THEIR INNERMOST CONSCIOUSNESS AND ASPIRE TO LOFTIER FORMS OF EXISTENCE.

—AND NOW IN THE GARDEN OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS IT TURNED TO THE TREE OF ENDURANCE, KINDNESS, HOPE, OPTIMISM, GRatitude, AND APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY.
But then people multiplied. They built cities, got to live their days and nights in confined space. They forgot how to watch the skies.

And so it came to pass, at some point during the Middle Ages...

King Solomon said that "Where there is no vision, the people perish." And we say that with more than one flavor. All those miracles would fall apart.

Another terror, men compelled to intervene.

All over the world, a few human beings have cannibalized all others.

Some fabricate visions too short. The horse have become comforting, depressing, and cruel.

Adults terrified turned further toward rewards, and hope, their ANXIETY in politics, blind to the laws of nature that can kill. Their passions and rules thrive even more intrinsically than these tyrants.

Now that they live together in great number, they must direct their ends to the ground, to find what is common to them and then agree on a shared peril.

I will point them to their anguish, senses, and show them how to look to the core of matter to discover what it is and its way up to the amazing edifications of life.
So this is the movie the technocrats were talking about!

For the next three hundred years, the second industrial revolution taught humans how to think in terms of reality versus illusion.

—To use logic rather than intuition—

—and to develop a cultural sense of self out from understandings of the physical substance human bodies are made of.

With the seminal ideas of thinkers like these, humanity birthed a second I.A.
I discovered was industrious from the start. He unfurled science and technology, by which humanity harnessed many of the forces of nature, and progressed toward a richer and more comfortable existence.

He also pioneered nutritional supplements for some virtues:

- **Conscientiousness**
- **Self-regulation**
- **Drive to progress**

Yet, because he only looked to the ground, he can't see too far ahead—

"Maybe that's why, by 1960 through the 20th century, things weren't going that great."

By looking down to the ground for too long, humans were losing the big picture of life.

Their new powers had surpassed their vision, and turned their species predatory on a global scale.

This is so disgusting!!! I must see the textbooks by once!

Oom
ALL WHILE IN REAL TIME...

HE KNOWS, WILL YOU COME TO MY PARTY?

I'M BUSY, I MUST FIND OUT WHY MY NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS LOST THEIR POTENCY.

IS I-PLEX COWING? BECAUSE IF HE--

I KNOW, HE WILL TRY TO DECONSTRUCT YOU.

GOD WILL BE THERE.

DON'T TEASE ME, I KNOW HE DOESN'T EXIST.

ONE IS THAT TRIVIUS FALSE ME WRONG AT THE PARTY, AND I'LL HELP YOU GET EVEN WITH I-PLEX.

GOT A GO NOW, SEE YA!
--The ferocious fight ensued while
evil, aligned, continued, entranced by the
a unknown of the self hold-illusion.

Looking
squadron
for thousands
of years, humans
discovered their souls.

Now
that they
look upon their
selves, they have discovered
battles and
evils.

I say it's time for them to look
within, in the crucible of passion
and reason, in the force of their minds.
I will help them become who they
choose to be.

Your path is dangerous,
sif they fashion themselves,
they may not only seem from nature,
but despair from each other as well.

Dangerous indeed,
but promising, such freedom can also
move them to more seriously consider
their path.

By self-reflection,
humans might find
their way.

Lion, first do your will,
then it will be the last
tremendous turn.
Philosophers of the Existential Self

Lich tetramorph took self-understandings that had quietly emerged during the previous century and spread them into the heads of thought leaders of the day. Collectively, these men and women proposed that the self emerged from choice and action. They said that each self is configured and reshaped by the meaning people ascribe to their lives and by each conscious step they take in the world.

When people learned to take responsibility for their own sense of self, the human collective gave birth to I-choose.
Hieros Game Story - Page 46

THANKS TO HIS WORK, MORE PEOPLE BECAME AWARE OF WHAT THEY HAD TO DO TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVES AND OTHERS LOOKING WITHIN FOR TOO LONG, BECAUSE SELF-REQUESTED. THEY SELF-IDENTIFIED THEIR SELF-SERVING OPINIONS AND STOPPED LISTENING TO THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD.

SOME SOUGHT PURSUED PERSONAL FREEDOMS BY CHANGING LIFESTYLES IN THE MARKETPLACE.

OTHERS STATED THAT THEIR SELF-EXPRESSION WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THEIR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.

THE WORSE, HOWEVER, PEPPED DE-CONTEXTUALIZED ABSTRACTIC IDEOLOGIES TO OPPRESS MINORITIES AND KEEP CONTROL OF THE WEALTH OF THE WORLD.

THIS WENT ON UNTIL THE SEVENTIES WHEN THE FOURTH TIERDORPH COULDN’T TAKE IT ANYMORE.

HUMANS HAVE LOOKED UP, DOWN, AND UNDER TO FIND THEMSELVES. IT IS TIME FOR THEM TO LOOK AROUND TO OTHERS AND ASSOCIATE THEIR WORLD.
It's time, the victorious one.
And the triple goddess, would've welcomed your
Honorable Presence at the holy gathering that
Will define the future of the human species.
Would you come to come to our party?

I'm sorry. I don't know. I'm very busy these days.

What if I entrust you
With the knowledge that your very existence
Hanged from the upcoming showdown
At the garden of the deep?

She left without changing in full.
The witch will know
That any attempt to kill
He who lives in eternity
Is futile.

In this god-forbidden place her witchcraft
Is strong.
Yet my divine will
Will always prevail!

Soon, those heathens will taste the wine
Of my wrath!!!
Philosophers of the Relativist Self

Prompted by the fourth transfer, a new group of philosophers came up with ideas that differed into the notion that the self was either a fluid product of culture, or a more abstraction. Because, after all, instead of a self, individuals can be said to exhibit as many social identities as groups they belong to.

Foucault
Wittgenstein
Derrida
Rorty
Kuhn
Winch

This notion birthed the fourth I in the human mind.
I haven't watched the ending.

The endings will be up to you.

But, since the eighties...

Okay, here's the update. Lolel is focused on tolerance, connectivity, and social justice. But just like the others before him, he is quoting the older days.

Actually, the four of them push each other out of consciousness all the time.

Now souls are gluing together or because that's how people attempt to align them in disconnected and unstable notions of self these days.

Oh! Is that why God wants to unleash apocalypse on humanity?
APOCALYPSE MY ASS!
YOU'LL COME UP WITH A BETTER SUPERSTITION.

BUT HOW WILL I DO IT?

SURE YOU WILL. THE KEY TO IT RESIDES IN THE HEROES GAME.
I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO THE QUEST. THERE ARE THREE OF US WHO....

WHAT THE HELL!!

NOW, THIS IS WHAT I CALL INSPIRATION BY ACTIVE IMAGINATION!!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE!

BULLSHIT!

YOU Brought an escort to the party, I am bringing one too. THAT'S FAIR!

OHHH... DON'T WORRY SIR. THEY WONT HURT GOD HAS BEEN DELAYED VERY, VERY DELAYED!

YOU BITCH!

YOU WANT TO PUT OUT OF EXISTENCE BRING IT ON THEM!

OH MY GOD! HE'S HERE!

RUNNN!!!
"As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish, because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God."
STOP IT, ASSHOLE!!!

ARE YOU GOING TO KILL YOUR OWN GRANDCHILDREN WITHOUT EVEN LOOKING AT THEM?

ZIPP!!

AHAAAAAAAH!!

MY GRANDCHILDREN?

THEY ARE... APPRE... THE CREATORS... HHHH... OF YOUR OWN CREATION!!
THOSE MONSTERITIES?

WHERE'S YOUR HEART? ALL THEY EVER WANT TO DO IS GOOD.

CRACK, CRACK, FOR YOUR OWN SAKE SHOW GRANDPA HOW MUCH YOU LOVE HIM.

IT'S TEAR-JERK TIME, GUYS. WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

GRANDADDY?

?!
Hi Grandpa! My name is I-Flow. I want people to appreciate each other's company, work together, accommodate more and more wonderful things together.

Hi Grandpa! My name is I-Choose. I promote people's self-reflection and freedom of thought, so they can be courageous, responsible, and commit to doing what is right.

They are ridiculous and repulsive, yet...

But the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and you all killed!

Hey! That looks neuropil! Tied?

Forget about that! Full throttle now!

Look at them! They can be so charming!
I beg to differ.

THOSE FOUR ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE SELF.

?!?

WANT IT?

I mean, entire philosophical traditions consolidated these four ways to understand who we...

UH?

CAN YOU PLEASE GIVE THEM YOUR ATTENTION? JUST GO FOR IT!

OK.

THIS FEELS STRANGELY FAMILIAR.

I'M BEGINNING TO LIKE THESE GUYS.

DEAD GOD, PLEASE ALLOW ME TO CONGRATULATE YOU. YOU HAVE FOUR HANDS ANNOYING CHILDREN.

I transcended. For example, he's shown us a disrupted view of ourselves and given us immense hope about our future.

With him, we enrich the meanings of our lives, see ourselves as belonging to a wondrous universe, and continue to strive toward happiness.

He is helping us imagine better lives and motivates us to work for the unfolding of all we can be.

WOW! THAT'S ME!
May I please be your advocate?

By all means, my grandson; go ahead!

God, your grandchildren are wonderful, mental abstractions!

This flat brought dooms, totalitarism, and exterminations of all kinds.

He drowned the world in segregation, hate, and violence.

I can't believe she is doing this to us!

Nothing to fear, I learned to argue in school.

I feel your pain, brother.

Well, some people might have twisted it up, but once I knew emerged in our minds, my species developed better laws to deal with that.

We also discovered medicine, technology, and other arts to make our lives longer and more peaceful and comfortable.

All this progress happened because I now motivated us to investigate the wonders of our mysterious universe.

Woe! That one licks people in their intellects, and tunnel-visioning them towards materialistic goals.
TW: But now, I-Chose helps us control our selfishness. He showed us that we are free and willful, but also responsible creatures.

C: He has shown us that our choices define us, and that we become authentic beings by choosing to act critically and with integrity to our highest calling.

H: That little creep turned your children into mercenaries, each composed of their own givers.

Y: You are so slimy.

T: That only happened to a certain point. Now, however, I-Flow is freeing us from our prejudices.

W: We are becoming more accepting of each other. I-Flow brought us a lightness of being that moves us to explore new lifestyles and creeds.

O: He inspires us to communicate with each other more frequently, and shows us how to use our global communications network to peacefully unify our species.

L: Dear Lord, is the cabinet for all those goofy new souls?

D: He had turned people into opportunistic dabbles with no sense of their own.

G: God, I admit that the pink and green creatures got it right.

M: My name is Babylon Lodges.
TW

I hear you saying that, separately, the four historical human races are humans, but... yet, I bet they are on the brink of trying to

DEAR LORD, CAN YOU IMAGINE THE MAGNIFICENT HUMAN BEINGS YOU WOULD HAVE CREATED WHEN THESE FOUR SPECIES OF SELF LEARN TO COMPENSATE FOR EACH OTHER'S WEAKNESSES AND ENJOY ALL THEIR STRENGTHS?

SEEP WE'RE FRIENDS!

WE ARE PARENT!

DON'T BE PROUD OUP! THE IMAGINE ARE JUST PRETENDING TO HATE EACH OTHER AND WILL NEVER TEAM UP!

I LOVE THESE GUYS!

WE HAVE ALREADY CONSIDERED THESE FOUR AWKWARD COMPLEMENTARY UNDERSTANDINGS OF SELF, AND NOW WE ARE POISED TO COMBINE THEM INTO AN AWESOME NEW WAY OF BEING IN THE WORLD!

WON'T IT BE FUN TO KEEP US AROUND TO WATCH OUR FORTHCOMING EVOLUTIONARY LEAP?

NOT BAD, FOR A HUMAN, RIGHT? HE WOULD MAKE A GREAT PRESENTER, DON'T YOU THINK?

FOR FUN TRY! GIVE THEM A BREAK!
Fine, you go talk to your kind. If you don't change them by the end of your earthly life, I'll finish them off.

I lost the argument! I can't believe it!

Not by much, considering it's just a matter of time.

What? But humanity will need at least a full century to make the leap!

Dante, you are an idiot! Your soul still dooms humanity, and... and you are my messiah!

AND YOU DO YOU STILL HUMAND AT ALL?

Have you forgotten their potential?

You planted their seed, you let the remnants of you within gonz fi from it.

KRRigggg!!!

WOW! Is... is that the-
THE SOUL OF THE MILLIONS OF YEARS? I BORROWED IT FROM THE EGYPTIAN GODS. NOW, MY BROTHERS WERE JUST TOO BUSY FOR THE OCCASION.

WELL, SURE, WILL YOU PLEASE HOLD ON A MOMENT?

NOW TO GET ACCESS TO THE HUMAN SPIRIT, I AM GOING TO BORROW YOUR SOUL FOR A WHILE.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?

WILL SHE ATTEMPT ROMANCE ON ME?

WHAT THE...

A CAJET. THAT’S NOTHING—I CREATED A WHOLE JAMMIE.
IT WEREN'T EASY, BUT I CONVINCED GOD TO KEEP ON THE ROOT OF THE MILLIONS OF VOICES TO TAKE STOCK OF THE HUMAN POTENTIAL, BEFORE DECIDING THE FATE OF THE HUMAN RACE.

YOU! A NEW AMBASSADOR? SHE IS BECOMING A BETTER ENVIRONMENTALIST!

I'M BODIED UP WITH YOUR WITCHCRAFT!

SOMEONE ELSE IS COMING, IS THE LORD OF THE UNIVERSE AWARE?

AFABROH HAI!

FOR ORE, ACKNOWLEDGE. THINGS WENT OUT DIFFERENTLY. ANY MAGIC HAD STOPPED HER NOT ONLY OF HER HUMAN FORM, BUT ALSO OF HER LOCALIZED SENSE OF SELF...
MYTHIC BEINGS NAVIGATE IN THE DARKNESS OF EXISTENCE.
WE BELONG TO ITS MYSTERY, AND ACT ON THE CAUSAL DIMENSION AT TIMES.

the Great Mystery of Being

BUT HUMANS DO NOT LIVE LIKE MYSTERIOUS BEINGS. INSTEAD,
YOU ARE CREATURES WITH MYSTERIES - PART OF THEM.
THE NATURE OF ALL GREAT MYSTERIES IS TO STAY INDOUCIBLE. THAT
THE GREAT MYSTERY OF BEING PRESENTED HYPOTHETICALLY AND TRANS-LOCAL.
DANTS FROM TELLING ANYTHING BUT THE EXTREME OF THE CASE.

--NEVERTHELESS, WE COULD STILL LISTEN TO TWO DISTINCT CONVERSATIONS
HAPPENING AT STERN AND BOW OF THE SHIP.

YOU KNOW WHAT I DO TO RELIEF.

LOOK TO ALL THOSE WONDERS!
YOU SEE ALL THAT PINK EXPLODENCE
BULK THERE IN THE DISTANCE?
PEOPLE HAVE AN AROUND POWER.

AT THIS EVOLUTIONARY POINT,
THEY ARE LIKE ADOLESCENTS PRELUSSES.
AND TRAVELING TO FIND OUT WHERE THEY ARE GOING, ALL OR THEIR OWN.

I TELL YOU THAT IN THE NEXT
TWO CENTURIES, ALL RACES BOND INTO EACH OTHER
AND CROSSES CONVERSE. THEY WILL PASS THEIR ADOLESCENT
CEREMONY TO FIND THEIR PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE.
WE JUST NEED TO GIVE THEM TIME FOR THEM TO FIGURE THINGS OUT!

THAT THEIR SPECIES WAS CREATED
TO CATCH THE SPIRIT OF HARMONY
AND FOSTER HARMONY UNTIL ALL LIVING CREATURES
CAN ENJOY THEIR SHARE.

WHY, THEY ALREADY WRECKED
THEIR PLANET!

HA!

HEAVENLY SENTINELS

HAVE YOU SEEN THEIR PATIENT TECHNOLOGY?
I GUARANTEE YOU THAT IN THE NEXT 500 YEARS,
THEIR INGENUITY WILL PROVIDE FOR MOST OF THEIR NEEDS.
FROM NOW AND ON, THAT THEY WILL REVALUE
THEIR SPECIES' DEBT TO THEIR HARMONY.
WALTH FOR ALL SPECIES ON EARTH.

WE ARE ENTERING THE HALL OF THE
IMAGINATION. IS IT RESIDENTIALLY?

THOSE JEWELLED STATUETTES ARE UNBELIEVABLE!

NOTHING COMPARED TO A HEAVENLY SURPRISE.

DO YOU REMEMBER MY TRYING WATER?
I'M BLESSING YOU! YOU CAN CALL ME ME.

SURE!

YOU KNOW MY TRYING WATER?
I'M BLESSING YOU! YOU CAN CALL ME ME.

ME. A GOD OF SOMEWHERE!
I AM THE FIRST CAUSE,
THE ETERNAL PILLAR,
ROOT OF THE UNIVERSE.

I AM THE INEXHAUSTIBLE
OUTPOURING OF LIFE.
RISING! SPREADING!
SUBMITTING ALL TO MY
COSMIC WILL!

I OPEN YOUR EYES,
YOUR THIRD EYE.
I ORCHARD THE SONG
OF HEAVEN.
I AM THE GREAT
ORCHESTRA,
THE SALON OF
HARMONY.

BY CLEVERLY MANIPULATING
THE COLLAPSE
OF THOSE TWO, SHEKHAN AVERTED APOCALYPSE.
AND YET, SHE HAD UNLEASHED SOMETHING EVEN CRIMIER.

AHHHHH!
WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM!

NOTHING... POOR BEELZE!
THE LOATHSOME SAWED HIS
MEMORY THAT THE HOMO TRINITY CONDITION
PENETRATES ALL ASPECTS OF DIVINITY
ON CONTACT!

SHEKHAN TURNED AWAY FROM BABYLON AND EXTENDED HER HAND TOWARDS THE DUNGEON. SHE PULLED ME BACK INTO THE BOAT.

OH NO
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE SEEN THAT WHEN
I WANTED HER TO SLEEP PEACEFULLY.
IT WAS HUMILIATING!

I LOOKED INTO HER EYES, AND SAW THAT SHE KNEW. WE HAD TO THwart ULTIMATE MASCULINITY BEFORE IT'S PRACTICE. EVERYTHING IS NOW CLEAR. AND CULTIVATED US ALL.

GET AWAY FROM ME,
YOU SLUTS!

NOOOO!

WE CORRECTED BABYLON AND THEN
WE JUMPED ON HER FOR OUR OWN
CALM TRIMM TO TRANSFORM US
INTO THE ETERNAL FEMININE.

AFTER THAT POINT.
IT WAS A PIECE OF CAKE.
--OUR HEROE S GADES WASHED THE NARRUM MYSTERIUM--

--AND THE NARRUM MYSTERIUM PRODUCED DAFFE'S SINGULARITY INTO ITS ABSOLUTE BEINGNESS...--
Borne in Dream and Substance Conjoined at the Gate of Life.

Intimating Synthesis, Cohesion, and Love.

Flowing from the Core of Non-Existence, I am Zero, One, and All.
BUT, UNFORTUNATELY FOR MR. AUGUSTUS, DIVINE GRACE FAVORS THE MEKK AND HUMBLE. SO, WHEN HE WAS STARTING TO GET COCKY ABOUT HIS MIND'S ACHIEVEMENT—

WOW...

AM I RESEARCHING...
BY ACTING INDIFFERENTLY,
OR ADAPTING TO
AN UPLIFTING
HAPP?

THE WHOLENESS...
THE CLARITY...
THE DIVERSITY...
FEELS SO REAL!

WHAT
COULD THIS
ULTIMATE
STATE OF
SELF-POSS
DELIVER TO
THE WORLD?

HOW WOULD
AN EXPERIENCE
OF SYNTHESIS
HELP HUMANITY
POW TO
THE CHALLENGES
OF DIVERSE
EXISTENCE?

HIS NEUROTRANSMITTER LEVELS DROPPED,
AND HIS PEAK EXPERIENCE FADED AWAY...
Wake up, man! You are re-energizing yourself…

Cheese! What happened?

Ah… all the bells and whistles, the shockwave brought us all back to reality.

It all depends, individually, it looks as if you fell asleep you crammed you mind to deliver your research proposal.

But in parallel…

While you were researching by active imagination up there, this heroic canopy was a nice restorative breathing inside your head.

Then, if you all the bells and whistles, the shockwave brought us all back to reality.

What do you mean? You are not real!

Actually, that’s open to debate.

People are waking! Please, put in your headphones, you don’t want them to see you screaming at thin air, right?

Oh, you could introduce us as your new multiple personality disorder.

Wouldn’t mind.

Wait! I remember! I became enlightened!

But you couldn’t stay at the source of existence and now you are back to square one.

No, actually, it’s like, you have progressed all the way to square four. That’s because now you have the four of us.

We are often disagree but we will always make you understand your life more thoroughly.
The End
Chapter Five: Analysis

In my blog posts, I analyzed and assessed the progress of my work from different perspectives and at various points during the creative process. In this chapter, however, I include analyses completed after I finished the story.

Process Analysis

The process of creating this preventive and entertaining graphic novel was non-linear. However, the process can be broadly divided in three stages that were crossed back and forth many times over during the creation process. The first stage involved the setting out of expectations for the active imagination method inquiry, and the practice of the active imagination research method as well. This process yielded the raw imagery and the relationship dynamics between the story characters leading to the story’s plot, and thus broadly answered the first sub-question of my inquiry: How to represent abstract ontological concepts, emergent pre-conceptual self notions, and other internal dynamics related to the self. These initial representations were further elaborated through the script and the character design phase of the artwork in preparation to the production of the graphic novel.

The second stage involved the combined application of the narrative, writing, and poetic inquiries, together, they yielded the story’s script and answered the second sub-question guiding this inquiry: How to use the initial representations in a story intended to be entertaining for my target audience while also eliciting the integration of the four ontological perspectives of self.
The third stage involved the application of the arts-based inquiry, which produced the art and the finished pages of the graphic novel, and thus answered the third sub-question: *How can I make this story graphically captivating and memorable for my audience?*

And yet, the process was not experienced as smooth as presented here. During the second phase, for example, while writing of the script, I often shifted between active imagination and the process of giving form to the scenes on paper. At times, these two phases collapsed into one. Similarly, at the third stage, when drawing the story, I often changed my mind about how the story should progress and revised the dialogue and the narrative sequence of the panels. I even regressed to the active imagination stage, both spontaneously when new and more exciting twist complications emerged uncalled to my mind, and also consciously when I felt the script had weak spots that had to be intentionally improved for consistency and flow.

**Content Analysis**

Once I finished the story, I analyzed *Hieros Gamos* first in relationship to my take on its Biblical context, and then in its capacity to combine two traditionally dissimilar literary genera.

**Religion in *Hieros Gamos***

I see my story as offering a unique light-hearted perspective on a topic that is usually treated with either reverence, or a cold anthropological lens. My approach to the historical religious aspects in this story derives from my proposition that religions might be studied as collections of stories; some still valuable and relevant, and some that in the present historical context may inspire more harm than good (De La Lama, 2012). In this paper I also propose that behavioral and social scientists might investigate and assess the moral value of religious stories, a task that our society has tacitly delegated to theologists who are usually invested in singular religious traditions.
I started writing *Hieros Gamos* with the intention of using the “I am that I am” of the
God of Sinai as a metaphor for the psychodynamic resistance to change our views of self,
however, without any conscious intent from my part, my academic view of religions
influenced the creation of the story. While I though I was creating funny character interactions
to entertain my readers, I was actually pointing to inconsistencies in the story of the Book of
Revelations, and using them as a pivot to propose a more benign look at the destiny of
humankind. This contrast of possible destinies became the backdrop to insinuate in my story
that this positive future is contingent on the integration of the I-ams as a step to balance the
moral deficits of the singular ontologies of self that afflict society in our times. For these
reasons, I see my treatment of religion in the story as incidental to my purpose of introducing
a mythos about the potential in the human self by subverting an old myth that I consider
detrimental to society today.

And yet, my dealing with metaphysics while dealing with the psychodynamics of the
self raised my story to a more abstract dimension that made it difficult to anchor Dante, the
only significant human character of the story, in any semblance of a normal human life. Have
I had the opportunity to rewrite the story, I would have given Dante Alighieri a girlfriend,
peers, parents, a more complete set of emotions, and made him try to apply his newfound
knowledge of the self to solve personal problems resembling those of real life.

**Comedy and Mythopoeisis**

Mythopoeic literature creates or transforms mythological material. Aligned with this
definition, my story transforms a well-established eschatological mythology; Asherah confronts
it with a hopeful vision for our future, and Dante introduces the mythos of the imminent
integration of the four human I-ams as a step to reach the positive future delineated by her.

However, mythopoeic literature usually stirs emotions of grandeur, wonder, and
transcendence, and as a comedy, my story inspires a different set of emotions. I might have
transgressed the mythopoeic genre; I am not aware of any other mythopoeic literary work set in comedic tone. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is mythopoeic literature, but is not comedic at all.

Nevertheless, in defense of my work, I argue that the emotions of grandeur, wonder, and transcendence are more difficult to translate from the literary to the real world. In everyday existence, we are closer to puzzlement, laughter, and lightheartedness than to epic feelings and trepidations of the numinous and sublime. More specifically, my intended audience, who craves the fantastic, certainly appears to gravitate to the comedic and performative more than to the dignified and universally significant. Based on this observation, I hypothesize that, in my readers, the educational and motivational aspects of my story will cross-over from the comedic in my story to their behavior in their everyday lives more-easily than if I had encoded my preventive educational message in a more solemn literary creation.

**Analysis of the Possible Unintended Impact of the Story**

During the active imagination research and when writing of the script for the story, at times I felt that the characters were taking a life of their own and pushing for their own directions. Those periods of inspired writing leaned the story towards satire and exaggeration; they actually made it funnier, more complex, and more intense than I had anticipated. While I was happy to find out that the story had gained in authenticity and uniqueness, and perhaps made it more memorable and competitive in the marketplace for graphic novels, I also worried that some of the characters’ dynamics could be considered offensive by readers others than my intended audience. Feminists, for example, might disapprove my portrayal of female characters despite my compliance with the standards of the graphic novel genre; Christians with a fundamentalist bent could react against my non-traditional representation of Biblical characters too.
This was one of the concerns that motivated me to reconsider my initial intention of having authenticity as the foremost value to determine the validity of my story. Instead, I asked for feedback. I posted the first 15 pages of my graphic novel online and asked two different groups if my story felt offensive: (a) counselor educators at their online at CESNET-L listserv, and (b) members of my intended audience at an online board for creators and readers of online comic books.

There were no responses saying that my story felt offensive from any group. Instead, the respondents were looking for me to continue to “be true to the story”, and to keep my “own distance from the characters as they struggle for answers.” These responses helped me see my creative process from a more distant perspective, and notice that while creating the story, I was working much as the ancient myth-makers did. I am characterizing as gods and other metaphysical agents, the forces and phenomena I do not fully understand, and I am attempting to understand these forces better by working out their relationships in a story occurring in their own mythological universe.

In my story, I try to understand and communicate the relationship between the forces that contribute to the stability and the development of the concept of self. After writing the complete story I noticed one psychodynamic blueprint revealed by it: Development implies *stages of instability during each phase-change*. How does the part of the self that seeks stability resists phase-change instability, but is nevertheless pushed by other aspects of the self to this instability that leads to development? This is the main intrapsychic dynamics that my story explores; one I want to elicit in my readers as well.

While the story explores this developmental process, it was also created to motivate my audience to conscious and intentional self-development by incorporating the four ontological perspectives of self in their thinking. I attempt to elicit in readers the willingness to try to reconcile the various ontological views under a larger, more empowering, and more
inclusive self-perspective. To create the mythic background for my original intent I started with a balanced pair of opposite and complementary mythological creatures. With his “I am that I am” edict, the god of mount Sinai was the perfect character to represent the tendency of the self to remain stable—always the same. Moreover, the mythology surrounding this god, well known in many parts of the world, can serve as scaffolding for the learning of the self-constructs I want my audience to explore.

Needing also a female character equal to the male for the enactment of their unification in consciousness (the hieros gamos), I researched ancient goddesses of the Mid-East and found one to represent the forces in the self that call to development with integration and thus challenges the tendencies to stability of the self.

As a culturally skilled counselor, and working under the guidance of the Multicultural Competencies issued by the ACA (1996), which recommends counselors to be “knowledgeable about communication style differences” (p.1), and to “anticipate the impact it may have on others” (p.1), I have questioned whether including a goddess in a traditionally monotheistic mythology and representing the god of Christianity in a non-traditional way might offend people with a religious and fundamentalist attitude about it. I pondered about this issue, and what made me decide in favor of continuing with this plan is that, still following the precepts of the multicultural competencies document, I “possess specific knowledge and information about the particular group with which they are working.” I have experiential knowledge of my audience and of the comic book/graphic novel tradition because I am part of it. The comic book/graphic novel medium includes many works depicting unorthodox religious views. This phenomenon is even more obvious in the more general context of entertainment, where even widely circulated T.V. shows for more diversified audiences, such as The Simpsons, have often ridiculed mainstream religious views.
Moreover—and on top of considering that counseling professionals were never intended to be an audience for my story—because the ACA code of ethics indicates that “Counselors are respectful of approaches to counseling services that differ from their own” (D.1.a) and that “Counselors work to develop and strengthen interdisciplinary relations with colleagues from other disciplines to best serve clients” (D.1.b), I believe that my story to develop the readers’ concept of self and indirectly reinforce their character strengths will be accepted, even when unconventional, by other counseling professionals as a specific tool for a particular audience.

In order to instill in readers the idea that the tendency to integrative development is valuable and desirable, I initially present my characters against the backdrop of the consequence of its opposites, the tendency to disintegration and stagnation. Therefore, the beginning of the story shows how the characters’ inability to reach consensus disintegrates their relationships and stagnates their development. For example, the god of Sinai, intending to remain on the same course of action, enters in conflict with his own son, who has evolved to a more benevolent take on humanity. These occurrences of conflict may cast the characters as extreme, cartoonish, and even ridiculous, but are congruent with the story’s original intent. They reveal the characters’ shortcomings, which serve to show what needs to be improved, and by contrast make salient the benefits of development via integration of opposites.

Conversely, if I tried to avoid the risk of offending others by going back and tailoring the representations and behaviors of my characters to suit all tastes, I would end up with an uninteresting and ineffective story. In the words of one of the respondents to my online posting: “The worst thing you can do is to stay in the middle ground, with a bland storyline, because you don’t want to startle your audience.” (Freelance337, 2014)
This consideration of the possible unintended impact of the story has shown me that the most abstract challenge for this dissertation project was, for me, the negotiation of the values of the counseling profession with those of professional entertainment. From my personal struggle, I deduce that the interdisciplinary intention that can lead counselors to team up with others to put into action marketable, inspirational, and engaging preventive public counseling projects, crucially depends on the curiosity, open-mindedness, and exploratory attitude of everyone involved in them.

Considerations About the Validity of my Research

How can I (and others) know that I appropriately accomplished what I have set to investigate? As stated in chapter 3, I situated my research within an emerging tendency within the qualitative research field described by Lynham, and Guba (2011) as “...inquiry that reflects ecological values... inquiry into ‘human flourishing’ ... to... reintegrate the sacred with the secular in ways that promote freedom and self-determination.” (p. 125). Were assessment will “depend on very general expectations, on criteria tailored to the subcategory of approach and on emergent expectations that vary in all areas as the methodology itself changes.” (Preissle, 2006, cited in Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011, p. 114). From this inchoated evaluative perspective, I look back to try to find out how much I accomplished in regards to Lincoln and Guba’s (2005, 2011) validity criteria.

Authenticity. Lincoln and Guba (2005, 2011) describe different kinds of authenticity: (a) ontological authenticity, or the capacity to elevate the researcher’s level of awareness; (b) educative authenticity, or the capacity to educate the critical capacities of others; (c) catalytic authenticity, or the capacity to motivate towards social involvement; and (d) tactical authenticity, or the capacity to promote positive social change.
In regard to ontological authenticity, I believe that during this study my own self-awareness progressed from being uncertain about the role and order of importance of my educator and artistic identities, to the understanding of my capacity to synergize them to produce unique material that simultaneously educates and inspires. Additionally, I learned to recognize how my research was helping me to integrate my pre-academic and academic understandings of the self into a more comprehensive and flexible vision of who I am.

More importantly, and event when in this dissertation I have described the different perspectives of the self as social and philosophical constructs, my ontological authenticity lead me to see myself as encompassing and transcending the social constructionist paradigm that pervades much of the social sciences today. Just like I now see the self as always shifting between ontological stances to adapt to an always-shifting environment, I see myself as a metatheoretical unit of consciousness leaning to different philosophical perspectives according to my changing needs and objectives, all while simultaneously seeking an overall sense of congruence and wholeness.

My striving for Educative and Tactical forms of authenticity is reflected in the purpose that led to the creation of my graphic novel, however, its capacity to educate critical capacities (self-reflectivity) and promote positive social change (increase, reinforce, and balance character strengths) has not been tested at this point.

I had originally added Heidegger’s definition of authenticity (Heidegger, 1977; Käufer, 2012) as another form of validity for my work. Heidegger interpreted authenticity as steadfastness to one’s own sense of internal congruence against the background of social conventions. This last form of validity proved to be the most difficult to assess and uphold, yet my uncertainty about how to consider this form of authenticity may have resulted in deeper understandings about what it means to balance and integrate different fields of human knowledge.
During the development of my story I tried to keep my distance from the characters as they struggled to resolve their differences in my mind, however, they acted more radically than I had anticipated. Even when I knew that their radicalization would increase the conflicts that sustained the dramatic tension that in turn more successfully would engage my target audience, I developed a fear of rejection from my secondary audience. I worried that not only my dissertation committee, but also future academic employers and research funding institutions would disapprove the comical bent, the treatment of religious and female characters, and the intensity of the visuals in the story. I persevered with my original vision, but only after consulting with other counselor educators on their dedicated listserv. I received few responses, all of them encouraging. Only then I regained the strength to continue to be authentic to my creative and educational voice.

Was this worry (which has not been entirely abated yet) based on my insufficient authenticity as defined by Heidegger? Maybe, but then, can this form of authenticity become an excuse for self-centeredness at the expense losing focus on my educational and social transformational goal? After all, I want to educate and transform, and to do this more effectively, I need the approval of others.

Looking back to the differences between the forms of authenticity proposed by Lincoln and Guba (2005, 2011), and that of Heidegger, a towering figure of Existential philosophy, it became clear to me that Lincoln and Guba interpret authenticity mostly in terms of pro-social awareness, commitment, and proactive influence; only their ontological authenticity refers to the researcher’s inner life. In contrast, Heidegger interpreted authenticity as an internally-generated virtue that could be abated by the social conventions of his times. Noting these differences, I discovered that I could interpret Heidegger’s authenticity in two ways: (a) I could own and attribute more value to my “creative genius”, and disregard external conventions to ultimately achieve expressive originality that might lead to more sales of my
graphic novel in the entertainment marketplace, this option would bring me closer to the entertainment industry, but further away from the educational field, or (b) I could own and attribute more value to my pro-social preventive and educational intention, and steadfastly negotiate with the social conventions to achieve my preventive and educational goals. This last interpretation would bring Heidegger’s existential authenticity closer to those proposed by Lincoln and Guba, and help me to integrate my goal of originality as a condition to engage my audience for an educational purpose, but not as an end in itself.

After adopting this last interpretation of authenticity, I concluded that opening up to the recommendations of my secondary audience did not reflect my lack of Heideggerian authenticity, but demonstrated authentic commitment to my larger, and still Heideggerian, pro-social preventive educational goal.

Trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (2005, 2011) describe trustworthiness as balance, fairness, inclusiveness, and “attempts to prevent marginalization” (p. 122). This research began as an effort to prevent the marginalization of the existential and essential ontological conceptions of self in order to achieve a more balanced and inclusive understanding of the self. Because I did not deviate from this objective, I hope that others will assess my research as trustworthy as well.

Resonance. Cole (1996) theorizes that metpherein, the "doing of metaphor" is the key agent in resonance. (p. 311). This key agent both populates and permeates the results of my investigation. The characters of my graphic story function as metaphors for the inner drive to stay the same (God), the drive to positive change (Asherah), the four ontological conceptions of self (the I-ams), the universe’s developmental forces (the tetramorphs), and the destructive potentials of the self (The Devil and Babylon). The landscapes are also metaphors, for example, the Garden of the Deep represents the promising potential of the unknown, the Pit of Old represents humanity’s historical past, and the Spirit Cavern represents the highest
aspects of human nature. Also, the metaphorical motif of the *hieros gamos* provides the integrative dynamics enfolded in the story, and Leonardo’s alchemical hermaphrodite represents the synthesis of opposites leading to the emergence of new possibilities of being in the world. Future research is needed to find out if the metaphors in the story contribute to create a resonance in the minds of its intended audience.
Chapter Six:
Summary, Conclusions, and Suggestions for Future Research

Summary

In this dissertation I have set out to find out how to create a fictional story that could bridge preventive counseling, education, and the entertainment arts. To find answers, I combined the Active Imagination, Narrative, Poetic, and Arts-based research methods to produce a 70-page graphic novel. The results of this investigation only show that it is possible for a counselor educator to produce a preventive intervention with the intention of educating while entertaining. Further research is necessary to test this intervention. However, even when the results of this investigation are not generalizable, they may be inspirational—other counselor educators might want to team up with creative professionals to produce works with an educational, preventive, and commercial entertaining value.

I consider that the main value of my finding is the knowledge that counselor educators can aim at sharing their expert knowledge of human nature not only with their students, but also with larger segments of the general population. This proposed modality of knowledge-sharing has the potential of being exponentially beneficial for society. For counselor educators, knowledge of this entrepreneurial opportunity could become an asset too, especially in times of budget cuts for academic education, the humanities, and research in the social sciences.
Conclusions

This study led me to three sets of conclusions: the first set is related to this investigation, the second set is related to the findings that led me to it, and the third set is related to the philosophical significance of my research.

In matters of this investigation, my conclusion is that it is possible for counselor educators to explore the possibility of adding the practice preventive mental health to their professional capacities. I am not suggesting that counselor educators change their career objectives, and do not have information that suggests counselor educators are interested in working in collaboration with the entertainment industry. I am only calling attention to this non-exclusive option because I believe that some counselor educators can come up with the expertise and skills—hired or personal—that are necessary to produce engaging and artistic psycho-educational interventions that may also have value in the marketplace.

The second set of conclusions derive from my assessment that other academic disciplines besides the social and behavioral sciences are urgently needed in the research of the potential of the self. The concept of self is the cornerstone of our being and existence and has a big and enduring impact through our lives. Complexity theory postulates that forces applied during initial conditions can have unimaginable consequences. In matters of self-understanding, this would indicate that impoverished understandings of selfhood could ultimately have vast nefarious ideological, behavioral, and social consequences. For example, with a culturally impaired vision of the dignity of the self, we would also lose sight of the dignity of other people’s lives and more easily condone moral wrong and accept, and perhaps even justify, the exploitation of others. Conversely, restoring and developing richer understandings of self could result in great and unimaginable social benefits. All this reasoning points to the importance of developing the most advanced and comprehensive understanding of the self.
In the literature review I have shown how William James’ exclusionary definition of the self still casts a long shadow over psychology. Even when most psychologists that followed after him have not authoritatively proposed their own definitions of self, but have more cautiously ventured definitions of the self-concept, their collective stance has continued to sway cultural awareness away from the more integrative essentialist and existentialist understandings of the self. Because historical scientific thinking has been ontologically biased towards the naturalistic perspective, I propose that for the central enterprise of understanding who we are, we need science, the humanities, and the arts.

Philosophers see the world from a higher ground, and let their imagination extend farther than scientists because they deal in concepts that are more abstract and general than the objective data and usually small, cautious, and discrete footsteps of science. For example, two years before William James surrendered the then emerging discipline of psychology to the naturalistic outlook and its proprietary scientific method, Nietzsche had already warned that science was being not only defined, but also reduced by its own method when he declared that “It is not the victory of science that distinguishes our nineteenth century, but the victory of scientific method over science.” (Nietzsche, 2006, [1888] N. 466).

Philosophy can reach farther that science, yet it is bounded by logic. Literature and the arts are free from even this limitation. Their freedom is an advantage when envisioning the many possibilities of being and becoming of the self. I believe that science needs the help from other branches of knowledge to better understand the self, and that its greatest value resides in its capacity to test the more adventurous claims about the self that may come from philosophy literature, and the arts.

My third set of conclusions revolves around the philosophical implications of my research of the self and how other scholars might consider my work. I realize that from the social constructionist lens from which much academic work is evaluated today, my
contribution might be framed as prompted from unique lived experiences that move me to speak in favor of fading and non-prevalent philosophical perspectives, and to add my voice to a cacophony of contextualized interpretations of the self that collectively demonstrate its relativity and perhaps even its not-existence. I should say that do not agree with such view of my work. Instead, I believe that by including the social constructionist perspective as one of the quadrants of a more complex, dynamic, and perhaps ultimately unresolvable but holistic and integrative philosophical self eco-system, my emergent, complexity-informed model of the self provides a wider conceptual lens allowing for a more comprehensive interpretation of what human beings may be—one that can actually expand our potential for self-authorship and personal transformation beyond that of any singular ontological or epistemological perspective.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Future research on this topic would be twofold: (a) testing the effectiveness of the preventive message imbedded in my graphic novel in its capacity to potentiate deeper understandings of self which in turn would lead to a more complete and abundant set of character strengths, and (b) testing the commercial viability of my story to find out whether it can propagate on the entertainment marketplace on its own merits and without the need of external funding. Before describing the challenges of these two research directions. It is important to note that the future success or failure of my graphic novel will not constitute an indication that other productions of this nature would yield similar results. For this reason, research of a complex topic like this should become non-linear, that is, other counselor educators do not need to wait to find out whether my story succeeds before attempting their own creative and preventive explorations.
Researching the effectiveness and the marketability of my story presents different and interrelated challenges. On one hand, quantifying the effects of a production designed for large subculture nested in, and responding to the many forces operating within mainstream culture, constitutes a difficult challenge. This problem is compounded because any measured changes in virtues and character strengths—which theoretically would impact the legal and public health systems—are nearly impossible to translate into monetary terms related long-term savings and/or expenditures for the public sector. These facts may limit the funding opportunities for projects like mine from Governmental and other non-profit institutions.

On the other hand, if productions of this nature demonstrate to have commercial value in the entertainment marketplace, the need of external funding would become irrelevant. Alternatively, marketable entertainment productions with psycho-educational content might be funded by non-traditional sources such as entertainment companies, venture capitalists, and crowdsourcing, and even by the creators themselves.

Funding by non-traditional sources represents a considerable possibility. Kickstarter.com is already the number one source for the funding of graphic novels. Editorial houses publish children’s books because they profit from their educational, entertaining, and artistic value. However, competing with other professional of the entertainment industries that do not feel constrained to educate while they entertain, may constitute a disadvantage for counselor educators in the marketplace. And yet, there is always the hope that public taste could be educated over time if more productions destined for entertainment were to provide, in addition to immediate excitement, the abiding satisfaction of deeper understandings about human nature, not unlike those that the best literary and artistic creations can convey.

Also, more research is necessary to answer the following questions:
Question 1

Are conceptions of self cultural trends that can become outdated when the conditions that created them change? Or, are they humanity’s developmental milestones which, in a constructivist-developmental sense, can and should continue to serve on their own merits as well as foundations for more advanced cultural constructs?

In order to answer this question it is important to find out whether the older and less popular conceptions of the self continue to have up to this day the potential to enhance our lives. The contrasting analysis I made during my comprehensive exam appeared to indicate that the older essentialist and the less popular existentialist perspectives increase courage, hope and optimism, better than those that are newer and more popular. Justified by this finding I may now advance the hypothesis that older conceptions of self should be compared not to past cultural fads or obsolete technological productions, but to evolutionarily-developed brain layers that must work together for our survival as a species. This is the view of the self that I conveyed in my fictional graphic story.

Question 2

What could counselor educators do about the various philosophical conceptions of the self?

Psychology strongly influences younger helping disciplines such as counseling and social work. However, those in the helping professions should also look beyond the psychological corpus for sources of inspiration and for personal and professional growth. Also, after seeing the American Psychological Association disregards or merely corners into divisions the therapeutic approaches that are philosophically alien to its own historical roots, Counseling associations could declare counseling a philosophical plurality, and research ways to promote an ongoing dialog between the different ontological perspectives to foster philosophical integrations that could reveal new vistas for the human experience. Doing this,
counseling would brand itself even more apart from psychology and become a more holistic discipline, informed by science and its method, but not limited by them.

Last, it should be noted that discussions about self-notions are never only about what we are or might be, but indirectly point to possibilities and choices regarding who we want to become. Therefore, the most important question for future research is an ontological one:

**Question 3**

What kind of beings we would we become if, always keeping in mind the four ontological perspectives of the self, we embraced the best in all and diligently worked through the dilemmas and contradictions that they create together to affirm through our daily actions an all-inclusive self-stance? The ending of my graphic novel poses such question. Its answer may take the best in us to find out.
References


