Sustaining Women’s Sense of Occupational Authenticity in the Catholic Workplace

by

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text.

I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

(Signature)
Acknowledgements

Emma Peters, Amy Morgan, Hannah Morgan, 
Lucy Morgan, and their partners

Paul Webber 

Dr David Wright

with

Dr Robert Woog and Dr Brenda Dobia 

Research Group Participants

Religious women, priests and brothers
whose commitment to justice includes the Catholic workplace

Blackfriars School.
Blackfriars initiated a number of ‘firsts’ in education:
the first kindergarten (1906); Blackfriars Training College
for teachers (as part of the University of Sydney);
the introduction of Montessori teaching methods (also 1906)
and the development of after school “play” programs (1918).

Blackfriars Correspondence School (1924 – 1975)
provided my formative, primary education (1960-1965)
under the supervision of Isabel Hemley, who gave me my love of literature,
Marj Haddrill, educator and sociologist, who taught me to question,
and John Haddrill, whose intelligence and commitment to peace
has inspired my own pursuit of justice in the workplace.

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List of Abbreviations Used

SOC: Sense of coherence (Antonovsky 1988)

SOOA: Sense of occupational authenticity (Morgan 2010)

OE: Organizational Examen (Morgan 2010)
Glossary

Agency

For an individual to possess agency is to possess internal powers and capacities, which, through their exercise, make her an active entity constantly intervening in the course of events ongoing around her (Barnes 2000, p.25).

Catholic women religious and brothers

Catholic women religious and brothers are considered “lay” by the Catholic hierarchy yet, in practice, people who are referred to as “lay” by most Catholics are those of us who are single or married and not under vows to a religious order or the wider Catholic church. Understanding how to describe/label women who do not live a consecrated life within the Church has always been problematic, usually because descriptions of “unconsecrated” women carry negative implications. Women who are not consecrated are always “not” someone. For that reason, throughout the present study I have used the possibly contested description of “unconsecrated” women as “laywomen” and the description of consecrated women as women religious.

According descriptive titles to women religious is also challenging, and for the purpose of the present study I have taken advice from a woman religious who has suggested that “consecrated” may be technically correct: however, professed women indicate a preference to be known as Catholic Sister or religious women (Slattery, personal communication 17th February 10).

Reflection on experience

Reflection on experience for the purpose of generating knowledge that actively promotes transformation (Schussler Fiorenza in Hogan 1995, p.99). Reflection on experience can produce knowledge that can effect personal transformation that, in turn, can effect social transformation.
Ignatian Spirituality

A set of particular emphases arising out of the heritage of Ignatius of Loyola. Those emphases have been placed on some particular aspects of the doctrine and practice of Christian spirituality as a whole. There exist certain abiding characteristics of Ignatian spirituality, for example, experience and reflective discernment on that experience, discernment followed by action, service of the needy and cultivation of the powerful (Padberg, 2001).

Interior Knowledge

Knowledge is central to Ignatian spirituality, knowledge that is the consequence of reflecting on experience. This knowledge is referred to by Ignatian writers, for example, Divikar (1990, p.13–14), as 'interior knowledge' and points to (a) knowledge of self—SE 63, (b) knowledge of God—SE 104 and (c) knowledge of so many benefits I have received—SE 233.

Interiority

The disposition of the person who consciously cultivates interior knowledge (see above).
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate how laywomen who work in voluntary or paid roles in social organizations governed by traditional Catholic religious structures can sustain a sense of occupational authenticity (SOOA) essential to effective collegial collaboration.

By the adaptation of collective biographic inquiry methods, research data of women’s experience of volunteering and employment within the spirituality ministry belonging to an international Catholic male religious order has been generated. The study itself follows, utilizes and promotes the dynamic of St Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. Through appropriation of concepts authored by occupational theorists, particularly Antonovsky’s (1988) theory of sense of coherence (SOC), the articulation of a theory of sense of occupational authenticity (SOOA) was made possible. This theoretical construct provided an interpretive lens through which research group participants’ experience could be contemplated. The thesis argues that gender discrimination can diminish workers’ SOOA, that is, workers’ experience of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. This diminishment has negative consequences for collegial collaboration and, thus, organizational effectiveness.

The study concludes that the traditional Exercises process—regarded by Catholic, and an increasing number of Protestant, organizations as an instrument for increasing apostolic effectiveness—may help to clarify and strengthen global SOC but does not necessarily strengthen workers’ SOOA. Therefore, while the value of a traditionally applied Exercises regime for laywomen, in general, is recognised, the study recommends that volunteer or employed laywomen’s SOOA can best be sustained by regular workplace practice of the Organizational Examen, a team-based process designed to elicit reflection and exchange within the group about each worker’s experience of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. It is anticipated that, true to Ignatian principles, this reflection and exchange will lead to action that sustains individual SOOA, with beneficial consequences for collegial collaboration.
Chapter 1: Orientation

Start Close In

Start close in,
don’t take the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step
you don’t want to take.

Start with
the ground
you know,
the pale ground
beneath your feet,
your own
way of starting
the conversation.
Start with your own question,
give up on other people’s questions,
don’t let them smother something simple.

To find another’s voice,
follow your own voice,
wait until that voice becomes a private ear listening to another.

Start right now
take a small step you can call your own
don’t follow someone else’s heroics, be humble and focused,
start close in,
don’t mistake that other for your own.

Start close in,
don’t take the second step or the third,
David Whyte 2007 pp. 362–363

**Introduction to the study**

Women’s participation in Catholic organizations is the subject of continuing debate among laywomen (Macdonald et al. 1999). Laywomen, who, as the consequence of considered deliberation, feel “an abiding sense of rightness” (Peloquin 1999, p. 236), that their character, personality and education can make extraordinarily rich contributions to the work of Catholic organizations committed to bringing peace and justice to a troubled world.

In this study, I draw on Antonovsky’s (1988) theory of sense of coherence (SOC) in order to develop a theory of sense of occupational authenticity (SOOA), thereby localizing Antonovsky’s (1988) theory to the workplace. Antonovsky’s theory has contributed to the field of occupational science and is referenced by occupational theorists such as Christiansen (1999) and Peloquin (1999). I do not test Antonovsky’s theory of SOC—rather, I appropriate the components belonging to this theory as a means of interpreting and describing the meaning that the female participants in this study gave to their workplace experience.

In order to propose a transformative process that can establish and sustain SOOA in social workplaces governed by performance criteria and gender inequalities imported from corporate and religious structures, I explore a selective appropriation of several elements belonging to The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius (Exercises) in order to articulate a process I refer to as the Organizational Examen (OE), a team-based process designed to elicit exchange within the group about each worker’s experience.
of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. I argue that it is this opportunity for shared articulation of workplace comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness that validates the worker - with the consequence of strengthening the worker’s SOOA and, ultimately, the organization’s SOC.

The Exercises process, a regime of spiritual development composed by St Ignatius Loyola in the sixteenth century, is a process designed to form women and men for more effective service. This process continues to inspire members of the Order and the many women and men who have been influenced by the Order. I have described the Exercises in detail below, Chapter Two.

It will be helpful to the reader, at this introductory stage of the thesis, to understand that the Exercises comprise five stages or movements. Traditionally, these stages can be described as: orientation to God’s love, consideration of sin, the public ministry of Jesus, Jesus’ passion and resurrection, and, lastly, love and mission. In this thesis, I propose a somewhat different understanding of the five stages: orientation to the process, evaluation of undiscerned assumptions, reorientation of life-purpose through carefully and consciously discerned values, testing of these values in everyday life, and the transformative consequence of living according to reoriented values.

While the opportunity to speak with a spiritual director is, for many women, a unique experience of being “seen” for who we are, this individually oriented process does not necessarily contribute to women’s SOOA in the workplace. This proposition questions the assumption that the Exercises process necessarily prepares women, in particular (and adults in general) for more effective apostolic service.

I argue that it is the Organizational Examen that can sustain workers’ SOOA in the Order’s workplace. I suggest that the Organizational Examen would also be of value to other social organizations (health, education) that strive to promote congruency “between the growth trends of a healthy personality in our culture and the requirements of formal organization” (Argyris 1957 p. 18).
My objective in developing a theory of SOOA is to better understand the effect of gender discrimination in workplaces associated with a particular Catholic male Religious Order (henceforth: “the Order”). While I acknowledge that gender discrimination can cause significant distress in any workplace, the effect of gender discrimination in the context of a religious organization that espouses equality and justice would seem to be particularly insidious.

The twelve women, including myself, who have participated in conversations associated with this study have each chosen to engage with the Order, on a voluntary or remunerated basis, primarily because they wish to join their gospel-inspired values and desires to ambitions and goals espoused by the Order.

Research participants’ values and desires have been clarified and strengthened by experiences of the Exercises in the years leading up to the present study. Each woman who took part in this study completed the Exercises then, inspired by the process, went on to engage in voluntary or remunerated work with the Order. This sequence of events is of significance to the argument belonging to this study.

This thesis is influenced by my understanding of occupation as voluntary or remunerated employment that takes account of research participants’ values and orientations shaped by principles of justice. This understanding recognises that occupation is a way of expressing one’s identity in the service of others.

Christiansen’s seminal article, describing the place of occupation in the life of an individual, argues: “To the extent that we can successfully weave together the various and multiple short stories that comprise our lives into a meaningful whole, we can derive a sense of coherence and meaning and purpose for our lives” (1999, p. 550).

Peloquin builds on Christiansen’s understanding by describing the sequence of occupations that have brought authenticity to her life as “life’s coherence” (2006, p. 236). As Hasselkus points out, “One way that I know myself is through occupation and one way that my self expresses itself in the world is through occupation” (2002,
Occupation, or vocation, becomes a way of authentically living “the life that wants to live within us” (Palmer, cited by Hasselkus 2002, p. 17).

It is this authentic, lived expression of occupation that has helped me develop the theory I have articulated as SOOA, thereby localizing Antonovsky’s (1988) theory of SOC to the workplace. By “sense of occupational authenticity” I mean a sense that one’s carefully discerned values, expressed in the competent performance of one’s work, are welcomed and validated by colleagues and the wider organisation.

I understand that SOOA relies on a structured, predictable, explicable and adequately resourced work environment deemed by the worker to be worthy of collaborative engagement for the purpose of meaningful service. My understanding and articulation of SOOA builds on Antonovsky’s (1988) theory of SOC and can be seen as one component of Antonovsky’s (1988) global SOC, just as work is one component of the worker’s life experience.


A. A hermeneutic approach to research

Women’s experience of volunteering and employment within the spirituality ministry belonging to an international Catholic male religious order provides research data that has been generated by an adaptation of collective biographic inquiry methods (Davies & Gannon 2006).

The transformative hermeneutic of the Exercises has informed both thesis structure and the research methodology of this study. The transformative hermeneutic underpinning the research follows the dynamic of the Exercises: orientation, evaluation, reorientation, testing and transformation. The appropriation of the dynamic of the Exercises through this series of operations offers an original methodological approach to doctoral study.
B. Structure of this thesis

The Chapter sequence structuring this study follows the above-mentioned dynamic of the Exercises in the following way:

Chapter 1 (Orientation) outlines the scope of the present study and factors that influenced my researching identity, including the values and assumptions that have determined my choice of research topic, methodology and methods, literature, theoretical insights and discussion of findings.

Chapter 2 (Evaluation) begins by presenting brief accounts from literature of the lives of four women. These accounts have assisted my evaluation and, thus, a more precise articulation of challenges encountered by women who have found themselves stranded without a sense of coherence, or at least some kind of loosely held plan that would give their lives direction and purpose. Each woman has her story of uncertainty and lack of agency and, while none of the four women volunteer or are employed by Catholic organizations, their struggle to find a sense of occupational authenticity closely resembles the experience of women who work in Catholic organizations. These accounts support my understanding that the challenges many women encounter in the workplace are, more often than not, gender related.

- Thecla, second century historical figure claimed as “Equal to the Apostles” (Carter 2000)
- Emilia, 1970s participant in Milan’s “la scuola delle 150 ore” (de Laurentis 1990 p. 102–107; Cavarero 2000 pp. 55–66)
- Koller, 1980s author (Koller 1981)
- Ellsworth, academic (Wear 1993)

After presenting accounts of the lives of Thecla, Emilia, Koller and Ellsworth, I refer to literature that distinguishes between social and corporate organizations before narrowing the discussion to women’s experience in the workplace, then women’s experience in the Catholic workplace.
I survey the literature that explains occupational identity and I describe consequences of perceived psychological contract breach when a worker’s SOOA is disrupted by sustained workplace stress.

I review the literature describing mentorship in order to discuss a model of mentorship aimed at increasing workers’ SOC vis a vis SOOA. I describe the Exercises and then focus on several aspects of the Exercises that can help women establish and sustain SOOA.

Chapter 3 (Reorientation) describes my work with research participants. This practical, contemplative process provides, in large part, the stimulus for the reorientation of my assumptions prior to the commencement of the study. I present a research methodology that accommodates a contemplative feminist appropriation of insights derived from hermeneutics and narrative approaches to research methods. Following these accounts, I describe the process that guided my work with research participants and the incorporation of methods congruent with the hermeneutic framework of the Exercises as a mode of transformational, narrative learning. I then present and analyze the data generated by three group meetings belonging to this study.

Chapter 4 (Testing) discusses insights gained through my work with research participants in light of the literature (Chapter 2), and the ways in which these insights test my growing understanding of the research topic.

Chapter 5 (Transformation) presents conclusions and observations that have transformed my understanding about how laywomen who work in voluntary or paid roles in social organizations governed by traditional Catholic religious structures can sustain SOOA.

The thesis format thus follows a hermeneutical pathway beginning with the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle (Chapter 1) then moving to the return arc of the hermeneutical circle (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5).
I have drawn on Anderson’s explication of the hermeneutic circle in order to develop a thesis format that is sympathetic with the thesis topic and the framework of the Exercises:

Identifying and articulating these interpretive lenses is an important aspect of the forward arc of the hermeneutical circle and requires an exacting self-inquiry into the researcher’s experience and understanding of the phenomenon studied. In what is known as the return arc of the hermeneutical circle, the researcher’s initial hermeneutical lenses are modified, expanded, and honed through successive comparisons with the relayed experiences of others. Specific themes and interpretations develop through modification, amplification, and discrimination (Anderson 2000 p. 3).

This hermeneutic research pathway can be recognized as the organizing framework belonging to the Exercises: orientation, evaluation, reorientation, testing and transformation. This framework serves as a focusing lens through which data from the researcher’s experience, the literature, and research group participants can be contemplated and organized in a way that is most likely to provide insight into the question that frames this study: how to sustain women’s SOOA in the Order’s workplace.

C. Methodology and methods: a gathering of influences

I am a contemplative hermeneutic researcher—feminist. Feminist perspectives have shaped my choice of research topic, methodology and methods, and also the tentative observations and conclusions that have emerged from the study. Hermeneutics is my preferred professional and academic way of allowing narratives to find their own transformational equilibrium. I am proposing contemplative hermeneutics as the methodology for this research project and collective biography as the method that is best suited to the hermeneutic methodology.

Explication of the methodology and methods underpinning this study draws on the work of authors such as Begnal (1991), Anderson (2000) and Davies & Gannon (2006), in order to articulate an original methodology that best positions the study to
investigate a contemplative transformative learning process that can establish and sustain a woman’s SOOA as she expresses her agentic potential in the workplace.

The methods utilized to generate the data for this research are influenced by collective biography (Davies & Gannon 2006). The aim of collective biography is to help participants “move beyond the clichés and usual explanations to the point where the written memories come as close as they can make them to ‘an embodied sense of what happened’” (Davies & Gannon 2006 p. 3).

In working in this way we do not take memory to be ‘reliable’ in the sense of providing an unquestionable facticity, nor do we take what initially surfaces as being truer, or more valid, than the texts that are worked and reworked in this approach. We take the talk around our memories, the listening to the detail of each other’s memories, as a technology for enabling us to produce, through attention to the embodied sense of being in the remembered moment, a truth in relation to what cannot actually be recovered—the moment as it was lived (2006 p. 3).

Quoting Grosz, Davies & Gannon (2006 p. 5) indicate that practices of collective biography ‘have effects, produce realignments, shake things up’—a phenomenon that is particularly evident in the present study as participants reflect on Thecla’s story and their own experience of the Church and Church-related organizations. I posed questions to research participants during each of the three days of group meetings associated with this study. Responses to these questions (amended by participants between meetings) are presented below (see Chapter 3). With agreement from the group, I have limited my report of data to four responses generated during each of the three meetings; this decision was weighed against the alternative of including much shorter quotes from every participant.

I was responsible for drafting and collating the transcripts in a way that reflected what I understood to be participants’ meanings. All group participants were then given the opportunity to review and revise transcript extracts so that responses would reflect their opinions as closely as possible. While this process took a long time to accomplish (in some cases nearly two years because of the circumstances of three of
the participants) I, and the group, believed that we needed to ensure that all participants’ contributions were reliably reported. Because Catholic women’s voices have, for so long, been excluded from the public arena, it was essential that all participants felt that they had been heard and acknowledged to the extent that this was possible, given the duration of the study.

Argument belonging to the present study owes much to Davies & Gannon’s discussion of a collective biography workshop focusing on three children’s novels and the way “these fictions work on us and in us to produce the fictions that we recognize as the morality needed for our own lives” (2006 p. 40). Davis & Gannon present Foucault’s delineation of two forms of morality: firstly, “obedience to a heteronomous code which we must accept, and to which we are bound by fear and guilt” and secondly, morality as “an exercise in ascetics, whereby through experimentation, exercise and permanent work on oneself one can make life into its own telos” (Rose 1999 cited by Davis & Gannon p. 37, italics in the original).

The implications of Davis & Gannon’s observations are particularly germane to the present study, particularly because research group participants were confronted with the need for belonging in religious workplaces but also the need for rapport a soi, “the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself . . . and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions” (Foucault 1997 cited by Davis & Gannon p. 59).

The hermeneutical framework (based on the Exercises) guiding research group meetings associated with the present study invited participants to respond to Thecla’s story by contemplating the events of Thecla’s life, and, simultaneously, their own experience. As Kate Begnal observes, “The reader is changed as the text moves her to think someone else’s thoughts” (1991 p. 286). These responses were then shared in the research group. Further reflection took place through writing and journalling between research group meetings, before these written reflections were shared in the group.

It has been the respectful contemplation of each other’s narrative that has invited rather than insisted on the revelation of transformed understandings during research
group meetings. This phenomenon endorses Scheler’s understanding regarding sympathy in the listening process: a particular disposition, a “feeling-with” wherein the sympathizer’s identity and subjectivity remain distinct, yet the other’s feeling is directly and intuitively grasped (Meyers 1997 p. 9).

As Rosenwald & Ochberg point out, “Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned (1992 p.1). Rosenwald & Ochberg believe that “It is no longer plausible to regard the events informants describe as intelligible without further inquiry into the background assumptions of the speakers and their audiences” (p. 3). Research group meetings provided an opportunity for participants to inquire into each other’s, and their own, experience. Acknowledging Passerini’s argument that “All autobiographic memory is true” (Personal Narratives Group 1989 p. 261), research group participants were also aware that each woman in the group was the interpreter of her own experience.

Participants were able to sympathize with Thecla’s experience “because they knew something of her experience for themselves and could experience even more vividly events in their own lives” (Davies & Gannon 2006 p. 42). As researcher, my task was to provide the setting, the story and several questions to stimulate the process. I invited research group participants to notice the conversations and events of the story, contemplatively. Thecla’s story, supplemented with stories shared by research group participants, stimulated the transformative hermeneutic process.
D. Research group meetings

The research process included twenty-four hours of contemplative group conversations with twelve women. All twelve participants attended three group conversations.

Each group conversation was eight hours in duration. Each conversation was divided into three periods that included (1) stimulus questions based on the biography of Thecla organized according to the dynamic of the Exercises, (2) silence for personal reflection and (3) group conversations.

Group conversations were conducted in the pleasant, rural surroundings of a spiritual retreat centre. Group participants appreciated the environment because it was conducive to thoughtful, contemplative conversation. Music and images contributed to the peaceful ambience.

Group conversations were introduced by a reading of poetry or other material relevant to the day’s conversation. After the first group meeting, all participants willingly took responsibility for creating and maintaining an atmosphere that would allow us to be present to the research question and to each other. In the weeks following each session, participants submitted written reflections offering insights stimulated by the previous session. These written reflections were circulated to all participants for comment at the following session.

In retrospect, it is interesting to notice that the research group conversations, and accompanying written reflections, remained focussed on the research topic. The topic was clearly of significance to each research participant. As one participant commented, “It’s as though we are trying to understand how to occupy our occupations...” (participant J). Clearly, for these women, work is more than an activity, as I shall discuss, below.
E. Sense of coherence and the workplace

An important aspect of this study has been to establish the understanding that work, whether voluntary or remunerated, is, indeed, more than activity. It is important that the relationship between work and identity be recognized; otherwise, workplace challenges such as gender discrimination can be dismissed as nothing more than unwelcome interruptions to a worker’s activity. In this study, I argue that gender discrimination in the workplace disturbs a woman’s sense of identity and thus, her life, and the lives of her family, friends, community and wider society.

Literature pertaining to the field of occupational science has proven to be of unexpected but nevertheless central importance to the study. I am particularly indebted to Antonovsky (1988), Christiansen (1999) and Peloquin (2006), whose insightful understanding of the relationship between occupation and identity has allowed me to develop my theoretical understanding of this relationship as it applies to women’s experience of the Catholic workplace.

The occupational science understanding of occupation is closer in spirit to the present study involving women’s experience of the Catholic workplace than articles addressed more specifically to, and about, the corporate sector. Commenting about occupation in the corporate sector, Bierema notes, “Corporate interests regularly prevail over human interests in corporate life” (Wilson & Hayes 2000, p. 278). By contrast, occupational theorists, such as Christiansen, comment “Contemplation of one’s occupations over time may contribute to a sense of satisfaction about life and the emergence of a satisfactory identity” (Christiansen & Townsend 2010, p. 13).

Antonovsky’s (1988) explication of the three components of SOC—comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness—has provided a focus for this study that goes beyond traditional, economically oriented organizational development and human resources discussion concerning workplace relations. A consideration of workplace experience from the perspective of the three components of Antonovsky’s SOC has provided a lens through which to observe women’s workplace experience from the perspective of human wellbeing.
As occupational theorists such as Christiansen acknowledge, research indicates that people with strong SOC “are healthier and better adjusted than people without a strong sense of coherence” (Christiansen 1999, p. 555). Peloquin underscores Christiansen’s perspective in her brief yet seminal article “Occupations: Strands of Coherence in a Life.” Peloquin argues, “occupations are life strands that create coherence” (2006, p. 236). Workplace experience belonging to occupation cannot be separated from human thriving.

In drawing a connection between identity and agency, I refer to Hasselkus (2002), whose argument about the relationship between performance and meaning makes clear the consequences for women who are valued as co-contributors to the workplace. Hasselkus insists,

> Further, it is through performance that we enter a life of understanding, because when we perform, we interpret, and interpretation is the source of comprehension. Comprehension enables us to enjoy what Steiner calls, ‘the authentic experience of understanding’ (2002, p. 5).

Hasselkus points to Steiner’s understanding of performance as “the action of meaning” and endorses this argument by emphasizing that “it is in action or ‘doing’ that meaning is realized in our lives” (2002, p. 5). Hasselkus underscores the relationship between occupation and identity by citing Palmer:

> Occupation is a strong enabler for knowing one’s self. To know one’s self is to know one’s being. One way that I know my self is through occupation and one way that my self expresses itself in the world is through occupation. Occupation helps me answer questions such as: What am I meant to do? Who am I meant to be? Is the life I am living authentic? Am I growing into my authentic selfhood? Is the life I am living the same as the life that wants to live in me? (Palmer in Hasselkus 2000, p. 17).

Palmer’s questions propose a relationship between occupation and authenticity, a concept I have extended in the present study by suggesting that SOOA is one component of the overarching SOC.
I discuss several studies addressing SOC in the secular workplace (Feldt 1997; Feldt, Kinnunen & Mauno 2000; Feldt, Kivimaki, Rantala & Tolvanen 2004). Three studies are discussed in order to further establish the relationship between coherence and the workplace and to support my argument for a transformative learning process that can establish and sustain a woman’s SOOA in the context of the Catholic workplace (Feldt 1997; Amirkhan & Greaves 2003; Neilsen, Matthiesen & Einarsen 2008).

Discussion about the relationship between narrative coherence and agency focuses on the work of Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992), Archer (2000) and Rindfleish, Sheridan and Kjeldal (2009). I preface the theoretical discussion about narrative and coherence by presenting four cameos from literature, stories that illustrate women’s experience of searching for coherence and authenticity.

As far as I can ascertain, SOC in relation to the Catholic workplace has not been discussed. Similarly, I am unable to locate any reference to the two concepts I have developed in the present study, that is: SOOA, and the Organizational Examen.

It should be noted that while the present study refers to the spiritual process of the Exercises, it does not, specifically, enquire into spirituality in the workplace, as has been a recent trend—for example, Guillory (1997), Smith (2006; 2006), Marques, Dhiman & King (2007), Giacalone & Jurkievicz (2010). The study is primarily concerned with the consequences of gender discrimination for women whose spirituality has motivated them to engage with a religious organization espousing values that resonate with this spirituality.

While it is easy to agree that discriminatory practices are unjust, the consequences of gender discrimination can be underestimated and dismissed as an inconvenient reality belonging to the Catholic workplace. If, as Hasselkus (2002) argues, performance entails interpretation and interpretation is the source of comprehension, discriminatory practice that limits or prevents a woman from successfully performing her role in the workplace has a far more deleterious effect than might be acknowledged by Catholic leadership, or, indeed, the wider community.
Good people may acknowledge but not necessarily take remedial initiatives aimed at addressing gender discrimination in the Catholic workplace. Religious imprecations, in keeping with Catholic sentiment, do not suffice when a worker experiences discrimination. In the opening years of the twenty-first century, laywomen are no longer passively content to welcome workplace discrimination as an opportunity to grow through suffering.

The Catholic workplace is, ideally, a context for occupational authenticity as the worker, inspired by the example of Christ, expresses her competence on behalf of others in a context that, itself, is inspired by the example of Christ. When discriminatory practices undermine and limit the way in which the worker can authentically express agency, the individual worker, and common projects belonging to the organization as a whole, are compromised.

It must be acknowledged that gender discrimination does not simply punish the laywoman by disrupting her self-perception. Gender discrimination harms workplace purpose and goals. If, as Palmer suggests, “occupation is one strand of the life that lives in us” (Palmer in Hasselkus 2000, p. 17), it may be argued that collegial collaboration ought to strive to be the collective expression of group interiority, each individual charged with the responsibility of fostering individual continuity for the sake of team efficacy. As I have proposed in Chapter 5, the collective practice of the Organizational Examen would strengthen individual SOOA and enhance collegial collaboration.

Archer acknowledges the relationship between commitment and continuity by asking, “How can one speak of making commitments, which, by definition are not fleeting, without someone who has sufficient continuity to sustain them?” (2000, p. 40). Archer looks to Shusterman in order to underscore her point:

Where is the coherent integrated individual narrative (among the myriad inconsistent narratives of quasi persons) which we wish to bind with others in a project of solidarity? The self . . . needs to attain its own narrative, solidarity and coherence, before it can hope to cohere with others in more
than a fleeting cohabitation of the same geography or language game (Schusterman in Archer 2000 p. 40).

Archer’s text argues against post-modern positions such as those put by Rorty who, Archer claims, “explicitly denies precisely that coherence which is essential to a life and a work alike by insisting upon a self made up of ‘a plurality of persons’ each with ‘incompatible systems of belief and desire’” (citing Rorty 1986).

Archer shrinks from Rorty’s argument for “a variety of ‘quasi-selves’, different internal clusters of belief and desire, amongst which there is no inner conversational relationship since they lack the internal coherence to constitute one unified person who is self-conscious about her own constituents” (2000 p. 36).

My own experience, and the experience of women who have come to me for spiritual direction for more than thirty years, suggests that acting in solidarity with others (in order to achieve good on behalf of society) requires the construction of a “self”—a self that may manifest differently and flexibly in a diverse range of contexts—but, nevertheless, a self that coheres sufficiently to allow fulfilment of commitments to collegial workplace projects.

I suggest that a coherent self is a self that possesses a consciously composed unifying narrative that allows one to evaluate, and to select or reject, narratives that contribute to the alignment of personal and social identity. Referencing Archer’s perspective regarding identity and social commitment (2000, p. 305), I further argue that the maintenance of a coherent self depends, largely, on the alignment of personal and social identity (2000, p. 305).

As Archer explains, compromising this alignment “is a refusal to prioritize what we care about, which is definitive of who we are” (2000, p. 305). My experience of giving spiritual direction suggests that gender discrimination in the workplace produces significant dissonance between personal and social identity. Women who are compelled or who choose to remain in workplaces dominated by gender discrimination risk becoming like those who are described by Archer as “time servers” (2000, p. 304).
These are the time servers: they are recognized as such because they have withdrawn their active personification to become passive executors of minimalistic and enforceable expectations, and they know themselves to be such for their self worth no longer derives from this source (2000, p. 304).

Time-servers, I suggest, cannot enter fully into, or sustain, commitments that are typical of collegial solidarity. Fulfilment of commitments to collegial workplace projects is, as Christiansen (1999) reminds us, “the principal means through which people develop and express their personal identities” (1999, p. 547): that is, the self. Occupation thus becomes a virtuous circle: my “self” expresses itself in the world through occupation and it is through this occupational expression that the self finds coherence and authenticity.

Women must experience SOOA if we are to collaborate with others in projects of solidarity. It is not enough for women to express solidarity with those in society whom we are called to serve. Occupational authenticity also relies on collegial recognition and validation of competence and value—and can be disrupted by gender discrimination. We must claim our identity, not have it simultaneously deconstructed (Butler & Scott 1992 p. 96) if we are to engage in projects of solidarity.

In this study, I refer to the transformative consequences of Rindfleish, Sheridan & Kjeldal’s (2009) decision to share workplace narratives about gender bias in academe, including their experience of psychological contract breach. The authors’ experience illustrates Archer’s (2000 p. 40) insight as they join together to compose a coherent narrative from the events that each experience in their own way.

Laywomen who participate in Catholic workplace contexts may support each other behind closed doors. However, my own experience and that of others suggests that women’s critique of gender-based discrimination in the Catholic workplace rarely risks public expression. My observation is that gender-related discussions can be dampened by the unspoken yet palpable consensus among Catholic clergy that the Church, paradoxically referred to as “she”, is in the guardianship of men.
In this thesis, I observe that recent corporatization of Church administrative structures exacerbates the problem of gender discrimination in Catholic workplaces. I continue the orientation to the research topic by describing the consequences of this corporatization.

F. Social and investment organizations: a distinction

An historical survey of the industrial and information ages is beyond the scope of the present study. However, of concern to the present study are the effects of corporate organizational culture on education, health and other services directly engaged in promoting human development and wellbeing. As Bierema notes,

> Corporate executives have embraced the heresy of upsizing short-term shareholder profits by downsizing the long-term workforce causing corporate America to view corporations as investment organizations instead of social organizations” (2000 p. 280–281, citing Miller 1998).

Leading up to the onset of the recent global economic crisis, organizations managed by religious orders—which I describe as social organizations promoting human wellbeing—have adopted aspects of the “investment organization” rationale. I have observed that factors influencing this shift may include the diminishing numbers of religious women, religious men and priests available to work for modest wages and the concomitant increase in adequately paid lay workers. Falling church attendance has reduced funding from bequests and other donations that have traditionally been the source of present and future resourcing.

The financial wellbeing of religious congregations is severely threatened; the shift to an investment rationale is unsurprising. The shift from the social to the investment culture has impacted on both laywomen and laymen employed by religious orders. However, the significance of this cultural change is particularly difficult for laywomen employed by male religious orders, especially women employed in the spirituality ministry. Gender often places these women employees as outsiders in the male religious workplace. That the laywoman employee must be adequately
remunerated for her work from dwindling financial reserves increases the tension between employer and employees. Women employed on the basis of training and experience in the spirituality ministry are now expected to satisfy business goals which have never been met by religious (priests and brothers), many of whom consider their work to be exempt from fee, open to donation.

I have followed Bierema’s distinction between social and investment organizations throughout the present study. I have accorded particular attention to her observations regarding gender and human resources development programs:

> Although alternative research designs are being used more widely in HRD, there is little focus on issues of social justice in the workplace or society. Women’s experience is ignored, as are asymmetrical power arrangements. Gender is not used as a category of analysis even when data are collected by gender (2000 p. 287).

I survey the literature in order to identify characteristics of a healthy and productive workplace (Argyris 1998; Peterson 2004), before reviewing the concept of workplace mentoring: A practice, although largely unacknowledged, that finds its implicit equivalent in the Church workplace.

I reflect on Whyte’s understanding “that the consummation of work lies not only in what we have done, but who we have become while accomplishing the task” (2001 p. 5) and suggest that conventional employee development programs, for example, mentoring, are not always impartial and without prior (organizational) agenda.

I argue that the aim of human-centred employment development programs must be to engage the worker in an ethically guided process with the desired outcome of establishing SOOA that will lead to a more robust engagement in challenging workplace contexts. In part, I am attempting to respond to Agryris’ question:

> How is it possible to create an organization in which the individuals may obtain optimum expression and, simultaneously, in which the organization itself may obtain optimum satisfaction of its demands? (1957, p. 24).
Insofar as Agryris’ question pertains to women employees—for example, the participants in this study—I suggest the need for the instigation of workplace initiatives that (a) reduce dissonance between the organization’s espoused theories and theories-in-action, (b) provide employee access to resources necessary for the satisfactory achievement of role expectations and (c) invite employees to participate in decision-making conversations that directly affect their capacity to achieve role expectations. That is, to strengthen the three components of SOC articulated by Antonovsky (1988): comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. My articulation of the theory of SOOA, based on Antonovsky’s (1988) explication of SOC, has assisted in the development of the Organizational Examen, see Chapter 5. I suggest it is the Organizational Examen that can help create the kind of organization described by Argyris (1957, p. 24): An organization in which the individual and the organization may work, collaboratively, towards mutual satisfaction of needs and goals.

G. Gender and workplace

I discuss women’s workplace experience, beginning with observations gleaned from Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA 2008). The EOWA Census of Women in Leadership (2008) provides a singular and definitive measure of the status of women on boards and in executive management in Australia’s top 200 ASX companies (EOWA 2008).

I am unable to locate reliable data concerning women’s workplace status within organizations that are not listed on the Australian Stock Exchange—for example, women’s leadership status within social organizations such as Catholic male religious orders.

As Smith (2008) recommends, women who work in the investment sector are urged to adopt aggressive male work styles. This option, hardly palatable but perhaps necessary, is not available to women who work in Catholic organizations. Catholic leadership urges women to a “feminine holiness that is the dignity and vocation of women” (Rousseau, 1990), a feminine holiness that extends the Virgin Mary’s fiat
(be it done unto me according to thy word, Luke 1:38) to women’s lives in general, including the Catholic workplace. This stance is, somewhat surprisingly, held by many Catholic women, as well as Catholic (male) leadership, as has been recorded in the significant research project conducted by Macdonald et al (1999).

H. Gender and the Catholic workplace

The present study builds on and departs from an earlier research project, “The Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia” (Macdonald et al. 1999). The Research Project was launched on August 21, 1996 and gathered data on the participation of women in the Catholic Church in Australia.

The Research Project drew on quantitative and qualitative research methods including contextual papers, written submissions, public hearings, a large-scale sampling of church attenders undertaken as part of the Catholic Church Life Survey, a survey of Catholic organizations, and targeted groups involving voices which had not been heard in the written submissions and public hearings.

In the written submissions, public hearings and targeted groups, responses were elicited from women and men from a variety of backgrounds and ages, those actively involved in Catholic Church structures and those who were not. The findings of the Project were diverse and, in the diversity, predictable.

I have conducted an extensive search for data describing laywomen’s experience of employment by Catholic male religious organizations. I have located one study, research conducted by Jackson. Jackson asks:

How do laywomen academic leaders in Catholic colleges and universities founded by male religious negotiate a system that is historically, structurally, and culturally embedded in patriarchal and hierarchical paradigms and discourses? (2002, p. 24).
Jackson’s (2002) doctoral findings focus on women’s experience of leadership within colleges and universities governed by the Catholic Church in the United States of America. Jackson’s findings suggest:

Most laywomen leaders in this study experienced and endured a fairly high degree of contradiction in their lives. They work in an environment where maleness and masculinity have been the prevailing paradigms and symbols of their institutions. They work in an environment where, although they could identify with the Catholic faith, they found their personal stances on certain feminist issues in contradiction with the church’s teachings. As outsiders within, however, they are likely to confront some of the realities of these contradictions in an effort to alleviate inequities by encouraging different ways of knowing. Living in a world of contradiction demands inner strength (2002, p. 183).

The college and university context for Jackson’s research shares some of the challenges confronting laywomen who volunteer or who are employed by ministries and associations belonging to the Order that provides the context for the present study.

Jackson’s comprehensive account of Catholic educational institutions in the United States of America possibly reflects similar Australian experience. During a meeting of Australian priests, brothers, women religious and laymen and women in 2007, it was noted by one female school executive that numbers of laymen and women on staff significantly outnumber priests and brothers on staff. This unforeseen shift has radically altered the gendered culture that once ignored or dismissed women’s contribution (Carter, personal communication, February 2007).

However, although the masculine, clerically shaped education culture may have undergone unexpected transformation, other ministries and associations that identify with the Order that provides the context for the present study, have been less open to change.
Some research participants report significant resistance as they have attempted to establish collegial equality with clerical counterparts. This resistance seems to have been focused on lay status and female gender (that is, elements basic to identity) rather than workplace competence. It might be speculated that threats to identity (the spirituality that shapes the life of the priest or brother) are countered by threats to the identity, gender and lay status of the lay, female volunteer or employee.

All participants who engaged with the present study were attracted to work with ministries and associations belonging to the religious order because the particular charism (spiritual orientation) had influenced their own spiritual formation and the way they make sense of their experience. For these women, work (whether paid or voluntary) is the practical expression of values that, together, articulate an active spirituality, with implications for themselves and those for and with whom they work. As Whyte explains, “To have a firm persuasion in our work—to feel that what we do is right for ourselves and good for the world at exactly the same time—is one of the great triumphs of human existence” (2001 p. 4).

Experiences of conflict in the workplace are processed through the lens of deep spiritual understandings and commitments to justice. Sustained experience of dissonance between these understandings and commitments and workplace hostility incurs repercussions far beyond the weekly pay cheque and/or commendation by prominent religious figures.

Such repercussions may extend to a phenomena described by Robinson & Morrison (2000) and Lester, Thurnley, Bloodgood & Bolino (2002) as psychological contract breach. In this study I extrapolate this research into the religious workplace by discussing the effect of dissonance between workers’ spiritually orientated workplace expectations and expectations aligned with Bierema’s “investment” paradigm. I begin this discussion by referencing employee development programs, programs designed to manage, and enhance, employees’ workplace experience.
I. Employee development programs (EDP)

My discussion of employee development programs relies on literature describing the secular workplace, literature that has limited application to the present study because of the quite particular experience of the Catholic religious workplace. It should be noted that my survey of the literature has not located publications that address employee development programs for lay female workers in the religious workplace. Religious orders appear, rather, to offer orientation programs that induct workers into the charism and culture of the particular order.

Employee development programs, including formal and or informal workplace mentoring, seek to manage workplace relations so that employees maintain a certain level of job satisfaction that allows for the accomplishment of organizational goals.

Employee development programs offered by investment organizations are usually confined to human resources development (HRD) programs. The purpose guiding most HRD mentoring and coaching programs is that of performance improvement. Cross comments,

> Occasionally the mentor helps the protégé develop the necessary skills to navigate an especially difficult turn in the road, but by and large the mentor concentrates on providing a map and fixing the road rather than on developing the traveller (Daloz 1999 p. xi).

According to my review of the literature concerning employee development programs, current programs do not address the “basic incongruencies between the growth trends of a healthy personality in our culture and the requirements of formal organization (Argyris 1957 p. 18). Bierema has observed, “If performance improvement is the ultimate goal, then learning serves not as an end to human growth, but rather as a means to corporate growth” (2000 p. 282). Bierema’s survey of current HRD addresses the postmodern performativity movement and its emphasis on HRD as a means of increasing productivity and promoting allegiance to the organization, instead of the focus being on the worker.
Four articles addressing coaching and mentoring in the workplace are discussed. Clutterbuck (2008) argues that coaching and mentoring have made significant progress over the past decade; however, Peterson (2002) questions the professionalism, accreditation and ethical standards inherent in the life-coaching industry. Lankau & Saunders (2002) make suggestions for more effective workplace mentoring relationships and Daloz et al. suggest characteristics belonging to justice-oriented workplace education (1996; 1999).

J. The Exercises as a framework for an employee EDP

Authored by Íñigo López de Loyola, later known as St Ignatius, the Exercises are a record of experience and insights as Íñigo reflected on his dramatic conversion at the age of thirty years and his subsequent experience in 1521 by the river Cardoner near the Catalanian town, Manresa. “His book is a work lived by himself and later on lived by others under his eyes” (Catholic Encyclopedia).

Íñigo soon entrusted other Jesuits to give his Exercises and, since the 1950s, laywomen and men have also become accredited givers of the Exercises. Women and men who direct the Exercises process are understood to be Ignatian spiritual directors. The task of an Ignatian spiritual director is to help women and men make decisions that will better position them to act according to their “fullest intrinsic potential” (Frolich 2001 p. 72) so that they may be more effective in their service with and to others.

The Ignatian spiritual director draws on the framework of the Exercises to help those making the retreat (directees or exercitants) recognize feelings, thoughts and actions that might hinder or help a more effective and generous expression of service.

An extended critique of the Exercises is beyond the scope of the present study. It should also be noted that I am not proposing an adaptation of the text belonging to the Exercises. Rather, I am recommending the transformational potential of the dynamic belonging to the Exercises in an organizational setting by means of adjunct use of the Organisational Examen.
K. Chapter summary

The present study presents a snapshot of the experience of twelve women who work with a Catholic religious Order. The women’s experience is contemplated in light of the thesis question: How can laywomen who work in voluntary or paid roles in social organizations governed by traditional Catholic religious structures sustain the SOOA essential to effective collegial collaboration?

Drawing on (a) my experience as a spiritual director, (b) the experience of the women associated with this study, and (c) the literature, I conclude that the transformational dynamic undergirding the Exercises can be appropriated as a contemplative device for critiquing workplace experience in a way that strengthens all employees’ SOOA and, consequently, collegial collaboration.

In this Chapter, I have identified several assumptions that shape my approach to the study. Of particular importance to this work is my assumption that work is more than routine activity, it is the means to the end of expressing our identity in the service of others.
Chapter 2: Evaluation

Introduction to the Chapter

Having identified the more central assumptions and interpretive lenses that influence my researching (Chapter 1: Orientation), I now move to the return arc of the hermeneutical circle shaping this study.

In this chapter, I review literature relevant to the thesis topic and, in doing so, evaluate my assumptions concerning the thesis question: how can laywomen who work in voluntary or paid roles in the context of traditional, hierarchical, male-dominated religious workplaces sustain SOOA essential to effective collegial collaboration?

In order to arrange this evaluation into a more meaningful schema, I draw on four narratives—Thecla (Elliott 1994), Amelia (Cavarero 2000), Koller (Koller 1981) and Ellsworth (Wear 1993).

The four narratives inform my understanding of the relationship between agency and SOC and, consequently, deepen my understanding of a question that has shadowed my research since the first months of study: “How can one speak of making commitments, which, by definition are not fleeting, without someone who has sufficient continuity to sustain them?” (Archer 2000, p. 40).

Archer’s question presumes a relationship between commitment and continuity that resonates with my intuition that effective collegial collaboration depends on the (experienced) coherent, validated, authentic identity of individual group or team members. Further, that gender discrimination in the workplace can disturb or disrupt an individual’s sense of validated authenticity, and, thus, collegial collaboration.
Archer explains her question by referring to Shusterman:

Thus, “we must ask with puzzlement, where is the coherent integrated individual narrative (among the myriad inconsistent narratives of quasi persons) which we wish to bind with others in a project of solidarity? Where is there a self that is unified and firm enough not only to allow a momentary self-satisfied glimpse of convergence with others but to guide the narrative enactment of continued and deepening bonds of solidarity?” (Archer 2000, p. 40).

During my experience as a spiritual director, I have observed that this search for a unified self occupies both men and women. It is women, however, that appear to be lost “among the myriad inconsistent narratives” (Archer 2000, p. 40) that go with a diversity of roles and the cultural expectations that accompany those roles.

My review of the four narratives pays special attention to Thecla’s story because her narrative illustrates the experience of a woman whose newly critiqued assumptions regarding familial and cultural imperatives motivate her to join with a group of like-minded others as they try to be of help to others. This story is central my work with research group participants, see Chapter 3. For a full account of Thecla’s story, also see Chapter 3.

The remaining three narratives offer additional insights into the relationship between SOC and agency. I acknowledge that other readings of narratives included in this literature review may stimulate curiosity about substantially different issues and topics, and I also acknowledge that I have used my authority as researcher to select the particular narratives discussed in this review.

After establishing features of SOC and then articulating a theory of SOOA, I explain the Exercises and discuss the potential of some aspects of the Exercises for strengthening SOC and, of particular interest to the present study, SOOA.
In this thesis, I argue that sustained experiences of gender discrimination, and lacking control of the resources necessary to successfully engage in the workplace can lead to the diminishment of the worker’s SOOA, with consequences for her capacity to work collaboratively and collegially. I now explain Antonovsky’s (1988) SOC theory before discussing the relevance of SOC and SOOA theory to workplace contexts.

A. Sense of coherence (SOC)

Workers’ sense of coherence (SOC) has been investigated by authors such as Feldt (1997), Feldt, Kinnunen & Mauno (2000), Feldt, Kivimaki, Rantala & Tolvanen (2004) and, more recently, by Amirkhan & Greaves’ (2003), Strauser & Lustig (2003) and Nielsen, Matthiesen and Einarsen (2008). All authors rely on Antonovsky’s (1988) theory of SOC. I, too, refer to Antonovsky’s (1988) theory of SOC and build on this theory in order to argue that SOC theory can inform organizations about (what I have termed) a worker’s SOOA.

Antonovsky (1988) explains SOC in the following way:

The SOC is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement (1988 p. 19).

Antonovsky explains structured, predictable and explicable stimuli as comprehensibility, resources to meet demands as manageability, and worthy challenges as meaningfulness (1988, pp. 16–19, italics mine).

Antonovsky comments, “Consistent experiences provide the basis for the comprehensibility component; a good load balance, for the manageability component; and . . . participation in shaping outcomes for the meaningfulness component (1988, p. 92).
Antonovsky’s third component, meaningfulness, is particularly relevant to the present study as it touches on the sensitive matter of women’s participation (or exclusion from participation) in Catholic contexts. Antonovsky stresses, “if participation is to lead to meaningfulness, it must be in activity that is socially valued.” (1988, p. 93). With regard to the topic of the present study, I suggest that although an activity, in itself, may be potentially meaningful, if the person participating in the activity is not socially valued—for example, because of gender—the benefits of meaningfulness may not be experienced.

Acknowledging that reality is far more complex than theoretical description may allow and that people of all ages do not necessarily experience comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness in their lives, Antonovsky nevertheless describes how SOC develops over the life span (1988 pp. 89–127). In the Table that follows (Table 1), I have summarized Antonovsky’s developmental schema, limiting the description of adult SOC development to the workplace, given the relevance of this context to the present study.
Table 1: *Summary of Antonovsky’s Sense of Coherence Developmental Schema (SOC)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>COMPREHENSIBILITY</th>
<th>MANAGEABILITY</th>
<th>MEANINGFULNESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy and childhood</td>
<td>Mindful that life for many infants and children is chaotic and unpredictable, nevertheless it can be observed that, in more nurturing environments, over time the infant and child may become persuaded that his or her world, physical and social, can be counted on not to be constantly changing. The variety of stimuli, from within and without, may become familiar and routinized, as may happen with responses (1988, p. 96).</td>
<td>The child experiences demands from the social world and the child makes demands on the social world. If the child wills to do something, for whatever reason, the response can be one of four kinds: being ignored, refused, channelled, or encouraged and approved. A balanced pattern of the four kinds of responses makes for a strong sense of manageability. Ideally, the child will not experience being left entirely to his/her own devices (under-load) or be exposed to unreasonable demands for development (overload). Parental SOC influences child’s SOC (1988, pp. 97–100)</td>
<td>Insofar as the infant is a proactive being, he/she seeks to shape the environment’s behaviour. To the extent that a desired outcome is contingent on the infant and child’s actions, it can reasonably be said that early on there is participation in decision making. The crux of the matter is whether the quality of the response is embedded in positive affect. Coldness, hostility, and disregard, even when obvious physiological needs are met, convey a clear message of disvaluation. Play, touch, concern, and voice, expressed in infinite cultural variety, state: You matter to us (1988, p. 97).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
societal ceremony facilitates transition between childhood submissiveness and adult responsibility. The messages are clear, unequivocal, and conveyed unanimously (1988, p. 101).

| adulthood (workplace) | Strengthened sense of comprehensibility through repeatedly experiencing that things fit together, that unknowns are explained to one’s satisfaction (1988 p. 113). | Strengthened sense of manageability through repeated work experiences appropriate to the worker’s abilities, which place adequate material, social, and organizational resources at his or her disposal, and which provide occasional overload as well as occasional opportunity for withdrawal and conservation of energy (1988 p. 113). | Strengthened sense of meaningfulness through participation in socially valued decision making, discretionary freedom, social valuation of the enterprise and of the particular job, equity of rewards, decision latitude with respect to work itself and the legitimacy of power allocation in the work collectivity (1988 p. 116) |

Commenting on SOC theory, Antonovsky advises:

(B)eing male or female, black or white, upper or lower class, Canadian or Kampuchean, Cuban or Costa Rican—with all that these social categories imply—is decisive in determining the particular patterns of life experiences that engender a stronger or weaker SOC (1988 p. 91).

Antonovsky measures SOC according to strength or weakness in the three identified core components—comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. He comments, “The persons we had identified as having a strong SOC were high on these components, in stark contrast to those we had identified as having a weak
SOC” (1988 p. 16). The following table clarifies characteristics characteristic of strong and weak SOC. These characteristics are based on Antonovsky’s (1988, pp. 16–18; 92–93) observations. However, I have extended Antonovsky’s descriptions of the category of weak manageability in order to present a comprehensive account of each component.

Table 2. The Sense of Coherence (SOC) Concept of Antonovsky (1988 pp. 16–18; 83)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>COMPREHENSIBILITY</th>
<th>MANAGEABILITY</th>
<th>MEANINGFULNESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRONG</td>
<td>Basis: consistent experience</td>
<td>Basis: good load balance</td>
<td>Basis: participation in shaping outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stimuli from internal/external environments make cognitive sense, as information that is ordered, consistent, structured and clear. Experiences can be coped with, challenges can be met. Consequences of very difficult experiences are bearable.</td>
<td>Belief that adequate resources are available to meet demands posed by internal/external stimuli. Resources may not be directly under one’s control, but are controlled by trustworthy others.</td>
<td>Belief that one is a participant in the processes shaping one’s destiny as well as one’s daily experience. Can identify areas of life that make sense, are important, are very much cared about. Problems and demands posed by living are worth investing energy in, are worthy of commitment and engagement. Challenges are “welcome” rather than burdens. Meaning can be found in unhappy experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEAK</td>
<td>Stimuli from internal/external environments is experienced as noise—chaotic, disordered, random, accidental, inexplicable.</td>
<td>Belief that resources to meet demands are not under one’s control or the control of trustworthy others.</td>
<td>When others decide everything for us—when they set the task, formulate the rules, and manage the outcome—and we have no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Antonovsky observes that repeated life experiences “characterized by consistency, participation in shaping outcome, and an under-overload balance” (1988 p. 19) build up SOC. However, although the three core components of SOC are intertwined, it is possible that an individual will experience a high SOC rating on one component but a low SOC rating on another component (Antonovsky 1988 p. 19).

Antonovsky comments, “one might find oneself in a social role that, although it provides life experiences of consistency and a reasonable underload-overload balance, does not provide the experience of participation in shaping outcome because one’s potentials are ignored” (1988, pp. 19–20). This observation is particularly germane to the present study, as I explain below.

Antonovsky acknowledges that while his early investigations indicated that an individual’s SOC remained relatively stable throughout life, he later revised his understanding on the basis that his early work focused on individuals who possess a strong SOC (p. 120). He remarks,

One’s SOC is constantly and inevitably being attacked. But what characterizes the person who has, in early adulthood, crystallized a strong SOC is the ability to bring into play the generalized resistance resources available to him or her (1988, p. 121).
Nevertheless, Antonovsky argues that changes to an individual’s SOC are rare:

When they happen, they are never the result of the fortuitous encounter, the change itself, the single decision; they occur only because these initiate a new pattern of life experience. If this pattern is maintained over a period of years, gradual change can occur. For the middle-aged adult, the new marriage, new job, new country, new social climate, or new therapist can only at best (or worst) begin to initiate change, insofar as this stimulus provides a different long-range set of life experiences characterized by different levels of consistency, load balance, and participation in socially valued decision making (p. 123).

Reference to the literature indicates previous interest in the relationship between SOC and the workplace. However, to the best of my knowledge, research has not posited SOOA, which might be treated as a sub-category of SOC.

For example, Feldt (1997) has written about SOC and the workplace. Feldt has also co-authored articles addressing the relationship between SOC and the workplace (Feldt, Kinnunen & Mauno 2000; Feldt, Kivimaki, Rantala & Tolvanen 2004).

Feldt’s (1997) findings indicate, “strong SOC subjects seemed to be better protected from the adverse effects of certain work characteristics” (p. 134). Subsequent research by Feldt et al. (2000) indicates:

(When an employee encounters negative changes in his or her working environment, his or her SOC weakens, which, in turn, reduces well-being, and, vice versa, when an employee experiences positive changes in his or her working environment, his or her SOC strengthens, which, in turn, increases well-being (p. 464).

Feldt et al. investigate predictive relationships between SOC and the environment and question whether “high-SOC individuals tend to modify their environments in a
more favourable direction than persons with a low SOC—or whether it is the environment that modified SOC in individuals” (2004).

Feldt et al. conducted a three-year study of managers, mostly male, average age 47 years, ranging from shop floor supervisors to senior managers whose mean level of SOC was relatively high and particularly stable (2004). The authors refer to Antonovsky (1988), who remarks that “high SOC is more stable than low SOC because it promotes successful selection of SOC-maintaining situations and avoidance of SOC-debilitating situations” (Feldt 2004).

Feldt references Antonovsky (1988a, 1988b, 1991) in determining that “good social relations at work and the possibilities to have control over one’s work serve as generalized resistance resources for an individual” (2004). The authors appear to attribute workplace comprehensibility and meaningfulness to manageability, a component described by Antonovsky as the availability of resources to meet internal and external stimuli from the environment (1988, p. 19). The inference drawn by Feldt et al. (2004) is that manageability depends on good social relations in the workplace:

Job control is essential, in particular, for a sense of meaningfulness, and good social relations at work for a sense of comprehensibility. In other words, those individuals whose work is characterized by high possibilities to influence it and who have good social relations are more likely to develop a strong SOC (2004).

The authors acknowledge that the generalizability of their findings must be taken into account because “the sample of managers was strongly male dominated and, in addition, their educational background was primarily technical” (2004). According to the authors, the SOC-related experience of this mostly male, homogeneous occupational group “should not be generalized, for example, to blue-collar workers” (2004) and future study would contribute to understanding the relationships between SOC and work characteristics in a wide range of occupational fields.
Amirkhan & Greaves’ (2003, pp. 31–62) investigation of the relationship between SOC and appraisal of stress present similar findings to those of Feldt (1997). Amirkhan & Greaves’ research comprises four studies in an attempt to discover “differences in perceptions, attributions, and coping behaviours distinguishing those with a strong SOC from those with weaker dispositions” (2003, p. 35). The first three studies were conducted in laboratory conditions and involved college students. The fourth study is based on archival data generated by previous research involving “long-term assessment of community residents enduring a chronic stressor” (2003, p. 35).

Armirkhan & Greaves’ first study engaged an overwhelming number of female participants (75%), all Introductory Psychology students (p. 36). This study indicated a correlation between strong SOC and the perception that even stressful life events have coherence. A second correlation was noted: “strong SOC individuals used more instrumental, and fewer avoidant, responses to cope with stressors in their own lives” (2003, p. 42).

Armirkhan & Greaves’ second study engaged most of the participants from the first study with a similar demographic composition—70% female. The results of the second study confirmed those belonging to the first study: “strong SOC individuals are more likely to use effective responses in coping with their problems” (2003, p. 46).

Their third study engaged sixty psychology students with a demographic profile similar to that of the first and second studies—73% female. Of particular interest to the present study is Armirkhan & Greaves’ finding that “Participants with strong SOC perceived a majority of life events to be coherent, and this was a greater number than that found for weak SOC subjects” (2003, p. 51). Armirkhan & Greaves also noted, “strong SOC individuals tend towards more adaptive coping” (2003, p. 51).

Armirkhan & Greaves (2003, p. 51) indicate the replicability demonstrated in findings belonging to the three studies: however, they acknowledge that further research needs to understand the distinction between SOC and other adaptive
perceptual and behavioural factors, such as optimism. Armirkhan & Greaves (2003, p. 51) also point out that the three studies involved university students in a laboratory setting. The authors acknowledge: “there is no doubt that the laboratory setting lacked ecological validity, bearing little similarity to the sturm und drang of real stressful episodes” (2003, p. 51).

The fourth study of Armirkhan & Greaves (2003) attempted to examine findings from their three earlier studies in real life contexts. The study was based on earlier research by Armirkhan generating data archived from a longitudinal investigation of people who had lost their jobs during an economic downturn (2003, p. 52). The demographic profile of participants included 67% females. This fourth study confirmed findings from the three earlier studies, finding that “strong SOC was shown to protect people against the physical as well as the psychological ravages of stress, both directly and indirectly” (2003, p. 58).

For example, regarding the experience of stress as the consequence of job loss, Armikhan & Greaves’ research indicates that research participants with a stronger SOC “did not experience as much trauma over job loss because this event (like other stressors in their lives) was viewed as having meaning” (2003, p. 58). The authors conclude:

> A strong SOC seems to work much like rose-colored glasses that one has grown accustomed to wearing: Although not conscious of their presence, one still benefits by the pleasant tint that they provide (2003, p. 59)

Armikhan & Greaves’ research is congruent with findings by Lustig & Strauser (2002, 6–10). Lustig and Strauser’s examination of the relationship between SOC and work adjustment concludes, “sense of coherence can serve as a positive moderating variable in an individual’s response to stressful life and career situations” (2003). Their research sample consisted of 156 undergraduate college students, 85% women, aged 18 to 58 years. Lustig and Strauser’s research also considered the relationship between career decision-making and SOC. The authors conclude: “individuals with a stronger sense of coherence are better able to understand and persist in the career decision-making process” (2002, p. 6).
However, recent findings by Nielsen et al. (2008, pp. 128–136) during the investigation of SOC as a protective factor among targets of workplace bullying challenge findings by Feldt, Kinnunen & Mauno (2000); Feldt, Kivimaki, Rantala & Tolvanen (2004); Feldt (1997) and Amirkhan and Greaves (2003). Of particular interest to the present study is the discovery that “the protective benefits of SOC for strong SOC subjects could be destabilized by dissonance between job stress and a positive view of oneself“ (2008 p. 133).

Nielsen et al. recognize research has established that workplace bullying “has detrimental effects on the health and well-being of the targets of such negative acts” (2008, p. 128). The authors want to understand “how bullying inflicts such long-lasting negative effects on the targets” (2008, p. 128) and wonder if SOC can provide a protective mechanism among targets of workplace bullying (2008, p. 128).

Nielsen et al. begin their report by defining workplace bullying as “a collective expression that includes various forms of ill treatment and hostile behaviour in the workplace setting” (2008, p. 128). The authors acknowledge that, according to scientific definitions of the term (Einarsen et al., 2003), workplace bullying is characterized by four main criteria:

- The target is exposed to direct or indirect negative acts that may range from the most subtle, even unconscious, incivilities to the most blatant, intentional emotional abuse (Fox & Stallworth, 2005)

- The negative acts in question are repeated regularly. Bullying, therefore, is not about isolated episodes or events but rather about aggressive behaviour that is repeatedly directed towards one or more employees

- The period of time over which the repeated events take place (Rayner et al., 2002)—frequency and duration. Leymann (1996) suggests that targets must be exposed to at least one negative act on a weekly basis and that the duration of the bullying must be a period of 6 months
A perceived imbalance of power between the bully and the target (Leymann, 1996; Niedl, 1995; Zapf & Einarsen, 2001). Thus bullying develops as an escalating process during the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts.

Neilsen et al. conducted research with 221 participants who were, at the time, members of two Norwegian support associations for targets of bullying at work. The demographic profile included 141 women and 80 men. While findings confirm that low levels of bullying have a stronger effect on targets with a low SOC than for targets with higher SOC, of particular interest to the present study is the finding that refines SOC and workplace research by Feldt (1997), Feldt, Kinnunen & Mauno (2000), Feldt, Kivimaki, Rantala & Tolvanen (2004), Amirkhan & Greaves (2003) and Strauser & Lustig (2003). Neilsen et al. find:

Increased levels of bullying have a greater relative effect on targets with a mean and high SOC than on targets with a low SOC. Thus, our findings suggest that SOC offers most protective benefits when bullying is mild; however, the benefits diminish as bullying becomes more severe (2008, p. 132).

Neilsen et al. describe this effect as a “reversed effect” (2008, p. 133) of the perceived benefits of strong SOC and suggest that one explanation for this reversed effect “could be that negative events such as bullying may be more salient when interpreted against a backdrop of a positive view of oneself and the world” (2008, p. 133).

As Neilsen et al. recognize, “Most targets of bullying consider themselves to be decent, worthy, and capable people who make valuable contributions to the organization in which they work” (Thylefors, 1988; Zapf, 1999) (2008, p. 133).

Research by Neilsen et al. (2008) suggests that targets of bullying may find the three components of SOC are compromised. I summarize the description of compromised
Neilsen et al. comment on the consequences of workplace bullying:

A central feature of bullying is that the target experiences that he or she lacks resources to handle the exposure to persistent negative acts. In consequence, the stigmatizing effects of bullying, along with their escalating frequency and intensity, make the targets constantly less able to cope with their daily tasks and the cooperation requirements of the job, thus becoming continually more vulnerable (Einarsen, 2000). This may be particularly stressful for targets with a high level of SOC (2008, p. 133).

Findings from research by Neilsen et al. (2008, p. 134) lead the authors to offer the following comments about the implications for organizations in which bullying occurs:

At a primary individual level, our results indicate that organizations must give high priority to the prevention and management of bullying as exposure to workplace bullying is strongly associated with severe impairment of mental health. At the organizational level, the cost for an enterprise can be considerable, as relatively small effects on the individual level may have substantial aggregated or cumulative effect with an organization (Daniels & Harris, 2000 in Neilsen et al. 2008, p. 134).
The authors suggest that the implications of their research must also be taken into account by those who practise in the profession of vocational rehabilitation:

Because the protective benefits of SOC seem to diminish as bullying becomes more severe, organizations must emphasize forms of rehabilitation that can help all targets readjust their view of the world, others and themselves so that they become better prepared to meet the requirements of a demanding work life. Fair management of, and intervention in, specific cases may also reassure targets with a high SOC that the world is still comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful (2008, p. 134–135).

As I have read the research concerning the relationship between SOC and the workplace (Feldt 1997; Feldt, Kinnunen & Mauno 2000; Feldt, Kivimaki, Rantala & Tolvanen 2004; Amirkhan & Greaves’ 2003; Strauser & Lustig 2003 and Neilsen et al. 2008), I have been particularly keen to discover findings that may indicate gender discrimination as a risk to SOC. Feldt et al. (2004) specifically referenced gender and SOC but did not find any gender differences (2004, p. 464). Other published research, see above, investigates stress and SOC in general and not the impact of specific sources of stress, such as gender discrimination, on SOC.

While male participants outnumbered female participants taking part in research conducted by Feldt (1997) and Feldt et al. (2004), women outnumbered male participants in studies by Feldt et al. (2000), Amirkhan and Greaves (2003), Strauser & Lustig (2003) and Neilsen et al. (2008).

Antonovsky makes reference to women in his discussion of SOC and the role of the housewife (1988, pp.107–109). He notes that a resource deficit of time (overload) and the lack of opportunity to express a variety of skills, abilities and interests (under-load) can be experienced by housewives (1988, p. 108). Without implying a devaluation of the role of housewife, yet noting this possibility in a work-oriented culture that does not necessarily acknowledge the housewife role as “work”, Antonovsky observes, “if participation in decision making is to lead to meaningfulness, it must be an activity that is socially valued” (1988, p. 93). He
argues, “There is little basis for seeing the life experiences of the housewife as strengthening the meaningfulness component of the SOC” (1988, p. 93).

Referring to women who work outside the home, Antonovsky claims that this work “is overwhelmingly in a work role that . . . is itself not conducive to a strong SOC, doubly so because she most often works in a disvalued female job” (1988, p. 109). It could be argued that Antonovsky’s observations are outdated because they reflect women’s experience in the 1980s. However, given EOWA’s determination that the number of women engaged in high level leadership in Australia “has declined since 2006, and in some cases reverted to pre-2004 levels” (EOWA Media Release 2008 p. 1), Antonovsky’s observations may not be completely irrelevant to women’s workplace experience of gender discrimination in the opening years of the twenty-first century.


Robinson & Morrison describe psychological contract breach as the perception that the organization has breached an employee’s psychological contract, or not adequately fulfilled promised obligations (2000 p. 526). The authors’ study comprised 147 employees who had recently earned their MBAs and begun full time jobs. The average age of participants was 27.67 years and 36% of participants were female (2000, p. 533). The aim of the study was to examine “factors affecting employees’ perceptions that their psychological contract has been breached by their organization, and factors affecting whether this perception will cause employees to experience feelings of contract violation” (2000, p. 525).

Results of the study suggest that “perceptions of contract breach may result not only from true contractual transgression, but from a complex, and sometimes imperfect, sense-making process” (2000, p. 543). The authors confirm earlier research (Morrison & Robinson 1997) that found “perceptions of psychological contract breach do not necessarily lead to feelings of violation. Instead, the emotional
experience of violation results from a sense-making process that occurs following the perception of a breach” (2000, p. 542).

Research by Lester et al. (2002, pp. 39–56) examined supervisor and subordinate perceptions of and attributions for psychological breach. The study comprised 134 supervisor-subordinate dyads enrolled in two MBA programs: 42% male, 58% female, average age 32 years. Participants belonged to two employer groups: a group described by the authors as “employed in a wide variety of industries” (2002, p. 45) and a group comprised of employees working in the telecommunications centre belonging to a national healthcare company (2002, p. 45). The aim of the study was to examine differences in supervisor and subordinate perceptions of psychological contract breach (2002, p. 51).

The study found that “employees are more likely than their supervisors to perceive that the organization has failed to keep all of the obligations comprising the employee’s psychological contract” (2002, p. 52). The authors noted, “no significant perceptual differences concerning breach existed for the dimensions of benefits, the work itself, or resource support” (2002, p. 52). However, the authors comment:

> When the data were collected in the fall of 1999, economic conditions in the U.S. were very favourable. At that time, a major concern for employers was their ability to attract qualified job candidates in a very tight labor market . . . As a result, respondents may have perceived lower levels of psychological contract breach than one might expect in recessionary periods (2002, p. 45).

In my opinion, it would seem that the global financial crisis of 2008 has increased employee vulnerability to psychological contract breach.

While both studies offer important insights into the perception of psychological contract breach, it must be noted that participants were representative of “investment” style organizations. The question for the present study must focus on the perception of psychological contract breach by volunteers and employees in social organizations.
I argue that perceptions of psychological breach by women seeking comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness (Antonovsky 1988, pp. 16–19) in organizational workplaces that espouse social and spiritual values, will differ from perceptions of psychological contract breach by employees belonging to investment organizations.

This difference is, I argue, primarily due to the spiritually oriented motivation to join one’s personal values to (resonating) values espoused by a social organization such as the Order described in this study. Women who volunteer or work with an organization because of the organization’s espoused values (including spiritual and ethical values) would seem especially vulnerable to perceptions of psychological breach.

**B. Human wellbeing in the workplace**

Women who volunteer or work with an organization such as the Order described in this study expect to participate in a respectful workplace shaped by values that reflect, at a minimum, the four key principles of Catholic social teaching, summarized below (Australian Jesuits, 2009).

- **Human dignity**: The principle of the dignity of the human person reminds us that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and has an inalienable and transcendent human dignity which gives rise to human rights. It is the bedrock of all Catholic social ethics

- **The common good**: The principle of the common good reminds us that we are all really responsible for each other—we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers—and must work for social conditions which ensure that every person and every group in society is able to meet their needs and realize their potential

- **Subsidiarity**: The principle of subsidiarity concerns how participation and decision making should be organized
• Solidarity: Human beings are social by nature. We cannot survive without others and can only grow and achieve our potential in relationship with others.

In relation to the present study, it is necessary to consider how these values might manifest in the Catholic workplace, a workplace that promotes the values of Catholic social teaching yet, as with any organization, is subject to economic constraints and human fallibility.

I suggest that, in light of Catholic social teaching, it is useful to consider the question posed by Argyris: “How is it possible to create an organization in which the individuals may obtain optimum expression and, simultaneously, in which the organization itself may obtain optimum satisfaction of its demands?” (1957, p. 24). Argyris’ question, although couched in secular language, inherently recognizes the four key principles of Catholic social teaching: human dignity, common good, subsidiarity and solidarity.

Argyris (1957, p. 1) argues that healthy development involves continuing developmental progress in the following areas:

• From being passive as an infant to being active as an adult

• From being dependent to being relatively independent

• From being in a subordinate position to achieving equal or higher position than friends achieve

• From expressing few and shallow abilities to expressing many and deeper abilities.
Argyris (1957, p. 1) outlines the effect on human development when employees work in the context of a formal organization characterized by task specialization, unity of direction, chain of command, and span of control:

- Dependency
- Subordination
- Passivity to leader

Argyris (1957, p. 1) argues that the effect of dependency, subordination and passivity can be frustration, conflict, and failure for the employee and that the employee may react by:

- Regressing
- Decreasing his (sic) efficiency
- Creating informal systems against management

My observation is that Catholic religious groups are characterized by indicia of the formal organization as described by Argyris (1957, p. 1) and that it is possible to observe a correlation between the effects of dependency, subordination and passivity as named by Argyris (1957, p. 1) and the effects of contract violation described by Robinson & Morrison (2000 p. 526).

It is important to note that, laudable though the key principles of Catholic social teaching may be, these principles are subordinate to Catholic social teaching about women, as Rousseau’s (1990) comment suggests. Explaining Catholic teaching about women (by Pope John Paul II), Rousseau—a woman—supports the argument that women are ontologically incapable of performing certain leadership roles in the Catholic context (1990).
The question must be asked: what is the effect on women who work in the Catholic context when women are considered ontologically incapable of holding particular responsibilities? “Frustration, conflict and failure”? (Argyris, 1957, p. 1). And, ultimately, ill-health, according to Peterson (2004, pp. 106–124).

Peterson’s research, in the area of gender medicine, investigates the effect of workplace culture on health outcomes (2004, pp. 106–124) in order to establish what men and women value at work, how each defines a healthy workplace, and what work factors best predict their health outcomes and stress (p. 106). Peterson’s study confirms a causal link between organizational climate and increased emotional labor:

Distress and ill health can occur when one’s values do not conform to those of the organizational body. In particular, women may experience increased emotional labour, which refers to efforts to cope with emotional states and displays—both one’s own and that of others (2004, p. 108).

After clarifying that prolonged emotional labour results in emotional distress, job dissatisfaction, and a decreased sense of professionalism (2004, p. 108), Peterson concludes that both men and women define a healthy workplace “as being clean and comfortable, functioning at a manageable energy level and pace, and displaying an overall fun and friendly atmosphere” (2004, p. 120). Other characteristics of a healthy workplace include:

- Pleasant and positive environment
- Demonstration of a proper work ethic
- Reward and recognition of achievements
- Opportunities for growth and advancement
- Allowance for appropriate control and autonomy
• Fairness and equitability

• Provision of health promotion programs

Peterson observes that, although both men and women were in agreement about the seven characteristics of a healthy workplace, listed above, women research participants identified additional characteristics:

Women, however, defined a healthy workplace significantly more in terms of an environment and behaviour that demonstrate and provide support, understanding and caring, more opportunities for collaboration, greater social and co-worker cohesion, more honest communication, and a greater focus on ethics and values (2004, p. 120).

Peterson concludes that, for a workplace to be considered healthy, there must be “satisfying work relationships, opportunities for growth and advancement, control over workload and pace, recognition and respect for what has been achieved, and work-life balance” (2004, p. 120). Peterson recommends that attention be given to gender values in the workplace. The workplace culture and climate must “capitalize on gender differences” otherwise “A chronically unpleasant work experience may incur increased illness” (2004 p. 120).

As far as I can ascertain, processes designed to monitor workplace culture and climate are absent from the organizational context of the Order associated with the present research. Monitoring visitations by major superiors do not always include laywomen working in the apostolate. This means that major superiors, who may be in a position to take remedial initiatives to rectify organisational problems, hear only the ordained person’s opinion. Induction and continuing education programs undertaken by volunteers and employees are designed to “help people integrate Ignatian spirituality into their life and work” (Loyola Institute, 2010). This spiritually oriented integration may, or may not, strengthen workers’ SOC. However, as I argue below, adaptations of the Exercises, judiciously given, can strengthen individual workers’ SOC. The Organizational Examen, based on the Exercises
(proposed in Chapter 5), can sustain individual workers’ SOOA and enhance collegial collaboration.

C. Employee development programs

The need for a transformative learning process that can help women sustain a sense of coherent occupational authenticity (SOOA) in the context of traditional, hierarchical, male-dominated religious workplaces is the central theme of the present study.

My experience as an organizational consultant leads me to conclude that the aim of human-centred employment development programs must be to engage the learner in ethically guided processes with the desired outcome of strengthening all employees SOOA—an essential condition for engaging in challenging workplace contexts.

However, as Daloz notes, current employee development programs provide maps and fix roads, without necessarily developing the traveller (1999, p. xi) or, for that matter, addressing the “basic incongruencies between the growth trends of a healthy personality in our culture and the requirements of formal organization” (Argyris 1957 p. 18).

Insofar as the Catholic workplace is concerned, my observations indicate that the focus of employee development programs is to encourage employees to understand and embrace Catholic values, to provide a “map” (Daloz 1999, p. xi) for participation in Catholic activities and ministries.

Again, according to my observations, the development of the “traveller” (1999, p. xi) may, more likely, occur in the context of informal mentoring relationships—including the spiritual direction context. These relationships may be based on the assumption that an individual’s developmental needs will be satisfied by adherence to the “map” of Catholic values.

It may be argued, for example, that until the introduction of spiritual direction formation (training) programs in the 1980s, most spiritual directors learned the art of
spiritual direction from his or her own spiritual director and/or a priest (less often a woman religious) whose spiritual direction facility was recognized by colleagues and religious institutions. As Nemeck & Coombs point out, spiritual directors may even be seen as spiritual parents—spiritual direction is a unique expression of spiritual paternity/maternity, “a special instrument in the spiritual regeneration of others” (1985, p. 34).

I suggest that it is possible that Thecla (whose story is related in Chapter Three, below) saw St Paul as a spiritual father as she took up her quest of becoming, like St Paul, a preacher. Indeed, as Nemeck & Coombs acknowledge, St Paul himself refers to spiritual paternity, for example, by addressing Titus as his “child” and referring to himself as “father” to the Christian community at Corinth (Nemeck & Coombs 1985, p. 35).

In my own experience, and in the experience of a significant number of women with whom I have spoken during leadership development programs conducted on behalf of women’s religious congregations, when spiritual direction relationships become blurred with organizational mentoring relationships there is the danger that one relationship will compromise the other. My observations led me to conclude that workplace mentoring relationships in Catholic workplaces may not necessarily help women who work in these workplaces sustain a SOOA.

Because spiritual direction conversations can include in-house organizational mentoring, I now turn to Martin et al. (2002) and the discussion of formal versus informal mentoring in a secular context, in order to further illustrate the potential for compromised mentoring relationships in Catholic workplace contexts.

D. Mentoring

Martin et al. comment on the difficulty of describing the concept of mentoring: “The term in contemporary use describes a wide range of relationships including coaching, teaching, networking, advising, and evaluating” (2002). The authors note the rapid increase in interest about mentoring since the 1970s and comment that, in spite of the
myriad publications that have sought to explain mentoring, the concept is not well understood in the Army, the organizational context for the authors’ research (2002).

Martin et al. note that past research has focused on the negative aspects of mentoring and that “misunderstandings regarding mentoring goals, strategies, and implementation methods are a core problem contributing to confusion and cynicism (2002):

While one person’s idea of mentoring evokes warm feelings of positive, caring leaders who invest in subordinates’ well-being for life, another gets resentful and angry because the term conjures up images of an exclusive “old boy” network that plays favorites and advances people based predominantly on who they know and what they look like (2002).

Acknowledging that efforts have been made to improve Army training and leader development, the authors refer to the Army Mentorship Program, and cite survey results that found “disconnects between what we as an Army believe and what we do in practice” (2002). A survey presenting input from nearly 14,000 officers indicated, “Officers would like to see a greater emphasis on mentoring, but do not want formal, directed programs” (2002). Referring to the origins of the concept of mentoring, the authors recall the origins of the word mentor:

The term “mentor” is actually derived from the character named Mentor, who was a faithful friend of the Greek hero Odysseus, in Homer’s epic story, The Odyssey. When Odysseus went off to war, he left Mentor behind to serve as tutor to his son, Telemachus. Mentor served in this role, earning a reputation as being wise, sober, and loyal (2002).

Martin et al. argue that the origins of mentorship suggest that mentoring “involves a more senior or experienced person taking a substantial personal (in addition to professional) interest in a junior, less-experienced person’s future” (2002). Of particular relevance to the present study is an acknowledgement of the personal nature of mentoring:
This personal aspect is important, as the classic notion of mentorship implies a genuine fondness and respect between the mentor and the protégé. Personality, profession, life-style, personal interests, background, home, family, religion, and other such aspects all may become a part of the relationship, such that the protégé develops a profound admiration and respect for the mentor. When this mutual attraction, respect, and interest exist, then a voluntary mentoring relationship can develop in the classic understanding of the term (2002).

Nemeck & Coomb’s understanding of spiritual maternity/paternity (1985, p. 34) emphasizes the spiritual nature of this relationship. However, at a practical level, it is possible to conclude that implicit mentoring relationships in the Catholic workplace are largely congruent with the mentoring relationship described by Martin et al. (2002). I argue that the spiritual maternity/paternity relationship, as it may play out in the Catholic workplace context, needs to be explicit and, for this reason, the definition of mentorship by Martin et al. (2002) is of significance to informal mentoring relationships in the Catholic workplace.

In my view, the relationship between spiritual director and directee, established during the extended process of the Exercises, encompasses the characteristics of the mentoring relationship as articulated by Martin et al. (2000). Although, in the context of the Army, the authors advise against formal mentoring programs—preferring instead the spontaneous, “naturally occurring behavioural phenomena in some senior-subordinate relationships” (2000), I argue that, in the Catholic workplace context, these spontaneous relationships, if not clearly articulated and acknowledged, can provide opportunities for problematic workplace relationships.

As I suggest in Chapter 4, below, a significant example of the potential for compromised mentoring relationships in Catholic workplace contexts is the experience of Thecla (Elliott 1994, pp. 350–389), a legendary figure described in the Acts of Paul, dated at the end of the second century. I have drawn on Thecla’s experience throughout this study as I believe, when considered through the lens of the Exercises, that her experience is one that resonates with the experience of many women who seek to participate in Catholic ministries in the twenty-first century.
Regarding the vexed question of mentoring, Thecla’s “mentor”—the apostle Paul—does not appear to act consistently in Thecla’s best interests. For example, Paul denies any association with Thecla when questioned by Alexander (Elliott 1994, p. 369) although, until that time, Thecla was part of the small group of followers accompanying Paul on his mission to evangelise Iconium.

E. Thecla

I provide a full account of Thecla’s story in Chapter 3, below. I focus on Thecla’s story in order to illustrate how the five movements of the Exercises (orientation, evaluation, reorientation, testing and transformation) can be appropriated as an organizing framework that may be used to make sense of past and present, seemingly disparate, experience. This sense-making process invites the accumulation of a reservoir of experience, experience that has been examined for its authenticity and usefulness insofar as it helps or hinders the construction of a unified self.

For the purposes of this literature review, I have arranged the following summary of Thecla’s narrative according to the dynamic that I have identified as belonging to the Exercises. That is, orientation, evaluation, reorientation, testing and transformation.

1. Orientation to Thecla’s story
2. The event that caused Thecla to evaluate existing assumptions
3. Events that evidence Thecla’s reorientation of values and goals
4. Thecla tests reoriented values and goals
5. Transformative consequences of Thecla living according to reoriented values and goals
1. Orientation to Thecla’s story

In summary, Thecla is a second century church-worker, revered in the Eastern church and known as “Equal to the Apostles” (Carter 2000). Thecla’s story appears in the New Testament Apocrypha within the “Acts of Paul”. Her story, and indeed the New Testament Apocrypha itself, is largely unknown to the Western church although, as Carter (2000) argues, in the 1980s women scholars began to be interested in Thecla because of the connection between women’s experience and debate about women’s leadership in church contexts today.

Elliott (1994) explains in the preface to his translation of the New Testament Apocrypha,

Much has happened in the study of New Testament apocrypha in recent years. Other new gospel-type fragments have come to light and these need to be set alongside the fragments known from earlier this century. The vast find at Nag Hammadi in particular had added significantly to our knowledge of early Christian and Gnostic literature and has profoundly influenced our understanding of those early centuries when Christianity was expanding and when the bulk of our apocryphal texts had their genesis (Elliott 1993 p. ix).

Elliott (1994) acknowledges that Thecla’s story is unlikely to be historical despite mention of Queen Tryphaena of Pisidian Antioch, who is historically attested. Notwithstanding, Thecla’s story was legendary; the cult of Thecla reached a peak in the fifth century (1993 p. 353). Some commentators, for example Carter, suggest that although Thecla seems to have been an historical character, a real Thecla may have lived in Asia Minor.

2. Thecla evaluates existing assumptions: a lived experience of the first movement of the Exercises

As Elliott explains, at the time The Acts of Paul were written, Christian communities were already in existence; Paul is not founding new churches (1999 p. 357). Thecla was a Greek girl living in Iconium when she first heard the apostle Paul preaching in
the church of the house of Onesiphorus. Schussler Fiorenza notes, “the early Christian vision of the discipleship of equals practised in the house church attracted especially slaves and women to Christianity but also caused tensions and conflicts with the dominant cultural ethos of the patriarchal household” (1998 p. 251). Thecla listened to Paul preaching “day and night to the discourse of virginity” (Elliott 1999 p. 365), a topic that attracted the interest of “many women and virgins” (p. 365).

We are not told why this topic was of such interest to Thecla, who was affianced to Thamyris, a well-off Iconian, only that neither Theoclia (Thecla’s mother) or Thamyris could distract her from her preoccupation with Paul’s preaching (p. 366). Paul advocated virginity and, in doing so, disturbed a society “in which the institution of marriage (and procreation) was of fundamental importance” (de Weg in Levine 2006 p. 162). De Weg further notes that, although the authorities wanted Paul punished for advocating virginity, they were more concerned about Thecla, “the female adherent of a life of celibacy’ (p. 150) who “is condemned to death for committing the crime of discarding the customs of the Iconians” (p. 150).

It may be presumed that, until she had listened for three days (Elliott p. 366), Thecla had not previously considered any kind of life other than that which was commended by the society in which she lived. Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning would understand Thecla’s exposure to the preaching of Paul as a sudden epochal reorienting insight (Mezirow & Associates 2000 p. 21). Paul’s preaching changed the values and desires that had, up until then, influenced the frame of reference that guided Thecla’s decision-making.

3. Thecla reorients her values and goals: a lived experience of the second movement of the Exercises

Thecla’s commitment to Paul and his apostolic work was incompatible with her participation in Iconian society. This new commitment revised and reordered values and goals that had previously characterized her position in Iconian society. “Thecla, who obviously belonged to the elite social stratum, is from now on a social outcast” (de Weg p. 150). During her visit to the imprisoned Paul, Thecla “severs the ties that
bind her to her family and everything that ‘mirrors’ the world, including marriage” (de Weg p. 150).

Thecla’s “sin” was to shun the community’s expectations of a woman in favour of a vocation that was usually the prerogative of men. Heilbrun notes author Dorothy L. Sayers’ comment: “We, who now know all the facts, may well decide that it was in her sinfulness, rather than her devoutness, that her true destiny as a woman is revealed (Heilbrun 1988 p. 59). Thecla’s story illustrates the experience of many women who have recognized that the non-autonomous nature of significant choices may have compromised the freedom necessary to living in harmony with one’s authentic self.

4. Thecla tests reoriented values and goals: a lived experience of the third movement of the Exercises

Thecla’s mother, Theocleia, insisted that Thecla should be burnt, as a lesson to other women influenced by Paul’s preaching. As de Weg suggests, possibly a face-saving device to protect family honour. Theocleia would not be seen as the mother of an unruly daughter but “as laudable indication that she has the well-being of the city at heart, which is after all the goal for which each and every citizen ought to strive” (de Weg p. 151).

Thecla miraculously survives her punishment. As de Weg observes, the message of the miracle is that Thecla’s decision to relinquish her family, and Iconian law, is divinely sanctioned (1999 p. 153). This miracle is followed by Thecla’s determined declaration that she intends to pursue her (chosen) values and goals: “I will cut my hair off and I shall follow you wherever you go’ (Elliott p. 369). Paul objects, “Times are evil and you are beautiful. I am afraid lest another temptation come upon you worse than the first and that you do not withstand it but become mad after men” (Elliott p. 369). Thecla begs: “Only give me the seal in Christ, and no temptation shall touch me” but Paul hesitates, “Thecla, be patient; you shall receive the water” (p. 369).

As de Weg comments:
He not only refuses to credit Thecla with integrity, but ignoring her extraordinary achievements, he reduces her to the classical tropes of woman and/or beauty—that is, sexuality and so seduction—and thus he turns women’s option for an ascetic life into a matter of the body which is equated with her sexuality. Underlying Paul’s reaction might be the tendency to keep control over the bodies of women and the fear of women invading the male domain (2006 p. 153).

A second persecution is provoked by Thecla’s refusal to submit to the advances of a prominent citizen of Antioch. Paul refuses to acknowledge Thecla’s identity or defend her from his advances (Elliott 1999 p. 369). As de Weg notes, there may be various perspectives about this incident but the fact remains that Paul fails Thecla (de Weg p. 154). Her suitor lodges a complaint with the authorities and the governor sentences her to death by condemning her to be killed by wild beasts. Thecla requests protection in the company of another woman until her fight with the beasts and is put in the care of Queen Tryphaena, a wealthy mother grieving for her deceased daughter (Elliott p. 369). At this point in Thecla’s narrative, themes of hospitality, comfort, compassion and support emerge (de Weg 2006 p. 161).

Thecla’s second persecution is singular in that it provides the opportunity for Thecla to baptize herself: “In the name of Jesus Christ I baptize myself on my last day” (Elliott 1999 p. 370) and, when questioned, to declare her identity: “I am a servant of the living God, and, as to what there is about me, I have believed in the Son of God in whom he is well pleased” (Elliott p. 371). When Thecla survives this second persecution, Queen Tryphaena consigns everything she owns to Thecla, thus ensuring Thecla’s independence.

5. Thecla’s transformation: a lived experience of the fourth movement of the Exercises

Following her second miraculous escape from death, Thecla was cared for by Queen Tryphaena and commenced her work as an apostle in the Queen’s house. She visited Paul, who was astonished to see her. He imagined “some new temptation was
coming upon her” (Elliott 1999 p. 371). Paul listened to her story before she took her leave, saying, “I am going to Iconium” (p. 371). It must be supposed that she means she is going to Iconium to work as an apostle. Paul “commissions” her: “Go, and teach the word of God” (p. 372). After visiting her mother she traveled to Seleucia where she “enlightened many by the word of God” (p. 372). De Weg comments, “Such moments express a form of autonomy and may offer the encouragement that women are indeed capable of detaching themselves from the societal norms/values they are expected to embody” (2006 p. 162).

Of special relevance to the present study is de Weg’s footnote: “‘Confirmed’ is the right term, because just as she made her own choice, unlocked doors for herself, defended herself, and baptized herself, she already taught the word of God and made converts” (2006 p. 162).

This developmental sequence resonates with the dynamic I have identified as belonging to the Exercises. Evaluation of existing assumptions and choice of new values and goals is an iterative process. Testing is therefore a testing of the initial evaluation of assumptions and newly incorporated—transformed—values and goals.

As de Weg notes,

In short, (Thecla) will be on her own and suffer. Nonetheless, the story conveys, she may endure and survive. God will be on her side: women as God’s agents work miracles and/or offer (mental and material) support. All of this might lead to what is told in the last paragraphs of the Acts of Thecla. Thecla, representing such a woman, is validated by the civil and religious authorities (i.e. the governor and the apostle) . . . and confirmed and commissioned to teach the word of God.

6. Importance of Thecla’s story for women today

Thecla’s story is perhaps the most effective narrative I have chosen to include in my spiritual direction work with individual women and women’s groups. I cannot remember an occasion when this narrative has not provoked deep exploration into
assumptions and habits of mind belonging to women who seek greater participation in the organization of the Church.

It is my experience of incorporating Thecla’s story in my spiritual direction work and the indication that this story elicits strong evaluative responses from women who encounter gender discrimination in Catholic workplaces, that recommended the inclusion of this story in the research process.

As one research group participant said of Thecla’s narrative:

Thecla’s story helps me see my own existence from a different perspective . . . I catch myself thinking . . . “What would Thecla think about this?” I suppose it’s a bit like the evangelical “What would Jesus do?” But I think Thecla’s experience is more like mine than Jesus’ experience . . . he didn’t have the problem of being a woman working in the Church . . . (participant E).

Levine, commenting on other historical and apocryphal female figures, points out the usefulness of such stories for women by referring to Jacobs’ insight that “the heroines of the Acts represent neither historical reality nor empty rhetoric but rather serve as ‘discursive construction’ by which women could ‘reconceptualize their own moral agency’ . . . The prescriptive texts thus become descriptive. Women readers could, and did, use Drusiana and Cleopatra to ‘think with’” (Levine 2006 p. 2).

Thecla’s story serves as a device that enables women to critique our own experience as we attempt to maintain SOOA in the Catholic workplace. As I describe in Chapter 3, below, I present Thecla’s story to research group participants as such a device for critiquing experience.

**F. Emilia**

Thecla has been a close companion during this research journey. My second companion on the research journey is a young Italian woman, Emilia. Italian feminist Adriana Cavarero (2000) presents a true story about two women, Emilia and Amalia,
an account originally included in “Non credere di avere dei diritti” (Cavarero 2000, p. 55) published in English under the title “Sexual Difference: the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective” (Cavarero 2000, p. 65), and subsequently referenced by de Laurentis (1990, pp. 1 - 21).

I have included Emilia’s story in this literature review because her confusion and narrative disorganization epitomize the experience of many women who participate in spiritual direction and the Exercises. For many of these women, linking discrete experiences into a flexible yet coherent, authentic narrative seems impossible.

Just as the protagonist in this story, Emilia, attempts to find narrative solidity by repeating again and again the story of her life to her friend Amalia, beginning spiritual direction sessions are often dominated by disorganized recollections of discrete experiences and encounters.

Emilia is described as “the person with the heaviest burden of problems to bear. Her life had been spent ‘without even the smallest satisfaction,’ and now she was married, poor, and childless. Emilia evaluates her life in conversation with Amalia: ‘My life has always been a no’” (de Laurentis 1990 p. 105).

Amalia, one of Emilia’s work colleagues, better educated than Emilia and tired of hearing Emilia’s story so frequently, decided to write the story of Emilia’s life on paper (p. 55). Cavarero notes,

Amalia and Emilia . . . are two friends. The first writes the story of the second because Emilia had continually recounted her story, in the most disorganized way, showing her friend her stubborn desire for narration. The gift of the written story is precisely Amalia’s response to this desire. Now Emilia can carry the text of her story with her and reread it continuously—moved every time by her own identity, made tangible by the tale (Cavarero p. 56).

As de Laurentis notes, “A close relationship developed between the two women, one wholly centred on writing, because Emilia needed to organize her thoughts and Amalia had the gift of expressing things well, both orally and in writing” (1990 p. 105).
Amalia could tell Emilia about her life, but Emilia lacked this autobiographical capacity. Amalia explains Emilia’s need: “She too needs to tell about her life, ‘but she wasn’t able to connect any of it up, and so she let herself go’” (1990 p. 106). Although Amalia found Emilia’s repetition irritating, Amalia looks back on their friendship after Emilia’s death and comments,

\[
\ldots\text{that woman really understood things; she wrote a lot of sentences that were unconnected with each other but were very profound and true. She underestimated herself only because she couldn’t connect her thoughts properly in writing (1990 p. 106).}
\]

Emilia’s written story makes her identity tangible (Cavarero 2000 p. 56). She knows that “a life about which a story cannot be told risks remaining a mere empirical existence, or rather an intolerable sequence of events” (p. 56). Cavarero speculates that Emilia, as happens with many women in Italy (and elsewhere), has probably had the domestic scene as the setting for her existence. If the principle—according to which the unexposable is the non-existent—is valid, then Emilia has lived a life in which her uniqueness has remained partially unexposed due to the lack of a shared scene of co-appearance [comparizione], the lack of a true political space (p. 57).

Recognizing that life-shaping choices can be non-autonomous is not enough. Emilia’s story illustrates the connection between autobiographical narration and participation in what Cavarero describes as “the plural and interactive space of exhibition . . . where uniqueness can be exhibited” (p. 57). Cavarero proposes,

\[
\text{The life-story, having come into its own tale, puts into words an identity—at the same time and in the same context in which the women present generate a political space that finally exposes them} (p. 59).
\]

Emilia’s story reflects women’s experience in Italy of the 1970s and it would be unwise to make generalizations based on her story in light of women’s experience in the twenty-first century Australian Catholic workplace. However, while particular cultural distinctions may discount generalization, Emilia’s story indicates the relationship between narrative and identity. Prior to Amalia’s gift of her (written)
narrative, a “connection of thoughts that saves one from letting herself go” (de Laurentis 1990 p. 106), Emilia was lacking that which Shusterman implies is imperative: “narrative, solidarity, and coherence” (Archer 2000 p. 40).

Emilia’s story does not include a description of the effect of her written narrative on her workplace experience. We simply know that she carried the “text of her story with her and reread it continuously—moved every time by her own identity, made tangible by the tale” (Cavarero p. 56). Nevertheless, in my experience as a spiritual director, I have frequently noticed that a woman’s newly narrated tangible identity affects her workplace experience. Germane to the present study is that a sense of coherent, narratable identity seems to enable women to “maintain our integrity by keeping our personal and our social identities in alignment” (Archer 2000, p. 305).

The argument presented by Shusterman (Archer 2000, p. 40) implies that, in order to collaborate effectively with others, a sense of narrative coherence is essential. The woman who cannot draw the events and experiences of her life into some kind of narrative coherence may be disadvantaged in her efforts to work collaboratively with others.

I suggest that women’s lack of narrative coherence contributes to the (albeit perhaps, unconsciously) adopted default position wherein experience is defined by dominant others rather than second order articulations of values and aspirations that have been considered, evaluated, prioritized and appropriated with conscious reference to consequences for the self and others.

The consequences of consciously or unconsciously adopting such a default position in the workplace include the possibility that women can take up roles in response to the expectations of others rather than because these roles reflect alignment between our personal and social identities; an alignment, I would argue, that is an essential condition of effective collegial collaboration.

The consequences of non-alignment between a woman’s personal and social identities, and the consequences for workplace participation, are illustrated in the following account of Alice Koller’s (1981; 1990) experience of gathering the
fragments of her life experience together in order to gain a sense of narrative identity that will allow her to test ‘. . . potential or ongoing commitments’ (Archer 2000, p. 228) against the unexamined ‘emotional commentaries’ (2000, p. 228) that have determined her life trajectory.
My third companion on the research journey is essayist Alice Koller (1981; 1990). I have chosen to include Koller’s narrative in the present study because her experience offers insights into women’s self-directed attempts to articulate and reorient our stance towards our physical wellbeing, our performative achievement and our self-worth (Archer 2000, p. 228).

As is clear from Koller’s account, women’s pursuit of narrative solidity begins with the evaluation of assumptions consequent on relationships and decisions that have brought one to one’s present circumstances. Koller’s experience suggests that this evaluative process depends on access to a felicitous space wherein we may find the freedom necessary for the project of making our own purposes clear to ourselves (Koller 1991 p. 49). For Koller, this space is an isolated cottage on Nantucket Island off the east coast of the United States of America.

Koller’s autobiography begins with the striking image of existence as perching rather than living (p. 1). It seems that her age and appearance have alerted her to the precariousness of her existence, an existence that isn’t validated by partnership, regular income and material possessions. Koller describes her employment as a “little busy-work job” yet admits she hasn’t tried to find a more satisfying job, one that would put her education to satisfying use. Instead, Koller tries to turn her dissatisfying job into a permanent connection (p. 2). Koller concludes: “I must have something certain in all this flux; no career, no home, no man” (p. 2).

A friend of Koller’s has recently inquired about what sustained her as she studied for her PhD; Koller is surprised that her friend imagines that being sustained is something people have the right to expect (p. 2). Koller describes herself as having arrived “at this outermost edge of my life by my own actions. Where I am is thoroughly unacceptable. Therefore, I must stop doing what I’ve been doing. And I can’t stop doing it until I know what I do” (p. 17). Koller admits:

I don’t have a life. I’m just using up a number of days somehow. There is no reason for me to be here. No plan formulated at some point in the past has led
me to this void that is my day, every day. No obligation to anyone requires me to live in this apartment, or in this city. I don’t live anywhere: I perch (Koller 1981 p. 1).

Koller understands that “each thing I do during the course of a day is something I’ve been told to do, or taught to do” (1981 p. 17) and that an extended separation from familiar people and places would be essential to the project of learning to make choices for herself. She rents a small cottage on Nantucket Island, south of Cape Cod in the Atlantic Ocean. The year is 1962, winter. Her purpose is to understand her past in order to “chart a fresh life” (1990 p. 2). This new life must include employment, yet employment would not necessarily be seen as an end in itself. Rather, as Koller notes, employment may fund real work:

Work is a world apart from jobs. Work is the way you occupy your mind and hand and eye and whole body when they’re informed by your imagination and wit, by your keenest perceptions, by your most profound reflections on everything you’ve read and seen and heard and been part of (1991 p. 42).

Koller’s record of her life-changing, solitary three-month journey was published in 1968 at the beginning of the women’s movement. An Unknown Woman was read three times in its entirety over National Public Radio in Washington, D.C. Listeners responded by deluging the station with requests for copies of the book” (1981). Koller’s “pre-Nantucket” bibliographic details read:

Alice Koller has worked as a typist, technician, salesclerk, and model. Before graduating from college, she studied acting at the Goodman Memorial Theatre in Chicago, was offered a contract with Universal Studios (which she turned down), and was a Guest Managing Editor of the August 1948 issue of Mademoiselle. She attended the University of Chicago and received a doctorate in philosophy from Harvard. While in graduate school she taught at Tufts and Harvard, and later at the University of California at Santa Barbara (1981, dust jacket).
“Post-Nantucket”, Koller’s bibliography reflects changes effected as a consequence of the Nantucket evaluation process: “She currently lives in McLean, Virginia, where she works as a free-lance writer and editor in the areas of energy, the environment, and biochemical research” (1981, dust jacket).

For the purposes of the present study, it is interesting to note that Koller sees her three months on Nantucket as a period of evaluation:

An inward journey lasting three months had altered the entire vision of the world that thirty-seven years had heaped over me. That journey was an unguided one between two unknown points: what I was when I undertook it, and what I could become (1990 p. 48).

Only in retrospect (after her sojourn on Nantucket) could Koller stand back from her experiences on Nantucket in order to understand the consequences of this prolonged evaluation:

Only afterward, when I was joyously in the thick of the new life I was daily designing, tailoring ever more closely to my own contours, did I try to piece together the path that led me from Nantucket to where I then stood. To understand how I had gotten from there to here, I sat down to my typewriter and wrote my thinking (1990 p. 3).

Koller’s subsequent reflection on her three-month retreat on Nantucket Island, Stations of Solitude (1991) shows a woman with clear purpose:

Writing, I do the only work I’m willing to do for its own sake. That it now supports me is a purpose I had in mind for it when I undertook it, but that purpose was not primary. Indeed, if I had written only to earn money, I think that no part of my life would be what it is today (1990 p. 361).

Koller’s evaluation of her life circumstances ultimately resulted in resolution of the disorganization she experienced before her time on Nantucket Island: “No career, no home, no man” (1981 p. 2).
I had to find the beginning, and the ending, and then fill in all the gaps, in an otherwise perfectly connected series of events. Imperfectly connected, because connected merely by temporal next-ness: this, then this, then that. I needed to organize, lay a grid on, the unrefined date of memories and wantings and despairings that I stumbled upon, that I deliberately dredged up, that I forced myself to examine, when I undertook the process of coming to know myself (1991 p. 49).

Women’s paperback self-discovery stories abound. However, Koller’s account of her time of solitude on Nantucket Island is robust with reflective insight and unadorned fact. Koller subsequently commented on the challenge of writing the manuscript that was to become published as An Unknown Woman: “I was calling on myself to show what my world felt like at a time when I did not feel my world . . . It was a time during which my insight into my feelings was not part of my sense of myself” (1991 p. 65). Koller comments that Nantucket was a time for “making my own purposes clear to myself” (1991 pp. 49-50).

Koller’s pursuit of a “life that will make sense of all the other ones” is entirely self-directed. As she sets out for Nantucket and solitude Koller notes, “I am closed off into myself and no-one but me can ever help me get out” (1981 p. 11).

Evaluation of her life led Koller to conclude that the task ahead would mean “fighting to break out of the pattern of what I’ve been doing . . . told or taught to do” (p. 17). Koller understands that she must begin to make choices for herself: “I have to learn how to choose one thing over another, one way of doing something over another way . . . want one thing, or one way, more than another” (p. 17). Initially, Koller is sure of little else other than her sense of colour (p. 17).

Koller senses that this evaluative process needs solitude:

If I could only go away somewhere. Somewhere quiet, without traffic or factories. Somewhere where I can be really alone, so that I don’t have to be pleasant to people all day long, so that I don’t even have to see other faces
when I walk outside my door. Somewhere where I don’t have to do anything but think all day long (1981 p. 2).

Koller’s decision to separate herself from other people reflects the lived experience of many women. Until Nantucket, Koller had “patched together a life from the leavings of others” (1990 p. 5). “I have turned other people into mirrors for me. I look at other people in order to see myself” (p. 69). Solitude is an opportunity to become “aware of the fullness of your own presence rather than the absence of others . . . deliberately observing and reflecting on your own doings and inclinations, then committing yourself to them for precisely these reasons” (p. 4). Although Koller had experienced a reflective process as part of a previous therapeutic process, on Nantucket introspection is not a discrete activity but one that “expands to encompass the day” (1981 p. 61). Koller believes such observation and reflection is impossible in the company of others:

(F)amiliar people and circumstances cushion you, make it easier to keep on pretending that you have no purchase on the matters you are trying (you tell yourself) to learn the truth about (1991 p. 21).

Koller approached the evaluation of her life by examining relationships and events that had brought her to this dissatisfying point in her life. Her method was to understand and clarify the purposes that had shaped her life. “Purposes constituted the ordering principle, the thread that strung together events seeming to have occurred at random, connecting them perfectly” (1991 p. 49).

Koller notes the importance of understanding one’s own purposes:

Once you know why you awaken, the hours of the day become subservient to that purpose, those purposes. It is an inherent consequence of a purpose: that it shapes your time. The question is only: whose shaping will you permit? Either you know your own purposes, or you will in your ignorance allow your life to be carved away, slice by fine slice, pursuing the purposes of others. You may be aware, acutely or with hazy vision, that your life is being lived for someone else’s purpose (1991 p. 40).
And explains that being clear about her own purpose or purposes allows her to grasp the purposes of others, a point that is particularly relevant to the argument of the present study:

Not that you project your purposes onto someone else, but rather, knowing what you intend, you don’t get in your own way when you observe others, listen to them, talk to them, to see what they intend. And you must understand the purposes of others: if you understand only your own, you’d continually collide with theirs (1991 p. 49).

Koller identified and clarified her purposes during her time on Nantucket Island. “For the process of coming to know oneself, the tool that lends structure is understanding: we can, we must, make our purposes clear to ourselves” (1991 p. 50).

Koller remarks on the consequences of learning to choose according to her own purposes, and act confidently in the accomplishment of those purposes:

No sign of submission, in the eyes of most men; too assured, in the view of most women; not properly respectful, to the gaze of all those in authority. I have become that third gender: a human person, the being one creates of oneself. I fell in love with my work, became fiercely protective of my freedom, started to make new rules (1991 p. 23).

Creating oneself takes time, as Koller notes:

On Nantucket the central thing I learned about myself was that I didn’t know what my feelings were. It took another whole year after leaving Nantucket for me to learn how to recognize, and then trust, the spontaneity of my feelings, and, with the light they shed, to learn what wanting is. At least one more year passed before I understood what I wanted (1991 p. 64).

Koller has written the account of her experience on Nantucket primarily for her own purposes. Using her training as a philosopher, she thinks about her own experience
through writing about it. As Koller acknowledges, the account of her experience on Nantucket is her “highly personal account of the way I have chosen to live, and of the consequences, only some of which were predictable, of my choices” (1991 p. 67). Koller understands her account to be “a philosophical inquiry into what it is to be a person: how one becomes a person, and what it is that one has become” (1991 p. 67).

Koller’s self-inquiry process led to an increased ability to grasp both her own and others’ purpose, a necessary condition for the collegial workplace, one which reflects Archer’s question: “How can one speak of making commitments, which by definition are not fleeting, without someone who has sufficient continuity to sustain them?” (2000, p. 40). Koller’s evaluative process situated her so that she could better integrate her personal and social identities (2000, p. 305).

**H. Ellsworth**

My fourth companion on the research journey is academic and activist Elizabeth Ellsworth. I have chosen to include Ellsworth’s narrative in the present study because her experience clarifies the relationship between solitude, narrative solidity and agency. Ellsworth’s essay appears in Wear’s collection of essays titled *The Centre of the Web* (1993).

Ellsworth describes her paper as an exploration of “the relation of solitude and the body to the process of getting tenure” (1993 p. 64). Drawing on autobiographical stories . . . interwoven with an analysis of the institutions of higher education and tenure” (p. 64) Ellsworth seeks solitude as a way to “acknowledge, confront, and nurture” a life that is “different from the academy’s template for its inhabitants” (p. xv).

Ellsworth notes, “I am writing from a place (scholar, tenured) still not intended for me” (p. 64). She describes the characteristics and requirements of a person traditionally accepted for tenure and how these requirements differ from her own (feminist) approach to research (pp. 65–67). Following these comparative observations, Ellsworth’s essay shifts (suddenly, without introduction) to a
description of a “tiny platform retreat” (p. 67), constructed by herself, where she begins to make notations in a journal about her relationship with the academy:

How to be there? Why to be there? How to relate to it in ways that support my life and my social and political identities? These were now questions of life and death (p. 67).

Building the platform challenged Ellsworth’s confidence in her physical capacity since a previous experience of heart palpitations. These had only disappeared when she took sick leave from her academic workplace:

I knew what had finally made them go away . . . not going into school for ten days after seven years of never taking a sick day, seven years of running the tenure track; crying more in ten days than I had in the last thirty-eight years altogether; seeing, for the first time, the March birds that had been coming to the feeder all along; and deciding, without question, that I would not kill myself—literally or symbolically—to get tenure (p. 67).

Ellsworth explains that a “profound reordering of my priorities” (p. 67) resolved the heart palpitations:

My breath, my heart and my heart’s desires, would now come first. Building the platform retreat was the first physical manifestation of this shift, casting a space in the world where I would go to hear my breath and my heart (pp. 67-68).

The solitude of the platform retreat provides Ellsworth with a “site of creation” (p. 5); space that allows her to re-conceptualize her participation in the academy. Ellsworth wishes to participate in the whole of life in a political way and realizes that political participation depends on her self-esteem coming from many places, not just work (Wear 1993 p. 72). Ellsworth concludes,

Find solitude, introspection, contemplation elsewhere, and pursue it not only in the service of my academic work—but for myself, women’s communities,
for participating meaningfully in creative self-representation of lesbians and other marginalized groups. Find “intrinsic worth” and “immanent values” elsewhere—in the spirit—the earth—my relationships with others. Be valued by others for honesty, for taking action out of what is true for me in the moment—as much as I can tell from my body, heart, mind, spirit, not for being The One with The (Original) Answers. Support my capabilities and power of self by growing across many places (Wear 1993 p. 72).

The platform retreat becomes “the construction site for knowings that are different from the academy’s . . . often challenging to or unsettling to the academy’s” (p. 73). It is in this place that Ellsworth hears a different voice, her own, but a “voice that is different . . . that often questions, de-centres, disturbs and rewrites . . . a voice that I have constructed and known only through solitude” (p. 73). Ellsworth’s academic self becomes “one among my many selves—not ‘the One Self’” (p. 73).

Solitude spares Ellsworth “the readings and constructions that would be made of me and my actions by others and by institutions” (p. 73), and allows her to “temporarily ignore the narratives others might be wanting or expecting me to live out” (p. 74), to “write words that I recognize” (p. 74).

Preacher Thecla, factory worker Emilia, essayist Koller and feminist, professor, activist, writer Ellsworth: four companions over the course of the present study whose searching has energized and inspired my researching. Their experience (whether apocryphal or factual) and the experiences of research participants, has directed my reading throughout the course of this study. Their narratives background the question at the heart of my research, a question put by Archer, who asks, “How can one speak of making commitments, which, by definition are not fleeting, without someone who has sufficient continuity to sustain them?” (Archer 2000, p. 40).

Archer’s questioning stance asks other, related, questions: When is continuity sufficient? What is the effect of insufficient continuity in the context of the collaborative workplace? What workplace opportunities might build continuity? Conversely, what workplace experience might interrupt continuity? Perhaps, most importantly, what is the nature of the workplace, its values and hierarchies?
I extend this literature review by clarifying the distinction between social and investment organizations, then I focus the discussion on women’s experience in the workplace, and women’s experience of the Catholic workplace, in particular.

In the pages that follow, I discuss particular challenges for women who work in the Catholic context. I acknowledge the satisfaction this work may provide, and the stress that can be experienced when women’s often deeply spiritual motivation for choosing to work in the Catholic context is at odds with an increasing emphasis on financial success. I argue that dissonance between personal spiritual motivation and organizational investment principles can result in significant workplace stress.

I refer to literature describing the experience of workplace contract violation in order to describe the potential effects of workplace stress. I present a brief overview of current trends in human resource development in order to explore opportunities for sustaining workplace resilience and indicate the absence of developmental programs that may better equip women to participate in organizations that are ordered according to traditional, male, hierarchical imperatives.

I. Social and investment organizations: a distinction

More than five decades ago, writer, researcher and teacher Argyris questioned the possibility that individual employees and organizations can attain mutually satisfying goals (1957 pp. 1-24). Argyris notes,

If formal organization is defined by the use of such principles as task specialization, unity of direction, chain of command and span of control, then employees work in a situation in which they tend to be dependent, subordinate, and passive to a leader. This type of situation may create frustration, conflict, and failure for the employee (p. 1).

More recently, Argyris has noted that his “first fundamental interest has been the notion of justice and then, after that, the notion of truth (Fulmer & Keys 1998 p. 21). These values are apparent as Argyris lists the requirements of tomorrow’s
organizations, noting the relationship between corporate productivity and employee relations. Argyris argues that tomorrow’s organizations require employees who:

(1) do not fear stating their complete views, (2) value and seek to integrate their contributions into a creative total (3) rather than needing to be individually rewarded, thus (4) finding the search for valid knowledge and the development of the best possible solutions (p. 31).

Argyris named these requirements prior to the advent of organizational globalization, a shift that is considered to be “the most fundamental redesign of the planet’s political and economic dealings since the Industrial Revolution” (Bierema 2000 p. 278, citing Mander, 1996). Bierema believes that “the human has gotten lost in the global rush to dominate commerce” (2000 p. 278). Bierema’s essay was written prior to the global financial crisis; however, she understands that this phenomenon is on the horizon (p. 280). Taking this recent economic shift into account, Kindleberger comments, “The past four decades have been the most tumultuous in monetary history and today the world is facing what is arguably being referred to as the worst financial crisis since the great depression” (in press).

Bierema notes the consequences of globalization and the accompanying corporate dominance:

Today’s corporation enjoys more legal rights than individual citizens, although this fact goes almost unnoticed by the populace. Corporate interests regularly prevail over human interests in corporate life. Corporations cater to investors, court customers, pursue suppliers of materials and natural resources, and seek global dominance (2000 p. 278).

Success is measured according to productivity gains, market share, return on investment, intellectual capital and performance improvement. Employee development is seen as investment in human capital (p. 281). Korten, as cited in Bierema (2000 p. 282), acknowledges the impact of globalization on employees, that there is a “serious disconnect between your own values and the realities of life in many of the corporations in which you work” (1996 p. 1).
Bierema notes that globalization has caused a significant shift in the way corporations are viewed. Corporations are now seen as *investment organizations* instead of *social organizations* (2000 p. 281, italics mine). For the purposes of the present study, I have drawn on Bierema’s distinction between social and investment organizations in order to describe the changed workplace experience of employees who work in organizations dedicated to promoting human development and wellbeing.

Throughout the remainder of this study I refer to “social organizations” as organizations that are human-centred, from both employee and client perspectives. I will refer to “investment organizations” as organizations that prioritize profitability. The present study focuses on a Catholic male religious order—an organization with espoused values that are congruent with human-centred social organizations.

During the period 2006–2008, when I was employed by the Order referenced throughout this study, I observed that fiscal management, including budget administration, was handed to an executive who had previously worked in the investment sector. The employee held the position of chief financial officer and was tasked with the responsibility of stabilizing investments and monitoring organizational expenditure. I, and other staff, discussed the growing corporatization of the organization (personal communication with “M”, 11 April 2006).

As Bierema points out, corporations cater to investors, court customers, pursue suppliers of materials and natural resources, and seek global dominance (2000 p. 278). Corporate, or investment, priorities are not compatible with social priorities. The discrepancy between investment and social values is evident, for example, in advice published by the Certified Practising Accountants, Australia (CPA). CPA (2010) offers a list of recommendations to not-for-profit organizations designed to soften the impact of the global economic crisis. Points of relevance to the present study are summarized as follows

- reward behaviour of staff that improves cash flow
• manage staff and volunteers by using codes of conduct that articulate the entity’s values, supported by sanctions for any breaches of the codes

• Spend time selecting staff and volunteers with values similar to those of the organization and get an ongoing commitment to those values

• Look out for signs of stress in volunteers as the economic environment affects them and their families

• Consideration of reducing the size of the workforce, or alternatives such as reducing hours.

Investment prioritizing can compete with the priorities of employees who have joined the organization in order to contribute to and promote human-centred values. In the specific context of Catholic organizations, competition for resources within this formally structured traditional context creates a significant conflict between the needs of individuals (employees and clients) and the requirements of the formal organization.

As Argyris (1957 p. 18) notes, principles belonging to formal organizations create working environments that are not congruent with the growth trends of a healthy personality. Agyris (1957 p. 18) lists characteristics that may be observed in employees who work in a formal hierarchical organization:

• They are provided minimal control over their work-a-day world

• They are expected to be passive, dependent, subordinate

• They are expected to have a short-time perspective

• They are induced to perfect and value the frequent use of a few superficial abilities
They are expected to produce under conditions leading to psychological failure.

Argyris’ (1957) last point is particularly pertinent to employees who are motivated by altruistic goals but who are employed within clerically governed investment structures.

Employees working in the Catholic context are often motivated by a deep personal commitment to values articulated by the Christian gospels. With few exceptions, employees working in the particular context of the Catholic spirituality ministry, as spiritual directors and or formators (educators), define themselves in terms of these values. Commitment by these employees to the ministry is a direct consequence of commitment to the spirituality and practical implications of Gospel values.

There is an absence of literature addressing laywomen’s experience of working for Catholic organizations and the potential for psychological failure when social ideals are overridden by investment priorities. However, I argue that literature belonging to occupational science can help explicate the link between workplace stress and psychological failure.

I draw on this literature in support of my understanding that an employee can encounter conditions leading to psychological failure when “investment” priorities override the social priorities that originally attracted the employee to work in the particular organizational context.

The hierarchical, male, formal organization typical of the Catholic work context has been historically challenging for laywomen. Globalization and the recent global economic crisis have intensified these challenges, just as women were finding ways of participating more robustly at leadership level in Catholic organizations. I continue this literature review by outlining the situation of women’s participation in the workforce in general before focusing on women’s participation in the Catholic Church in particular. I then explain the effect on women of working according to
social organization values in workplaces governed by investment organization imperatives.

**J. Women and the workforce**

Women’s participation in the workforce continues to be dogged by gender issues. The most recent survey by EOWA (Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency) notes that the number of women engaged in high level leadership in Australia is decreasing: “the number of women on boards and in executive management positions has declined since 2006, and in some cases reverted to pre-2004 levels. Australia now trails the USA, UK, South Africa and New Zealand” (EOWA Media Release 2008 p. 1).

The EOWA 2008 survey describes the pace at which women are advancing into senior leadership roles in corporate Australia as “glacial”:

Disappointingly, the 2008 Census reveals that across all indicators, the proportion of women to men on corporate boards and in executive leadership roles has declined since 2006. On these measures, Australia has now fallen behind the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and South Africa (EOWA).

The continuing exclusion of women from leadership and other positions of responsibility illustrates Argyris & Schon’s (1994) argument that espoused theories of action, for example, “genuine involvement of women in consultation and decision making in our Jesuit ministries”—a determination espoused by the religious order during General Congregation 34, 1995—compete with reactionary theories-in-use, for example: “men have been emasculated by women’s rise up the corporate and political ladder” (Gatrell & Cooper, 2007 p. 57).

Launching the 2008 Census of Women in Leadership, EOWA Director Anna McPhee laments, “The recognised pipeline to CEO and board positions has got narrower and women are clustered in support roles” (McPhee, 2008). McPhee
continues, “Somewhat incredulously 91 companies out of 200 do not have any senior female executives. 54.5% of companies have at least one” (McPhee 2008).

McPhee notes that the declining numbers of women executives and board members may be explained by changing business trends: “the changing population of the census and the increased representation of material and energy companies, traditionally male dominated. Another is the shrinking size of executive management teams (McPhee 2008). However, McPhee adds a further reason for the decreasing number of women executives and board members, that of “the underlying and pervasive bias against difference” (McPhee 2008).

EOWA survey results for 2008 are supported more recently by accounts of women’s workplace experience at the executive level:

The numbers say it all. Only 1 of every 15 boardroom seats in the FTSE 100 companies is occupied by a woman. And there are worrying signs that this tiny representation is shrinking even further. The percentage of board seats held by women has gone backwards in the last four years (Caro 2010).

Smith (male) CEO of ANZ Bank, comments:

(M)ost Caucasian men have never had the experience of being in a minority in business and in the Western World, and we need to be kept honest around diversity and aware of what it is like to be a minority in this environment (EOWA 2008).

Smith challenges women, too, to adapt to the business environment:

Often women will need to work and succeed in organisations where single-minded, logical, and even aggressive male styles are the dominant paradigm. Given this, women need to decide how far they go aligning and adapting themselves to this environment while still remaining true to themselves and not losing the broadness of thinking that they bring to the table (EOWA 2008).
Smith reminds his audience that, at the beginning of 2008, ANZ launched the ANZ Global Women’s Network, identifying five priorities for action:

- diversity must be understood as a business imperative and linked to business results;
- real accountabilities with consequences for senior management who are not ‘walking the talk’ in regard to supporting and promoting women;
- helping people who seek and access flexibility to also be seen as committed and career-oriented;
- establishing formal and informal mentoring and support of women to build women’s self-confidence and promotional opportunities; and
- supporting women’s confidence and encouraging self promotion to enable women to more successfully advance.

Smith (2008) approaches the question of women’s equality from an investment perspective; his argument relies on principles governed by profit. Smith’s logic bears a message for women who volunteer or who are employed within social organizational contexts, for example, the Catholic Church; after all, the Catholic workplace is not immune from secular chauvinism. Women appear to be caught between two unpalatable options: conform to the “aggressive male styles” (Smith, 2008) of the male dominated workplace—or stay home.

Describing women’s workplace experience in the United States, Bilimoria & Piderit note:

Women managers, no matter how well-qualified and hard working, continue to be excluded from senior and executive roles due to discriminatory attitudes
on the part of employers. We also suggest that the exclusion of women managers from top-level roles has a negative impact on their well-being” (2007 p. 58).

Gatrell & Cooper refer to a report published in The Economist (2005) that indicates 46% of America’s workforce is female but less than 10% of these women occupy top management roles (Bilimoria & Piderit 2007 p. 59). Women experience similar workplace stressors to those experienced by men (long hours, short-term contracts, work-overload). However, “women managers face additional stress-related problems due to their gender” (2007 p. 59). Bilimoria & Piderit attribute this significant source of stress to social resistance to women (p. 59). Women managers “are likely to experience the frustration of tokenism, the ‘maternal wall’ and exclusion from male networks” (2007 p. 59).

EOWA’s Census finds that “women who do make it to executive roles are overwhelmingly clustered in support roles that don’t provide access to the profit-and-loss or direct client services that are widely considered essential for rising to the top” (2008 p. 1). EOWA Director McPhee notes, “At the 2006 Census we described the pace of change as glacial, in 2008 the results show that women’s progress is melting away” (2008 p. 2).

EOWA’s women in the workforce ‘Trend Data’ gathered in 2008 indicates the percentage of managers that are women (29.8%), the percentage of women managers that are part-time (23.4%), the percentage of female employees that are full-time (55.4%), the percentage of professionals that are women (50.9%) and the percentage of the labour force that are women (45.6%).

Gatrell & Cooper acknowledge a backlash against women’s equality by quoting UK BBC television reporter Michael Buerk’s call for men’s equality to be reinstated. Buerk suggests that “women increasingly set the agenda in business . . . and in society at large, [and] women’s values are now considered superior to men’s values” (Gatrell & Cooper 2007 p. 57 citing Gibson, 2005).

As Gatrell & Cooper indicate,
“women who defy the traditional female gender path by taking on leadership roles at work may find themselves excluded and criticized, which makes their situation stressful because society believes “ . . . that all working women are violating the normative assumptions of the role of women . . . simply by choosing to be employed” (2007 p. 66, citing Desmarais & Alksnis 2005 p. 459).

Gatrell & Cooper explain a particular reaction to competency demonstrated by women in the workplace:

“women who exhibit characteristics associated with male managers may, instead of being praised for their decisiveness and their ability to “pursue their objectives in a vigorous manner” be labeled “bossy” or “nagging”, where a male manager would be more likely to be praised for his “leadership qualities” (2007 p. 66, citing Cooper & Davidson 1982 p. 36).

Literature authored by Bierema (2000), Argyris (1957; 1998), the EOWA (2008, 2010) and Gatrell & Cooper (2007) call attention to women’s workplace challenges. I summarize these challenges below:

- Globalization has seen a shift in organizational values from social to investment; social organizations are human-centred, whereas investment organizations are investment focused.

- The shift from social to investment motivations reduces the possibility that organizations will willingly balance employee needs with corporate success

- Employees attracted to the organization by the apparent congruence between spiritual/religious beliefs and the goals of the organization are exposed to significant pressure to prioritize investment imperatives
• Women, well represented in the health, education and spirituality ministry sectors, are expected to provide human-centred services according to investment drives and measurements

• Investment principles determine organizational performance yet women can be criticized when we perform according to these principles

I have drawn on the literature describing women’s experience in the (secular) workplace in order to emphasize the challenges inherent in working with an organization that expects employees to offer human-centred services according to investment priorities. I will now discuss the particular context of women’s participatory experience in the Catholic context.

K. Women and the Catholic workplace

The present study builds on and departs from an earlier research project, “The Participation of Women in the Catholic Church in Australia” (Macdonald et al. 1999). The project was undertaken for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference by the Bishops’ Committee for Justice, Development and Peace, Australian Catholic University and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes.

Members of the Committee included one bishop, three laymen, three religious women and one laywoman. The committee was appointed by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference without consultation with any individual or group outside that committee (1999 p. 11). Research sources included findings from the Catholic Church Life Survey (a large sampling of church attenders), contextual papers, written submissions, public hearings, a survey of Catholic organizations, and targeted groups involving voices that had not been heard in the written submissions and public hearings (1999 vii). Women and men participated in the research project.

The overall research identified two key areas regarding the participation of women in the Church: (1) an orientation towards maintaining the status quo or even returning
to more conservative, pre-Vatican II, understandings of women’s roles and (2) an orientation towards an “expanded role for women” (1999 p. vii).

The key issue belonging to the research was the complementarity and mutuality of women and men. The Church was acknowledged to be slow in joining Australian society in recognizing the equality of women, especially in the area of leadership.

The Catholic Life Survey indicated that gender representation at Sunday mass revealed an aging profile, a ratio of three women to two men and the greater likelihood of women more than men engaging in parish activities.

Respondents suggested that the best ways to increase women’s participation were through prayer, increasing women’s involvement in decision-making and Church administration, and reforming beliefs and practices that do not promote the equality of men and women. Three quarters [of those taking part in the survey] said they had neither experienced nor observed barriers to women’s participation in the Church but more than a quarter said they did not accept the Church’s teaching on the ordination of women (1999 p. viii).

A different response was recorded via written submissions, public hearings and targeted groups. Participants revealed

. . . a strong sense of pain and alienation resulting from the Church’s stance on women. The results of these research approaches highlighted the enormous contribution of women to all aspects of the life of the Church, except in the ordained ministry, leadership and decision-making (1999 p. viii).

Recommendations emerging from the research project include:

Women’s involvement in decision-making at all levels, a re-examination of the nature of ministry with exploration of the possibility of more inclusive roles for men and women, and reform of beliefs and associated practices that do not promote the equality of men and women” (1999 p. ix).
Findings from the research project were edited, compiled and published in 1999. Perhaps because of the magnitude of the project, the published document does not capture a complete picture of women’s experience of participation in the Catholic Church. Brief extracts and quotes convey interesting points; the reader needs a much deeper comprehension of the complexities of women’s experience in this particular context in order to appreciate both the consolation and desolation that lie at the heart of the research. Nevertheless, the research project was the first of its kind and a pioneering effort to represent women’s experience.

Wagner, a member of the research project committee, presented a review of the project to the conference Women: Gathering, Affirming, Celebrating in 2009. Wagner notes that, in response to the research project data,

> The Bishops reminded us that they cannot and would not wish to change the teaching of the Church on any matter despite the difficulty some respondents had with some elements of the Church’s teaching. Likewise they reminded us that they cannot and will not reverse the changes ushered in by the Second Vatican Council or turn away from its path. In both cases they said they are willing to dialogue with women about these matters for the sake of mutual understanding and in a spirit of Christian love (2009 p. 8).

Wagner comments that although there has been “fidelity to the task” and that “the findings have not been lost” there have been “significant changes that some would read as a diminution of importance of the matter of women in the Church and a failure in follow through from the Report” (2009 p. 10).

As the data belonging to the present study reveals (see Chapter 3, below), discrimination on the grounds of gender continues to impact on women’s participation in the Catholic Church. As Macdonald et al. acknowledge,

> Discrimination against women on the basis of gender was discussed as a serious and fundamental barrier to women’s participation. The lack of equality of women and their exclusion from some areas of the Church’s
ministry and governance, sometimes described in terms of the ‘sin of sexism’, were a source of great pain and distress to many women (1999, p. 125).

Data belonging to the current study indicates that gender discrimination within the religious order has been exacerbated by investment strategies designed to tighten financial management. It is my understanding that laywomen are consulted about management matters. However, they are not accorded the opportunity to participate in decision-making meetings that ultimately determine the precise goals they are expected to achieve.

Decision-making has been delegated to clerical committees. Control of resources (including knowledge, communication and decision-making) necessary to accomplish goals (congruent with the altruistic motivations that drew these women to the workplace) has evaporated.

A laywoman who understands her vocational commitment as one of service in the context of Christian spiritual direction and formation is motivated to use her skills and abilities, honed by long years of training, at her own cost, for the good of others. Her motivation is energized by her deep conviction that she is called to participate in the universal project of justice and peace. She has decided that her contribution to this project will be more effective if pursued in the company of like-minded women and men and believes that the Church can provide a context of solidarity for this collaborative endeavour.

According to my own observations over the past thirty years, most Catholic female spiritual directors and formators work in the context of traditional Catholic religious organizations. Spirituality centres administered by religious orders usually provide the context for the work of spiritual direction and formation. A laywoman’s choice of spiritual direction and formation (as her vocation) may have been influenced by contact with members of a religious order; perhaps some years of voluntary work with this religious order have increased and inspired her desire to work collaboratively with members of the order. Payment for her work as a spiritual director or spiritual formator is a relatively recent phenomenon.
Decreasing numbers of women and men joining religious life and increasing opportunities for laywomen and laymen to participate in theological and spiritual formation programs means that laywomen are well positioned to work in roles formally reserved for religious men and women. Yet, not only are the numbers of women and men joining religious life decreasing, but attendance at mass in general is decreasing in Australia:

For each weekend, while over 700,000 Catholics gather for thanksgiving, memorial and presence, more than 4 million Catholics opt to stay at home or, at the very least, choose to be elsewhere (ACBC Pastoral Projects Office 2008). If we hold the Eucharist to be fundamental to our Catholic faith, the cornerstone of the Church’s identity and mission, then we must address the stark reality that almost four out of five Australian Catholics do not participate in the primary sacramental event of the Church to which they profess to be members (Ang, 2008, p. 21).

Conversations with colleagues, religious and lay, indicate that the decreasing numbers of women and men joining religious life in Australia, together with the falling numbers of Australian Catholics attending Mass, has created anxiety within the Catholic Church. Publicity attending the culture of sexual abuse by priests (Coffey, 2010) contributes to this anxiety, not simply because sexual abuse by priests morally distances laypeople even further from the institutional Church (with the concomitant effect of reducing bequests and donations) but because litigation as a consequence of this abuse will “cost the Church an immense amount of money and it will drain the coffers” (Doogue, 2002).

Theologian Hans Kung describes the culture of “clerical abuse of thousands of children and adolescents” as “a scandal crying out to heaven” (Kung, 2010). Kung comments,

There is no denying the fact that the worldwide system of covering up cases of sexual crimes committed by clerics was engineered by the Roman Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Cardinal Ratzinger (1981-
During the reign of Pope John Paul II, that congregation had already taken charge of all such cases under oath of strictest silence (2010).

Kung acknowledges, “The consequences of all these scandals for the reputation of the Catholic Church are disastrous” and outlines six proposals for church reform that he is convinced “are supported by millions of Catholics who have no voice in the current situation” (2010). Although Kung’s proposals do not directly address the subject of women’s participation in the Catholic Church, there is little doubt that his suggested reforms would eventually create a more hospitable working environment for women. In his open letter to all Catholic bishops, Kung urges the Bishops to collegiality: “you should not act for yourselves alone, but rather in the community of the other bishops, of the priests and of the men and women who make up the church.” Such collegiality will require magnanimity on the part of all whose hopes “have not been fulfilled” (Kung 2010).

Kung’s vision of collegiality seems an unlikely prospect, as can be seen in a recent statement issued by the doctrinal watchdog, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF):

The ordination of women as Catholic priests is a “crime against the faith” the Vatican has said while it issued a raft of new disciplinary rules. Cases of “attempted ordination of women” will now be handled by the Vatican's doctrinal watchdog, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), a Vatican statement said on Thursday. The new rules put attempts at the ordination of women among the “most serious crimes”, along with paedophilia (Sydney Morning Herald, July 27, 2010).

None of the twelve Catholic women who took part in research group conversations belonging to the present study wish to be ordained. However, occasional statements such as that offered by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, send a clear message to Catholic women: we are excluded from collegiality because of our gender and this exclusion alienates us from the institutional Catholic Church.
Slee’s exploration of women’s faith development reveals that alienation appears to be “a highly significant feature of women’s spiritual lives which pastors and educators must take with fundamental seriousness” (2004, p. 82). Slee cites Bons-Storms reference to the “unstory: (2004, p. 83)—the absent story—“to describe the self-narratives that women attempt to articulate which do not ‘fit’ the accepted narrative forms provided by patriarchy” (2004, p. 83). Slee comments:

Where women’s self-narratives do not confirm to these expectations, they are highly likely to be misunderstood, denied or rendered invisible. Not infrequently, women whose stories break out of the limitations of the “proper roles” are considered abnormal, neurotic, immoral or even mad. The effects upon women of such reactions includes depression, a profound sense of powerlessness, an inability to take meaningful action, anger, fear and self-hatred (2004, p. 83).

Some clerics attempt to ameliorate the effects of Vatican statements that, for example, equate the seriousness of consideration of women’s ordination with the seriousness of paedophilia (SMH July 27, 2010). Hamilton (2010) notes that a spokesman for the Vatican has assured Catholics that, in fact, no equivalence between women’s ordination and paedophilia was intended. Hamilton explains that the Vatican spokesman insisted, instead, that “To participate in the ordination of women was a crime against faith” (Hamilton, 2010), a statement that has shocked many Catholic women as much as the statement it was seeking to explain.

Hamilton argues, “It would seem more accurate to describe the ordaining of women in the Catholic Church as primarily an offence against order rather than as an offence against faith”—a perceptive comment. As women insist, women’s participation in Catholic organizations is constrained by organizational order rather than any matter pertaining to faith.

While it is comforting to know that better informed and more compassionate clerics try to reason with hierarchical leadership, the message—that women are alienated from the Catholic organizations—is constantly reinforced and inscribed in the collective memory of many Catholic—and non-Catholic—women.
L. Women and the Order

The religious order for which the women in this study work or volunteer has, in the past, acknowledged that members of the Order “have been part of a civil and ecclesial tradition that has offended against women” (Society of Jesus, 1995). The following guidelines were recommended to address this traditional discrimination:

- explicit teaching of the essential equality of women and men in Jesuit ministries
- support for liberation movements which oppose the exploitation of women and encourage their entry into political and social life
- specific attention to the phenomenon of violence against women
- appropriate presence of women in Jesuit ministries and institutions, not excluding the ministry of formation
- genuine involvement of women in consultation and decision making in our Jesuit ministries
- respectful cooperation with our female colleagues in shared projects
- use of appropriately inclusive language in speech and official documents
- promotion of the education of women and, in particular, the elimination of all forms of illegitimate discrimination between boys and girls in the educational process.
Women who were associated with the Order when the document was promulgated welcomed these guidelines. However, topics covered by the Order’s recent 35th General Congregation (2008) did not include a reference to the Order’s relationship with women in general and women colleagues in particular. Women colleagues looked to GC35 for a refinement of GC34’s Decree on Women (Society of Jesus, 1995); many were deeply disappointed that topics set down for discussion at GC35 did not include that of the Order’s collegiality with women:

Since a great part of the work of the Society of Jesus is in justice, I would hope that one point of justice to consider is the lack of voice and opportunity for women in the church and governance in particular. With well over half the church as women, it is impossible to imagine a modern educated group of men would not at least consider the political and social treatment of women within the church. Until the men of the church appreciate the gifts of women and offer room to share them, it is difficult to see how Christ is modeled in many current Catholic groups (Creighton University, 2008).

In light of Kung’s (2010) observations and the absence of discussion about collegiality with women at the Order’s most recent General Congregation, it would seem imperative that attention be given to developing processes and programs designed to prepare laywomen to participate in present and future collegial endeavours. We must discover and maintain a strong sense of coherent authenticity that is essential to working collegially in workplaces challenged by the fear of change, particularly change to the distribution of power and authority.

At this point, it is important to recall the question that lies at the heart of the present study: “How can one speak of making commitments, which, by definition are not fleeting, without someone who has sufficient continuity to sustain them?” (Archer 2000 p. 40). I extend Archer’s question by inquiring into the nature of continuity. When is continuity sufficient to working collegially in Catholic workplaces that may be experiencing fear of change? What happens to women’s sense of continuity when we work in inhospitable environments?
I will turn to the literature concerning occupational identity in order to identify potential consequences for women’s sense of continuity when we are expected to provide human-centred services according to investment imperatives in Catholic workplaces that espouse, but do not consistently practise, collegiality with laywomen.

M. Occupational identity

What happens to a person who chooses to engage in work (because it is right for her and, as she understands, good for the world), when the workplace is fraught with discrimination, exclusion and tensions not generally of her own making?

If, as Christiansen (1999), Christiansen & Townsend, (2010), Kielhofner (2008) and Peloquin argue, occupations create and maintain an identity, can hostile work environments cause disruption to self-efficacy and, ultimately, identity? What happens when the workplace diminishes one’s sense of “ability, control, satisfaction, and fulfilment” (Kielhofner 2008 p. 107)? What are the consequences of working collaboratively with others when the individual worker’s sense of self-efficacy is reduced or damaged by discrimination?

Kielhofner describes occupational identity as “a composite sense of who one is and wishes to become as an occupational being generated from one’s history of occupational participation” (2008 p. 106) and occupational participation as “engaging in work, play, or activities of daily living that are part of one’s socio-cultural context and that are desired and/or necessary to one’s wellbeing” (Kielhofner 2008 p. 101).

Christiansen (1999) notes that identity refers to a composite definition of the self, including roles and relationships, values, self-concept, and personal desires and goals (in Kielhofner 2008 p. 106). Christiansen (in Kielhofner 2008, p. 106) argues that participation in occupations helps to create identity. Kielhofner (2008, p. 106) states that occupational identity includes a composite of the following:

- One’s sense of capacity and effectiveness for doing
• What things one finds interesting and satisfying to do

• Who one is, as defined by one’s roles and relationships

• What one feels obligated to do and holds as important

• A sense of the familiar routines of life

• Perceptions of one’s environment and what it supports and expects.

Kielhofner understands that “These elements are garnered over time and become part of one’s identity (2008 p. 106). Kielhofner has identified occupational competence as “the degree to which one sustains a pattern of occupational participation that reflects one’s occupational identity” (2008 p. 107) and understands that occupational competence includes:

• Fulfilling the expectations of one’s roles and one’s own values and standards for performance

• Maintaining a routine that allows one to discharge responsibilities

• Participating in a range of occupations that provide a sense of ability, control, satisfaction, and fulfilment

• Pursuing one’s values and taking action to achieve desired life outcomes.

It is possible to detect congruency between Kielhofner’s (2008, p. 107) description of occupational competence and Antonovsky’s (1988, p. 19) three components of SOC, namely, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. A similar resonance is apparent in Christiansen & Townsend’s (2001, p. 8) description of occupational engagement. The authors observe, “Occupational engagement is sometimes used to
describe people doing occupations in a manner that fully involves their effort, drive and attention” (2001, p. 8) and elaborate:

Typically, people understand the meaning of their lives by considering their occupations as part of their lifestory. It seems that occupations gain meaning over time by becoming part of an individual’s unfolding autobiography, or personal narrative. Contemplation of one’s occupations over time may contribute to a sense of satisfaction about life and the emergence of a satisfactory identity (2010 p. 13).

Christiansen & Townsend refer to the spiritual dimension of occupational meaning-making and explain that this is experienced occupationally as “the belief(s) that one’s occupations have a purpose or significance beyond the individual” (2010 p. 13).

This belief is evident in Peloquin’s seminal article (2006). Peloquin quotes Wood (2004 p. 4): “To have a firm persuasion in our work—to feel that what we do is right for ourselves and good for the world at exactly the same time—is one of the great triumphs of human existence” (2006 p. 236). Peloquin argues that “occupations are life strands that create coherence” (2006 p. 236), explaining that her work has shaped her sensibilities (2006 p. 236). Christiansen articulates a similar position:

Occupations are key not just to being a person, but to being a particular person, and thus creating and maintaining an identity. Occupations come together within the contexts of our relationships with others to provide us with a sense of purpose and structure in our day-to-day activities, as well as over time. When we build our identities through occupations, we provide ourselves with the contexts necessary for creating meaningful lives (1999 p. 547).

Maddux & Gosselin (2003) assert that “‘self’ and ‘identity’ are largely concerned with the question, ‘Who am I?’ by asking, ‘What am I good at?’” (2003, p. 218). The authors explain self-efficacy as “people’s beliefs about their personal capabilities and how these beliefs influence what they try to accomplish, how they try to accomplish it, and how they react to success and setbacks along the way” (2003 p. 218).
They explain, “Self-efficacy beliefs are not concerned with perceptions of skills and abilities divorced from situations” (2003 p. 219); rather, self-efficacy beliefs are concerned with “what people believe they can do with their skills and abilities under certain conditions” (2003 p. 219). The authors continue, “In addition, they are concerned not simply with the ability to perform trivial motor acts but with the ability to coordinate and orchestrate skills and abilities in changing and challenging situations” (2003 p. 219).

A laywoman who understands her vocational commitment as one of service in the context of Christian spiritual direction and formation is motivated to use her skills and abilities for the good of others. However, exclusion from organizational decision-making, absence or undermining of authority, investment-oriented performance measurements and explicit and implicit gender discrimination can lead the laywoman to perceive that the organization’s espoused operational values (values the organization purports to uphold) are in conflict with the organization’s enacted values (values that govern the organization’s action).

As organizational development literature explains, “the norms, strategies and assumptions embedded in the [organization’s] practices constitute its theory of action” (Wallace, 2007, p. 80). A theory of action encompasses:

- Norms for organizational performance
- Strategies for conforming to those norms
- Assumptions that link norms and strategies.

I suggest that employee confusion and frustration—and the potential for discriminatory behaviour—may be largely consequent on the gap between the organization’s theory of action and it’s theory-in-use:

This instrumental theory of action need not be—and frequently is not—officially adopted or recognized or encoded in the form of a document. In
fact, formal corporate documents such as organization charts, policy
statements, and job descriptions often reflect a theory of action (the espoused
theory) which conflicts with the organization’s theory-in-use (the theory of
action constructed from observation of actual behaviour)—and the theory-in-
use is often tacit (Wallace, 2007, p. 80).

I argue that this dissonance can result in the perception of psychological contract

Robinson & Morrison explain that, “At the foundation of the employee-organization
relationship is a psychological contract, comprised of beliefs about reciprocal
obligations between the two parties” (2000, p. 1, citing Rousseau, 1989; Schein,
1965).

Perceptions that this contract has been breached by the organization can “reduce
employees’ trust, job satisfaction, intentions to remain with the organization, sense of
obligation, and in-role and extra-role performance” (2000 p. 525 citing Robinson,
1996; Robinson et al., 1994; Robinson and Morrison, 1995). Robinson and
Morrison (2000 p. 526-528) identify three causes of psychological contract breach,
summarized below:

- Reneging: when agent(s) of the organization recognize that an
  obligation exists but knowingly fail to meet that obligation, either
  because the organization is unable (because of a change in available
  resources) or unwilling, to meet that obligation

- Incongruence: when the employee and organizational agent(s) have
different understandings about whether a given obligation exists, or
about the nature of a given obligation. Incongruence can exist when
there is (a) divergence in assumptions and interpretations regarding
obligations, and/or (b) complexity and ambiguity regarding the
perceived obligations and/or (c) a lack of sufficient communication
regarding obligations (citing Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Implicit
promises conveyed through organizational actions or indirect statements are particularly vulnerable to incongruent perceptions.

- Vigilance: when the employee actively monitors how well the organization is meeting the terms of his or her psychological contract. Vigilance is related to three factors: uncertainty; the amount of trust underlying the employee-organization relationship; and the potential costs of discovering an unmet promise (citing Morrison and Robinson 1997).

Robinson & Morrison note that the intensity of emotional response to perceived psychological contract violation “depends on an interpretation process whereby the employee attaches meaning to the perceived breach” (2000 p. 528) and that “employees will experience more intense feelings of violation following a perceived breach if they attribute it to reneging rather than to incongruence (i.e., misunderstanding)” (2000 p. 532). Intensity of emotional response to perceived psychological contract violation will also depend on “employees’ beliefs about the interpersonal treatment that they experienced (e.g., honesty, respect, consideration, adequate explanation)” (2000 p. 532).

Citing Brockner and Wiesenfeld (1996), Robinson & Morrison argue that, “Unfair interpersonal treatment signals to an employee that he or she is not valued or respected in the relationship” (2000 p. 532). This perception “intensifies feelings of anger and betrayal” (2000 p. 532). Robinson & Morrison predict:

a three-way interaction where the impact of attributions on the relationship between perceived breach and violation will be stronger when the employee also perceives that he or she was treated with little consideration or respect (2000 pp. 532–533).

The authors note, “Sometimes psychological contract breach is unavoidable, yet the destructive reactions that often follow are not” and that reaction to perceived
psychological breach may be mitigated when the organization offers “honest and adequate explanations for the situation” (2000 p. 543).

Robinson & Morrison’s research explicates the effects of perceived psychological contract breach using data gathered from a study involving 147 MBA graduates who had begun full-time employment. The average age of participants was 27.67 years, 36.1 per cent of participants were female (2000 p. 533). Robinson & Morrison’s (2000) identification of factors leading to perceived psychological contract breach can be usefully applied to the present study.

However, several distinctions must be noted with regard to the demographic associated with the present study.

Findings belonging to the present study reveal that factors leading to psychological contract breach have been, and, in several cases, continue to be, experienced by the women who have contributed to the study.

However, as set out in the Discussion chapter below (Chapter 4), participants’ motivation to work in the spirituality ministry—personal commitment to values espoused by the Order managing the spirituality ministry—introduces an additional factor relating to psychological contract breach.

Reneging and incongruence may be perceived when the organization fails to meet agreed obligations and expectations. Women employed in the spirituality ministry may become more vigilant as they experience workplace challenges; guarding against future, similar challenges.

Initially, these challenges may be filtered through the employee’s faith construct and accepted as the inevitable consequence of embracing the Christian way of life:

I remain steadfastly loyal to the Church, although often disenchanted, frustrated and angry. My disappointments about lack of support have not lessened my faith but deepened it, giving me an awareness of the suffering and needs of others, with a desire and ability to reach out to them. I both love
and hate the Catholic Church. I am both highly committed to it and to the Good News, while also ready to leave and give it all away (Macdonald et al. 1999 p. 174).

Some women have begun to share experiences of exclusion and trivialization. Organizations such as WATAC (Women and The Australian Church) have provided avenues for solidarity among women who seek inclusive models of church (WATAC 2010). Although several participants belonging to the present study are members of WATAC, participants who are employed by Catholic spirituality centres who have contributed to the present study are not members of this organization or similar organizations.

Robinson & Morrison’s (2000) study recommends several strategies to offset perceptions of psychological contract breach and feelings of violation:

- Organizations need to be careful about what they promise, especially during periods of organizational decline

- Organizations may want to consider increasing the amount of contact and communication between organizational agents and potential or new employees

- Organizations may want to be particularly careful about managing the perceptions held by employees known to have had prior experiences of psychological contract breach and violation.

- Organizations should offer honest and adequate explanations for situations that have led to the perception of psychological contract breach.

While Robinson & Morrison’s (2000) recommendations are sound, the present study argues that women must be helped to establish and sustain a SOOA that will enable
us to participate more robustly and effectively within traditional, hierarchical, male-dominated religious workplaces.

I suggest that an adaptation of *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* may provide a framework that is of use to women who seek to assemble and make meaning of significant life experience so that the choice and living out of occupation establishes, and deploys, an authentic sense of continuity and coherence.

**N. The Exercises**

I now describe the Exercises, and Ignatian spiritual direction, before addressing potential challenges inherent in the Exercises for women, particularly for women who are engaged in the Catholic workplace. My understanding and explanation of the Exercises is indebted to documents (CMISE 2008) authored by lay and ordained members of *Companions in the Ministry of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*. Michael Smith SJ, Brendan Kelly SJ, Patrick O’Sullivan SJ, Des Purcell SJ and Gerald Coleman SJ (2000) offer helpful insights into Íñigo and the Exercises.

Authored by Íñigo López de Loyola, later St Ignatius, the Exercises are a record of experience and insights as Íñigo reflected on his dramatic conversion at the age of thirty years and his subsequent experience in 1521 by the river Cardoner beside the Catalonian town, Manresa. As Coleman comments, “In a well known letter to Sister Teresa Rejadell of June 1536, we can see plentiful evidence that what he had learnt at Manresa provided him with the experience to guide others” (2000 p. 78).

Traditionally, the literature describing the Exercises claims the Exercises process is of great benefit to those who wish to enter into a prolonged process in order to increase openness to the Holy Spirit, to identify sinful tendencies and to strengthen and support the effort to respond to God’s love (Fleming, p. 5, 1991).

Perhaps less traditionally, I describe the task of an Ignatian spiritual director to be one of facilitating a process that enables women and men to make decisions that will
better position them “to act according to their fullest intrinsic potential” (Frolich 2001 p.72) so that they may be more effective in their service to others.

According to Íñigo’s sixteenth century understanding, these decisions will be left to the directee and God - the human director “should never provide a hindrance to such an intimate communication” (Fleming, 1991 p. 13). The director simply draws on the framework of the Exercises to help those making the retreat (directees) recognize feelings, thoughts and actions that might hinder or help the decision-making process, which leads to a more effective and generous expression of service.

Those who have been inspired by Íñigo’s Exercises to guide others according to Íñigo’s insights would eventually be known as Ignatian spiritual directors, facilitators of spiritual “exercises” that help women and men make informed decisions in order to be of greater help to others.

The book of The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius is divided into several sections, beginning with Annotations, instructions to the Ignatian spiritual director about how to give the Exercises to the excitant and what to notice in the exercitant as he or she progresses through the retreat. The Exercises are referred to as a “retreat” because, as Íñigo recommends, there is much to be gained by withdrawing from one’s busy life in order to reflect on the material of the Exercises (Fleming 1991 p. 16 Annotation 20).

Following the Annotations, Íñigo presents a series of spiritual exercises that may be given to the exercitant—the one making the Exercises retreat. These exercises are divided into a sequence of four “Weeks”—not literally weeks, but movements or stages. Throughout this study I have elected to use the term “movement” instead of the more traditional “Week”, although most Ignatian spiritual directors, including myself, are more familiar with the traditional terminology.

The first movement of the Exercises presents a consideration of God’s love for the sinful excitant and his or her life-world. The second movement presents a consideration of Jesus’ work and teaching. The third movement presents Jesus’ suffering and death. The fourth movement presents Jesus’ resurrection and
continuing universal participation and friendship with those who work towards the
transformation of world values according to gospel values and priorities.

Today, participants may make the Exercises in a variety of ways; the framework
governing the process doesn’t change so much as the time available for the process.
Typical adaptations of the Exercises refer to recommendations by St Ignatius in the
literal text of the Exercises (for example, Fleming 1991).

The exercitant, depending on life circumstances, may make the Exercises over a
period of approximately thirty-three days in the context of a silent retreat usually
conducted in Catholic retreat house environs. Alternatively, for the exercitant who
cannot set this time apart for the retreat, the process may be offered as an
(approximately) eight-month experience. The Exercises retreat conducted in silence
in a retreat house is known as a “Twentieth Annotation Retreat” (Fleming 1991 p. 16).
The Exercises retreat conducted during the course of the exercitant’s everyday
life is known as a “Nineteenth Annotation Retreat” (Fleming 1991 p. 16) or, more
colloquially, the “retreat-in-daily-life”.

The Twentieth Annotation retreat requires that the exercitant give time to material
recommended by the text of the Exercises for up to five hours each day. The
exercitant meets with the Ignatian spiritual director (of the retreat) once each day for
a period of fifty minutes. During this meeting the exercitant discusses responses to
the material and the experience of the retreat with the Ignatian spiritual director. The
Ignatian spiritual director presents material for consideration for the following day.

The Nineteenth Annotation retreat requires that the exercitant sets aside
approximately one hour each day for the consideration of material based on the
Exercises. The exercitant meets with the Ignatian spiritual director of the retreat each
week for fifty minutes for the purpose of discussing the exercitant’s response to the
material and other matters regarding his or her experience since the last meeting with
the Ignatian spiritual director.

Shorter eight day or weekend retreats based on dynamics shaping the Exercises are
also popular with exercitants who lead otherwise busy lives.
Many women and men choose not to make the full Exercises nor a shorter adaptation of the Exercises. Instead, they regularly visit an Ignatian spiritual director who will listen to their experience in a way that is informed by the dynamic of the Exercises.

Editions of *The Spiritual Exercises* range from the literal translation (for example, Puhl 1951) to more contemporary translations (for example, Fleming 1991; Ganss 1991; Tetlow 2000) to the—perhaps—feminist reinterpretation of the *Exercises* presented by Dyckman, Garvin and Leibert (2001).

The Exercises process is a fragile process; much depends on the understanding and theological perspectives of the director of the process and his or her ability to adapt the process to the individual directee. Much also depends on the life experience of the directee and his or her openness to new and sometimes challenging ways of thinking and acting. Consideration also needs to be given to the stage of life the directee is experiencing at the time of making the Exercises. For example, as Studzinski explains,

> The *Sturm und Drang* of midlife puts faith to the test; fear and doubt beset even the most staunch believers. Faith battles with doubt; when faith is deepened, it is prepared for new encounters with doubt. The experience of midlife for some people can be compared to sinking into a sea of hitherto unnoticed feelings (1985, p. 133).

I will now turn to the literature describing potential challenges for women who enter into the Exercises process.

**O. Exercises and potential challenges for women**

Ideally, the Exercises teach directees the art of examining experience for information that is helpful in discerning various options, especially in the context of service to others. Dyckman, Garvin & Leibert acknowledge, “the spirituality based in the Spiritual Exercises can offer contemporary women numerous important values” (2001, p. 4). The authors list these values as:
• The value of the human experience of God shared with another

• The value of a spirituality of the whole person

• The value of a spirituality grounded in Scripture

• The value of prayer in life, of contemplation in action

• The value of adaptability and flexibility as signs of authentic spirituality.

However, this guidance can become problematic for women for a variety of reasons, chief among which are directly related to gender:

• Gendered content typical of traditional translations of the Exercises in the hands of conservative spiritual directors of the Exercises

• Omission of women’s experience from spiritual direction conversations

• Gendered content typical of traditional translations of the Exercises.

Authors—for example—Dyckman, Garvin & Liebert, acknowledge this situation and its implications for women:

The text of the Spiritual Exercises and the process it sets out live deeply in the experience of the members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). The conversations about legitimate interpretations, appropriate adaptations and implications of the Spiritual Exercises have been carried on under the auspices of and largely within Jesuit contexts. Yet the experience of women making the Spiritual Exercises rarely appears in this scholarship (2001, p. xiv, footnote).
Despite Dyckman, Garvin & Liebert’s belief that the Exercises “have surprisingly liberating possibilities for contemporary women”, the authors nevertheless recognize “the difficulties many women have found and continue to find in Ignatian spirituality and the Exercises” (2001, p. 3).

Below is a summary of several aspects of the Exercises that Dyckman, Garvin & Leibert claim “put women off” (2001, p. 3):

- The symbolism embedded in the text
- Ignatius’s unswerving obedience to the church, an institution that has been singularly destructive of women’s full personhood at times in its history
- The centrality of Christ as male saviour

In the opening years of the twenty-first millennium more traditional translations of the *Exercises* are used less frequently. It may be speculated that these literal translations have fallen from favour because the use of somewhat archaic English is unfamiliar to modern-day directees. As Dyckman, Garvin & Leibert (2001, p. 68) point out, there is also the danger of an inflexible application of Ignatius’ sixteenth century directives. The authors offer an example that is pertinent to any discussion of the gendered nature of the Exercises by posing the question, “Ought women look at the corruption and foulness of their bodies, and upon themselves as a sore or abscess from which has issued great sins [Exercise 58]?” (2001, p. 68).

Dyckman, Garvin & Leibert ask,

> ... should the one giving the Exercises follow Ignatius’s text precisely, or should he or she introduce the dynamic of the Exercises by moving freely from within the seeker’s needs, images, language and desires (2001, p. 69).
And answer their question by insisting “The Exercises should never be imposed upon the seeker; if the dynamic of the Exercises somehow does violence to the one making the Exercises, it must be sacrificed to the needs of the seeker’s relationship with God” (2001, p. 69).

Somewhat surprisingly, this debate can be traced to the sixteenth century, with interpretations by Juan Polanco and Diego Miro:

(Polanco) insisted on a “heart” approach which accommodated the individual in his/her situation. (Miro) stood for a literal application of the details of the text and took as its norm a theoretical ideal of spiritual proficiency (Society of Jesus 2010 p. 12).

Nevertheless, I suggest that neither Polanco nor Miro would have moved much beyond their sixteenth century theology and symbolism inherent in that theology. As O’Malley has observed, “women made up the only group of persons whose participation in the Exercises decreased after Ignatius’s lifetime” (cited by Dyckman, Garvin & Leibert, 2001, p. 67). I suggest that it is unlikely that the decrease was caused by sixteenth century women rejecting the gendered language and symbolism promulgated by literal translations of the Exercises.

Insofar as more flexible adaptations inform directors in the twenty-first century, I argue that two related and significant barriers to flexibility continue, unquestioned:

• The inclusion of literal or non-inclusive texts of the Exercises in the training of students in the art of spiritual direction (Society of Jesus, 2010).

• The Exercises process in the hands of the novice spiritual director.

Although the contemporary Australian program for training spiritual directors (Society of Jesus, 2010) attempts to follow the spirit of Juan Polanco’s heart-centred adaptation of the Exercises, the primary text used for training purposes (Tetlow 2000) continues to reflect understandings that can be less than helpful to
contemporary directees. For example, “A Meditation on Our Sins” (Tetlow 2000) exhorts the directee to consider how she has taken on disorder evident in the world and to feel sorrow for her participation in this disorder, including, for example, the threat of nuclear holocaust, considering herself as the best and most important person around, valuing herself above all the saints and angels . . . “Sometimes I seem to be a canning factory whose every tin is steeped in salmonella; everything I touch is tinged with selfishness” (Tetlow, 2000).

Tetlow’s (2000) adaptation of the Exercises is accessible and therefore provides the novice spiritual director with an excellent resource for directing the Exercises process. This adaptation admirably attempts to foreground the “heart” and yet echoes of sixteenth century theological mindset resonate, alarmingly, with the text Tetlow (2000) attempts to contemporize. Interestingly, feminists Dyckman, Garvin and Leibert do not recommend a particular text of the Exercises but, instead, albeit implicitly, expect the director to (a) understand that “the model of holiness assumed in the interpretation of the Spiritual Exercises has been gender-marked and at points assumes a male norm for holiness” (2001, p. 15) and (b) to be capable of generating a negative hermeneutic “to uncover any complicity with a patriarchal ideology as well as a ‘positive hermeneutic’ to uncover any liberating possibilities for women” (2001, p. 15).

I argue that, while directors might identify an andocentric model of holiness assumed in the text of the Exercises, it would require a very experienced spiritual director to perform a hermeneutic analysis of constricting and/or liberating possibilities for women at the same time as directing the Exercises.

Commenting on the omission of women’s experience from spiritual direction conversations, a value of particular interest to the present study, Dyckman, Garvin & Leibert reiterate what could be said to be the universal regret of women who struggle to identify with traditional, Catholic thinking: the omission of women’s experience. The authors quote Carol Christ’s understanding of the consequences of this omission for women:
Women’s stories have not been told. And without stories there is no articulation of experience. Without stories a woman is lost when she comes to make the important decisions of her life. She does not learn to value her struggles, to celebrate her strengths, to comprehend her pain. Without stories she cannot understand herself. Without stories she is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and world that have been called spiritual or religious (2001, p. 5).

Arguing that “Distancing women from their own experiences and from their history as women essentially denies them authentic spiritual consciousness”, (p. 5), the authors claim that “the basis for all spiritual care of women lies in effectively attending to women’s experience” (2001, p. 5).

It is not uncommon for a women to enter the Exercises process equipped with little more than episodic fragments of experience, unable to thread these fragments together to form a sense of narrative coherence that might fortify her against challenges such as those she may encounter in her workplace.

Inevitably one recalls Smith’s sociology of experience:

The ideological practices of our society provide women with forms of thought and knowledge that constrain us to treat ourselves as objects. We have learned to set aside as irrelevant, to deny, or to obliterate our own subjectivity and experience. We have learned to live inside a discourse that is not ours and that expresses and describes a landscape in which we are alienated and that preserves that alienation as integral to its practice (1988, p. 36).

It seems probable that women’s difficulty in recounting experience in the context of the spiritual direction meeting reflects an unfamiliarity with recounting experience in other contexts, including that of the workplace. It is as if women need to be coached to speak about our experience, to respond to the inquiry from others in the workplace—inquiry that, I suggest, may rarely be forthcoming.
As Emerson notes, “If you cannot talk about an experience, at least to yourself, you did not have it” (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992 p. 128). Emerson’s comment reflects the situation of many women who come to me for spiritual direction. All too frequently, these women enter the spiritual direction process by telling themselves about their experience in order to narrate this experience to me. As Meyers notes, “women often lack a conceptual framework capable of rendering their frustrations and yearnings intelligible to themselves (1989 p. 251)—let alone another person, I would add.

The Exercises afford women an opportunity to mine and sift experience for information that can be organized into a loosely narratable unique lifestory. The exercitant’s unique lifestory, evaluated and retold, emerges as a consequence of gathering together seemingly disparate experiences and ways of thinking about those experiences. The exercitant begins to see herself as the protagonist in a narratable biography.

*Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero—his biography, in other words . . . “who” someone is can be “known” (although this is not epistemological knowledge) through the narration of the life-story of which that person is the protagonist (Cavarero 2000 p. viii, italics in the original).

Discovering an “unrepeatable identity” (Cavarero 2000 p. viii) that has emerged, from close inspection of one’s own experience, seems to strengthen exercitants’ sense of solidity. This solidity can equip women to challenge workplace denial and or dismissal of biographical identity.

The opportunity of speaking with a spiritual director is, for many women, a unique experience of being “seen” for who they are, and to build confidence by performing, during spiritual direction conversations, the person they want to be. In my observation, it is this opportunity for performance that enables women to develop the narrative solidity that can equip them to participate more confidently and effectively in the workplace.
Emilia’s story evidences the role of conversation in building identity and illustrates the connection between autobiographical narration and participation in what Cavarero describes as “the plural and interactive space of exhibition . . . where uniqueness can be exhibited” (p. 57).

As Dyckman, Garvin and Leibert note,

Attentive listening to one’s experience is by no means automatic; many women must learn this skill. Next, she names these experiences and gives them life outside herself. Simultaneously, she receives validation that her experiences are not idiosyncratic, but that she belongs to a community of shared experience and articulates one unique aspect of it (2001, p. 5).

Studzinski understands the challenge and the importance of storytelling, arguing that “To tell a story requires that a person find an imaginative ordering to his or her experience” (1985, p. 111) and explains:

Spiritual direction is one place among many where storytelling goes on. It is by the stories people tell about themselves that both directors and the people themselves arrive at a fairly adequate sense of their identities (1985, p. 110).

Studzinski cites Crites in order to clarify the relationship between narrative and experience:

Storytelling is not an arbitrary imposition upon remembered experience, altogether alien to its own much simpler form. Images do not exist in memory as atomic units, like photographs in an album, but as transient episodes in an image-stream, cinematic, which I must suspend and from which I must abstract in order to isolate a particular image. The most direct and obvious way of recollecting it is by telling a story, though the story is never simply the tedious and un-illuminating recital of the chronicle of memory itself (1985, p. 110).
The value of the organizing framework belonging to the Exercises is an example of Studzinski’s succinctly argued position that spiritual direction “can be the occasion for digesting the past so that it becomes a resource in the present” (1985, p. 111).

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge potential dangers in the spiritual direction relationship. As Nemeck & Coombs warn, “Even a directee desirous of serious spiritual direction may be drawn to a certain director for questionable reasons” (1985, p. 49).

In a growing relationship with another, we quickly discover mutual affinities and similarities. Yet, if we do not also recognize the complementary and unitive aspects of fundamental differences, we drift towards mutual absorption and loss of personal identity. Seeing the other too much as an extension of self leads us to expect the other to feel, think and respond exactly as we ourselves do (1985, p. 59).

Freedom to choose options (that may bring coherence to our lives) may be further compromised by the explicit understanding that, no matter how sympathetic the spiritual director, the Exercises belong to a Church that is hierarchically structured in a way that can exclude women. The Exercises can attend to women’s desires for the fullness of life however, depending on the freedom and flexibility of the director of the Exercises, this attention can be compromised.

It is not uncommon to notice a woman directee holding two lines of thought simultaneously: one line of thought is congruent with who she is, a woman hoping to live according to her “fullest intrinsic potential” (Frolich 2001 p. 72). A second line of thought is also congruent with what she is—the sum of her roles: partner, mother, worker, Catholic.

Dorothy Smith aptly describes this forced shift as “Movement between a consciousness organized within the relations of ruling and a consciousness implicated in the local particularities of home and family” (Smith 1988 p. 7). As Smith describes, living this double life involves “a different organization of memory,
Fischer, author of one of the few texts addressing feminism and spiritual direction, exhorts women to be aware of the social and cultural forces influencing discernment and decision-making:

Many discussions of discernment place all the emphasis on awareness of inner states and the process of sifting through our affective experiences. This is good, but the focus of interest needs to be broadened. It must include outer circumstances, social arrangements, and structures. It must situate our personal histories within cultural and religious history (1988 p. 123).

Fischer insists that social analysis must be incorporated into decision-making processes:

In this model discernment still begins with experience, listening to the Spirit in self and world and becoming aware of what one hears. Social analysis adds a next step to this. If I feel the call of the Spirit to a fuller ministry in the church, why is it that I cannot live out that call? Is the situation as it stands God’s will? Why must I struggle so hard as a single mother to make enough money to support my children? What are the forces influencing my life and determining the kind of opportunities I will have, what I can earn, what choices I have? The action which follows from this kind of discernment reflects a more complete sense of all the factors influencing a decision (1988 p. 123–124).

Fischer argues that “the goal of discernment is growth in the Spirit, not the maintenance of the present social or religious system” (1988, p. 125) and implies that one consequence of discernment may be conflict. While Fischer advises that decision-making can be accompanied by feelings of desolation, feelings of discomfort do not necessarily discount the decision (1988, p.125).
Whether or not the spiritual director understands the importance of incorporating a critique of the social and cultural forces influencing discernment and decision-making, or the importance of social analysis, is almost a matter of chance. At least in Australia, spiritual direction training programs do not offer formation in socio-cultural critique or social analysis.

In my experience as a spiritual director, incorporating women’s biography and autobiography within the Exercises process seems to lead to an intuitive critique of social and cultural forces that may not operate in the best interests of women. Again, this approach is not taught to spiritual directors in formation.

It is possible that Hanisch’s (1969) paper, “The Personal is Political”—though dated—remains of relevance to the spiritual direction context. Although, in intervening years, authors such as hooks (sic, cap omitted) (Meyers 1997 pp. 485–500) have demanded a revisioning of the concept of sisterhood that underpins Hanisch’s argument, hooks admits of the usefulness of political solidarity—not on the basis of shared victimization, but on the basis of shared strengths and resources (Meyers, 1997, p. 487).

Hanisch describes consciousness-raising groups such as those advocated in her article as “analytical sessions”—“a form of political action” (1969). Hanisch’s endorsement of “analytical sessions” resonates with spiritual director Fischer’s plea for women to take account of social and cultural forces, social arrangements and structures that impinge on our decision-making processes (1988, p. 123–124). Such social analysis would seem more possible in a group context rather than a one-to-one spiritual direction conversation according to more traditional forms of that conversational interaction.

Despite hooks’ well argued misgivings concerning consciousness-raising groups (Meyers, 1997, pp. 485–500), the transformative potential of group sense-making continues to encourage women who may otherwise be left to manage workplace challenges in isolation. Rindfleish, Sheridan & Kjeldal (2009, pp. 486–499) provide a contemporary account of sharing workplace experience and the beneficial effects that they experienced as a consequence of this exchange.
Rindfleish, Sheridan & Kjeldal make the following observations about their experience of workplace sense-making through storytelling:

The process of storytelling between we three academic women became a reflexive device that not only led to the three of us identifying with our individual perceptions of inequity but produced the “safe” space for a dialogue that co-constructed a world of meaning and allowed for a spontaneous revision of our “lived experience” through our interaction. Our storytelling of internal conflict actually made visible the gendered practices in our workplace. Once made visible these practices could be resisted and challenged with the outcome being that our agency was enhanced (2009, p. 495).

Rindfleish, Sheridan & Kjeldal’s paper “explores how stories between colleagues can lead to positive change through the co-construction of new worlds of meaning which are spontaneously revised through interaction” (2009, p. 486).

Can the interaction between spiritual director and directee achieve this co-construction? Traditional understanding belonging to the Exercises is that the director must constrain him or herself to a brief explanation of the particular Exercise the directee is to consider (SE #2, #15). In the context of spiritual direction and retreats based on traditional experiences of the Exercises, this understanding is legitimate.

However, is this legitimacy necessarily beneficial to all directees? My experience as a spiritual director leads me to suggest that many women, particularly women who have dedicated two or three decades of their lives to home-making, are longing for interaction rather than limited and focused explanation of material and process relating to the Exercises. Limited interaction can be particularly problematic for women (and, perhaps men) when the spiritual director relies on psychotherapeutic concepts and processes to structure the spiritual direction interview.
In summary, although difficult to comprehend, as Dyckman, Garvin & Liebert (2001, p. 5) point out, in the opening years of the twenty-first millennium women’s experience continues to be omitted from the Exercises process, a process that purports to be wholly focused on the directee’s experience in order to interpret, or reinterpret, this experience in light of the grace of the Exercises. If women’s experience is routinely, or even occasionally omitted from the Exercises process, the nature of spiritual direction and the spiritual direction relationship must be examined.

If, as Littleton argues, women’s experience is to be accepted, not simply accommodated (Meyers, 1997, p. 724), prevailing norms protecting gender discrimination must be discussable, especially in contexts that purport to help women become more effective agents in their own, and others’, lives, including the workplace.

As women have discovered, an interactive space is essential to our human development and, as Rindfleish, Sheridan & Kjeldal (2009, 496) point out, essential to acknowledging workplace inequalities and, subsequently, taking action to remedy those equalities. I propose that this interactive, action-oriented space is essential to women’s SOOA.

**P. Exercises as a conceptual framework**

Given the challenges of the Exercises for women, identified by authors such as Dyckman, Garvin and Liebert (2001), how can the Exercises be adapted for the purpose of strengthening a woman’s SOOA that is essential for collegial collaboration?

This question articulates a curiosity that has shadowed my professional practice as a spiritual director and organizational consultant to women’s religious orders and other Catholic work groups.

In the early years of my career as an organizational consultant, I read an essay by Argyris (1957, pp. 1–24) who describes the problems of mutual adjustment for organizations and individuals: adjustments required of an employee in order to
achieve organizational goals may compromise the employee’s human development. Focus by the organization on individual employees’ human development on the other hand may compromise organizational productivity.

In my role as a spiritual director I noticed the consequences of this “adjustment” for individuals. The question that concludes Argyris’ (1957) essay, quoted elsewhere in this study because of its relevance to the thesis question, seemed especially germane to my observations:

How is it possible to create an organization in which the individuals may obtain optimum expression and, simultaneously, in which the organization itself may obtain optimum satisfaction of its demands? (1957, p. 24).

During the early years of my practice as a spiritual director, I gave the Exercises process using traditional and contemporary texts: for example, Puhl (1951) and Fleming (1991). I noticed that directees followed the process with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

During discussion of traditional Exercises material, I noticed that directees offered interesting commentary on the process and their experience of life, in general, since the previous spiritual direction meeting; yet the commentary was not necessarily, potentially transformational.

During the concluding minutes of the spiritual direction meeting, directees often spoke about their experiences in a general way, without referring to the Exercises material. Frequently, these conversations focused on the directee’s workplace experience. In discussion with my supervisor and peers, I was advised that spiritual directors often observed this phenomenon—that is, directees often raise matters that are most important to them towards the conclusion of the spiritual direction conversation. The traditional explanation was that the process was impacting directees but that directees would not, or could not, associate the material with its impact in a way that could be articulated in the main part of the direction meeting.
As my experience as a spiritual director increased, I questioned the generic applicability of this explanation. It seemed more than coincidental that the less formal, concluding minutes, of the spiritual direction conversation concerned the workplace. Of course, directees were usually returning to the workplace after the spiritual direction conversation. Yet the content of these conversations about the workplace indicated to me that women, especially, were struggling to express themselves in the workplace in a way that contributed to more effective participation in collaborative projects.

I wondered: why aren’t conversations about directees’ workplace experiences included in the discussion elicited by material belonging to the Exercises text? Why is the workplace topic so often left until the final moments of the meeting? Could it be that women’s workplace experience was, indeed, of great importance to them, but that the traditional, formal Exercises text did not leave room for conversations about the workplace?

I began to vary the material I gave to directees who were undertaking the Exercises process. My choice of prose, poetry and image seemed to invite directees to engage with the Exercises in a way that indicated my adaptations were relevant, and, in many instances, transformational. The material helped directees evaluate present life circumstances, including workplace experiences, and, where possible, make adjustments to those circumstances so that life events were more congruent with the person they felt themselves to be, and wanted to be, in future. I noticed, what I am now able to articulate, a transformational alignment between directees’ personal and social identities (Archer 2000, p. 305).

Directees entering the adapted Exercises process spoke about the lack of, or loss of, a sense of who they were; experience was often reported as fragmented and meaningless. Directees completing the adapted Exercises process reported a new sense of purpose, and changes to the way they participated in the workplace. Apparently random experience could now be arranged in ways that made sense to directees. First order emotional response to experience was “articulated and re-articulated” (Archer 2000, p. 227) into a coherent yet flexible narrative.
It seemed possible that this adapted Exercises process helped satisfy directees’ desire for narrative continuity. The benefit of the adapted Exercises process was evidenced by directee’s accounts of workplace experience. Of particular interest was the benefit of the adapted Exercises process to women who participated in workplaces dominated by gender discrimination. A stronger sense of personal narrative appeared to fortify these women against discriminatory attitudes and behaviours.

In this thesis, I argue that it is possible to adapt the Exercises in order to provide an interactive process that invites women to assess the “alignment between our personal and social identities” (Archer 2000, p. 305). This assessment is based on careful examination and interpretation of our experience, which, in turn, leads to an appropriation of a flexible, coherent narrative. It is this coherent narrative that enables us to “bind with others in projects of solidarity” (Shusterman cited by Archer 2000, p. 40).

It is to the Exercises process itself that I now turn in order to suggest that the five movements belonging to the Exercises (orientation, evaluation, reorientation, testing and transformation), can offer women who work in discriminatory workplaces a framework for developing and sustaining SOOA essential to collaborating with colleagues in projects of solidarity.

In order to further establish the potential of aspects of the Exercises for strengthening occupational authenticity, and in order to avoid the possibility of betraying the confidentiality of the spiritual direction context, I refer to stories describing the experience of Thecla, Emilia, Koller and Ellsworth.

I show how the desire for narrative continuity manifests in the experience of these women, and then focus on Thecla’s story in order to illustrate how the four movements of the Exercises can be appropriated as an organizing framework that can be used to assess and reorient the “alignment between our personal and social identities” (Archer 2000, p. 305).

In this way, the Exercises process can give birth to a “coherent integrated individual narrative (among the myriad inconsistent narratives of quasi persons)” (Archer,
A narrative affording women stability and confidence as we express our agency in workplaces subject to gender discrimination.

**Q. The desire for narrative continuity**

Thecla’s story shows a woman moving beyond her own and others’ assumptions and inserting herself—at great personal cost—into the world and thus beginning “a story of her own” (Arendt 1998 p. 186). Initially Thecla relinquishes what Mezirow names “points of view” (Mezirow in Sutherland & Crowther 2006 p. 26) as she chooses to break her engagement with Thamryis in favour of pursuing her “life-project” (Illeris in Sutherland & Crowther 2006 p. 20) of preaching in the early Christian church.

Thecla’s journey towards fulfilling her desire, although ultimately successful, appears to be unplanned and disorganized and thus especially vulnerable to the assumptions and expectations of her family and the authorities. Thecla’s SOC initially appears to depend on Paul’s recognition (for example, Elliott 1999 p. 365). It is possible to read her self-administered baptism (1999, p. 370) and subsequent declaration of her identity (1999 p. 371) as evidence of her desire for SOC that would sustain her as she began her preaching vocation (1999, p. 371).

Emilia’s desire was to bring coherence to the random events and experiences of her life. As Cavarero points out, “the aim of women who have returned to school in order to attend the 150–hour classes is indeed to ‘think that my “I” exists’” (2000 p. 56). Emilia’s futile efforts to feel that her “I” exists is dependent on the actions of Amalia, a work colleague who was bored by Emilia’s repetitive attempts to connect the events of her life into a story that would give her a sense of her own identity (Cavarero 2000 p. 55).

Emilia could not begin to articulate a life plan; her inability to organize the events of her own life into a coherent narrative precluded a sense of self in the present, a necessary precursor to articulating a preferred future. With Amalia’s assistance, Emilia was able to derive SOC by recording the events of her life as a coherent narrative.
Koller retreats to an isolated cottage on Nantucket Island to discover what she should be doing with her life (1981 p. 2); this project relies on a gathering of episodes of experience into some kind of unity. She wants to live a life that makes sense of all the other ones, to understand all the things she has done up until now (p. 13), deliberately turn herself open to her own view (p. 33), know herself better so that she can make good choices about her future.

In the absence of a methodology that would help her understand more about herself and possibilities for her future, Koller decided to consult correspondence from family and friends. “If I can’t see what I do, I can surely see what other people think I do or am, or thought I did or was. It will come through, not just in what they say about me, but in their manner” (1981 p. 25). Koller seeks self-discovery, self-definition and self-direction (Meyers 1989 p. 20) and is left to invent and improvise ways of working towards these goals and aspirations. Koller attains SOC that enables her to make choices according to her own desires.

Ellsworth is well aware of socialized constraints and lists the “shoulds” that surround the process of achieving university tenure (1993 p. 64). Ellsworth is aware that it is her experience of the things she researches that shapes her identities and social positionings (p. 66) but that tenure relies on other values. She retires to a solitary place to research herself in the academy, asking herself “life and death questions”: “How to be there? Why to be there? How to relate to it in ways that support my life and my social and political identities as a woman, a lesbian, a ‘radical’ scholar”? (p. 67).

Like Koller, Ellsworth improvises ways to clarify how she might participate in the academy and, at the same time, sustain her social and political identities (p. 71) and make room for reading fiction and writing poetry. Ellsworth may be seen to have successfully developed a SOOA when she was able to link her social and political identities. That is, Ellsworth successfully aligned her personal and social identities (Archer 2000, p. 305).

Thecla and Emilia, in particular, illustrate the vulnerability of women who strive to express themselves in action but who are without some kind of premeditated flexible
plan that will enable them to act in accordance with their own reasoning in the various circumstances in which they find themselves. Koller and Ellsworth, also lacking a model that may guide their searching, nevertheless improvise creative yet not necessarily sustainable ways of evaluating and reorienting the values and aspirations that define their lives, thus bringing their personal and social identities into closer alignment.

R. Story, insight, action: the organizing framework

My experience as the facilitator of women’s consciousness raising groups in the late 1980s influenced, and continues to influence, my impression that shared stories can elicit insight that inspires action.

Conversations shared among women participating in these groups stimulated insights via sharing of experientially generated self-knowledge about our everyday lives, not just our various roles and our affective response to our experience within these roles. Keen to nurture our growing sense of self, yet unable to take sufficient distance on our experience, we selected several autobiographies for discussion. We were challenged as we interacted with the autobiographical text. As Kate Begnal observes, “The reader is changed as the text moves her to think someone else’s thoughts” (1991 p. 286).

As we thought and spoke about our response to the books, we began to view our lives from the perspective of other women, women who had struggled to identify how they really wanted to live their lives, what assumptions had dampened their energies and what values shaped chosen ways of living.

Other women’s stories allowed us to “try on” different points of view (Mezirow & Associates 2000, p. 20). Imaginative explorations into the foreign territory of other
women’s lives glistened with indicia of homecoming and gave us glimpses of potential and possibility for our own lives.

However, at that time, like Emilia (Cavarero 2000), we didn’t have or understand the importance of organizing our newfound knowledge into action. We lacked an organizing framework that would help us transform knowledge into action.

Some years later I was interested to learn that, during his recuperation from wounds received at the battle of Pamplona in 1521, Íñigo, author of the Exercises, experienced a similar response to the few books that could be found in the house of his brother and sister-in-law, Magdalen.

Íñigo was confined to bed in the family castle and nursed by his sister-in-law and her two daughters. Magdalen provided the only books that could be found in the castle (Coleman 2000 p. 10), religious books. Íñigo’s preference would have been to read stories of the make-believe world, books that had “so captured his imagination in the past and had led him into amorous and sinful pursuits, quarrels and delusions of grandeur” (Coleman 2000 p. 10).

However, the books made available by Magdalen were about the life of Christ and the lives of the saints. Driven by boredom, Ignatius began to read these books, following the advice offered by Ludolph of Saxony in his book about Christ, “to pause and relish and savor what he was reading” (Coleman 2000 p. 10). Gradually Íñigo became absorbed in the lives of the characters depicted in the books he was reading. Coleman notes,

His imagination was so stimulated that he became attached to what he was reading, and his natural ability to notice how others lived made him aware of a whole new way of living . . . For this was not like the ordinary type of reading of Romances which he had done before and which had entertained him. This was a special type of reading—a reading which touched him deeply and challenged him. Thus he was able to read the same thing many times over, and he noticed the unusual effect it had on him. He was actually beginning to enjoy it. There were affective consequences to this type of
reading, and they would become important for him as he learnt how to discern (Coleman 2000 p. 12).

As he read and reflected on his reading, and, at other times, fell to daydreaming about his previous life at court and all its pleasures, Íñigo noticed that the affective consequences of reading and reflecting on his reading were happiness and contentment, whereas the affective consequences of becoming lost in fantasies about the pleasures of courtly life were discontent and restlessness. Coleman comments:

At Loyola, Íñigo had read, pondered on his reading, noted the feelings which were stimulated by the reading, gained some insight into the diversity of the movement of spirits. After many months, he was able to get in touch with his true desires and to make a decision (Coleman 2000 p.33).

Coleman notes that Íñigo’s practice of reading, reflecting and noticing helps him to identify his true desires and to make decisions that are congruent with those desires. Noticing how others lived made him aware of previously unconsidered opportunities for his own life.

Íñigo was changing as the texts of the books he was reading moved him to imagine a different future. Although a detailed account of communications theory, particularly reception theory, is beyond the scope of the present study, it is nonetheless interesting to note Iser’s Reader-Response theory insofar as it helps to explain Íñigo’s experience:

Aesthetic response is therefore to be analyzed in terms of a dialectic relationship between text, reader, and their interaction. It is called aesthetic response because, although it is brought about by the text, it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader, in order to make him (sic) adjust and even differentiate his own focus (Iser 1980 p. x).

Just as Íñigo’s reading helped him adjust and differentiate his values and priorities, members of the women’s groups I facilitated in the 1980s identified and critiqued
assumptions that had, up until then, subtly but surely channeled our lives. As Iser notes,

In thinking the thoughts of another, he (sic) temporarily leaves his own disposition, for he is concerned with something which until now had not been covered by and could not have arisen from the orbit of his personal experience (Iser 1980 p. 155).

Iser posits,

As the reader uses the various perspectives offered him (sic) by the text in order to relate the patterns and the “schematized views” to one another, he (sic) sets the work in motion and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself (sic) (Tomkins 1980 p. 51).

Iser believes that the reader is given the chance to recognize the deficiencies of his own existence and the suggested solutions to counterbalance them. Sympathetically, Albertson explains, literature “creatively constructs a virtual self-possession out of imagined possibilities” (Albertson 2000). I suggest that herein lies the transformative potential of prose, poetry and other media when incorporated into a transformative learning process such as the Exercises.

I have presented accounts of women’s (group) experience of reading autobiography, and Íñigo’s response to reading biography, in order to give the reader an understanding about my choice in foregrounding Thecla’s story against the background of the four “Weeks” or movements of the Exercises.

I maintain that story elicits insight—“imagined possibilities” (Albertson 2000); the Exercises provide an organizing framework that makes imagined possibilities actionable. That is, imagined possibilities move towards and accomplish action, they do not simply remain dormant in the imagination. Without such an organizing framework, insight derived from “trying on” other points of view may be interesting yet not necessarily transformational.
Critical reflection on clearly and freely articulated values and aspirations, non-negotiables belonging to what Meyers terms a “life plan” are essential if one is to “build up patterns of personal significance to which to anchor (one’s) life against the lash of the random unheeding flail” (Schulkind 1985 p. 20). Meyers comments:

Instead of positing the question, “What do I really want to do now?” this form of autonomy addresses a question like, “How do I really want to live my life?” To answer this latter question, people must consider what qualities they want to have, what sorts of interpersonal relationships they want to be involved in, what talents they want to develop, what interests they want to pursue, what goals they want to achieve, and so forth. Their decisions about these matters together with their ideas about how to effect these results add up to a life plan (Meyers 1989 p. 48).

It should be emphasized that a life plan must be flexible enough to include or exclude variables that may be unpredictable in the future, depending on whether or not these variables constrain or promote one’s developing aspirations. As Meyers insists, “Life plans are usually loose enough to allow for the inception and satisfaction of unanticipated desires” (1989 p. 49). If time permits, inclusion or modification of variables that have previously sustained a successful life plan should be accorded the same contemplative consideration previously given to composing the original life plan.

I suggest that, well guided, the Exercises can offer women the opportunity to speak about our experience, to gain insight into our experience and to take action on our insight. In this way, the Exercises afford women a process for developing a life plan that brings stability to our personal identity—an essential condition if we are to participate effectively in collegial projects that can be compromised by gender discrimination.

**S. Solitude**

Contemplative consideration, in solitude, has been a defining characteristic of the Exercises process since the Exercises were directed by Íñigo in the sixteenth century:
A unique characteristic of these Spiritual Exercises is that they are taken in silence—this is an essential aspect of the retreat. Although many people might think it's impossible to spend a few days without talking, most of those who have gone through the Spiritual Exercises have found the silence to be extremely valuable and easier to do than they first thought. In particular, they find that keeping silence helps in producing a fruitful and deep understanding of spiritual matters, as well as enhancing their personal communication with God (Institute of the Incarnate Word, 2010).

As Long & Averill point out, “positive experiences of solitude have been relatively neglected by social theorists, especially psychologists. From a broad social perspective, however, solitude’s benefits often outweigh its detriments” (2003, p. 21).

Although solitude can be understood to be “a state of relative social disengagement” (Long & Averill 2003, p. 37) solitude is not nothingness, or loneliness:

Though solitude seems particularly suited to facilitate contemplation, spirituality, creativity and even intimacy, it can be spent in many different types of activities. In contrast to loneliness, which by definition involves a negative emotional script, solitude is a more open-ended experience (2003, p. 37).

Long & Averill speak of solitude as a “vital social phenomenon” (p. 21) that contributes to freedom, creativity, intimacy and spirituality (pp. 24–29). Of particular interest to the present study is Long & Averill’s opinion that solitude can be transformational in that it may facilitate “a new understanding” of oneself and one’s priorities (p. 26). Long & Averill reflect on Storr’s argument that “by separating us from our usual social and physical environments, solitude can remove those people and objects that define and confirm our identities” (p. 26).

As I have mentioned above, Koller (1981, 1990) and Ellsworth (Wear 1993) emphasize solitude as a necessary condition for evaluating and reorienting life.
defining values and aspirations. Koller’s commentary on the importance of solitude resonates with Storr’s (Long & Averill 2003, p. 26) argument. Koller instinctively understands that she needs to reflect on her life, and the decisions that have shaped her life, and this can only be done away from the people whom she had turned into “mirrors” (Koller 1981 p. 69) that reflected an identity she now understood, needed evaluation and reorientation.

Koller’s need to separate from other people in order to understand who she might be in her own right reflects Brockmeier’s appreciation of silence as her “opportunity to construct or reconstruct my part of me, knowing that others can claim more than their share of this work” (2001, p. 34).

Similarly, solitude has been necessary to my own life, as a note in my personal journal attests: “Solitude provides the silence which allows me to experience continuity of my self so that I’m not entirely reconfigured according to the whim of a moment in the presence of other people” (Morgan personal journal, 2004). My own experience of solitude is close to that described by Long & Averill (2003 pp. 21–44). I would add that my experience of solitude over the past thirty years has been productive, mostly because I have deliberately appropriated solitude as an opportunity to reflect on my experience. My solitude, more often than not, is shaped by the dynamic of the Exercises; it is a transformative solitude that, as Long & Averill propose, “facilitates self-attunement and reflection” (2003, p. 26).

As Kirschenbaum & Henderson comment, “reflective time affords us an opportunity to let ourselves down into the immediacy of our experiencing in order to sense and clarify all its complex meanings” (1990, p. 157). I argue that the challenge is to ensure that this reflective time is considered sufficiently important to be a regular, ongoing practice.

**T. The Awareness Examen**

The contemplative, transformative process belonging to the Exercises process, the “Awareness Examen”, is adapted according to personal preference. I propose that the Awareness Examen, regularly practised, may provide the opportunity to evaluate
experience and, in light of this evaluation, allow for the reorientation—as far as possible—of commitments and responsibilities so that there exists a strong integration between personal and social identities. As I have argued above, it is the integration between personal and social identities that will allow women to participate effectively in collegial projects of solidarity.

Traditional adaptations of the Awareness Examen (for example, Contemplative Christian, 2010, see below) focus on helping the individual find God amidst the experience of everyday life.

The Awareness Examen (Contemplative Christian, 2010):

- Recognize that you are in the presence of God
- Recall your day with gratitude for the gifts received
- Ask God to send you His Holy Spirit to help you look at your actions and attitudes and motives with honesty and patience
- Now review your day
- Have a heart-to-heart talk with Jesus.

Adaptations of the Awareness Examen, particularly regarding the formality of religious language, may be made according to the preference of those who are not helped by formal, religious language. For example, see below, “Busy Persons’ Awareness Examen” (Loyola Marymount University, 2010).

Busy Persons’ Awareness Examen (Loyola Marymount University, 2010)

- I pray in gratitude for all the gifts that I have received as I glance back at the experiences of the past twenty-four hours, and allow a
spontaneous conversation to develop with God who was and is present.

- I pray for enlightenment so that the Spirit will help me see myself honestly, as I review both my actions and my heart’s involvement in them.

- I survey the period since last engaging in reflective prayer, paying special attention to the more intense feelings, moods, thoughts, and desires that surface, as a way of getting a sense of what is going on in my life.

- I pray for healing in my heart for any of the ways that I have not lived up to the requirements of love in my relationship with God, myself, and others.

- I ask for help to live with renewed hope and increased love of God and others, considering briefly the immediate future, and paying attention to the feelings that spontaneously arise.

The Awareness Examen, as I have discovered, brings structure to solitude that allows the evaluation of experience and opportunity to reorient goals and aspirations. Time given to reflecting on experience, in solitude, allows for a conscious processing of experience that, otherwise, isn’t available to the individual with numerous and demanding roles and responsibilities.

As Virginia Woolf suggests, meaning unfolds after the experience; time taken to remember our experience extends the dimensions of the moment (Schulkind 1985, p. 20) thus allowing a deliberate evaluation of experience. Such evaluation brings to attention any conflict between our “personal and social identities” (Archer 2000, p. 305), experience, apropos the present study, that may threaten the integration of personal and social identities—with detrimental consequences for the worker’s SOOA.
Chapter summary

I have surveyed the literature in order to evaluate my assumptions and extend my knowledge about how women who work in traditional, hierarchical, male-dominated religious workplaces can sustain SOOA.

This review has established that the Exercises process can be adapted in ways that provide an organizing framework that may be of assistance to laywomen seeking to establish a SOOA. Further, I have suggested that time given, in solitude, to evaluating experience and reorienting goals and aspirations can strengthen an individual’s SOOA.

However, research associated with this thesis strongly suggests that the organization as a whole, not just individual workers within the organization, must take responsibility for implementing processes that maintain workers’ SOOA.

As I have noted, current employee development programs provide maps and fix roads, without necessarily developing the traveller (Daloz 1999, p. xi). Individual Exercises, including the Awareness Examen, may develop the individual traveller by helping to establish or renew her SOOA. Yet, if responsibility for sustaining workers’ SOOA does not become an organizational responsibility, the individual may experience indicia of psychological contract breach (Robinson & Morrison 2000; Lester, Thurnley, Bloodgood & Bolino 2002) with associated physical and psychological effects.
Chapter 3: Reorientation

Introduction to the Chapter

In the previous Chapter, Chapter 2: Evaluation, I reviewed literature relevant to the thesis question: how can laywomen who work in voluntary or paid roles in the context of traditional, hierarchical, male-dominated religious workplaces sustain a SOOA essential to effective collegial collaboration? This review included an account of experience from the lives of four women: Thecla (Elliott 1994), Amelia (Cavarero 2000), Koller (1981) and Ellsworth (Wear 1993). I now describe the process of research participant selection and other documentation associated with forming the research group. I then present extracts from transcripts taken during meetings of the research group associated with this study.

A. Selection of research participants

The possibility that the research group process would prompt investigation of long-held and possibly cherished assumptions about women’s participation in the Church prompted the careful selection of potential research group members. Criteria for research group selection included:

- Long experience with Catholic organization(s)
- A realistic appreciation of the benefits and risks of participating in Catholic organizations
- Completion of the full Exercises retreat at least three and no more than ten years prior to the commencement of research group conversations
• The ability to reflect on experience using processes proposed by the study

• Familiarity with group participation

• Familiarity with expressing thoughts in writing as well as verbally

• Access to spiritual direction in order to process the work of the project at a deeper psycho-spiritual level

• Access to psychological counselling if required

• Not currently engaged in a psychological or other therapeutic process that may be jeopardized by the process or material belonging to the study.

B. Letters of invitation to potential participants

Twenty letters of invitation (6th January, 2004) were sent to women who were considered to meet the study criteria. Eleven women accepted the invitation, and the inclusion of myself as researcher/participant meant that the group comprised twelve women. The average age of participants at the time of the research group meetings was fifty-nine years. Ten participants were involved in Church-related organizations on a voluntary basis or part time basis; two were involved on a full time employed basis. All participants volunteered or were employed in the spirituality ministry belonging to a Catholic male religious order.

Letters of invitation to participate in the study explained the following:

• The purpose of the research project: to understand how women’s sense of identity might expand or contract our ability to participate in Catholic organizations
• Why each participant will be invited to be part of the research group: because of long engagement with Catholic organizations, including the Catholic Church, and because of familiarity with reflective and group processes

• What I would be seeking—comprehensive depictions or descriptions of:

  o Participant’s sense of identity—who she says she is

  o Factors which have shaped that identity

  o How this sense of identity influences participation in Catholic organizations

• My interest in the research topic, including my experience as a worker with Catholic organizations

• My desire to explore findings from Macdonald et al.’s (1999) research project in light of women’s identity and agency in the Catholic context

• Timing of research group meetings: May, July and August 2004

• Venue for research group meetings: St Joseph’s Spirituality Centre Baulkham Hills NSW

• Meeting process and options for participation. For example, choice of not providing written reflections on experience of the process, ways to participate if a group meeting is missed
• Consent form, financial considerations for taking part in the research, provision for withdrawing from the project after commencement of the project

• My hope for participants: that, as a consequence of taking part in the project, we will come to a better understanding of how our Catholic workplace or volunteering experience has influenced our workplace self-concept, and that this increased awareness may assist us to participate more effectively in Catholic organizations.

I explained that the Exercises would serve as a lens through which the story of Thecla (Elliott 1994) would be read. As I note below, none of the participants, other than myself, knew of the existence of The Acts of Paul, the narration of Thecla’s experience. I explained that I had previously given women directees a copy of Thecla’s story and that it seemed to help them identify aspects of their own experience of moving into Church ministry. I also explained that music, poetry and images would supplement the process and, hopefully, stimulate participants’ reflection, sharing and writing throughout the study.

C. Questionnaire completed prior to meeting

In the period between research group participants’ acceptance of my invitation to participate in the research project, and the first research group meeting, participants completed a questionnaire designed to elicit information about their experience of Catholicism, religion and spirituality and sense of identity (Appendix A) prior to their participation in this research.

Catholic affiliation

• How long have you identified with the Catholic faith tradition?

• How long have you identified your spiritual journey within the Catholic faith tradition?
• List your current association with recognizably Catholic institutions, organizations or groups—for example, diocese, parish, spiritual group, discussion group, work.

• Focus on one of these associations and describe your role or way of participating.

• In what ways does your participation in this organization deepen your relationship with Christ?

• In what ways does your participation in this organization inhibit your relationship with Christ?

• Would you like your participation in this organization to change? How?

Identity and spirituality

• Describe the person you are.

• Briefly describe one turning point in your spiritual journey that has played a significant part in forming who you are today.

• Has this turning point changed your idea about yourself? How?

• Would you say you have a strong sense of your identity? How do you know you do/don’t?

• What helps strengthen your sense of identity?

• What weakens your sense of identity?
All participants completed the two-page questionnaire and most participants submitted additional pages offering biographic details relating to the questionnaire. I outline here, the salient data insofar as this study is concerned.

**Catholic affiliation**

Participants reported lifelong, or lengthy, Catholic affiliation. Reports ranged from “Since birth, all my life” to a certain period, ranging from fourteen to forty-eight years.

**Identity and spirituality**

Participants’ reports of identifying their spiritual journey with the Catholic tradition differed from reports of identification with Catholicism. Of particular interest to the present study is that participants report that the relationship between spirituality and the Catholic institution of the Church has changed, over time. Eleven of the twelve participants reported a divergence between personal spirituality and institutional allegiance. All participants agreed that, as they had grown older, the understanding of spirituality was no longer mediated wholly by the Church and Church representatives, such as clergy. Rather, their understanding of spirituality had broadened to include experiences in every-day life to which they had accorded a spiritual meaning.

Although participants’ responses illustrated a significant diversity within the research group, the question “Identity and spirituality: describe the person you are” showed that all participants were confidently able to describe themselves meaningfully and articulately:

I am a woman—middle aged—married—mother of 4—professional pastoral care worker—recently graduated with B.Th. I am daughter, sister, sister-in-law-aunt-great aunt and friend. My whole life I have had a deep yearning to “know God”—to understand—to find meaning in my life. I am a searcher
and I have a great passion for life. I have a deep desire to use my gifts and talents to make the world a better place (participant H).

I am a reflective, thoughtful person. I feel there are two parts of me: the part that has to get up, go to work, be organized, fit in with the hustle and bustle of life and the other part which is quieter, calmer. I have a rich inner world. I can be a very sensitive, thoughtful and loving person but I need also to be sensitive to my own needs (participant F).

I am a mature divorced woman with much experience of coping with adverse circumstances in childhood and adulthood. I am mother to seven children, two deceased. My spirituality and my life with Christ is central to who I am. I am a child of God, part of Her family, forgiven and redeemed (participant A).

I am a mature, optimistic middle-aged Australian born female of Irish and English ancestry. I have a strong sense of my connection with nature and the interconnectedness of all things in and through God. I have a deep sense of God within and in my life, and an ever increasing desire that my sense and awareness of God as the core of my being continues to grow and expand so that I can say with passion and conviction “You are everything to me” (participant C).

Participants’ responses to the question, “In what ways does your participation in this organization inhibit your relationship with Christ?” reveal something about participants’ perceived relationship with the institutional Catholic Church:

It is inhibited when others do not recognize that lay people can speak with knowledge and authority in the Church. Many associate this ability only with the clergy (participant I).

By too many rules, right ways to celebrate Mass, to read the Word of God, how to and who to give the Body and Blood of Jesus to black and white. Restricting laity and too much emphasis on the role of priests and their authority. No understanding and acceptance of women outside of family roles
and no support and affirmation of women and men abused sexually and otherwise by priests (participant B).

I’m not letting it inhibit me anymore. Over the years I have been disappointed in the quality of teaching in the homilies and the patriarchal hierarchy which the “official” church presents. The assumed role of women in the church is inhibiting (participant A).

When I am working at grass roots level, and doing what Ignatius did—working with lay people, and guiding them into a deeper relationship with Christ, I am not inhibited at all. However, I have in the past participated in the governing bodies of this organization and found that participation personally destructive and debilitating. I felt that the only contribution wanted from me was to be a bum on a seat”—my talents were not wanted (participant F).

D. Orientation to the process

1. Explanation of the process

At the beginning of the first meeting, I repeated information that had been outlined in the letter of invitation, described above, and questions of clarification about the process were addressed. I explained that each of the three group meetings would be conducted according to cycles of (a) input from me, including reading the text of The Acts of Paul, (b) personal reflection on questions loosely based on the Exercises, (c) group sharing of responses to the reflection questions.

I explained that I would be taking notes while group participants were sharing their comments in response to the reflection questions, that these notes would be edited by myself then circulated to allow participants to make amendments. I advised that excerpts from these revised notes would be included in the thesis report and that, although I did not seek to enrol participants as co-researchers, the process did include this opportunity to edit transcripts that may be selected for reporting within the thesis.
All participants were happy to participate in the research conversations according to this process. Participants were familiar with similar processes in the context of retreats and formation programs.

Research participants were introduced and each one spoke about why she had accepted my invitation to join the study.

A brief overview of The Acts of Paul (Elliott 1994) was presented. No participant, other than myself, knew of the existence of The Acts of Paul. The outline of the story provoked lively discussion.

I have arranged my report of the three meetings according to the following headings:

- Gathering poem, read aloud, accompanied by instrumental music and followed by a short period of silence.
- Focus for reflection (first, second or third meeting, morning or afternoon)
- Summary of paragraphs from The Acts of Paul (Elliott 1994)
- Reading from The Acts of Paul (Elliott 1994)
- Personal reflection
- Group sharing, including excerpts from transcripts
- Commentary
- Orientation to next meeting (evaluation of final meeting)
2. Focus for reflection, first meeting, morning

Gathering poem: The New Story of Your Life

Say you finally invented a new story
of your life. It is not the story of your defeat
or of your impotence and powerlessness
before the large forces of wind and accident.
It is not the sad story of your mother’s death
Or of your abandoned childhood. It is not,
even, a story that will win you the deep
initial sympathies of the benevolent goddesses
or the care of the generous, but it is a story
that requires of you a large thrust
into the difficult life, a sense of plenitude
entirely your own. Whatever the story is,
it goes as it goes, and there are vicissitudes
in it, gardens that need to be planted,
skills sown, the long hard labors
of prose and enduring love. Deep down
in some long-encumbered self,
it is the story you have been writing
all of your life, where no Calypso holds you
against your own wilfulness,
where you can rise
from the bleak island of your old story
and tread your way home.
Dan Wakefield (1990)

Paragraphs 1–6 of The Acts of Paul (Elliott) were read aloud and a printed copy was given to each participant. The text used throughout the study is taken from *The Apocryphal New Testament*, translated by Elliott (1994). A summary of the paragraphs under consideration was also given to participants. I explained that the morning’s work would reflect the orientation days leading up to the First Week, or first movement, of the Exercises. This orientation would set the scene for our work together over the three group meetings.

3. **Summary of paragraphs from The Acts of Paul 1–6**

Paul is on his way to Iconium after his flight from Antioch. He has two companions, male, whom he describes as full of hypocrisy, who flatter Paul, probably basking in his reflected glory. Paul visits the house of a townsman. His two companions become jealous of the townsman because Paul seems more interested in him than them. Paul preaches in the “house church” of the townsman; his sermon is similar to the Sermon on the Mount.

4. **Reading from The Acts of Paul 1–6**

i. As Paul was going to Iconium after his flight from Antioch, his fellow-travellers were Demas and Hermogenes, the copper-smith, who were full of hypocrisy and flattered Paul as if they loved him. Paul, looking only to the goodness of Christ, did them no harm but loved them exceedingly so that he made sweet to them all the words of the Lord and the interpretation of the gospel concerning the birth and resurrection of the Beloved; and he gave them an account, word for word, of the great deeds of Christ as they were revealed to him.

ii. And a certain man, by name Onesiphorus, hearing that Paul was to come to Iconium, went out to meet him with his children Simmias and Zeno and his wife Lectra, in order that he might entertain him. Titus
had informed him what Paul looked like, for he had not seen him in the flesh, but only in the spirit.

iii. And he went along the royal road to Lystra and kept looking at the passers-by according to the description of Titus. And he saw Paul coming, a man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, of noble mien, with eyebrows meeting, rather hook-nosed, full of grace. Sometimes he seemed like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel.

iv. And Paul, seeing Onesiphorus, smiled; and Onesiphorus said, ‘Hail, O servant of the blessed God.’ And he said, ‘Grace be with you and your house.’ And Demas and Hermogenes were jealous and showed greater hypocrisy, so that Demas said, ‘Are we not of the blessed God that you have not thus saluted us?’ And Onesiphorus said, ‘I do not see in you the fruit of righteousness, but if such you be, come also into my house and refresh yourselves.’

v. And after Paul had gone into the house of Onesiphorus there was great joy and bowing of knees and breaking of bread and the word of God about abstinence and the resurrection. Paul said, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; blessed are those who have kept the flesh chaste, for they shall become a temple of God; blessed are the continent, for God shall speak with them; blessed are those who have kept aloof from this world, for they shall be pleasing to God; blessed are those who have wives as not having them, for they shall experience God; blessed are those who have fear of God, for they shall become angels of God.

vi. Blessed are those who respect the word of God, for they shall be comforted; blessed are those who have received the wisdom of Jesus Christ, for they shall be called the sons of the Most High; blessed are
those who have kept the baptism, for they shall be refreshed by the Father and the Son; blessed are those who have come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ, for they shall be in the light; blessed are those who through love of God no longer conform to the world, for they shall judge angels, and shall be blessed at the right hand of the Father; blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy and shall not see the bitter day of judgment; blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well pleasing to God and shall not lose the reward of their chastity. For the word of the Father shall become to them a work of salvation in the day of the Son, and they shall have rest for ever and ever.

5. Reflection and group sharing, first meeting, morning

Participants were asked to reflect, in silence, on two questions and briefly note their responses in writing. Participants were then invited to share any comments and insights that may have been generated by the questions. Participants were reminded that written notes and verbal exchanges would be retained for the purposes of the study, unless participants requested otherwise.

- Can you recall a homily or address or other kind of conversation that inspired you to reassess the way you were living your life? Who gave the address? How exactly did the address affect you at the time?

- Why do you work, or volunteer, with this organization?

6. Excerpts from transcripts, first meeting, morning: Thecla

Can you tell me why we haven’t heard about Thecla’s story? Yes, it could have been used as an argument in favour of celibacy, but it also could have inspired women to put up with the Church’s intolerance of women . . . perhaps I’ve answered my own question (participant D).
I was shocked to discover that there is a New Testament Apocrypha. I’ve studied at theological college and I’ve never heard of this book, I’ve never heard of Thecla (participant A).

I suppose I’m wondering what other documents we don’t know about if we don’t know about Thecla (participant G).

I’m feeling quite angry about the Thecla thing. I’m going to get a copy of her story and give it to my spiritual director (participant J).

7. Excerpts from transcripts, first meeting, morning: the Exercises

I remember a woman speaking about her overseas missionary work. I was at Mass. I think she was trying to raise money for some kind of project in Africa . . . providing medical equipment and help. She spoke at the end of Mass. Usually these talks are given by nuns, but this woman was a laywoman. I’d never heard a laywoman speaking about being a missionary. She was married, too, and young. She talked about how she decided to do missionary work and I was amazed because, before she became a missionary, she was living a life just like me. A while later, when I made the Exercises, I became quite clear that I wanted to give other people the Exercises, myself. The Exercises changed my way of thinking about religion, and, actually my way of thinking about myself and other people. Everything made a lot more sense to me, and I wanted to help other people get this sense. The organization is based on the Exercises; it’s why I give so much time to the organization (participant C).

When I was about thirty a new parish priest came to my parish. He talked about life, not just scripture and Church stuff. He talked about issues in the newspaper, on TV. I started to see some connection between Mass and ordinary life. Not long after the new priest came to the Parish, the sisters in our parish organized a retreat, you didn’t have to live at a retreat house so I was able to do the retreat. I didn’t realize then that the retreat was based on
the Exercises. I could almost say the retreat changed my life. It was the first
time I’d told anyone about my life . . . my life wasn’t special, it was just the
first time anyone had asked me to talk about my life from my birth up until
the time I made the retreat. I felt like one person, I felt like all my experiences
were who I was . . . it’s really difficult to explain. I found I had more
confidence and I was very grateful for the Exercises. A few years later I did a
course that would help me to give the Exercises to other people. I do this
work with the organization, it’s more or less on a voluntary basis. I can’t do it
too much longer because I’ll have to get a paid job, eventually (participant
B).

The priest in the Parish I attended went overseas. While he was away a relief
priest took his place. He talked about scripture in a way I’d never heard
before. One Sunday he told us that Jesus had to figure things out too, just like
us. He talked about a ‘real’ Jesus, I could relate to this priest’s Jesus and
when he left the Parish I was quite upset. A friend told me about a priest who
was a spiritual director and I visited this priest. Eventually he suggested I
might make the Exercises, and I did. It took about a year but it was the best
year in my life. It kind of made sense of a lot of things in my life. In
retrospect, I’m not sure it was really “me” in the process but it was someone
. . . and that felt better than the no-one I had been feeling previously.
Sometimes I felt the priest couldn’t understand my experience but I just
decided to leave some of this experience out of our conversations and work
through it myself. It wasn’t a problem. About ten years after I made the
Exercises I trained to be a spiritual director. I don’t work with individuals
very much but more with groups. I belong to a lay movement that’s based on
the Exercises and we have a lot to do with the organization (participant
F).

Some of the women in my Parish started a group for women. One day, one of
the women said she was thinking of not going to Mass every week. I was
shocked because she was a prominent member of our Parish. She said that
since she had studied theology she could not really accept some things the
Church said, especially about women. Of course most Catholic women I
knew then didn’t like what the Church said about women, but we would
never tell anyone. I wanted to start theology study too so that I could speak my mind like this women. I did a theology degree and went on to other study. It changed the way I thought about the Church. After my children were all attending school I made the Exercises—this really made sense of my theological study and my life, generally, I suppose. I felt “together” and that I knew who I was and what I was meant to be doing. Like other people in this group, I eventually started to work as a spiritual director on a voluntary basis. My contact with the organization is because of this work (participant A).

8. Commentary, first meeting, morning

Most of the research participants commented that a new or visiting priest had given them a different way of thinking about the Church and about themselves. The Exercises had presented an opportunity to reflect on their lives and make decisions about working for the organization. As can be seen in the transcripts, there was agreement that the Exercises had given participants a new sense of their identity. However, the comment by participant F generated extensive discussion as participants wondered—aloud—whether the self they’d “put together” (participant J’s expression) was actually representative of the person they experienced themselves to be outside the Exercises process.

The average age of group participants was fifty-nine years. Most of the experiences of the Exercises recounted by all participants took place when they were in their late thirties to early forties. Participants rejected the suggestion that the addresses and conversations had had a significant impact because of any age-related factor, although all participants identified the Exercises as a turning point in their lives and that this experience had led them to volunteer or work with the Order. Participants identified a relationship between their own personal religious and/or spiritual values and their decision to work with the Order.

The objective of the orientation morning questions was to provide an opportunity for participants to begin to focus on the research project and this was achieved. Participants understood that the afternoon session would offer opportunities for
extended reflection and discussion on Thecla’s story, the First Week of the Exercises, and their own experience.

FIRST WEEK OF THE EXERCISES

1. Focus for reflection, first meeting, afternoon.

Gathering poem: Healing

I am not a mechanism,
an assembly of various sections.
And it's not because the mechanism is working wrongly,
that I am ill.
I am ill because of wounds to the soul,
to the deep emotional self
and wounds to the soul take a long, long time,
only time can help and patience,
and a certain difficult repentance,
long difficult repentance, realization of life’s mistake,
the freeing oneself from the endless repetition of the mistake
which mankind at large has chosen to sanctify.

D H Lawrence (Ellis, p. 480–481, 1998)

Paragraphs 7–15 from The Acts of Paul were read aloud and a printed copy was given to each participant. A summary of the paragraphs under consideration was also given to participants. Each participant received a copy of the first icon from the series Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios (Figure 1: Asuncion & Guasch, 2002).
Figure 1. First Icon. From Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios. (Asuncion & Guasch 2002)
2. Summary of paragraphs from The Acts of Paul 7 – 15

Thecla, engaged to be married and destined to live out the cultural traditions so carefully kept by her mother, listens to Paul's preaching. She experiences an eager desire to be deemed worthy to stand in Paul’s presence and hear the word of Christ. Her focus moves from her fiancé to Paul and his preaching. Her fiancé and her mother try to bring her to her senses—in vain. Paul’s jealous companions plot with Thecla’s fiancé to have Paul arrested. Paul is betrayed and arrested.

3. Reading from The Acts of Paul 7–15

i. And while Paul was speaking the midst of the church in the house of Onesiphorus a certain virgin named Thecla, the daughter of Theoclia, betrothed to a man named Thamyris, was sitting at the window close by and listened day and night to the discourse of virginity, as proclaimed by Paul. And she did not look away from the window, but was led on by faith, rejoicing exceedingly. And when she saw many women and virgins going into Paul she also had an eager desire to be deemed worthy to stand in Paul’s presence and hear the word of Christ. For she had not yet seen Paul in person, but only heard his word.

ii. As she did not move from the window her mother sent to Thamyris. And he came gladly as if already receiving her in marriage. And Thamyris said to Theoclia, ‘Where, then, is my Thecla (that I may see her)?’ And Theoclia answered, ‘I have a strange story to tell you, Thamyris. For three days and three nights Thecla does not rise from the window either to eat or to drink; but looking earnestly as if upon some pleasant sight she is devoted to a foreigner teaching deceitful and artful discourse, so that I wonder how a virgin of her great modesty exposes herself to such extreme discomfort.

iii. ‘Thamyris, this man will overturn the city of the Iconians and your Thecla too; for all the women and the young men go into him to be
taught by him. He says one must fear only one God and live in chastity. Moreover, my daughter, clinging to the window like a spider, lays hold of what is said by him with a strange eagerness and fearful emotion. For the virgin looks eagerly at what is said by him and has been captivated. But go hear and speak to her, for she is betrothed to you.’

iv. And Thamyris greeted her with a kiss, but at the same time being afraid of her overpowering emotion said, ‘Thecla, my betrothed, why do you sit thus? And what sort of feeling holds you distracted? Come back to your Thamyris and be ashamed.’ Moreover, her mother said the same, ‘Why do you sit thus looking down, my child, and answering nothing, like a sick woman?’ And those who were in the house wept bitterly, Thamyris for the loss of a wife, Theoclia for that of a child, and the maidservants for that of a mistress. And there was a great outpouring of lamentation in the house. And while these things were going on Thecla did not turn away but kept attending to the word of Paul.

v. And Thamyris, jumping up, went into the street, and watched all who went into Paul and came out. And he saw two men bitterly quarrelling with each other and he said to them, ‘Men, who are you and tell me who is this man among you, leading astray the souls of young men and deceiving virgins so that they should not marry but remain as they are? I promise you money enough if you tell me about him, for I am the chief man of this city.’

vi. And Demas and Hermogenes said to him, ‘Who he is we do not know. But he deprives the husbands of wives and maidens of husbands, saying “There is for you no resurrection unless you remain chaste and do not pollute the flesh.”’

vii. And Thamyris said to them, ‘Come into my house and refresh yourselves.’ And they went to a sumptuous supper and much wine
and great wealth and a splendid table. And Thamyris made them drink, for he loved Thecla and wished to take her as wife. And during the supper Thamyris said, ‘Men, tell me what is his teaching that I also may know it, for I am greatly distressed about Thecla, because she so loves the stranger and I am prevented from marrying.’

viii. And Demas and Hermogenes said, ‘Bring him before the Governor Castellius because he persuaded the multitude to embrace the new teaching of the Christians, and he will destroy him and you shall have Thecla as your wife. And we shall teach you about the resurrection which he says is to come, that it has already taken place in the children whom we have and that we rise again, after having come to the knowledge of the true God.’

ix. And when Thamyris heard these things he rose up early in the morning and, filled with jealousy and anger, went into the house of Onesiphorus with rulers and officers and a great crowd with batons and said to Paul, ‘You have deceived the city of the Inconians and especially my betrothed bride so that she will not have me! Let us go to the governor Castellius!’ And the whole crowd cried, ‘Away with the sorcerer for he has misled all our wives!’ and the multitude was also incited.

4. Reflection and group sharing, first meeting, afternoon

Participants were asked to reflect, in silence, on the following questions then briefly note their responses in writing before sharing any responses with the group.

- Is there any way you can relate to Thecla’s experience?

- Do you find yourself choosing between family and career . . . either/or?

- What challenges do you encounter in your workplace?
What happens when you look at the icon? What are you thinking?

5. Excerpts from transcripts, first meeting, afternoon

I didn’t really get into Thecla’s story . . . her determination is great but I just don’t see how Paul’s words could’ve had such a big impact on her. It just seems odd that she could make such a big decision so quickly. Unless she didn’t want to marry her fiancé, anyway, and this was a way out. I spent a lot of the reflection time looking at the icon—this icon shows exactly how I feel now—caught between lots of expectations, mostly other people’s expectations, especially about the conflict between my work and my family. I can feel so guilty when I’m at work, especially on weekends if I’m running programs. But I can’t work out what I should feel guilty about, and what I should just regret. My life feels incredibly disorganized, or something. There’s an expectation that I run programs on weekends, it’s when people can come to programs. I don’t know if it’s easier for nuns and priests who don’t have family stuff on the weekends. It’s difficult. I want to take more time to think about the icon because I’m quite confused about what I should be doing with my life [participant F].

I don’t automatically accept everything the organization tells me. There’s stuff the founder of the organization believed that can’t apply to this time in history or women in leadership. Thecla seems a bit silly to me . . . but I can understand her, in a way, because it can be really easy to compromise your own values for your career. But sometimes I get really tired of being two people: there’s a lot of tension between the person I am outside work and the person I have to pretend to be at work. Sometimes I get the impression that the priests at work don’t like me being there and this confuses me. There are less priests to do the work . . . why aren’t lay people more welcome, if it means the work can continue? I can’t even have a cup of coffee in the lounge room now because there’s a new rule that lay people can’t go into that room unless they are invited by a priest [participant C].
When I thought about Thecla’s story I got the sense that I was meant to be doing something with my life, use my life somehow, be more than a great hostess for my husband’s business dinners. I guess it would have been easy for Thecla to go along with her engagement—keep the status quo. I’ve done that, a lot. My in-laws would prefer I didn’t do voluntary work for the organization, that’s for sure. They think I’ve become some kind of religious freak. I really like the icon; sometimes I feel really confused because there are things I’d like to do but they’re so different from what’s possible in the life I have. I don’t have much contact with the priests in the organization. I’d like to be included in some of the staff meetings because what’s decided can make a difference to me [participant H].

Thecla’s like a lot of women who come to me for spiritual direction especially once their children are all at school. Yes, they’ve welcomed being a wife and a mother but once those early years are over they have to move on a bit. I’m in that situation, now. I have enough time to go back to the paid workforce and the money would help with our mortgage. But there’s a lot of tension about it because I feel really strongly that I’m meant to be working with this organization. It’s hard because the priests keep asking me about my children. I think they can only see me as a mother and wife, they don’t see me as a spiritual director. Sometimes I think the priests resent me giving other people spiritual direction. Odd things happen, like, suddenly I don’t have a room to see my directees because the priest in charge has given it to someone else to use. One day one of the brothers told me spiritual direction is a waste of time and that the building was where the priests lived and should not have laypeople in it. I was really upset and told a more senior priest. He implied that I was in the wrong . . . I was very confused about this; I’m not paid by the organization, I do the work because I believe in it. I think I should be respected more [participant A].

6. Commentary, first meeting, afternoon

The impact of the First Week icon on the research group participants was significant; they seemed to find Thecla’s story interesting but the icon was of greater personal
relevance to most participants. Words frequently used during the group conversation were “confusion” and “tension”.

As I had not posed a question that directly related to the Exercises, I decided to remedy my oversight by referring to the Exercises in the closing moments of the group discussion. I asked the group how the afternoon’s conversation might be connected to the First Week of the Exercises. Responses were immediate and can be summarized by a comment from one participant:

That picture of the icon was exactly how I was feeling when I started making the Exercises. I was really confused about a decision I needed to make, it was about whether I would go back to work or do more study. Or do both at the same time. My family wanted me to stay home and not work or study—they were being a bit selfish but okay, they actually had good reasons for wanting me to stay home, too. I really wanted to get a part time job and do part time study—was this me being selfish? It was interesting . . . the priest who was directing the Exercises for me was very helpful . . . he didn’t give me advice about what to do but he did help me see just how confused I was and how much there was riding on my decision. I didn’t really know it, myself . . . no, I knew it, I just couldn’t say it. But if I’d had a copy of that icon when I made the Exercises I would have told him it is exactly where I’m at—my thinking at the time was totally disorganized. I wanted to do something but I didn’t know how to go about thinking it through . . . the consequences for everyone, and that sort of thing [participant J].

Participants agreed that they experience considerable tension in expectations from the organization, their families and themselves and that this tension caused confusion. Tension was attributed to expectations about the role of women as mothers and/or workers benefiting from remuneration. Examples of discrimination by professed members of the religious order were given and the effect of this discrimination was discussed.
7. Briefing in preparation for next (second) meeting

At the end of the first meeting, participants were invited to speak about anything they had found helpful or interesting during the meeting, and anything they had found unhelpful during the meeting. The group decided on some small changes to the process—for example, that they would take turns to choose music and images that would help to make the group discussion space more feminine. Participants were invited to continue to reflect on the morning’s conversation and to make a note of these reflections.

SECOND WEEK OF THE EXERCISES

1. Focus for reflection, second meeting, morning

Gathering poem:

The Lord will give you
the bread you need and
the water for which you thirst.
No longer
will your teacher hide,
but with your own eyes
you shall see your teacher.
While, from behind,
when you would turn to the left
or to the right,
a voice shall sound in your ears:
‘This is the way; walk in it’ (Isaiah 30: 20–21)

Paragraphs 16–18 from The Acts of Paul were read aloud and a printed copy was given to each participant. A summary of the paragraphs under consideration was also given to participants. Each participant received a copy of the second icon from the
series *Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios* (Figure 2: Asuncion & Guasch, 2002). A scriptural quote was read to the group.
Figure 2. Second icon. From Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios. (Asuncion & Guasch 2002)
2. Summary of paragraphs from The Acts of Paul 16–18

Paul is accused before the governor by Thecla’s fiancé. He defends himself but is committed to prison, and visited by Thecla after she bribes the prison guards by giving them her bracelets and her silver mirror. She sat at Paul’s feet and listened to him talk about Christ—her faith increased.

3. Reading from the Acts of Paul 16–18

i. And Thamyris standing before the tribunal said with a great shout, ‘O proconsul, this man—we do not know where he comes from—makes virgins averse to marriage. Let him say before you why he teaches thus.’ But Demas and Hermogenes said to Thamyris, ‘Say that he is a Christian and he will die at once.’ But the governor kept his resolve and called Paul, saying, ‘Who are you and what do you teach? For they bring no small accusation against you.’

ii. And Paul, lifting up his voice, said, ‘If I today must tell any of my teachings then listen, O proconsul. The living God, the God of vengeance, the jealous God, the God who has need of nothing, who seeks the salvation of men, has sent me that I may rescue them from corruption and uncleanness and from all pleasure, and from death, that they may sin no more. On this account God sent his Son whose gospel I preach and teach, that in him men may have hope, who alone has had compassion upon a world led astray, that men may be no longer under judgment but may have faith and fear of God and knowledge of honesty and love of truth. If then I teach the things revealed to me by God what harm do I do, O proconsul?’ When the governor heard this he ordered Paul to be bound and sent to prison until he had time to hear him more attentively.

iii. And Thecla, by night, took off her bracelets and gave them to the gatekeeper; and when the door was opened to her she went into the prison. To the jailer she gave a silver mirror and was thus enabled to
go in to Paul and, sitting at his feet, she heard the great deeds of God. And Paul was afraid of nothing, but trusted in God. And her faith also increased and she kissed his bonds.

4. Reflection and group sharing, second meeting, morning

Participants were asked to reflect, in silence, on the following question then briefly note their responses in writing before sharing any responses with the group.

- Can you make any connection between Thecla’s experience, the icon, and your experience of working or volunteering with the organization?

5. Excerpts from transcripts, second meeting, morning

Why did Thecla bribe the prison guards . . . gain access to Paul . . . by giving them her bracelets? And the silver mirror? The mirror? Nooooo! Thecla’s been inspired by Paul’s words . . . and then she gives away the bracelets that presumably identify her? and the mirror that might make her look at herself? Think a bit more about what she was doing . . . her motivation? I can see a figure coming out of the mess of the first icon . . . there’s a person. I remember this is the time in the Exercises when you start thinking about Jesus’ birth and life; I can remember starting to think about my birth and life, too, and I felt a bit clearer about how all my experience had actually brought me to this point in my life. It was good . . . I could think about doing things that I really wanted to do, not just the things other people wanted me to do. I was ecstatic when a priest suggested I should consider being a spiritual director and when I’m working in this role I know it’s what I’m meant to be doing [participant J].

I’ve done this! I’ve given away my “bracelets” in exchange for what it is that I’m pursuing. I think Thecla’s bracelets are somehow symbolic of her relationship to her family. She’s giving up her family, for Paul. But it really worries me . . . she’s giving up her family for Paul . . . is she exchanging
Thamyris for Paul? One set of commitments for another? Why must we give
up our bracelets and mirrors to gain access to a career? I’ve done it with this
organization . . . I gave away bracelets, mirrors and who knows what, the
person I knew myself to be, just to work with the organization [participant I].

Thecla’s on the right journey . . . she’s worked out what she wants to do, who
she wants to be . . . but somehow she’s become lost . . . made a good decision
then followed this with bad decisions. Or ignorance? Look at the icon . . . the
figure in the icon has become clear, so different to the first icon. This has
happened to me . . . I’ve been really committed to working in justice, I’ve
understood it’s where I meant to be . . . but then the whole way I do my work
is completely dependent on the priest who’s in charge of the work. I’ve
looked back and wondered if I’ve been doing the justice stuff for the priest—
or the people I’ve tried to help? I’m thinking . . . have my motives been
mixed motives? I’ve liked the priest to say nice things about me because I
work with poor people. It’s pretty nice when an important priest tells you
you’re doing great work with the poor. Of course I care about the poor . . .
but I care about the Justice Guru Priest telling me I’m doing great work . . . I
grew up in an Irish Catholic home . . . pleasing the priest was the best thing
anyone could do . . . I really hope I didn’t fall for that . . . I did, a bit. I can
see that, now [participant B].

What’s with Thecla? Paul’s bandy legs! Is she really interested in Paul? I
don’t think so. I think she’s using him . . . but I think he enjoys being used.
It’s a kind of secret agreement between them. They wouldn’t talk about it.
He’s into power . . . and power’s something she needs . . . otherwise she can’t
do what he does. Thing about working for Church organizations is, you’ve
got to find out who’s got the power, then you tag along with that person. You
put up with crap along the way but the only way to get good power is to use
bad power to get you there. It works, it’s the currency, power. It can backfire
though. If your job depends on friendship with a priest or brother, when he’s
moved to a different place, you’re really vulnerable. If Thecla wants to do
what Paul does then she has to go in through his power. I reckon it’s pretty
much like that for women, outside the Church as well as inside the Church [participant A].

6. Commentary, second meeting, morning

Group participants’ response to Thecla relinquishing her bracelets and mirror in order to see Paul in prison is startling. Response to the earlier session about Thecla and Paul had been interesting but not overwhelming. In contrast, in this session, participants were horrified when Thecla appeared to be pursuing Paul rather than her potential career. Participants commented that the choice to work in a particular context could be the right choice but that great care needs to be taken in order to ensure that compromises (relinquishing personal identity, symbolized by Thecla’s mirror and bracelets) don’t erase personal identity simply in order to please an individual or organization that has authority.

THIRD WEEK OF THE EXERCISES

1. Focus for reflection, second meeting, afternoon

Gathering poem: Marie Curie

Today I was reading about Marie Curie:  
she must have known she suffered from radiation sickness 
her body bombarded for years by the element 
she had purified.  
It seems she denied to the end 
the source of the cataracts on her eyes 
the cracked and suppurating skin of her finger-ends 
till she could no longer hold a test-tube or a pencil.

She died a famous woman denying her wounds
denying her wounds came from the same source as her power.

Adrienne Rich (Rich, Charlesworth & Gelpi, A. 1993)

Paragraphs 19–30 from The Acts of Paul were read aloud and a printed copy was given to each participant. A summary of the paragraphs under consideration was also given to participants. Each participant received a copy of the third icon from the series Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios (Figure 3: Asuncion & Guasch, 2002). Attention was drawn to the Third Week of the Exercises.
Figure 3: Third icon. From *Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios.* (Asuncion & Guasch 2002)
2. Summary of paragraphs from The Acts of Paul 19–30

Thecla is sought and found by her relations. She is brought with Paul before the governor. She is ordered to be burned as an example to others, and Paul is to be whipped. Fortunately, God intervenes by way of a tropical rainstorm and Thecla is miraculously saved. Thecla rejoins Paul; offers to follow him but he isn’t so sure because he is “afraid lest another temptation come upon you worse than the first and that you do not withstand it but become mad after men”. Thecla replies, “Only give me the seal in Christ, and no temptation shall touch me”. To which Paul says, “Thecla, be patient; you shall receive the water”. Paul and Thecla go to Antioch. On the way, a prominent townsman falls in love with her and kisses her by force. She resists him and because he has lost face he arranges for her to be brought before the governor and condemned to be thrown to wild beasts. Thecla entertained by Tryphaena; brought out to the wild beasts; a she-lion licks her feet. Tryphaena, upon a vision of her deceased daughter, adopts Thecla, who is taken to the amphitheatre again.

3. Reading from The Acts of Paul 19–30

i. And when Thecla was sought for by her family and Thamyris they were hunting through the streets as if she had been lost. One of the gatekeeper’s fellow slaves informed them that she had gone out by night. And they examined the gatekeeper who said to them, ‘She has gone to the foreigner in the prison.’ And they went and found her, so to say, chained to him by affection. And having gone out from there they incited the people and informed the governor what had happened.

ii. And he ordered Paul to be brought before the tribunal, but Thecla was riveted to the place where Paul had sat whilst in prison. And the governor ordered her also to be brought to the tribunal, and she came with an exceedingly great joy. And when Paul had been led forth the crowd vehemently cried out, ‘He is a sorcerer. Away with him!’ But the governor gladly heard Paul speak about the holy works of Christ.
And having taken counsel, he summoned Thecla and said, ‘Why do you not marry Thamyris, according to the law of the Iconians?’ But she stood looking earnestly at Paul. And when she gave no answer Theoclia, her mother, cried out saying, ‘Burn the wicked one; burn her who will not marry in the midst of the theatre, that all the women who have been taught by this man may be afraid.’

iii. And the governor was greatly moved, and after scourging Paul he cast him out of the city. But Thecla he condemned to be burned. And immediately the governor arose and went away to the theatre. And the whole multitude went out to witness the spectacle. But as a lamb in the wilderness looks around for the shepherd, so Thecla kept searching for Paul. And having looked into the crowd she saw the Lord sitting in the likeness of Paul and said, ‘As if I were unable to endure, Paul has come to look after me.’ And she gazed upon him with great earnestness, but he went up into heaven.

iv. And the boys and girls brought wood and straw in order that Thecla might be burned. And when she came in naked the governor wept and admired the power that was in her. And the executioners arranged the wood and told her to go up on the pile. And having made the sign of the cross she went up on the pile. And they lighted the fire. And through a great fire was blazing it did not touch her. For God, having compassion upon her, made an underground rumbling, and a cloud full of water and hail overshadowed the theatre from above, and all its contents were poured out so that many were in danger of death. And the fire was put out and Thecla saved.

v. And Paul was fasting with Onesiphorus and his wife and his children in a new tomb on the way which led from Iconium to Daphne. And after many days had been spent in fasting the children said to Paul, ‘We are hungry.’ And they had nothing with which to buy bread, for Onesiphorus had left the things of this world and followed Paul with all his house. And Paul, having taken off his cloak, said, ‘Go, my
child, sell this and buy some loaves and bring them.’ And when the
child was buying them he saw Thecla their neighbour and was
astonished and said, ‘Thecla, where are you going?’ And she said, ‘I
have been saved from the fire and am following Paul.’ And the child
said, ‘Come, I shall take you to him; for he has been mourning for you
and praying and fasting six days already.’

vi. And when she had come to the tomb Paul was kneeling and praying,
‘Father of Christ, let not the fire touch Thecla but stand by her, for she
is yours’; she, standing behind him, cried out, ‘O Father who made
the heaven and the earth, the Father of your beloved Son Jesus Christ,
I praise you that you have saved me from the fire that I may see Paul
again.’ And Paul, rising up, saw her and said, ‘O God, who knows the
heart, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I praise you because you have
speedily heard my prayer.’

vii. And there was great love in the tomb as Paul and Onesiphorus and the
others all rejoiced. And they had five loaves and vegetables and
water, and they rejoiced in the holy works of Christ. And Thecla said
to Paul, ‘I will cut my hair off and I shall follow you wherever you
go.’ But he said, ‘Times are evil and you are beautiful. I am afraid lest
another temptation come upon you worse than the first and that you
do not withstand it but become mad after men.’ And Thecla said,
‘Only give me the seal in Christ, and no temptation shall touch me.’
And Paul said, ‘Thecla, be patient; you shall receive the water.’

viii. And Paul sent away Onesiphorus and all his family to Iconium and
went into Antioch, taking Thecla with him. And as soon as they had
arrived a certain Syrian, Alexander by name, an influential citizen of
Antioch, seeing Thecla, became enamoured of her and tried to bribe
Paul with gifts and presents. But Paul said, ‘I know not the woman of
whom you speak, nor is she mine.’ But he, being of great power,
embraced her in the street. But she would not endure it and looked
about for Paul. And she cried out bitterly, saying, ‘Do not force the
stranger; do not force the servant of God. I am one of the chief persons of the Iconians and because I would not marry Thamyris I have been cast out of the city.’ And taking hold of Alexander, she tore his cloak and pulled off his crown and made him a laughing-stock.

ix. And he, although loving her, nevertheless felt ashamed of what had happened and led her before the governor; and as she confessed that she had done these things he condemned her to the wild beasts. The women of the city cried out before the tribunal, ‘Evil judgment! Impious judgement!’ And Thecla asked the governor that she might remain pure until she was to fight with the wild beasts. And a rich woman named Queen Tryphaena, whose daughter was dead, took her under her protection and had her for a consolation.

x. And when the beasts were exhibited they bound her to a fierce lioness, and Queen Tryphaena followed her. And the lioness, with Thecla sitting upon her, licked her feet; and all the multitude was astonished. And the charge on her inscription was ‘Sacrilegious.’ And the women and children cried out again and again, ‘O God, outrageous things take place in this city.’ And after the exhibition Tryphaena received her again. For her dead daughter Falconilla had said to her in a dream, ‘Mother, receive this stranger, the forsaken Thecla, in my place, that she may pray for me and I may come to the place of the just.’

xi. And when, after the exhibition, Tryphaena had received her she was grieved because Thecla had to fight on the following day with the wild beasts, but on the other hand she loved her dearly like her daughter Falconilla and said, ‘Thecla, my second child, come, pray for my child that she may live in eternity, for this I saw in my sleep.’ And without hesitation she lifted up her voice and said, ‘My God, Son of the Most High, who are in heaven, grant her wish that her daughter Falconilla may live in eternity.’ And when Thecla had spoken
Tryphaena grieved very much, considering that such beauty was to be thrown to the wild beasts.

xii. And when it was dawn Alexander came to her, for it was he who arranged the exhibition of wild beasts, and said, ‘The governor has taken his seat and the crowd is clamouring for us; get ready, I will take her to fight with the wild beasts.’ And Tryphaena put him to flight with a loud cry, saying, ‘A second mourning for my Falconilla has come upon my house, and there is no-one to help, neither child for she is dead, nor kinsman for I am a widow. God of Thecla, my child, help Thecla.’

4. Reflection and group sharing, second meeting, afternoon

Participants were asked to reflect, in silence, on the following question then briefly note their responses in writing before sharing any responses with the group.

- Can you make any connection between Thecla’s experience, the third icon, and your experience of working or volunteering with the organization?

5. Excerpts from transcripts, second meeting, afternoon

I’d never thought about my wounds coming from the same source as my power. I’ve had just an hour to think about this before coming to the group. It’s a big question for me . . . maybe it’ll be a question that’ll be with me for a long time. Perhaps it’ll be a way of working out whether the decisions I’ve made are actually the decisions I should’ve made. Thinking about the relationships at work, I could ask myself: ‘Is this wound coming from the power that’s been given to me to make a difference in the world?’ I felt very angry when I read that Paul refused to baptize Thecla. She’d given up everything to follow him, I suppose so she could work as he did, and he won’t baptize her? What’s going on there? Would being baptized mean she could do what he did, preach and whatever he did? I’ve often wondered what
it’ll take before the organization recognizes my right to do my work, for laywomen to do the work that used to be done by priests (participant E).

I think Thecla’s wounds did come from the same source as her power. I’m really interested in the third icon because the figure in the third icon is so clear . . . it’s dark, but the figure is clear. For me, this means that you really know who you are when things are hard. In the Exercises this is the stage when you really try to focus on Jesus’ suffering, not your own suffering. Marie Curie’s suffering was something like Jesus suffering. But this makes me wonder: does all suffering work towards some good? I think of my own life . . . I haven’t suffered much, but a bit. Sometimes when I’ve put my own needs on hold it’s been good for other people. But sometimes I put my own needs on hold and it’s been messy for other people. When I put myself on hold the consequences are nearly always messy. I was really irritated when I read the bit about Paul refusing to baptize Thecla. He was putting her on hold. Why? Sometimes I get the feeling that the organization is putting me on hold . . . their words sometimes don’t match their decisions. I can feel a real outsider when I’m with some of the priests, not all, but a few. Their resentment of me is almost palpable and when that happens being invisible is a good option (participant I).

This is a huge reading and I can’t take it all in today, I’ll have to think about it. I kind of understand Tryphaena’s role . . . but I’m a bit confused by it. What’s the point? Does Tryphanea represent women’s solidarity? You can’t depend on women’s solidarity in this organization . . . power’s too scarce, everyone has to fight for herself, even though we keep smiling at each other while we do it. I felt sad when Paul refused to baptize Thecla. I’ve had this experience, not with baptism, but when people at work tell me I can’t have access to information because I’m not a priest. It’s the opposite of baptism . . . it’s like being made invisible. Would there have been a second persecution if Paul had baptized Thecla when she asked him (participant F)?
Paul. What’s Paul doing? Judas? How many times has this happened . . . not just to women, anyone who’s tried to take a different view. We count on someone to back us . . . then we’re invisible. It really makes me angry because I’ve been encouraged to take a stand about something in my workplace and then, when it comes in front of the group that makes the decisions, the blokes who’ve encouraged me to take the stand have forgotten who I am. Sometimes there are no Tryphaneas around when a woman lodges a complaint. Or sometimes, and this really annoys me, a well-meaning Tryphanea tells me to offer my suffering to Jesus. On the rare occasion when I’ve gone to the Provincial about stuff, absolutely nothing has been done. One time I asked him for help and he referred me to the same person who, he knew, was denying me help. This person constantly tells me that the work I do isn’t needed anymore . . . I don’t think he says this to the men. It’s like . . . when I do the job it is unimportant. When this happens to me I really get clear about what’s going on . . . like the way the icon figure stands out from the darkness. Things are tough, but clear. As I know Jesus, he’d be with Thecla. (participant J).

6. Commentary, second meeting, afternoon

A lot of information about Thecla was given and perhaps it was too much for participants to absorb. The predominant mood within the research group was anger. Towards the end of the group sharing I questioned this anger, trying to understand its source. One participant replied:

You are the researcher . . . and you are the only woman in this room who has not been a Catholic since birth. We are ‘cradle Catholics’—you are not. You’ve worked in the Catholic system for years but this doesn’t mean you understand what Catholic women have been through. We have been raised on the mantra: ‘Offer it up’—this has been the response to any and all suffering we’ve experienced. We are sick of ‘offering it up’—I’m sick of having a really horrific day at work and then hearing my spiritual director tell me . . . ‘imagine how bad it was for Jesus.’ It was bad for Jesus. And it can be bad for me. At least Jesus got abused in the name of trying to do something
positive. I get abused simply because I’m a woman—never mind that I’m trying to work with the organization to do something positive. Sometimes I go home not knowing who the hell I am anymore. I’m supposed to help people but because I’m a woman I don’t have access to stuff that’ll help me help people. And then I’m told I’m not meeting the budget [participant A].

Participants attributed lack of recognition and acceptance to gender discrimination by some members of the religious order and equated Paul’s refusal to baptize Thecla with refusal to recognize their lay vocation as equal to the ordained vocation.

7. Briefing in preparation for third and final meeting

At the end of the second meeting, participants were invited to speak about anything they had found helpful or interesting during the meeting, and anything they had found unhelpful during the meeting. No changes were suggested. Participants were invited to continue to reflect on the day’s conversation and to make a note of these reflections.

FOURTH WEEK OF THE EXERCISES

1. Focus for reflection, third meeting, morning

Gathering poem: Everything is waiting for you

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone. As if life
were a progressive and cunning crime
with no witness to the tiny hidden
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
out your solo voice. You must note
the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom.
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.
The stairs are your mentor of things
to come, the doors have always been there
to frighten you and invite you,
and the tiny speaker in the phone
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into
the conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots
have left their arrogant aloofness and
seen the good in you at last. All the birds
and creatures of the world are unutterably
themselves. Everything is waiting for you

David Whyte 2003

Paragraphs 31–43 from The Acts of Paul were read aloud and a printed copy was
given to each participant. A summary of the paragraphs under consideration was also
given to participants. Each participant received a copy of the fourth icon from the
series Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios (Figure 4: Asuncion & Guasch, 2002). A
poem was read to the group.
Figure 4: Fourth icon. From Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios. (Asuncion & Guasch 2002)
2. Summary of paragraphs from The Acts of Paul 31–43

Thecla is thrown naked to the wild beasts and, when all seems lost, throws herself into a pit of water and baptizes herself... Then they sent in many beasts as she was standing and stretching forth her hands and praying. And when she had finished her prayer she turned around and saw a large pit full of water and said, ‘Now it is time to wash myself.’ And she threw herself in saying, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I baptise myself on my last day.’ The rejected suitor dreams up another way of killing her and suggests this to the governor... And the governor consented grudgingly, ‘Do what you will.’ And they bind her by the feet between the bulls and put red-hot irons under their genitals so that they, being rendered more furious, might kill her. They rush forward but the burning flame around her consumes the ropes, and she is as if she had not been bound. Miraculously saved—again! Thecla finds Paul and tells him... ‘I have received baptism, O Paul; for he who worked with you for the gospel has worked with me also for baptism.’ As Paul listened to her speaking about her experience he was full of wonder. Others who heard her story were strengthened. She told Paul... ‘I am going to Iconium.’ Paul answered, ‘Go, and teach the word of God.’ In Iconium she visits the man in whose house church she first heard Paul speak, and she visits her mother in a spirit of forgiveness. Her ex-fiance is dead—probably a more face-saving alternative than seeing Thecla being who she was created to be. Thecla then took up the vocation of preaching the gospel.

3. Reading from The Acts of Paul 31–43

i. And the governor sent soldiers to bring Thecla. Tryphaena did not leave her but took her by the hand and led her away saying, ‘My daughter Falconilla I took away to the tomb, but you, Thecla, I take to fight the wild beasts.’ And Thecla wept bitterly and sighed to the Lord, ‘O Lord God, in whom I trust, to whom I have fled for refuge, who did deliver me from the fire, reward Tryphaena who has had compassion on your servant and because she kept me pure.’
ii. And there arose a tumult: the wild beasts roared, the people and the women sitting together were crying, some saying, ‘Away with the sacrilegious person!’, others saying, ‘O that the city would be destroyed on account of this iniquity! Kill us all, proconsul; miserable spectacle, evil judgment!’

iii. And Thecla, having been taken from the hands of Tryphaena, was stripped and received a girdle and was thrown into the arena. And lions and bears were let loose upon her. And a fierce lioness ran up and lay down at her feet. And the multitude of the women cried aloud. And a bear ran upon her, but the lioness went to meet it and tore the bear to pieces. And again a lion that had been trained to fight against men, which belonged to Alexander, ran upon her. And the lioness, encountering the lion, was killed along with it. And the women cried the more since the lioness, her protector, was dead.

iv. Then they sent in many beasts as she was standing and stretching forth her hands and praying. And when she had finished her prayer she turned around and saw a large pit full of water and said, ‘Now it is time to wash myself.’ And she threw herself in saying, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I baptise myself on my last day.’ When the women and the multitude saw it they wept and said, ‘Do not throw yourself into the water!’, even the governor shed tears because the seals were to devour such beauty. She then threw herself into the water in the name of Jesus Christ, but the seals, having seen a flash of lightning, floated dead on the surface. And there was round her a cloud of fire so that the beasts could neither touch her nor could she be seen naked.

v. But the women lamented when other and fiercer animals were let loose; some threw petals, others nard, others cassia, others amomum, so that there was an abundance of perfumes. And all the wild beasts were hypnotized and did not touch her. And Alexander said to the governor, ‘I have some terrible bulls to which we will bind her.’ And the governor consented grudgingly, ‘Do what you will.’ And they
bound her by the feet between the bulls and put red-hot irons under
their genitals so that they, being rendered more furious, might kill her.
They rushed forward but the burning flame around her consumed the
ropes, and she was as if she not been bound.

vi. And Tryphaena fainted standing beside the arena, so that the servants
said, ‘Queen Tryphaena is dead.’ And the governor put a stop to the
games and the whole city was in dismay. And Alexander fell down at
the feet of the governor and cried, ‘Have mercy upon me and upon the
city and send the woman free, lest the city also be destroyed. For if
Caesar hears of these things he will possibly destroy the city along
with us because his kinswoman, Queen Tryphaena, has died at the
theatre gate.’

vii. And the governor summoned Thecla out of the midst of the beasts and
said to her, ‘Who are you? And what is there about you that not one of
the wild beasts touched you?’ She answered, ‘I am a servant of the
living God and, as to what there is about me, I have believed in the
Son of God in whom he is well pleased; that is why not one of the
beasts touched me. For he alone is the goal of salvation and the basis
of immortal life. For he is a refuge to the tempest-tossed, a solace to
the afflicted, a shelter to the despairing; in brief, whoever does not
believe in him shall not live but be dead forever.’

viii. When the governor heard these things he ordered garments to be
brought and to be put on her. And she said, ‘He who clothed me when
I was naked among the beasts will in the day of judgment clothe me
with salvation.’ And taking the garments she put them on. And the
governor immediately issued an edict saying, ‘I release to you the
pious Thecla, the servant of God.’ And the women shouted aloud and
with one voice praised God, ‘One is the God, who saved Thecla’, so
that the whole city was shaken by their voices.
ix. And Tryphaena, having received the good news, went with the multitude to meet Thecla. After embracing her she said, ‘Now I believe that the dead are raised! Now I believe that my child lives. Come inside and all that is mine I shall assign to you.’ And Thecla went in with her and rested eight days, instructing her in the word of God, so that many of the maidservants believed. And there was great joy in the house.

x. And Thecla longed for Paul and sought him, looking in every direction. And she was told that he was in Myra. And wearing a mantle that she had altered so as to make a man’s cloak, she came with a band of young men and maidens to Myra, where she found Paul speaking the word of God and went to him. And he was astonished at seeing her and her companions, thinking that some new temptation was coming upon her. And perceiving this, she said to him, ‘I have received baptism, O Paul; for he who worked with you for the gospel has worked with me also for baptism.’

xi. And Paul, taking her, led her to the house of Hermias and heard everything from her, so that he greatly wondered and those who heard were strengthened and prayed for Tryphaena. And Thecla rose up and said to Paul, ‘I am going to Iconium.’ Paul answered, ‘Go, and teach the word of God.’ And Tryphaena sent her much clothing and gold so that she could leave many things to Paul for the service of the poor.

xii. And coming to Iconium she went into the house of Onesiphorus and fell upon the place where Paul had sat and taught the word of God, and she cried and said, ‘My God and God of this house where the light shone upon me, Jesus Christ, Son of God, my help in prison, my help before the governors, my help in the fire, my help among the wild beasts, you alone are God and to you be glory for ever. Amen.’

xiii. And she found Thamyris dead but her mother alive. And calling her mother she said, ‘Theoclia, my mother, can you believe that the Lord
lives in heaven? For if you desire wealth the Lord will give it to you through me; or if you desire your child, behold, I am standing beside you.’ And having thus testified, she went to Seleucia and enlightened many by the word of God; then she rested in a glorious sleep.

4. Reflection and group sharing, third meeting, morning

Participants were asked to reflect, in silence, on the following question then briefly note their responses in writing before sharing any responses with the group.

- Can you make any connection between Thecla’s experience, the fourth icon, and your experience of working or volunteering with the organization?

5. Excerpts from transcripts, third meeting, morning

I found the imagery of Thecla’s second persecution a bit difficult to think about but I’m surprised and happy that she baptized herself and that she could tell the governor who she was. I haven’t had long to think about this, but I think this could be the whole point of the Exercises, especially for women. This morning, I started to wonder if I feel “baptized” in my workplace, I don’t think I do. I’m wondering what feeling baptized in the workplace would feel like, what difference it would make? I wonder what would happen if I went to the boss and said, “My name is [ . . . ] and this is what there is about me”—I’d really like to do this, not in a confrontational way, but I’d like to tell him who I am. The brothers and priests are always telling each other and other people who they are, not in a boasting way, they don’t talk about themselves but they listen really carefully when they talk about older or deceased members of the religious order. I like listening to these stories but I’d like to be able to share my stories, too. When you can’t share your stories, you’re almost not there. I don’t know how to describe this, exactly, and I’m going to have to give it a lot more thought. I love the light in the fourth icon and I’m going to think about what this light is, in my life, and how this light connects with my work (participant J).
I don’t relate to the imagery in Thecla’s story but I relate to what she’s going through. I was blown away when I thought about Thecla baptizing herself and when she had such an amazing answer when the governor asked her who she is. I want to be able to baptize myself in my work with this religious order. I want to say “I am a servant of the living God and, as to what there is about me, I have believed in the Son of God in whom he is well pleased” and really, really feel this. I have never heard the Church say it’s pleased with me and I suppose my values would make this impossible. I’d just like to be able to say this in my work context. I’d like to be able to say what Thecla said, confidently, in the company of my colleagues. I’m really going to give a lot of thought to this. I want to say, in my workplace, who I am, like Thecla did (participant F).

We were asked to say who we are, just as Thecla explained herself to the governor. I want to be able to answer this question. I have no idea who I am. . . well, I know who I am, but I don’t know who I am other than who I am as a role . . . wife, mother, Catholic, volunteer. It’s huge . . . just being given the opportunity to think about who I am. I’m so sorry this is the last research meeting because I think a lot of the women in this group would like to work on the question about who we are. I loved the poem. It tells me that, whatever is, is okay. I loved the icon . . . full of light and hope (participant I).

I was really taken by Tryphaena. I don’t care what her motivation was, I just care about people supporting people and particularly women supporting women. The workplace can be very competitive; the winner is often the person who can perform according to what the religious order expects. Some days I feel I have two choices: dumb down and do what’s expected or depend on grace and do what the gospel might expect. I understand the Fourth Week of the Exercises but, work-wise, I’m not there, I’m back in the First Week (participant C).
6. Commentary, third meeting, morning

Discussion in the group focused on Thecla, admired because she baptized herself and could tell the governor who she was. Participants agreed that they sometimes don’t feel “baptized” in the organization and they wondered what difference this would make. There was agreement that they would like to be able to say who they are in their workplace.

Following this discussion, I made a short PowerPoint presentation about Thecla, the Exercises, and questions that the Exercises seemed to draw out from Thecla’s story (Appendix B).

7. Focus for reflection and group discussion, third meeting, afternoon

Participants were given a copy of all the transcripts that had been generated and recorded by myself from the morning of the first meeting to the end of the morning of the third meeting. They were also given copies of notes that participants had made (at home) in the weeks between group meetings. In light of all the data and conversations during the course of the research meetings, participants were asked to reflect, in silence, on the following questions and briefly note their responses in writing before sharing any comments with the group.

• What are some of the challenges in your Catholic workplace that expand or contract your ability to participate in the organization?

• Is there any distinction between voluntary and paid experience of challenges in the Catholic workplace?

• What would help you to participate in your Catholic workplace more effectively?
8. Challenges perceived to expand or contract women’s participation

Challenges perceived to expand or contract participants’ ability to participate in the Catholic workplace were listed on the whiteboard. As each challenge was named, participants were asked to raise their hand if they, too, experienced this particular challenge. Brief discussion accompanied the naming of each challenge. Challenges are listed in diminishing order according to number of participants that share that challenge.

- Discrimination on the grounds of gender (11 of 12 participants)
- Discrimination on the grounds of lay status (9 of 12 participants)
- Exclusion from decision-making meetings (8 of 12 participants)
- Exclusion from lines of communication (7 of 12 participants)

9. Relationship between discriminatory factors

It was commented that there is a relationship between the named challenges—for example, exclusion from lines of communication may be connected to the lay status of the volunteer or employee. It was agreed that exclusion from lines of communication might be understandable if the nature of the communication was confidential to the religious order. However, it is less understandable when communication is withheld from volunteers and employees when the nature of the communication has a direct bearing on the way the volunteer or employee performs her work.

Both voluntary and employed workers attributed an increase in discrimination to changes in the religious order’s financial management. Employed participants agreed that, until several years before the research project took place, they were willing to work overtime without cost to the organization. One participant recalled working ten-hour days for fifty-eight days, continuously. Volunteers were content to
contribute hours of time doing work that, in any other work context, would have attracted a wage. When the religious order appointed a chief financial officer from an investment organization, employed staff, in particular, were subject to financial surveillance that undermined trust between employees and the religious order and reduced employees’ willingness to contribute hours of time to the workplace without cost to the organization.

Participants agreed that the scandal caused by the revelation of sexual abuse within Catholic organizations had caused a fluctuation in the financial resources held by Catholic organizations. Although participants stated categorically that they did not know of any incidents of sexual abuse in the religious order described in this study, participants agreed that sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in general had resulted in usually loyal and financially generous Catholics withholding donations and bequests, against the custom of centuries. Although participants could not provide evidence of this phenomenon they understood that increased withholding of resources was increasing and that this change, unfolding at the time of the research group meetings, would be documented in the next several years.

10. Distinction between voluntary and paid experience of challenges in the Catholic workplace

Group participants agreed that, although voluntary and paid workers shared similar experiences of gender and lay status discrimination, the consequences of this discrimination were different according to the status of the participant—whether volunteer or employed. Volunteer workers were interested to understand the effect of discrimination on paid workers and a discussion took place that indicated discrimination may have less effect on volunteer workers than on employed workers. The group agreed that, because only two of the twelve participants were employed workers, generalizations about employed workers’ experience could be inaccurate and thus lead to false conclusions.

Nevertheless, the group decided they wanted to hear from one volunteer worker and one employed worker. Another group participant [B] was asked to “interview” the volunteer [D] and employed [J] workers. Although the interview was necessarily
brief because of time constraints, of significance to the present study is the following question put by the interviewer to both workers:

[B - interviewer] In the evening, how do you look back on your day in your workplace?

[D] Sometimes I wonder about the amount of voluntary work I do for the organization. My husband is always telling me to get a real job, one that will help with the family finances. At the end of a day, I know what I’ve done at work will help the organization and the people the organization helps. I feel different, though, from the people in my office who are employed and paid to do the same work I do, for free. Also, I can’t attend staff meetings and this upsets me a bit because things get decided at staff meetings that can affect my work. I’ll probably find a paid job when my children are a bit older. I do get a lot of satisfaction out of helping the organization but I don’t want to do the work without being paid, and being excluded from meetings and information.

[J] Sometimes I’m just too tired to look back on my day. I remember my life when I worked for a normal organization, before I started working in the Catholic organization. I used to get home at a reasonable hour at night even though I worked very hard during the workday. Now that I work for the Catholic organization I’m rarely home before 9pm and I often work on weekends. I have a huge amount of responsibility but I don’t have any decision-making control, especially over my budget. The budget comes into everything I think about at work and sometimes I have to make decisions that I know are incompatible with the work but the budget has to come first. I’m often tempted to leave the organization. I really loved my job when I first started working for the organization but so much has changed. What I find really difficult is that there’s no trust between people who make decisions and myself. Sometimes I feel that it wouldn’t matter if I worked every hour of every day, I just wouldn’t fit in to the organization because I’m a woman, a lay-woman, who’s married with kids.
Participants listened to the two interviews with great interest. There was agreement in the group that working with the religious order, whether as a volunteer or a paid employee, had significantly changed over the past several years leading up to the time of the group meetings (2004). Participants suggested that the impact of this change could be affecting employed workers more than volunteer workers.

11. Participating in the Catholic workplace more effectively

Changes that would help participants participate more effectively in the Catholic workplace were suggested by participants and listed on the whiteboard. As each change was named, participants were asked to raise their hand if they, too, agreed that this change would benefit their workplace experience. Changes supported by more than five participants are recorded below:

- Ongoing opportunities to develop more collegial relationships with ordained members of the religious order (11 of 12 participants)

- Access to communication that impacts on the worker’s ability to perform her job (10 of 12 participants)

- Acknowledgement by brothers and priests that gender discrimination exists and has been left unaddressed by the organization’s leadership (10 of 12 participants)

- Inclusion in staff meetings (9 of 12 participants)

- Action by the leader when abusive behaviour is reported (8 of 12 participants)

- Staff development and access to facilitation to resolve staff conflict (6 of 12 participants)
Robust discussion of challenges and changes perceived to expand or contract participants’ ability to participate in the Catholic workplace was limited by the amount of time available in the closing hours of the final research group meeting.

12. Reflection on the Exercises process:

Participants were asked two questions designed to elicit data about their experience of the Exercises process prior to, and during research group meetings:

- Recalling your experience of making the Exercises in the form of the 19th or 20th Annotation retreat—as a one-to-one conversation with a spiritual director, what was it about that experience that you recognise as important, now?

- Reflecting on your experiencing of taking part in this research group and the way the group conversations have been influenced by the Exercises, what is it about this experience that you have found most helpful?

Responses indicated shifts in participants’ experience of the Exercises. As I have mentioned above, this Chapter, all participants had made the Exercises in the traditional one-to-one form prior to joining the research group. Participant responses validated that one-to-one experience, yet noted the benefits of participating in the group process I have adapted from the traditional process.

As I look back on my experience of making the Exercises I can see how much I’ve changed since then. I took on the Exercises because . . . maybe I didn’t know it then . . . I wanted to make sense of heaps of stuff in my life that just didn’t seem to connect . . . and I wanted my past, present and future to, somehow, connect . . . but I’ve never even made the connections myself so it was hard to make the connections for the director . . . but I did . . . The group has been good, it’s a different scene, but I think I really benefited from hearing other women’s experience. You listened (participant I).
I just needed to talk to someone about my experience . . . I didn’t need therapy . . . I wasn’t “hurting”—I was just trying to figure out what to do next, in my life. It’s been pretty much the same in this group . . . I’ve really appreciated being able to talk about my life in this group—and your experience has helped me become a lot more cluey about my own experience (participant H).

I felt torn between options. I wanted to talk to someone about the options because, as far as I could see, all the options seemed okay. It was a lot better than putting on a blindfold and choosing the right option according to wherever my finger landed on the list. In a way, I’ve talked about my options in this group, it’s different, but all your experiences have really helped me get clear about my own stuff (participant J).

It was important just to talk to someone about my experience. It’s been really important to me to talk to this group about my experience. Making the Exercises, and this group, have been the two opportunities I had to speak about these things. For me, the one-to-one thing was important because I just needed some focused attention—I needed to focus, myself, and this was only going to happen in the intense conversations I had when I made the Exercises. But now, having done that, the best thing for me has been to speak about my experience in a group like this—and to let other women’s experience give me some ideas about my own experience (participant D).

Participants clearly valued the opportunity to speak to another person during their experience of the Exercises. Similarly, participants valued the opportunity to speak—and listen—to the experience of other women during research group meetings. It is possible to surmise that both one-to-one sharing of experience—and group sharing—have different but equally important benefits.

13. Evaluation of the group meetings by participants

The meeting, and the research group, concluded with an evaluation of participants’ experience of the group meetings. All participants were invited to evaluate their
experience; responses are summarized below. The evaluation question consisted of two parts:

- As you reflect on our three group meetings, have you come to a better understanding of how your volunteer or employed Catholic workplace experience has influenced your workplace self-concept?

- If so, do you think your increased awareness will assist you to participate more effectively in your workplace?

14. Excerpts from transcripts of participant evaluations:

It was really helpful to hear Thecla’s story . . . and to talk about her experience and relate it to our experience. And all this using the Exercises! This process was different to my experience of making the Exercises a few years ago with just the spiritual director and myself. It’s really helped me to hear everyone here talk about their work issues . . . we don’t usually hear these kinds of stories . . . about laywomen who struggle to work in some kind of religious or spiritual place. Next time I feel disempowered at work, I’m going to be like Thecla, tell people, “This is who I am” instead of just shutting up (participant E).

I really admired Thecla but I got a bit lost in all the imagery when she went through her second persecution. What’s helped me are the icons, I think I’m going to use the icons to understand my own experience, especially my experience at work. Scripture often doesn’t really help me think about who I am and what I’m doing . . . if it’s what I’m meant to be doing. I try to think about the female figures in Scripture but, really, their purpose always seems to highlight some action by male figures [participant F].

I was really happy that you gave us Thecla’s story because I’d never heard it before and it really helps me to think more about my own experience of following what I want to do, and the resistance I get in my workplace. I think
I’m going to frame the icons and use them myself, and at work [participant G].

I made the Exercises about ten years ago but, afterwards, I thought about the process itself. Now I look at the icons and I can SEE the Exercises . . . actually, I can feel the Exercises. And I can hear all of the women here feeling the Exercises through Thecla’s story and the icons. It’s been a really incredible experience for me but it wouldn’t have been the same unless we’d been sharing this experience in this group. I can understand how my thinking can actually stop me from making the best decision . . . and I can see how the best decision might mean suffering, but not useless suffering. Suffering’s useless unless it achieves good change. I’m going to think about this a lot more [participant B].

These meetings have been life changing for me because I can see that even good people can work against your best interests if it threatens their own identity. This is what happened to Thecla . . . Paul may have inspired her but then I think he actually worked against her. And I can hear it’s what’s happened to a lot of you, too. This is an important lesson for me because I’m thinking of making a big change in my life at the moment but I can see that it’s not a change my spiritual director would make himself . . . and this is somehow limiting me . . . stopping me from moving forward. Thecla obviously felt very strongly about Paul but in the end she had to go it alone [participant A].

I’m a bit surprised. I came to these meetings partly because I’m just so pissed off with Church stuff and especially stuff to do with my work. But today I feel a bit different . . . I think if I can be more sure of who I am, I’ll be able to deal with the institutional stuff much better. I found the icons really helpful and, as well as thinking about my own decisions in terms of the icons, I found myself thinking about the religious order in terms of the icons. I think the religious order is experiencing the first icon now, there’s a lot of tension and conflict and doubt. I’m interested in history . . . I like to look back over the
history of the religious order and see if it has travelled through the icons [participant L].

I loved Thecla’s story and I felt a bit sorry for Paul. I’d like to think he had his reasons for not baptizing Thecla when she asked him, and for pretending he didn’t know who she is. I feel sorry for the religious order too. But, the fact is, some people in the religious order have really made my life very difficult and when I’ve spoken to the leader about this I’ve been told to get on with the very people who are actually quite abusive in an emotional way. I have nearly decided to leave the organization because I don’t see that some of my colleagues will ever respect me. I’d just settle for “polite” but it won’t happen while the leader prioritizes his men no matter what [participant J].

I was really interested in today’s discussion about the changes in our experiences of Catholic workplaces. I can see why the religious order is making changes to the way it finances the work but perhaps people would’ve found it easier to accept if the financial blokes had approached people differently. Overall, I found the icons really helpful because they help me to think and talk about my experience in a more helpful way. Sometimes my experience seems so random, it’s like it happens to different people, not me. The icons help me to put my experiences together and I’m going to use them when I go on retreat in a few weeks. The icons are the Exercises but they “exercise” me in a much deeper way than the typical text does. But of course, the icons wouldn’t exist without the Exercises, they are the Exercises—for women! And this experience of the Exercises wouldn’t have been the same without this group of women to speak and listen [participant I].

When I came to the first meeting I wondered what the research had to do with me because I’m just a volunteer for the organization. Then I started paying attention to what the other women were talking about and I was really amazed because we’re not all doing exactly the same work but there’s a similarity in our experience. First I wondered if I’d just started to think other people’s thoughts but then, between the second and third meeting, I could see the same things happening to me. What really struck me is that although I’m
only a volunteer, I need to be baptized into my role—recognised. I don’t know what being baptized into my role might look like, but I’m going to think about it because I just feel it would change the way I see myself [participant K].

I’m sorry our meetings are ending because I don’t have any other place to talk about my experience of working with a Catholic organization. I love my work but I’m not sure how much longer I can do what I do when just being a woman is causing me so much trouble. I really relate to the third icon, I reckon I’ve been working in this darkness for the past few years. Right now I have to ask myself if a few years of darkness is actually doing anything good for anyone. I was raised with the expectation of suffering for Jesus but, at the moment, I’m not sure my challenges are about suffering for Jesus. I have to think about it more [participant H].

During the week I had lunch with a good friend. I said to my friend, “My name is ( . . . ) and this is what there is about me” just like Thecla said to the governor after her second persecution. My friend was quite surprised—she knew I was part of this group—but she didn’t realize that the meetings were having an effect on me and my self-esteem. I really feel like I’m in the light of the fourth icon and it is making a difference to the way I see myself at work. I think I’m a bit more gentle, but, at the same time, I’m less likely to pay attention to the bitchiness in the office [participant D].

Thecla’s story is great and it’s helped me to think about my own situation from a different perspective. When I’m at work I feel somehow incredibly incompetent. This has started to affect my other roles. Logically I know I’m competent but constant resistance to who I am at work is starting to eat into my confidence everywhere else. These meetings have helped me to see that I don’t see myself at work in the same way I see myself in other roles. I wonder if this is because I’m a volunteer. I don’t know. I’m not sure that I can blame my work colleagues, I just know I need to think about what’s going on at work that leaves me feeling incompetent [participant C].
After each participant had given her evaluation of the process, I asked one further question: What do you remember most clearly from our meetings? Participant’s responses fell into two categories: the process and the material:

The process:

- All twelve participants commented that sharing their experience within the group is the memory that will stay with them, over time.

- All twelve participants commented that the Icons had impacted them more than other material. However, most agreed that the “gathering poems” had given them a lot to think about and a different way of thinking, and that these poems were remembered and cherished.

The evaluation questions put to participants were not always directly addressed in participants’ responses. However, participants said what they wanted to say in response to the evaluation questions. After the group listened to each participant’s response, there was a brief discussion about what had been said. There was a strong sense of regret that the meetings had come to an end. More than half the participants decided to keep meeting regularly as a way of supporting each other’s work experiences.

15. Commentary, third meeting, afternoon

As the researcher, I was happy with the three group meetings and the way the final session had unfolded. However, although the group conversations had revealed the experience of women who are, in the majority, volunteers with the religious order, there seemed to be more to be learned about the experience of women who are employed by the religious order.
16. Follow up

I gave each group participant a copy of a diagram that, albeit simplistically, set out Thecla’s story according to the dynamic of the Exercises (Appendix C). I also gave participants a worksheet that invited them, at their leisure, to reflect on insights that may arise over the following months (Appendix D). The following extracts have been taken from the worksheets and illustrate how a framework for thinking about values and decisions can be very helpful:

It might be possible to question assumptions too much . . . I could become paralyzed by evaluating everything that seems to influence my life. On the other hand, it’s been really helpful to use the worksheet to keep in touch with what I really want . . . it’s so easy to drift along or get too busy and never think about what I’m doing in small ways that can make a big difference, eventually (participant I).

I took the sheet away with me when I went on retreat—it was good because it gave me a process to work through over the week. I realized our group meetings had helped me to become much more conscious of the structures in my life that aren’t actually helping me live the life I’ve committed to live. I discussed all this with the director of the retreat. Our discussions were really productive and absolutely focused on what was going on in my life—she’s going to use the sheet with other directees (participant B).

I didn’t look at the sheet until about 4 months after our last group meeting. I was a bit resistant but I wanted to send my sheet back to you. When I finally gave some thought to the icons I became really caught up in thinking things through. I realize I’d made a decision that actually didn’t fit with values I value. I could see why I made this decision but, before I thought about the sheet, I felt the decision was a good decision (participant G).

I used the sheet to help me decide whether or not to leave the organization. I felt like I was constantly living in the first icon—but when I gave a lot of thought to the second icon and got clear about what I’m doing when I feel
most myself—I could see I couldn’t be this person as long as I was working for the organization. It’s been a risky decision, I don’t have a job and sometimes I think I’ve made the wrong decision. But even when I’m most fearful of being unemployed I still feel peaceful and that my decision was the right one (participant J).

Eight of the twelve participants returned the worksheet to me within a year of the final research group meeting. I was pleasantly surprised by this commitment to the process.

17. Attempted small research group focus

I discussed my impression with a woman colleague, who, like me, was employed by the religious order in Australia. She said she believed that there are particular challenges that confront women who are employed by male Catholic orders, and gave examples of how we had both encountered these challenges.

Subsequently, I decided to contact colleagues who held similar (employed) leadership positions in the same religious order, in Australia and two other countries, in order to gain a better understanding of these challenges. Two years after the large group research project, I sent a letter of invitation (October 2006) to my colleagues in the hope that we could join together in a second, smaller and more focused project that would identify specific challenges associated with laywomen’s employment by a male, Catholic, religious order.

My colleagues initially showed strong interest in conducting a focused project that would identify challenges that we encounter in our leadership roles within the Catholic organization. We corresponded about the areas we would agree to discuss in order to generate data for the project. The data would come from a questionnaire, with the possibility of further email discussion.

Two participants returned the questionnaire. I was surprised to read the responses provided by these participants because the responses were not congruent with personal conversations and less formal discussions we had shared up to that time. I
had some sympathy with the dilemma the questionnaire caused participants. I, too, would be responding to the questionnaire and I was reluctant to describe, in writing, the challenges I experienced in my workplace. The fourth participant did not reply to the questionnaire.

It is the opinion of one of the participants (who did return the questionnaire) that data generated by the questionnaire could be accessed by people who could easily identify participant names, and that this identification could jeopardize participants’ careers. I share this opinion and have subsequently advised each of the participants in the small, focused study that I will not include data from email correspondence and questionnaires in this study.

**Chapter Summary**

In this Chapter, I have described the process of research participant selection and other documentation associated with forming the research group. I have presented extracts from transcripts taken during meetings, including extracts from transcripts of participants’ evaluation of taking part in the research group meetings. While a detailed commentary on my work with research participants is presented in the following Chapter, Chapter 4, in this conclusion to the present Chapter it is worth noting that all participants found the process helpful, and continue to draw on the experience.
Chapter 4: Testing

Introduction to the Chapter

I now discuss data presented in the preceding chapter (Chapter 3) in light of the literature referenced (Chapter 2). The literature has helped me to articulate a theory of SOOA and, in doing so, to find a more precise focus in my interpretation of the research group conversations, leading to the conclusions presented in the following chapter (Chapter 5).

In the present study, I extend Antonovsky’s (1988) theory of SOC and develop the concept of “sense of occupational authenticity” (SOOA) in order to localize Antonovsky’s perspectives to the workplace.

I suggest that a strong SOOA relies on an explicable and adequately resourced environment deemed by the worker to be worthy of collaborative engagement. Drawing on Antonovsky’s three core components of SOC (1988 p. 19), I describe SOOA in the following way:

- Comprehensibility: stimuli from the internal/external work environment make cognitive sense, are ordered, consistent, structured and clear

- Manageability: adequate resources are available to meet the demands of the role, whether controlled by the worker herself, or trustworthy others

- Meaningfulness: the worker experiences being an influential workplace participant by participating in decision-making that impacts on the everyday fulfilment of her responsibilities
Research data raises five interrelated questions that concern SOC with consequences for SOOA. These questions are addressed according to the dynamic of the Exercises in order to give the discussion hermeneutical consistency with the overall thesis.

- Orientation: What was the woman’s level of SOC prior to making the Exercises?

- Evaluation: Can the Exercises process challenge and change a woman’s SOC?

- Reorientation: How might challenges and changes (wrought by the Exercises) to a woman’s SOC influence a woman’s decision to volunteer or work for the organization that is identified with the Exercises?

- Testing: What happens to the worker’s SOC when, once she is part of the workplace, she experiences challenges to her SOOA because of discriminatory practices?

- Transformation: What processes may be offered to the worker that may sustain SOOA?

At the outset of this discussion it is helpful to recall Antonovsky’s (1988) understanding of SOC as “a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence” (p. 19).

As I have mentioned (Chapter 2), Antonovsky argues that a sense of coherence relies on structured, predictable and explicable experience of the environment, that demands from the environment can be met by adequate resources and that these demands are “worthy of investment and engagement” (1988 p. 19).
The person experiencing weak SOC will exhibit contrary characteristics in one or more of the three components of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. Although the three components of SOC are intertwined, it is possible that a person will experience high levels on one component and low on another (1988, p. 19).

1. Orientation: what is the woman’s level of SOC prior to, and after, making the Exercises?

Prior to making the Exercises, was each participant’s experience of SOC weak, moderate or strong? Was each participant’s experience of her environment structured, predictable and explicable? Or was each participant’s experience of her environment chaotic, disordered, random, accidental, inexplicable? Did she regard as adequate the resources required to meet the demands of her environment? Or did she feel that resources were neither in her own control, nor in the control of trustworthy others? Did she consider the demands worthy of investment and engagement? Or did she believe that little in her life seemed to matter excepting insofar as life events imposed wearisome burdens and unwelcome demands? (Antonovsky, 1988 pp. 16–18).

Criteria for participation in the present study included the expectation that every participant had made the Exercises within the previous ten years. At the time of designing the research, it did not seem possible to establish participants’ prior level of SOC. In some cases, participants had made the Exercises up to eight years before the research group convened. A significant point that has arisen from the research is the indication that future research could helpfully investigate levels of SOC prior to directees entering the traditional, one-to-one, Exercises process. I have recommended that this question ought be the subject of further study. See Chapter 5.

Although information indicating participants’ SOC prior to making the Exercises is unavailable to the present study, I have returned to participants’ responses to the initial questionnaire, and transcripts from the first meeting, in order to identify indicia of participants’ spiritual experience that were in place prior to exposure to the adaptation of Exercises that I presented during research group meetings:
• Nearly all participants report a lifelong or lengthy association with the Catholic Church

• While identification with Catholicism is lifelong or at least lengthy, participants distinguished between spirituality mediated by representatives of the Catholic Church as an institution, and spirituality that encompassed the participants’ personal spiritual interpretation of every-day events in their lives

• All participants showed a thoughtful desire for active, committed engagement with the spiritual life

Of relevance to the present study is that all participants experienced spiritual identification with the Catholic faith tradition prior to making the Exercises. Because all participants considered Catholicism—and Catholic-oriented spirituality—to be central to their lives before making the Exercises, it is possible to surmise that Catholic spirituality was an important determinant in the meaning-making schemas participants brought to their experience of the Exercises.

It might be argued that, prior to the first research group meeting, women participants evidenced comprehensibility (Antonovsky 1988 p. 19) insofar as their personal and/or spiritual values are, more or less, structured, predicable, and explicable. It is doubtful that I would have invited women to join the research group unless I were confident in potential participants’ psycho-spiritual maturity.

Nevertheless, participants could be said to exhibit weak comprehensibility in that they found some aspects of Catholic doctrine—describing the way they were, as Catholics, expected to live their lives—illogical.
2. Evaluation: Can the Exercises process challenge and change a woman’s sense of coherence (SOC)?

While it is not possible to surmise that participants’ spiritually-oriented meaning-making schemas were necessarily characterized by weak or strong SOC prior to making the Exercises, research data does indicate that the experience of the Exercises helped participants to be more aware of factors described by Antonovsky (1998 p. 19) as SOC. All research participants agreed that the Exercises process was a unique experience. I noted strong agreement within the research group when one participant commented:

I didn’t realize then that the retreat was based on the Exercises. I could almost say the retreat changed my life. It was the first time I’d told anyone about my life . . . my life wasn’t special, it was just the first time anyone had asked me to talk about my life from my birth up until the time I made the retreat. I felt like one person, I felt like all my experiences were who I was . . . it’s really difficult to explain. I found I had more confidence and I was very grateful for the Exercises (Chapter 3, No. 7, participant B).

The Exercises process had helped research participants make better sense of their lives, just as, for example, Emilia found narrative solidity by telling her life experience to her friend Amalia (Cavarero, 2000). The Exercises process gave research participants a method—and company—while they made sense of life experience, a method and company not available to Thecla (Elliott 1994), Koller (1981) and Ellsworth (Wear 1993).

It must be acknowledged that the Exercises process can be experienced positively and thus may be said to strengthen SOC with a potential follow-on effect for SOOA. Although self-reporting may not necessarily yield uniformly accurate observations, all participants agreed that their experience of the Exercises had influenced their lives in a beneficial way:

The Exercises changed my way of thinking about religion, and, actually my way of thinking about myself and other people. Everything made a lot more
sense to me, and I wanted to help other people get this sense (Chapter 3, No. 7, participant C).

I could almost say the retreat changed my life. It was the first time I’d told anyone about my life . . . my life wasn’t special, it was just the first time anyone had asked me to talk about my life from my birth up until the time I made the retreat. I felt like one person, I felt like all my experiences were who I was . . . it’s really difficult to explain. I found I had more confidence and I was very grateful for the Exercises (Chapter 3, No. 7, participant B).

A friend told me about a priest who was a spiritual director and I visited this priest. Eventually he suggested I might make the Exercises, and I did. It took about a year but it was the best year in my life. It kind of made sense of a lot of things in my life (Chapter 3, No.7, participant F).

After my children were all attending school I made the Exercises—this really made sense of my theological study and my life, generally, I suppose. I felt “together” and that I knew who I was and what I was meant to be doing (Chapter 3, No. 7, participant A).

Although it has not been possible to assess group participants’ SOC prior to their experience of making the Exercises, it is possible to suggest that Catholic spirituality influenced the meaning-making schemes of each participant prior to entering the Exercises process, a process that was found to be beneficial.

Without, for the moment, questioning the authenticity of participants’ experience of the Exercises before joining the research group, prior to the first research group meeting all research group participants exhibited a sense of a unitary self. This, according to Shusterman, is prerequisite to commitment to solidarity (Archer 2000 p. 40). It is interesting to speculate that the invitation to join the research group may have influenced this sense of solidarity.

While, according to Antonovsky’s (1988) definition of SOC, participants could be said to exhibit weak comprehensibility in that, at this age, they found some aspects of
Catholic doctrine that had shaped their lives illogical, it was possible to notice a growing solidarity and comprehension within the group as participants shared their experiences of spirituality, religion and the institutional Catholic Church in the context of research group meetings. This solidarity seemed to coalesce around questioned aspects of Catholic doctrine, as might be predicted by spiritual directors such as Studzinski (1985). Studzinski considers midlife to be a time when people withdraw from commitment or “set out on an interior journey to gain new perspectives on themselves and their work” (1985, p. 4).

I suggest that the capacity to question doctrine (that has influenced one’s development over a period of years and been integral to the early formation of SOC) can be a sign of strong SOC. That is, traditional explanations may not suffice. Critique of explanations that no longer satisfy may require a strong SOC and increase the strength of coherence. As Studzinski points out, spiritual direction at midlife can be an opportunity to test and reshape “the guiding illusion that has provided meaning so far in one’s life” (1985, p. 89).

Participants understood that our research group conversations followed the dynamic of the Exercises, and, inevitably, conversations were framed in the context of women’s participation in Church organizations. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that some participants commented that they found a freedom in the research group to discuss topics that had been avoided during their experience of the more traditional Exercises process in the years before the research group was convened.

This freedom seems to have been consequent on hearing and discussing the story of Thecla (Elliott 1994), and by contemplating Asuncion & Guasch’s Icons (2002). This reflection elicited useful insight because it was organized according to the dynamic of the Exercises (orientation, evaluation, reorientation, testing and transformation) and shared in the group of twelve women:

This process was different to my experience of making the Exercises a few years ago with just the spiritual director and myself. It’s really helped me to hear everyone here talk about their work issues . . . we don’t usually hear these kinds of stories . . . about laywomen who struggle to work in some kind
of religious or spiritual place (Chapter 3, Fourth Week, No. 14, participant E).

I made the Exercises about ten years ago but, afterwards, I thought about the process itself. Now I look at the Icons and I can SEE the Exercises . . . actually, I can feel the Exercises. And I can hear all the women here feeling the Exercises through Thecla’s story and the Icons. It’s been a really incredible experience for me—but it wouldn’t have been the same unless we’d been sharing this experience in this group (Chapter 3, Fourth Week, No. 14, participant B).

These meetings have been life changing for me because I can see that even good people can work against your best interests if it threatens their own identity. This is what happened to Thecla . . . Paul may have inspired her but then I think he actually worked against her. And I can hear it’s what’s happened to a lot of you, too . . . as we’ve talked about each stage of the Exercises I think we’ve become much more aware of stuff that maybe we don’t think about or talk about (Chapter 3, Fourth Week, No. 14, participant A).

The Icons are the Exercises but they “exercise” me in a much deeper way than the typical text does. But of course, the Icons wouldn’t exist without the Exercises, they are the Exercises—for women! And this experience of the Exercises wouldn’t have been the same without this group of women to speak and listen (Chapter 3, Fourth Week, No. 14, participant I).

The spiritual direction relationship can be an opportunity for women to be “seen” for the unique person we feel we are. However, sharing experience in the research group appeared to stimulate consciousness in the research participants that allowed for an articulation of feelings that may not have been possible during participants’ previous, more conventional, experience of the Exercises.
Rindfleish, Sheridan & Kjeldal’s (2009, pp. 486–499) study concerning the benefits of sharing workplace experience with others reflects the evaluation of the research group process by research group participants.

The author’s argument, that “there must be more storytelling in openly public spaces between colleagues to challenge and negotiate the gendered organizational cultures of academia” (Rindfleish, Sheridan & Kjeldal 2009, p. 486) is equally applicable to the Catholic workplace and is discussed at some length below (see Chapter 5).

Research group transcripts endorse Hanisch’s (1969) argument for action-oriented group sharing—described by Hanisch as “analytical sessions”—an activity that resonates with Fischer’s argument for the inclusion of social analysis in the discernment and decision-making processes associated with the spiritual direction context (1988, p. 123–124).

Hook’s insistence that women’s group interaction should concentrate on building “shared strengths and resources” (Meyers, 1997, p. 487) is congruent with the goal of strengthening SOC. SOC will not, I argue, be strengthened simply by identifying occasions of victimization, although this may well be the starting point and a necessary foundation for the identification of strengths and resources, as was apparent from research group participants’ comments.

Research group participants could identify with the victimization of Thecla:

I’ve often wondered what it’ll take before the organization recognizes my right to do my work, for laywomen to do the work that used to be done by priests (Chapter 3, Third Week, No. 5, participant E).

Sometimes I get the feeling that the organization is putting me on hold . . . their words sometimes don’t match their decisions. I can feel a real outsider when I’m with some of the priests, not all, but a few. Their resentment of me is almost palpable and when that happens being invisible is a good option (Chapter 3, Third Week, No. 5, participant I).
You can’t depend on women’s solidarity in this organization . . . power’s too scarce, everyone has to fight for herself, even though we keep smiling at each other while we do it. I felt sad when Paul refused to baptize Thecla. I’ve had this experience, not with baptism, but when people at work tell me I can’t have access to information because I’m not a priest. It’s the opposite of baptism . . . it’s like being made invisible (Chapter 3, Third Week, No. 5, participant F).

On the rare occasion when I’ve gone to the Provincial about stuff, absolutely nothing has been done. One time I asked him for help and he referred me to the same person who, he knew, was denying me help. This person constantly tells me that the work I do isn’t needed anymore . . . I don’t think he says this to the men. It’s like . . . when I do the job it is unimportant. When this happens to me I really get clear about what’s going on . . . (Chapter 3, Third Week, No. 5, participant J).

However, towards the completion of research group conversations, identification with victimization seemed to shift to a sense of realistic hope for the future:

I found the imagery of Thecla’s second persecution a bit difficult to think about but I’m surprised and happy that she baptized herself and that she could tell the governor who she was. I haven’t had long to think about this, but I think this could be the whole point of the Exercises, especially for women. This morning, I started to wonder if I feel “baptized” in my workplace, I don’t think I do. I’m wondering what feeling baptized in the workplace would feel like, what difference it would make? I wonder what would happen if I went to the boss and said, “My name is [ . . . .] and this is what there is about me (Chapter 3, Fourth Week, No. 5, participant J).

I was blown away when I thought about Thecla baptizing herself and when she had such an amazing answer when the governor asked her who she is. I want to be able to baptize myself in my work with this religious Order. I want to say “I am a servant of the living God and, as to what there is about me, I
We were asked to say who we are, just as Thecla explained herself to the governor. I want to be able to answer this question. I have no idea who I am. . . well, I know who I am, but I don’t know who I am other than who I am as a role . . . wife, mother, Catholic, volunteer. It’s huge . . . just being given the opportunity to think about who I am (Chapter 3, Fourth Week, No. 5, participant I).

It’s really helped me to hear everyone here talk about their work issues . . . we don’t usually hear these kinds of stories . . . about laywomen who struggle to work in some kind of religious or spiritual place. Next time I feel disempowered at work, I’m going to be like Thecla, tell people, “This is who I am” instead of just shutting up (Chapter 3, Fourth Week, No. 14, participant E).

Findings by Nielsen et al. that “the protective benefits of SOC for strong SOC subjects could be destabilized by dissonance between job stress and a positive view of oneself” (2008 p. 133) allow for the consideration that research participants felt victimized by workplace gender discrimination precisely because their SOC had been previously strengthened by the Exercises process.

In considering the consequences of adaptation to the consistency and balance of organizational assumptions belonging to most Catholic workplace contexts, it is helpful to consider the necessity of distinguishing between an authentic SOC and a false SOC.

It seems entirely possible that a woman (or man) might accept that discrimination against women is justifiable and simply part of maintaining order. This person might be adjudged to evidence a strong SOC simply because they evidence certainty about their beliefs:
For some, the path of fundamentalism, as it leads to a shattering rock of reality, is devastating. For others, marching along the road of history and salvation is slowly transmuted into a truly valuable experience out of which the gold of belonging, comradeship, meaning and clarity retains its enriching quality (1988, p. 106).

Although Antonovsky discusses fundamentalism and SOC in light of adolescence, it must be argued that fundamentalism is not confined to a particular age category. As Antonovsky describes fundamentalism, fundamentalism appears to provide certainty during the tumultuous time of adolescence. A cursory glance at the literature describing stages of faith development will indicate the possible association between immature faith reasoning and fundamentalism. Streib’s articulation of faith-related developmental theory suggests that the reciprocal-instrumental faith style “develops when the child becomes aware of his or her own needs and interests as opposed to those of other people” (Francis, Astley & Robbins 2001, p. 189):

Means of trade are obedience and observation of religious commandments . . . metaphoric or symbolic meaning has not yet developed . . . we must not modify any detail of the story or of the religious rules. Literally everything happened precisely as told in the story, literally everything has to be observed exactly as the religious rules prescribe (2001, p. 189).

An adult who evidences assumptions belonging to Streib’s reciprocal-instrumental faith style descriptor could be described as a person with a strong SOC. Yet this SOC may be said to be age-inappropriate and, apparently, doomed to fail when the person engages with the reality of everyday life.

Yet, as Antonovsky admits, “the rigidity of an SOC that emerges in such a (fundamentalist) context inevitably makes it fragile, inauthentic, and doomed to shattering” (1988, p. 106); however, the evidence in support of this belief is not clear (1988, p. 106).
Antonovsky’s uncertainties are, perhaps, a good sign, given the perils of fundamentalism. However, his uncertainty raises a question for the present research: Is there an authentic and a false SOC? From Antonovsky’s descriptions of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, it would seem that it is possible to determine that an individual exhibits strong or weak SOC without reference to the ethics or morality underpinning that SOC. In this case, SOC is an entirely subjective descriptor.

In fact, a woman with little sense of herself as a unique individual may well be described as exhibiting a strong SOC if she can make sense of the politics that denies her uniqueness (comprehensibility), if she is content with access to resources that are congruent with her self-concept, and if she participates in societal contexts that complement her (compromised) self concept. Research group participants were struck by one participant’s comment about her experience of “finding herself” during the Exercises process:

*In retrospect, I’m not sure it was really “me” in the process but it was someone . . . and that felt better than the no-one I had been feeling previously. Sometimes I felt the priest couldn’t understand my experience but I just decided to leave some of this experience out of our conversations and work through it myself* (Chapter 3, Introduction, No. 7, participant F).

This participant’s statement and the degree of acknowledgement of the statement by research group participants may indicate that the Exercises process does not guarantee to strengthen a woman’s authentic SOC and may, in fact, weaken the authenticity of her SOC—for example, by undermining values which strengthen controversial aspects of her gender and reinforcing values that strengthen conventional aspects of her gender.

On this basis, it is possible that the Exercises “graduate” may enter the clerically-dominated workplace with a false SOC. Participant F’s response evidences this possibility: “I’m not sure it was really ‘me’ in the process but it was someone . . . and that felt better than the no-one I had been feeling previously” (Introduction, No. 7, participant F).
While one of the benefits of the Exercises process is to provide women with an opportunity to interpret “personal experiences which are found stored in a person’s memory . . . ” (and integrate) “past, present, and future into a coherent, meaningful story” (Studzinski, 1985, p. 110–111), one must wonder if the emphasis given particular experiences contributes to an authentic story.

A false SOC may, in fact, work in favour of structural arrangements that depend on conformity to organizational culture and yet, paradoxically, against the collegial collaboration that is essential to effective pursuit of organizational goals. See, for example, participant I:

“Sometimes when I’ve put my own needs on hold it’s been good for other people. But sometimes I put my own needs on hold and it’s been messy for other people. When I put myself on hold the consequences are nearly always messy” (Third Week, No.5 participant I).

Conformity to organizational culture does not necessarily lead to the effective pursuit of organizational goals. As Argyris argues, employees who work in the context of a formal organization characterized by task specialization, unity of direction, chain of command, and span of control may exhibit dependency, subordination and passivity and the effect of these reactions can be frustration, conflict and failure for the employee. The employee may regress, decrease his or her efficiency and create informal systems against management (1957, p. 1).

SOOA may be compromised by the individual worker’s need to find acceptance in the workplace. She may elect to do without resources that are necessary for the successful completion of tasks associated with her role. She may normalize exclusion from participation in important workplace processes, such as decision-making. The price of acceptance is her SOOA and, perhaps, overall sense of coherence, within and outside the workplace: Sometimes I go home not knowing who the hell I am anymore (Third Week, No. 6, participant A).
It seems possible that the Exercises process may strengthen SOC but challenges—such as workplace gender discrimination—may provoke self-concept dissonance leading to weakened SOOA. For example, participant J comments: “This morning, I started to wonder if I feel ‘baptized’ in my workplace. I don’t think I do” (Fourth Week, No. 5, participant J).

Experience that consistently weakens the worker’s SOOA will weaken global SOC—that is, not just the worker’s self-concept within the workplace but also the worker’s self-concept in other life contexts. The seriousness of workplace gender discrimination is underestimated when the effects are thought to be confined to the working day. As participant C indicates, workplace experience impacts on the way one sees oneself in other contexts:

*When I’m at work I feel somehow incredibly incompetent. This has started to affect my other roles. Logically I know I’m competent but constant resistance to who I am at work is starting to eat into my confidence everywhere else* (Fourth Week, No. 14, participant C).

Controversial issues, such as the inclusion of gender discriminatory texts as part of the Exercises process must be taken into account when assessing the relationship between the Exercises and SOC. Dyckman, Garvin & Liebert acknowledge that “the Bible as it has been interpreted has not proven an altogether liberating text for women” (2001, p. 8) and find comfort in feminist biblical interpretation that has “laid the groundwork for a biblical appropriation more friendly to women” (2001, p. 8).

Yet, the fact remains, no matter how Scripture is interpreted, and no matter how the text of the Exercises is subject to (usually male) translation and interpretation, these texts emerge from, and are promulgated by, a culture that excludes full participation (Smith, 1988, p. 20) by identified and marginalized sectors of the community.

My enquiry about which translations of the *Exercises* had formed the basis of research group participants’ experience of the Exercises process in the years before the research group was convened, did not provide useful information from ten of the
twelve participants. I did not expect research group participants to know which translation of the *Exercises* had informed their experience of the Exercises because spiritual directors usually do not discuss the mechanics of the Exercises process.

However, it is my experience as a spiritual director that helps me to understand that the particular translation of the Exercises used during retreats and direction based on the Exercises process plays a central part in how the exercitant experiences the process.

I argue that different translations of the *Exercises* profoundly shape the spiritual direction conversation—particularly in the selection of experience recounted by the exercitant, and the emphasis accorded to that experience. The experience of one group participant hints at this possibility: “I’m not sure it was really ‘me’ in the process but it was someone . . . and that felt better than the no-one I had been feeling previously” (Introduction, No. 7, participant F).

During research group meetings, I did not use texts that might otherwise be included in a more traditional adaptation of the Exercises: for example, passages from the Christian Old and New Testaments and extracts from the Exercises.

As I have mentioned above (Chapter 3), material given to research group participants comprised the story of Thecla (Elliott 1994) and Icons from the series *Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios* (Asuncion & Guasch, 2002). The absence of text taken from any translation of the Exercises may, I argue, have contributed to the freedom participants found to explore their experience during research group meetings.

None of the participants had heard, or known of the existence of, Thecla’s story until the commencement of the research meetings. Participants expressed surprise that such an inspiring story might have been in existence and yet had not been discussed in the various religious and spiritual circles in which participants moved:

> Can you tell me why we haven’t heard about Thecla’s story? Yes, it could have been used as an argument in favour of celibacy, but it also could have
inspired women to put up with the Church’s intolerance of women . . .
perhaps I’ve answered my own question (Introduction, No. 6, participant D).

I was shocked to discover that there is a New Testament Apocrypha. I’ve studied at theological college and I’ve never heard of this book, I’ve never heard of Thecla (Introduction, No. 6, participant A).

I suppose I’m wondering what other documents we don’t know about if we don’t know about Thecla (Introduction, No. 6, participant G).

I’m feeling quite angry about the Thecla thing. I’m going to get a copy of her story and give it to my spiritual director (Introduction, No. 6, participant J).

Of equal surprise to research group participants were the Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios (Asuncion & Guasch, 2002). Participants found these images particularly freeing because their reflection on the images seemed to be wholly their own, uninterrupted by even the most innocuous text although certainly presented (by me) in the context of my interpretation of the dynamic of the Exercises and Thecla’s story.

Considering the question—can the Exercises process challenge and change a woman’s SOC?—it did indeed seem that participants’ contemplation of the Icons had a deep effect on each person. It was as though the images gave the women a new freedom to consider their lives, a “conceptual framework capable of rendering their frustrations and yearnings intelligible to themselves” (Meyers 1989, p. 251).

A year after the research group meetings, and participants’ exposure to the Icons, the majority of participants were using the Icons as a way of contemplating and processing aspects of their life experience. For this reason, it is possible to suggest that the Icons have given participants a visual framework, a method for organizing and making sense of experience that may have, otherwise, remained in a raw, unreflected and thus unusable state. It must be remembered that the Icons were inspired by the Exercises and so it seems that, devoid of the traditional text, the
underlying dynamic (belonging to the Exercises) provides a useful framework for eliciting action-producing insight from experience.

Participants’ response to Thecla’s story (The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian literature, Elliott 1994) and the first of the four Icons (Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios, Asuncion & Guasch 2002), provoked a conversation among participants that identified tensions participants experience, between their own hopes and others’ expectations and tensions between the person they are at work and at home. That is, re-experiencing the dynamic of the First Week of the Exercises generated a group conversation that indicated various challenges to participants’ sense of comprehensibility, the first of Antonovsky’s (1988, p. 19) three components of SOC:

Caught between lots of expectations, mostly other people’s expectations, especially about the conflict between work and my family (First Week, No. 5, participant F).

Sometimes I get really tired of being two people; there’s a lot of tension between the person I am outside work and the person I have to pretend to be at work (First Week, No. 5, participant C).

Sometimes I feel really confused because there are things I’d like to do but they’re so different from what’s possible in the life I have (First Week, No. 5, participant H).

It’s hard because the priests keep asking me about my children, I think they can only see me as a mother and wife, they don’t see me as a spiritual director (First Week, No. 5, participant A).

Whether, or not, the Exercises process can challenge and change a woman’s SOC may depend on the mindset of the spiritual director and his or her willingness and ability to adapt the Exercises dynamic to the circumstances of the directee. It is possible to say that the adaptation of the Exercises (based on Thecla’s story and the Cuatro Iconos para los Ejercicios) according to the dynamic belonging to the first
movement of the Exercises (evaluation) proved a worthwhile experience for research group participants.

3. Reorientation: How might challenges and changes (wrought by the Exercises) to a woman’s sense of coherence (SOC) influence a woman’s decision to volunteer or work for the organization that is identified with the Exercises?

All participants spoke about how their experience of the Exercises had played a part in clarifying the connection between faith and life and, ultimately, their decision to give the Exercises to others in contexts associated with the Order:

A while later, when I made the Exercises, I became quite clear that I wanted to give other people the Exercises, myself. The Exercises changed my way of thinking about religion, and, actually my way of thinking about myself and other people. Everything made a lot more sense to me, and I wanted to help other people get this sense. The organization is based on the Exercises; it’s why I give so much time to the organization (Introduction, No. 7, participant C).

I found I had more confidence and I was very grateful for the Exercises. A few years later I did a course that would help me to give the Exercises to other people. I do this work with the organization, it’s more or less on a voluntary basis (Introduction, No. 7, participant B).

About ten years after I made the Exercises I trained to be a spiritual director (Introduction, No. 7, participant F).

After my children were all attending school I made the Exercises—this really made sense of my theological study. Like other people in this group, I eventually started to work as a spiritual director on a voluntary basis. My contact with the organization is because of this work (Introduction, No. 7, participant A).
Participants identified the Exercises process as a significant opportunity to reflect on their lives and make important decisions, including the decision to volunteer or work for the Catholic male Order, steward of the Exercises. At the time research participants decided to volunteer or work for the Order they would have claimed to have made well-informed decisions.

It is possible to hear Peloquin’s “abiding sense of rightness” (2006, p. 236) as participants describe an implicit or explicit link between their spirituality and their decision to take up voluntary or paid work with the Order. Any discussion pertaining to women’s experience of participating in traditional, hierarchical, male-dominated workplaces must acknowledge the impact of gender discrimination on women as an unjust undermining of this “abiding sense of rightness” (2006, p. 236).

In order to understand the significance of gender discrimination, work must be acknowledged as more than the achievement of organizational goals. Drawing on Christiansen’s work, Peloquin explains, “. . . occupations are more than movements strung together, more than simply doing something. They are opportunities to express the self, to create an identity” (2006, p. 236). As Hasselkus argues, work is different from, and more than, activity (2002, p. 15). Participants evidence this distinction as they speak about the cost (to themselves, and their families) of working with the Order:

*I spent a lot of the reflection time looking at the icon—this icon shows exactly how I feel now—caught between lots of expectations, mostly other people’s expectations, especially about the conflict between my work and my family. I can feel so guilty when I’m at work, especially on weekends if I’m running programs. But I can’t work out what I should feel guilty about, and what I should just regret. My life feels incredibly disorganized, or something. There’s an expectation that I run programs on weekends, it’s when people can come to programs* (First Week, No. 5, participant F).

*But sometimes I get really tired of being two people: there’s a lot of tension between the person I am outside work and the person I have to pretend to be at work* (First Week, No. 5, participant C).
My in-laws would prefer I didn’t do voluntary work for the organization, that’s for sure. They think I’ve become some kind of religious freak. I really like the icon; sometimes I feel really confused because there are things I’d like to do but they’re so different from what’s possible in the life I have (First Week, No. 5, participant H).

I have enough time to go back to the paid workforce and the money would help with our mortgage. But there’s a lot of tension about it because I feel really strongly that I’m meant to be working with this organization (First Week, No. 5, participant A).

It is possible to speculate that there is a relationship between participants’ spiritual convictions and the sacrifices they are prepared to make in order to express those spiritual convictions. Peloquin recognizes such a relationship by quoting Whyte’s opinion that synchronicity between our experience of work and its worthy effect on others “is one of the great triumphs of human existence” (Peloquin 2006 p. 236).

However, when recalling Lustig & Strauser’s claim that “individuals with a stronger SOC are better able to understand and persist in the career decision-making process” (2002, p. 6), as I have discussed above, one wonders if the individual’s SOC can be claimed to be authentic. For example, is the decision-making process that leads to engagement with the Order characterized by freedom of expression—or has the decision-making process been influenced by the directee’s weak SOC?

Just as Thecla seemed to be converted, initially, to Paul (Elliott, 1999 p. 367) and made the life-changing decision to become part of his group of apostles, it is possible that participants’ spiritual direction narratives attained a coherency that may have been naively influenced by the spiritual direction relationship. Nemeck & Coombs’ warning, that the directee can so identify with the director that she may “begin imitating in these initial phases certain aspects of the director’s personal spirituality” (1985, p. 170) is particularly germane to this discussion.
Unless the directee has sufficiently matured in her relationship with the director, it would be difficult to determine the integrity of her (“structured, predictable, and explicable”) self-interpreted experience and decision-making capacity. It is possible that the directee has, consciously or unconsciously, engaged in a process of adjustment rather than transformation (Fischer, 1988, p. 15).

A process that results in adjustment rather than transformation is not authentic and will not adequately fortify the person when she is confronted by challenges such as gender discrimination in the workplace. It is likely that she will show indicia of characteristics identified by Argyris: regression, a decrease in efficiency, and engagement in creating informal systems against management (1971, p. 1).

If the person has engaged in a process of transformation rather than adjustment, if the spiritual direction conversations that strengthen her SOC are inclusive of the experience she feels is relevant to the spiritual direction context, there is every possibility that the components that comprise her SOC will be strengthened, with positive follow-on for her SOOA, including her capacity to contribute to collegial projects. The workplace will inevitably challenge the comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness components of her SOOA however, she will be confident in her ability to deal with these challenges and continue to contribute to collegial projects.

4. Testing: What happens to the worker’s sense of coherence (SOC) when, once she is part of the workplace, she experiences challenges to her sense of occupational authenticity (SOOA) because of discriminatory practices?

I have argued that the Exercises process can challenge and changes a woman’s SOC—whether weak or strong, prior to the commencement of the Exercises. I have also argued that the Exercises process can subsequently influence a woman’s decision to volunteer or work for the organization that is identified with the Exercises. The question must be: what happens when this challenged and changed SOC, shaped at a deep spiritual level by the Exercises, is exposed to workplace discrimination in contexts associated with the stewardship of the Exercises? Can “an
abiding sense of rightness . . . sustain a professional life through even difficult times” 
(Peloquin, 2006, p. 236)?

SOOA is evidenced when the woman’s workplace experience is characterized by a pervasive sense of confidence regarding the following components of workplace experience:

- The values-in-action displayed by the organization make sense according to the spiritual values that are espoused by the organization and that are congruent with the woman’s spiritual values.
- Access to resources needed for the successful performance of tasks
- Participating in, and influencing, decisions that directly impact on her ability to successfully perform her role.

It seems possible that each of Antonovsky’s (1988) three components of sense of SOC can be compromised and weakened when exposed to discriminatory practices in the workplace and that discriminatory practices are experienced as diminishment of the worker’s SOOA.

The SOC component that is particularly vulnerable to gender discrimination in the workplace is that of meaningfulness, defined by Antonovsky as the belief that one is a participant in the processes shaping one’s destiny as one’s daily experience (1988, p. 18).

Antonovsky acknowledges that “Many life experiences can be consistent and balanced but not of our own making or choosing in any way” (1988, p. 92). From one perspective, assumptions that govern the Catholic workplace, in general, are consistent, if not necessarily balanced. Lack of choice is apparent in research participants’ accounts of workplace frustrations. Antonovsky explains that the world can become devoid of meaning “When others decide everything for us—when they set the task, formulate the rules, and manage the outcome—and we have no say in the matter” (1988, p. 92).
In large part, tensions are caused when the relationship between so-called consistent and balanced assumptions (that govern the Catholic workplace) and negative outcomes are ignored. When one party retains the prerogative of determining what is consistent and balanced, as is evidenced by the current debate among clergy as to whether women’s ordination as Catholic clergy is a sin against the faith, or the order upheld by the organization: “It would seem more accurate to describe the ordaining of women in the Catholic Church as primarily an offence against order rather than as an offence against faith” (Hamilton, 2010).

What are the options? Adapt, or pretend to adapt, to the consistency and balance of organizational assumptions? Or, as Thecla did, rely on divine mercy, and resist?

I argue that while women who work in Catholic contexts dominated by male, clerical, hierarchical governance may exhibit characteristics congruent with strong levels of comprehensibility (information from the environment is ordered, consistent, structured, and clear; Antonovsky 1988 p. 17), workers may experience weak levels of manageability and meaningfulness.

While research group participants may have been fully cognizant of gender discrimination in the Catholic Church prior to volunteering or being employed by the Order identified in this study, transcripts evidence the frustration and disappointment experienced by participants as they grapple with the reality of negotiating the Catholic workplace:

I’ve often wondered what it’ll take before the organization recognizes my right to do my work, for laywomen to do the work that used to be done by priests (Third Week, No. 5, participant E).

Sometimes I get the feeling that the organization is putting me on hold . . . their words sometimes don’t match their decisions. I can feel a real outsider when I’m with some of the priests, not all, but a few. Their resentment of me is almost palpable and when that happens being invisible is a good option (Third Week, No. 5, participant I).
I’ve had this experience, not with baptism, but when people at work tell me I can’t have access to information because I’m not a priest. It’s the opposite of baptism . . . it’s like being made invisible (Third Week, No. 5, participant F).

It really makes me angry because I’ve been encouraged to take a stand about something in my workplace and then, when it comes in front of the group that makes the decisions, the blokes who’ve encouraged me to take the stand have forgotten who I am. Sometimes there are no Tryphaneas around when a woman lodges a complaint. On the rare occasion when I’ve gone to the Provincial about stuff, absolutely nothing has been done. One time I asked him for help and he referred me to the same person who, he knew, was denying me help (Third Week, No. 5, participant J).

I get abused simply because I’m a woman—never mind that I’m trying to work with the organization to do something positive. Sometimes I go home not knowing who the hell I am any more. I’m supposed to help people but because I’m a woman I don’t have access to stuff that’ll help me help people. And then I’m told I’m not meeting the budget (Third Week, No. 6, participant A).

The workplace can be very competitive; the winner is often the person who can perform according to what the religious Order expects. Some days I feel I have two choices: dumb down and do what’s expected or depend on grace and do what the gospel might expect. I understand the Fourth Week of the Exercises but, work-wise, I’m not there, I’m back in the First Week (Fourth Week, No. 5, participant C).

Antonovsky stresses, “if participation is to lead to meaningfulness, it must be in activity that is socially valued” (1988, p. 93). Research participants identify that their participation in the Order is socially valued per se, yet participants also recount experiences that do not evidence social validation by members of the Order:
This person constantly tells me that the work I do isn’t needed anymore . . . I don’t think he says this to the men. It’s like . . . when I do the job it is unimportant (Third Week, No. 5, participant J).

When I’m at work I feel somehow incredibly incompetent but I know I’m competent because I have other roles and I do these really well (Fourth Week, No. 14, participant C).

I was really happy that you gave us Thecla’s story because I’d never heard it before and it really helps me to think more about my own experience of following what I want to do, and the resistance I get in my workplace. I think I’m going to frame the Icons and use them myself, and at work (Fourth Week, No. 14, participant G).

But, the fact is, some people in the religious Order have really made my life very difficult and when I’ve spoken to the leader about this I’ve been told to get on with the very people who are actually quite abusive in an emotional way. I have nearly decided to leave the organization because I don’t see that some of my colleagues will ever respect me. I’d just settle for “polite” but it won’t happen while the leader prioritizes his men no matter what (Fourth Week, No. 14, participant J).

Just as Antonovsky comments “There is little basis for seeing the life experiences of the housewife as strengthening the meaningfulness component of the SOC” (p. 93), so it may be for the laywoman working in clerically governed organizations. While the Order may not necessarily support the Vatican’s teaching about women, there is, nevertheless a consequence for women—for example, when Vatican departments equate the subject of ordination of women with paedophilia (Sydney Morning Herald, July 27, 2010).

Antonovsky comments, “Conceivably, one’s role may be socially valued in a given subculture or by one’s significant others, even while being disvalued by the broader society. This may well be adequate for a sense of meaningfulness. But social valuation there must be” (p. 93).
While social validation for laywomen working with the Order may not freely issue from some members of the Order, statistics revealing significant diminishment in Australian Mass attendance—700,000 attend Mass, 4 million remain at home (Ang 2008, p. 21)—suggest that social validation for workers, including laywomen, may not be forthcoming by Australia’s Catholic population in general.

Neilsen et al. found that “the protective benefits of SOC for strong SOC subjects could be destabilized by dissonance between job stress and a positive view of oneself” (2008 p. 133). It is possible to find evidence of such dissonance in research group participants’ comments. The dissonance I have identified occurs between participants’ spirituality and their experience of participating in the religious structure at an organizational level. I have taken three transcripts from four participants’ responses in order to illustrate the experience of this dissonance:

PARTICIPANT H

My whole life I have had a deep yearning to “know God”—to understand—to find meaning in my life. I am a searcher and I have a great passion for life. I have a deep desire to use my gifts and talents to make the world a better place (Introduction, Questionnaire).

I don’t have much contact with the priests in the organization. I’d like to be included in some of the staff meetings because what’s decided can make a difference to me (First Week, No. 5).

I love my work but I’m not sure how much longer I can do what I do when just being a woman is causing me so much trouble. I really relate to the third icon, I reckon I’ve been working in this darkness for the past few years. Right now I have to ask myself if a few years of darkness is actually doing anything good for anyone. I was raised with the expectation of suffering for Jesus but, at the moment, I’m not sure my challenges are about suffering for Jesus. I have to think about it more (Fourth Week, No. 14).
PARTICIPANT F

I have a rich inner world. I can be a very sensitive, thoughtful and loving person but I need also to be sensitive to my own needs (Introduction, Questionnaire).

I can feel so guilty when I’m at work, especially on weekends if I’m running programs. But I can’t work out what I should feel guilty about, and what I should just regret. My life feels incredibly disorganized, or something (First Week, No. 5).

I think I’m going to use the Icons to understand my own experience, especially my experience at work. Scripture often doesn’t really help me think about who I am and what I’m doing . . . if it’s what I’m meant to be doing. I try to think about the female figures in Scripture but, really, their purpose always seems to highlight some action by male figures (Fourth Week, No. 14).

PARTICIPANT A

My spirituality and my life with Christ is central to who I am. I am a child of God, part of Her family, forgiven and redeemed (Introduction, Questionnaire).

One day one of the brothers told me spiritual direction is a waste of time and that the building was where the priests lived and should not have laypeople in it. I was really upset and told a more senior priest. He implied that I was in the wrong . . . I was very confused about this . . . think I should be respected more (First Week, No. 5).

I’m thinking of making a big change in my life at the moment but I can see that it’s not a change my spiritual director would make himself . . . and this is somehow limiting me . . . stopping me from moving forward (Fourth Week, No. 14).
PARTICIPANT C

*I have a strong sense of my connection with nature and the interconnectedness of all things in and through God. I have a deep sense of God within and in my life, and an ever increasing desire that my sense and awareness of God as the core of my being continues to grow and expand so that I can say with passion and conviction “You are everything to me”* (Introduction, Questionnaire).

*But sometimes I get really tired of being two people: there’s a lot of tension between the person I am outside work and the person I have to pretend to be at work* (First Week, No. 5).

*When I’m at work I feel somehow incredibly incompetent but I know I’m competent because I have other roles and I do these really well* (Fourth Week, No. 14).

While it would seem that, because of exclusion from participation, women are particularly vulnerable to experiencing compromised meaningfulness in the Order’s workplace, research group transcripts reveal a weakened experience of comprehensibility and manageability, as well as meaningfulness according to Antonovsky’s definitions of these concepts in relation to the theory of SOC:

- Participants grapple with Catholic teaching that discriminates against women: comprehensibility

- Participants expressed disappointment that access to information relating to their work could be restricted to members of the Order; taking action to remedy difficult workplace situations was of little help: manageability

- Participants expressed discouragement as they recounted experiences of being excluded from decision-making processes that directly
impacted on their ability to perform the tasks that were otherwise considered to be their responsibility: meaningfulness

I argue that dissonance between workers’ spiritual values in action and the organization’s espoused values (imparted and embedded through the Exercises process) can lead to (what I term) “occupational disconfirmation”. I use this expression in order to expose the consequence of what others have described as workplace bullying, “an escalating process during the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts” (Einarsen cited by Neilson et al., 2008, p. 128).

Consideration of the consequences of occupational disconfirmation is crucial when one understands occupation as the opportunity “to express the self, to create an identity” (Christiansen, 1999, p. 552). Indicia of workplace bullying listed by Nielsen et al. (see Chapter 2, above) have not simply been an annoyance to the women who describe their workplace experience in this study. The consequences of even “subtle, even unconscious, incivilities” (Nielsen et al. p. 128)—such as the withholding of information needed to complete a task—are serious:

_I felt sad when Paul refused to baptize Thecla. I’ve had this experience, not with baptism, but when people at work tell me I can’t have access to information because I’m not a priest. It’s the opposite of baptism . . . it’s like being made invisible_ (Third Week, No. 5, participant F).

Repeated experiences of occupational disconfirmation may result in a weakening of the worker’s SOOA and the belief that contract breach and violation (Robinson & Morrison 2000 pp. 525–546) has occurred.

Robinson & Morrison describe psychological contract breach as the perception that the organization has breached an employee’s psychological contract, or not adequately fulfilled promised obligations (2000, p. 526). The authors note “perceptions of psychological contract breach do not necessarily lead to feelings of violation . . . the emotional experience of violation results from a sense-making process that occurs following the perception of a breach (2000, p. 542).
As has been noted earlier (this Chapter, above; Chapter 3, Introduction, Questionnaire), it is possible to surmise that spirituality was an important determinant in the sense-making schemas participants brought to their experience of the Exercises prior to taking part in the research group conversations associated with the present study.

Further, the process of the Exercises was undertaken by participants in contexts clearly identified as spiritual contexts: that is, contexts that participants understood to be representative of Catholic faith and spirituality.

Finally, as has also been noted above, participants identified the Exercises process as a significant opportunity to reflect on their lives and make important decisions, including the decision to volunteer or work for the Order identified as the steward of the Exercises process. For example, Introduction, No. 7, participant C:

*A while later, when I made the Exercises, I became quite clear that I wanted to give other people the Exercises, myself. The Exercises changed my way of thinking about religion, and, actually my way of thinking about myself and other people. Everything made a lot more sense to me, and I wanted to help other people get this sense. The organization is based on the Exercises; it’s why I give so much time to the organization.*

At this point, it is valuable to consider Argyris & Schon’s understanding of the difference between espoused theories of action and actual theories in use (1974 p. 7). I suggest that, in the time up to making the Exercises and during the making of the Exercises, research group participants were exposed to the Order’s espoused theories of action. That is, the Order’s commitment to gospel values and, in particular, the values of justice and peace.

The Order’s espoused theory of action regarding workplace partnership with women is clearly articulated in documents belonging to General Congregation 34 (1995). Two of the Congregation’s recommendations are of particular relevance to the
present study: genuine involvement in consultation and decision-making and respectful cooperation with female colleagues in shared projects (GC 34, 1995).

However, in the course of engaging in workplace contexts governed by the Order, research group participants have been exposed to the Order’s theories-in-use, theories that govern the thinking and subsequent actions of individual members of the Order and which are incompatible with the Order’s espoused theories of action.

A concern highlighted by the present study is the possibility that a woman who completes the Exercises process, and soon after engages in a voluntary or employed relationship with the Order that made the Exercises available to her, may not possess sufficient objectivity to inquire into, or otherwise assess, organizational norms, including discriminatory practices.

It may be argued that Íñigo López de Loyola, author of the Exercises would himself be wary of career decisions made immediately on completion of the Exercises process. As Schemel & Roemer point out, “the person must come to a decision in the matter under deliberation because of weightier motives presented by reason and not because of any sensual or disordered inclination” (2000).

Íñigo’s decision-making process (summarized below by van Gelder, 2010) is precise and, in its precision, seems more likely to rely on a sober recognition of theories-in-use rather than espoused theories of action:

- Identify the issue you need to decide upon, framed as whether to take a proposed action or not
- Identify and keep in mind your most important values and objectives
- Cultivate an indifference to the outcome
- List and weigh up the pros and cons of acting in the proposed way, and the pros and cons of not acting
• Determine whether acting has the greater net benefit

• Choose what to do based on this determination rather than your gut feeling

As I have suggested above (Chapter 2), the Exercises process can offer a conceptual framework for decision-making by providing exercitants with an extended opportunity to evaluate present assumptions, discern more authentic desires, test ways of implementing these desires and begin to express these desires in action. However, a number of factors influence the outcome of the process; factors that can, I argue, strengthen or weaken the exercitant’s SOC with predictable flow-on effects on SOOA:

• The environment where the process takes place: does the environment embody theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. 7) that influence the guide of the process and the one experiencing the process?

• The guide: does the guide of the process profess to be gender inclusive (espoused theory of action) yet manage the process according to a discriminatory mindset (theory-in-use)?

• The exercitant: is the person able to identify and analyze personal and cultural patterns of thinking and acting that may influence the outcome of the process?

As Fischer warns, “Insight is not usually sufficient to bring about change” (1988, p. 128). Fischer implies that the predicted cost of change can dissuade women from challenging oppressive personal and cultural patterns of thinking. I add that any process (in this case, the Exercises) that purportedly invites the identification of authentic desires, yet (implicitly, at an organizational level) presumes discriminatory assumptions about values such as gender, may subtly redirect or flatten women’s authentic desires. The consequences, for those women who move into the Church
workplace, include a weakened SOC. It must be acknowledged that an employee’s weakened SOC can work in favour of structural maintenance of the organization but, paradoxically, works against the collegial collaboration that is necessary for effective service.

Despite the potential perils inherent in the Exercises process, acknowledgement must be made that the Exercises process can be experienced positively and thus may, potentially, strengthen SOC with possible follow-on effects for SOOA. Although self-reporting may not necessarily yield uniformly accurate observations, all participants associated with the present study acknowledged the beneficial effect of the Exercises.

Given findings by Nielsen et al. that “the protective benefits of SOC for strong SOC subjects could be destabilized by dissonance between job stress and a positive view of oneself” (2008 p. 133) it is possible to surmise that research participants felt workplace gender discrimination precisely because their SOC had been strengthened by the Exercises process.

A “graduate” of the Exercises process may emerge from the process with a strengthened SOC, the dissonance provoked by strong SOC and workplace gender discrimination may, nevertheless, result in the worker experiencing a weakened SOOA.

5. What processes may be offered to the worker that may sustain her sense of occupational authenticity (SOOA)?

The dynamic belonging to the Exercises has been beneficial to the women who participated in this research project. Participants acknowledged that the traditional Exercises process, involving one-to-one conversations with a spiritual director, were appreciated and valued. Participants also acknowledged that the adapted Exercises process that gave structure to research group meetings was also of benefit (Fourth Week, No. 14).
Research participants identified the opportunity of speaking to another person about their experience as a valued aspect of their experience of the traditionally directed Exercises process. However, as I have noted above (Chapter 2, Mentoring), it is important to acknowledge that these conversations are not always helpful, especially when spiritual direction conversations stray into territory better suited to formal, external, organizational mentoring. As one research group participant commented, regarding her pending decision concerning her continuing employment by the religious order, some experience cannot be discussed during spiritual direction meetings when the spiritual director is personally invested in the religious order (Fourth Week, No. 14, participant A).

The benefits belonging to peer mentoring were apparent when research participants identified the opportunity of speaking to the group about the experience as a valuable experience. Participants also identified the opportunity to listen to other women’s experience as a valuable experience associated with research group meetings.

> It was important just to talk to someone about my experience. It’s been really important to me to talk to this group about my experience. Making the Exercises, and this group, have been the two opportunities I had to speak about these things. For me, the one-to-one thing was important because I just needed some focused attention—I needed to focus, myself, and this was only going to happen in the intense conversations I had when I made the Exercises. But now, having done that, the best thing for me has been to speak about my experience in a group like this—and to let other women’s experience give me some ideas about my own experience (Fourth Week, Chapter 3, No. 12, participant D).

It is possible to suggest that much happens in the speaking, and listening, process that is associated with any adaptation of the Exercises process, including the group experience of the dynamic of the Exercises. This phenomenon endorses the opinion of those who argue that listening to other people’s experience allows us to try on different points of view (Mezirow & Associates 2000, p. 20) and change as we think someone else’s thoughts (Begnal 1991, p. 286). It is in the recounting of story, whether to oneself (as was the experience of Koller and Ellsworth) or to others (as
was the experience of Emilia) that we find a lifestory that puts into words an identity (Cavarero 2000, p. 59). It is, I argue, strengthened identity that supports the possibility that occupation can be integrative and meaningful (Peloquin 2006, p. 239). Or, rather, it is the iterative relationship between identity and occupation that brings a SOC to our lives.

If the Exercises process can bring about a weakened SOC with negative consequences for a woman’s SOOA, how may the Exercises be appropriated, adapted and monitored in order to ensure that an individual’s SOC is strengthened, and this strengthening reinforces the individual’s SOOA?

Research group conversations identified participants’ desire to be recognized and validated in the Order’s various work contexts. Transcripts reveal a distinct separation between laywomen workers and ordained leaders; participants perceived this separation to be caused, at least in part, by the lack of opportunity for women to be present biographically in the workplace—in the same way that ordained members of the Order are biographically present through the recounting of personal stories and stories belonging to other (ordained) members of the Order. This situation is particularly clear in comments offered by two research group participants, employees of the Order. These comments found unanimous agreement with, and support from, the majority of participants:

*I wonder what would happen if I went to the boss and said, “My name is [ . . . .] and this is what there is about me”—I’d really like to do this, not in a confrontational way, but I’d like to tell him who I am . . . . I like listening to these stories but I’d like to be able to share my stories, too. When you can’t share your stories, you’re almost not there* (Chapter 3, Fourth Week, No. 5, participant J).

*I want to be able to baptize myself in my work with this religious order. I want to say “I am a servant of the living God and, as to what there is about me, I have believed in the Son of God in whom he is well pleased” and really,
really feel this . . . I’d just like to be able to say this in my work context. I’d like to be able to say what Thecla said, confidently, in the company of my colleagues (Chapter 3, Fourth Week, No. 5, participant F).

Participants were asked to suggest what might help them participate in the Catholic workplace more effectively (Fourth Week, No. 11). Ongoing opportunity to develop more collegial relationships with ordained members of the Order was suggested by eleven of the twelve participants. Ten of the twelve participants stated that access to communication and acknowledgement of gender discrimination left unaddressed by leadership would assist their participation. Other issues canvassed by participants: inclusion in staff meetings, action to address reported abusive behaviour, staff development and access to conflict resolution processes.

Because participants’ deeply held spiritual values, clarified by the Exercises, led them to volunteer or work with the Order, it seems likely that processes designed to sustain all workers’ SOOA should be shaped by the Exercises and thus draw on a spiritual framework that is held in common by both lay workers and ordained members of the Order. Such a process would improve collegial relationships and, consequently, introduce into the workplace characteristics of a healthy workplace identified by Peterson (2004, p. 120).

As I conclude this Chapter, it seems important to comment on the process and material used during research group meetings. As I have explained, see Chapter 3, each of the three research group meetings followed a process that was, in most respects, familiar to all participants. Reflecting on input and then sharing the fruit of this reflection is, generally, the process used during Ignatian spiritual direction and retreats. All participants had made the Exercises and the majority of participants had experienced this reflective process in shorter retreats and in the context of sessional spiritual direction.

It is interesting to note that, in terms of the research group process, participants highly valued sharing their experience in the group. Further, research participants agreed that the Icons were very helpful for stimulating reflection, and the majority of
participants indicated that the “gathering poems” had been an important and memorable part of the research group experience.

In this Chapter, I have considered data from research group meetings in light of the literature discussed in Chapter 2, above. I have addressed five interrelated questions that concern SOC with consequences for SOOA and organizational effectiveness. In summary, discussion of the research data in light of the literature allows me to offer the following observations:

- It is not possible to infer that research group participants’ experience of SOC was weak, moderate or strong prior to making the Exercises in the years leading up to research group discussions. However, it has been possible to establish that all participants identified with the Catholic faith tradition prior to making the Exercises and, from that, I have surmised that Catholic spirituality was an influential determinant in the meaning-making schemas participants brought to their experience of the Exercises. All participants claimed that the Exercises process had helped them make better sense of their lives.

- Whether, or not, the Exercises process can challenge and change a woman’s SOC may depend on her experience of SOC prior to the Exercises and her experience of the Exercises (especially the relationship between director and directee and the freedom to participate in unedited conversations). Experiencing an adapted Exercises process in a group may provide opportunities for social analysis and exploration of shared strengths and resources that are not always available in one-to-one Exercises processes. Care must be taken in articulating beliefs and actions that evidence a strong or weak SOC; a strong SOC may be attributed to a person whose fundamentalist perspectives are not congruent with values espoused by justice-oriented organizations. SOC assessment is subjective and thus vulnerable to manipulation.
Participants identified the Exercises as a unique process that helped them reflect on their lives and make important decisions for the future. All participants agreed that the Exercises had significantly influenced their decision to volunteer or work for the Order and that this choice was intertwined with deeply held spiritual values. Engaging with the Order became a way of expressing these spiritual values through action, sometimes at personal cost to the worker and her family. Careful distinction ought to be made between adaptation and transformation. Adaptation leads to a strengthened SOC based on false premises and is unlikely to equip the person to negotiate challenging workplace contexts. Transformation is evidenced by a strengthened yet dynamic SOC that will enable the person to feel a pervasive sense of confidence.

The component of SOC that is most vulnerable to gender discrimination in the Catholic workplace is that of meaningfulness (Antonovsky 1988, p. 18). Having completed the Exercises, participants moved towards engagement with the Order (inspired by the Exercises but perhaps lacking in objective information, or even a weakened SOC) to discover that values espoused by the Order were not necessarily congruent with the values-in-action promulgated by the organization. Women’s participation in daily events and decision-making associated with their work responsibilities could be described as limited, and their presence was not always validated by members of the Order, a validation that is essential to SOC (Antonovsky 1988 p. 93). The consequence of a lack of workplace validation, or, indeed, invalidation, can lead the person to perceive that her relationship with the organization has been breached (Robinson & Morrison 2000, p. 542), with negative consequences for collegial pursuit of organizational goals.

Ongoing opportunity to develop more collegial relationships with ordained members of the Order was named as a way to enable women to participate in the Order’s workplace more effectively. A process
based on the Exercises, experienced by work groups or teams, would allow all members of the workplace to develop a SOOA, with positive effects for the organization.

6. Chapter summary

In this Chapter, I have discussed data presented in the preceding chapter (Chapter 3) in light of the literature referenced (Chapter 2).

At the close of this Chapter, it is important to recall Shusterman’s argument: “The self needs to attain its own narrative, solidarity and coherence, before it can hope to cohere with others…” (Archer 2000, p. 40). I argue that gender discrimination prevents or interrupts the attainment and maintenance of narrative, solidarity and coherence. The consequence for women workers is the reduced opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, collegial efforts to accomplish organizational goals.

Collaborating with others for the purpose of taking effective action in society is a key feature and goal of Ignatian spirituality and the Exercises. For this reason, careful attention must be accorded to those assumptions and behaviours – such as gender discrimination – that can be shown to disrupt collegial endeavour.

Although the Order acknowledges past and potential discrimination against women colleagues (GC 34, 1995), the Order has not, as far as I am aware, investigated how gender discrimination impacts on women, and, further, the consequences of gender discrimination for the organization.

By including, and moving beyond traditional organizational development literature to theory pertaining to occupational science, I have developed a lens through which to examine the effects of gender discrimination on women workers, and the organization as a whole.

The literature has helped me to articulate a theory of SOOA and, in doing so, find a more precise focus in my interpretation of research group conversations. In the
following Chapter (Chapter 5), I present conclusions that have emerged from an iterative reading of my experience, the literature and the research group data.
CHAPTER 5: Transformation

Introduction to chapter

The thesis asks how laywomen who work in voluntary or paid roles in the context of traditional, hierarchical, male-dominated religious workplaces can sustain the sense of occupational authenticity (SOOA) that is essential to collegial collaboration. I offer the following observations in response to this thesis question.

1. Laywomen’s participation in religious workplaces

The Report by Macdonald et al. (1999) concerning women’s participation in the Australian Catholic Church recommends the re-examination of ministry roles “with exploration of the possibility of more inclusive roles for men and women” (1999 p. ix). Ten years after the publication of the Report by Macdonald et al. (1999), Wagner notes a “diminution of importance of the matter of women in the Church and a failure in follow through from the Report” (2009, p. 10).

Whether this diminution reflects the loss of ground experienced by women in “investment” organizations (McPhee 2008, p. 2) remains a matter of speculation, due to the absence of quantitative data concerning women’s participation in the Catholic Church. It is difficult to resist the idea that the “melting away” (McPhee 2008, p. 2) apropos women’s workplace progress impacts both social and investment organizations.
2. Gender discrimination in religious workplaces

The Order associated with the present study acknowledges that members of the Order “have been part of a civil and ecclesial tradition that has offended against women” (GC34, 1995) and recommends the “genuine involvement of women in consultation and decision making…in our ministries” (CG34, 1995). Experience reported by participants taking part in this study indicates that this recommendation may not be progressing as may have been hoped at the time of the General Congregation (1995).

Wagner refers to discrimination against women on the basis of gender as the “sin of sexism” (1999, p. 125). The present study helps to reveal the experience of gender discrimination so that the injustice inherent in gender discrimination may be seen in its effect. In order to make clear the workings of gender discrimination, I have drawn on Antonovsky’s (1988) theory of SOC. This appropriation has allowed me to examine, in some detail, three components that are vulnerable to gender discrimination: comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. I have named this workplace-based analytical framework the SOOA.

In this thesis, I argue that the effect of discriminatory workplace behaviours and attitudes is far more serious than the Order presently acknowledges. I argue that discriminatory behaviour affects a woman’s SOOA, with probable deleterious consequences for her global sense SOC. My argument is supported by literature generated by occupational health theorists such as Antonovsky (1988), Feldt (1997), Christiansen (1999) and Christiansen & Townsend (2010), who indicate a strong correlation between SOC and workplace stress leading to significant “pathogenic influences on well-being” (Feldt 1997, p. 145).

Unless the organization implements recommendations regarding women’s participation in the Order’s ministries provided by GC34 (Society of Jesus 1995), collegial collaboration—essential to effective organizational performance—will be compromised.
3. Authentic occupation

In order to address the thesis question I have moved outside parameters belonging to spirituality and organizational development by referencing literature emerging from the discipline of occupational theory. Literature generated by occupational theorists acknowledges occupation in a way that resonates with the work experience of women who have taken part in this research project.

As Palmer observes, “one way that my self expresses itself in the world is through occupation” (Hasselkus, 2000, p. 17). Laywomen who elect to work or volunteer for an organization, such as the Order described in this study, do so as a way of expressing their “self”—the sum of the values and priorities shaped by deep spiritual reflection throughout decades of experience.

During the course of this study, as I have listened to women’s experience of working in contexts associated with the Order, I have come to understand that authentic occupation is, or can be, a primary avenue for the expression of cherished values that comprise identity.

The women who have taken part in this study describe their voluntary or remunerated work with the Order as a way of acting on carefully discerned, profoundly meaningful values in ways that are of service to others. These women have an abiding sense that their engagement in this occupation is not only right for them, but it is “good for the world at exactly the same time” (Wood, cited by Peloquin 2006, p. 236), an exchange described by SE# 101 as the “mutual sharing” of what one possesses (Puhl 1951, p. 101).

The admonition of mutual sharing both summarizes and concludes the Exercises process, just as it summarizes and concludes this thesis. Mutual sharing lies at the heart of occupational authenticity; it is the quality and measure of workplace justice. Its presence describes those who work with the Order as “people for others”; its absence reveals the need for reconciliation, and a commitment to do better in future.
4. Laywomen negotiating the Catholic workplace

It is possible that a laywoman is attracted to participating in Catholic organizations, such as the Order described in this study, because this voluntary, or, in some cases, remunerated, work recognizes her contribution (to the organization) and affords her an opportunity to engage abilities that are not necessarily expressed within the family arena. The majority of participants who have contributed to this study are engaged in full time home duties as well as making significant, part-time, contributions to the work of the Order. Several participants are engaged in full time employment with the Order. These women are also partners and parents—and find themselves wondering how they can balance the sometimes extreme working hours asked by the Order and remain engaged in their personal lives.

Discussing the development of SOC, Antonovsky acknowledges the problem of overload for women whose occupation is that of homemaker. Of particular interest to the present study, Antonovsky notes that, although overloaded with domestic responsibilities, housewives can also experience under-load. Antonovsky explains that under-load “comes into being when one’s life is so structured that one’s skills, abilities, interests, and potential have no channel for expression” (1988, p. 108). I would argue that the homemaker does indeed express her identity through a range of skills, abilities and interests. However, especially as children begin school, many women homemakers do hope to express potentialities that have been held in abeyance during her children’s infancy.

It seems possible that the Catholic workplace may appear to offer a space for a woman to perform skills and abilities (certainly, in a voluntary capacity) and, in doing so, express her identity before an appreciative audience, an audience whom she values because it espouses values that are congruent with her own deep spiritual commitment. The appreciative audience permits her an agentic visibility that may not necessarily be possible in the domestic arena at this stage of her life.

Yet, if the reality of volunteering or working for a Catholic organization proves to work against a woman who wishes to express her agentic potential, she may choose to adapt or ignore that potential in order to receive recognition and validation. In the
opening decade of the twenty-first century, it seems that Smith’s identification of a “gap between where we are and the means we have to express and act” (1988, p. 19) continues to determine women’s experience in workplaces that are dominated by assumptions that place the male at the centre of that experience.

Women whose stories are recounted in the context of this study and during spiritual direction meetings with me, comment that their experiences outside the work environment are left outside the office door. I understand that they claim to be physically present (as workers) yet biographically absent (as uniquely storied people). Paradoxically, many of the priests for whom these women work or volunteer are always ready to share extensive biographical information. These stories are respected and appreciated. Undoubtedly, the lives of the members of this religious Order are characterized by courage and commitment . . . and a wry sense of humor. The men seem to know their own, and other priests’ and brothers’ stories well enough to recount them to people such as the women who have participated in this study. I suggest that this story telling is of enormous significance as it is in the recounting of narrative that these men reaffirm a sense of belonging and authority that validates their sense of organizational coherence.

5. Collegial collaboration

As I listened to the stories shared by women during our research group meetings, it became obvious to me that gender discrimination against women is easier to perpetrate when women’s experience is omitted from conversations that seek to build collegiality in the workplace. Clearly, not all experience is germane to the workplace. However, just as ordained members of the Order enjoy recounting their own and other members’ experiences of religious life, and receive validation in the telling of the experience, so must laywomen’s experience be welcomed into the collegial workplace.

Conventions that have shaped the Order since its foundation in the sixteenth century do not necessarily facilitate conditions that will be experienced by laywomen as “welcoming.” Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that it is the prerogative of the
Order to arrange its operational activities in a way that is congruent with traditions established by the Order’s founder.

Acknowledgement must also be made of the possibility that members of the Order are, themselves, living according to a consciousness organized within the relations of ruling and a consciousness implicated in the local particularities of community and ministry workplace (Smith, 1988, p. 7). For example, it is difficult to believe that members of the Order in Australia are comfortable with Vatican statements equating the seriousness of women’s ordination with paedophilia (Sydney Morning Herald, July 27, 2010).

Nevertheless, there exists a discrepancy between the Order’s espoused values and the values that are evidenced in action. It is this discrepancy that, in my opinion, undermines collegial validation of women’s contribution to the organization’s mission. In some instances, as is evidenced in transcripts belonging to this study, women’s contribution has been invalidated; this invalidation has been acknowledged but not addressed by the Order’s leadership. This situation is an example of gender discrimination. It is unjust, contrary to the values espoused by the Order, and offensive even to many members of the Order.

6. Comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness in the workplace

I have observed that the three components belonging to Antonovsky’s (1988) SOC—comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness—are vulnerable to gender discrimination in workplaces associated with the Order identified in this study. I have narrowed my examination of Antonovsky’s (1988) global theory to the workplace, using the three components of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness as the means to describe and measure SOOA.

I have been particularly interested in understanding how women’s experience of volunteering for, or being employed by, the organization can affect our SOOA. I propose that women’s experience of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness can be compromised in the following ways:
• Comprehensibility in the workplace can be compromised by the perceived conflict between the organization’s theories-in-action and espoused theories. For example, the espoused theory concerning respectful cooperation with female colleagues in shared projects (Society of Jesus, 1995) can be compromised by organizational strategies (Wallace, 2007, p. 80) designed to maintain hierarchical decision-making processes.

• Manageability in the workplace can be compromised by the withholding of resources proper to the achievement of role-related work tasks. Information is a particularly valued resource that can be withheld from non-ordained employees.

• Meaningfulness in the workplace can be compromised by exclusion from participation in decision-making processes that directly impact on the worker’s ability to successfully perform her role within the organization.

Antonovsky’s third component, meaningfulness, deserves special attention in the context of the present study. As Antonovsky stresses, “if participation is to lead to meaningfulness, it must be an activity that is socially valued” (1988, p. 93). During the course of this study, I have noted that an activity, in itself, may be potentially or notionally, meaningful. Yet, if the person participating in the activity is not socially valued, for example, because of gender, the benefits of meaningfulness may not be experienced. In fact, the worker is likely to perceive that there has been a betrayal of the commitment she has offered, by way of her qualifications, skills, experience and time, to the organization.

7. The Exercises

Throughout this study I have wondered to what extent the Exercises prepare women to engage in voluntary or paid roles in the context of traditional, hierarchical, male-dominated religious workplaces. I have also wondered to what extent the Exercises
might help women sustain our SOOA as we participate in projects of solidarity with our ordained colleagues.

I err towards the conclusion that the Exercises process, *per se*, cannot be assumed, automatically, to encourage the development or maintenance of SOC or, by extension, SOOA. There can be significant differences between an experience of the Exercises that strengthens SOC (and, by extension, SOOA)—and an experience of the Exercises that compromises SOC (and, by extension, SOOA).

Three potential challenges confront women wishing to experience the Exercises process. The first challenge is the mindset and training of the director of the process. The second, related, challenge is the gendered text offered by most translations and interpretations of the Exercises. The third challenge relates to the directee herself.

*A. The director of the Exercises*

Spiritual directors may be ordained or lay, male or female, traditional or untraditional, masculinist or feminist, well or poorly trained, well or poorly suited to the vocation of spiritual director. As many women have discovered, including the participants belonging to this study, a spiritual director can be of inestimable assistance as we grapple with significant life decisions.

If, however, because of the disposition of the director, a directee feels compelled to edit the experience she describes during the Exercises’ spiritual direction interview, it is difficult to see how the Exercises can be said to authentically contribute to the strengthening of her SOC, including her SOOA.

My experience as a director of the Exercises—together with my experience as the researcher of this topic—allows me to observe that, unless the Exercises process invites the directee to freely assemble and make meaning of significant experience, the process cannot be said to have legitimately assisted in developing the directee’s SOC or, by extension to the workplace, her SOOA.
In particular, it is possible that the comprehensibility component of SOC will be based on meaning-making that subdues expression of individuality (for example, gender and sexuality) in favour of values that are espoused or implied by the director of the Exercises and/or the organization that stewards the Exercises and educates directors of the Exercises.

B. The text of the Exercises

My tentative conclusion that the Exercises process, per se, cannot be assumed, automatically, to encourage the development or maintenance of SOC is influenced by my consideration of the texts of the Exercises that are available to directors of the Exercises.

Women, especially feminist women, seek contemporary translations of the Exercises in order to move away from the language of sixteenth century Europe. Yet, as has been observed,

> Conversations about legitimate interpretations, appropriate adaptations and implications . . . have been carried on under the auspices of and largely within Jesuit contexts . . . the experience of women making the Spiritual Exercises rarely appears in this scholarship” (Dyckman, Garvin & Leibert 2001, xiv, footnote).

Directors of the Exercises process must confront the inconsistencies inherent in even contemporary translations, adaptations and interpretations of the Exercises. It seems likely that the context conducive to the production of a woman-friendly translation of the Exercises may not necessarily be that of traditional, Jesuit-only scholarly meetings, as is presently the case (2001, p. xiv, footnote). If woman-friendly translations of the Exercises are to validate women’s experience, perhaps those best placed to author such a translation are women who can draw on (their own) experience in order to articulate Exercises based process that hold liberative potential for both women and men.
It is not the task of the present study to propose a feminist revision of the Exercises text. My own adaptation of the Exercises, developed during my practice as a spiritual director and refined for the purpose of this study, carefully avoids the literal Exercises text and the occasionally sexist theology that inspires this text. From my (feminist) perspective, the liberative potential of the Exercises lies outside the text of the Exercises.

It is, rather, the overarching dynamic of the Exercises (orientation, evaluation, reorientation, testing and transformation) that offers women a framework within which to contemplate, and act on, our experience. As I have shown in this study, this framework can be represented by image, a medium that allows the imagination to suggest possibilities and potentialities for expressing one’s identity in the service of others.

Naturally, the woman (or man) new to directing the Exercises will reach for easily accessible translations and interpretations published by familiar figures (see, for example, Tetlow, 2000). It must be acknowledged that novice directors cannot be expected to direct the Exercises from traditional interpretations of the process and, simultaneously, perform a hermeneutical analysis of the text in order to identify discriminatory assumptions. Nevertheless, spiritual direction education programs must include critique that is more than a cursory review from standpoints that are apparently neutral but covertly masculine (Smith 1988 p. 53).

C. The directee in the Exercises

Lastly, my tentative conclusion that the Exercises process, *per se*, cannot be assumed, automatically, to encourage the development or maintenance of SOC is influenced by my impression that the directee’s strengthened SOC may be person-related and thus, potentially compromised by psychological transference. While qualified spiritual directors may possess basic psychological literacy (see, for example, Veltri “Orientations”), to the best of my knowledge published literature discussing the complexities of psychological projection in the spiritual direction relationship does not address the topic of the spiritual direction relationship and its
potential influence on the directee’s present or subsequent participation in the Catholic workplace. This topic is worthy of further research.

Thecla’s story is germane to this concern. Thecla’s initial conversion to Paul stands as a reminder that intense spiritual experience can be accompanied by subsequent action that may be skewed by zealous enthusiasm and disordered attachments. Zealous enthusiasm and disordered attachments were considered by Íñigo to be expected, but must be acted against, if the directee were to become apostically effective (Puhl 1951 pp. 141–150; Young, 1959, pp. 120–130).

It must be remembered that Íñigo did not give the Exercises to everyone—he gave the Exercises to those he felt already demonstrated magnanimity and generosity towards God and who were sufficiently free to place themselves and their possessions at God’s disposal (SE #5).

As far as I am aware, an instrument designed to gauge a prospective retreatant’s readiness for the Exercises does not yet exist. Retreatants usually hold references that attest to spiritual and psychological suitability to undergo the Exercises. These references are, traditionally, character references, and while informative, do not provide guidelines that might assist in a more rigorous assessment of capability and readiness.

The spiritual and psychological maturity that would underpin the degree of magnanimity Íñigo expected to find in potential retreatants suggests a person who already possesses a strong SOC and whose SOOA will be strengthened for even more effective apostolic service as a consequence of making the Exercises.

That is, the potential directee ought indicate a “pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence” (Antonovsky, 1988, p. 19) that her or his life makes sense, challenges can be met, resources are available that allow her or him to meet internal and external demands, and that she or he takes an active part in shaping her or his daily experience.
During the process of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Annotation Exercises, the director must monitor the three components of SOC, paying particular attention to the directee’s level of SOOA, which, as I have shown in this study, is closely associated with the capacity for collegial, apostolic effectiveness. Evidence of strengthening SOOA will include strengthening of the three components of SOOA and an increasing alignment between personal and social identities.

At the conclusion of the Eighteenth—but particularly the Nineteenth and Twentieth Annotation Exercises, the director and the directee ought to review the directee’s experience of the Exercises, including the three components that comprise SOC and SOOA. Director and directee would hope to notice an authentic strengthening in all three components. If this strengthening is apparent, the experience of the Exercises process can be said to be transformative. If the Exercises process has been compromised by the mindset and training of the director, the text, or the freedom of the directee to fully enter into the process, the outcome is likely to be adaptation rather than transformation, with the consequence of minimal enhancement of apostolic effectiveness.

A process that results in adaptation rather than transformation, whether because the director, the text or the directee is unsuited to the process, is not authentic and will not adequately fortify the person when she is confronted by challenges such as gender discrimination in the workplace. It is likely that she will show indicia of characteristics such as those identified by Argyris: regression, a decrease in efficiency, and engagement in creating informal systems against management (1971, p. 1).

If the person has engaged in a process of transformation rather than adaptation, if the spiritual direction conversations that strengthen her SOC are inclusive of the experience she feels is relevant to the spiritual direction context, there is every possibility that the components that comprise her SOC will be strengthened, with positive follow-on for her SOOA, including her capacity to contribute to collegial projects.
In summary, I err towards the conclusion that the Exercises process, *per se*, cannot be assumed, automatically, to encourage the authentic development or maintenance of SOC or, by extension, SOOA. While the Exercises may not have been designed to develop or maintain SOC or SOOA, it is my impression that St Ignatius hoped that apostolic effectiveness would increase as a consequence of making the Exercises. Throughout this thesis, I have proposed a relationship between SOC, SOOA and individual and organizational apostolic effectiveness. My conclusion suggests the need for further research into the (a) disposition of the spiritual director, (b) Exercises text and (c) disposition of the directee—in light of developing and maintaining SOC and SOOA. This research would add significant understanding to the way the Exercises process could be changed in order to achieve more efficacious, transformational outcomes.

8. **SOOA and the organization**

Women’s SOOA will thrive—with beneficial effects for ministry—when shared projects can be seen to promote comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. The Order’s progress in the pursuit of “respectful cooperation with our female colleagues in shared projects” (GC34, 1995) will be measured by the strength (or weakness) of the SOOA of volunteers and workers.

- Comprehensibility will strengthen when dissonance between espoused theories and theories-in-action is reduced. The reduction of this dissonance requires honesty and vulnerability.

- Manageability will strengthen when all workers, or trustworthy others, have access to resources necessary for the satisfactory achievement of role expectations.

- Meaningfulness will strengthen when all workers participate in decision-making that directly affects their capacity to achieve role expectations.
While strong SOOA is essential for collegial collaboration, strengthening individual lay workers’ SOOA in isolation from the workplace is insufficient and may protect discriminatory aspects of workplace culture.

Individual mentoring processes, such as adaptations of the Exercises, can (depending on variables I have listed above) establish a stronger SOC in the directee.

However, during the course of this study, I have concluded that the individually directed experience of the Exercises process is not, by itself, an effective, or, at least, the most effective, Ignatian instrument for sustaining workers’ SOOA. This study concerns the individual’s experience within the organizational context and it is to this context that I turn in order to respond to the thesis question.

In consideration of the concept of SOC and SOOA in the organizational context, I refer to Antonovsky’s suggestion that the concept of SOC can be applied sociologically, at group level (1988, pp. 170–179):

A group whose individual members tend to perceive the collectivity as one, that views the world as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful, and among whom there is a high degree of consensus in these perceptions, is a group with a strong SOC (1988 p. 175).

Antonovsky notes that individual and organizational SOC may not necessarily be congruent; it is possible for individuals to possess weak SOC while the organization exhibits strong SOC (p. 175). From this it is possible to speculate that external factors, such as those that currently beset the Order identified in this study, may weaken the Order’s SOC, with an equivalent follow-on effect for individual members of the Order. Interestingly, prominent among the several topics discussed at the Order’s recent General Congregation is that of the Order’s contemporary identity (Corkery, 2008).

Members of the Order might, understandably, be contemplating the consequences of radical changes inherent in contemporary society and, simultaneously, wondering if, in the context of dwindling numbers of ordained religious and contemporary...
financial constraints, the distinct organizational identity the Order has maintained over centuries is sustainable. It is possible to surmise that organizational SOC and individual SOC is in danger of weakening in light of these challenges.

Undoubtedly, any weakening of organizational SOC will impact on lay workers’ SOOA as well as the global SOC experienced by members of the Order. Feldt’s research indicates a relationship between strong worker SOC and good organizational climate and a weakening of worker SOC when the worker perceived that the organizational climate had worsened during the year (Feldt, Kinnunen & Mauno, 2000, p. 471). Although more research is needed, organizations experiencing external stress, such as that caused by the global economic crisis, need to consider the impact of this stress on individual workers within the organization.

In light of the findings presented by this study, weakened worker SOOC will, ultimately, negatively impact on the organization’s capacity to survive external pressures. It is notable that advice provided to organizations (for example, CPA, 2010) about managing organizational stress caused by the recent global economic crisis does not acknowledge stress experienced by individuals as a consequence of organizational stress.

Perhaps it is especially during periods of organizational stress that management needs to introduce processes that promote workers’ SOOA. Such processes must seek to strengthen employees’ SOOA. In considering the nature of these processes, this study has shown a strong argument for the inclusion of opportunities in the workplace for team and group members to be equally present to the organizational context.

I argue that the Exercises have the potential – yet not the guarantee - to achieve this purpose by providing an organizing framework for the collective narration of life experience relevant to the service-oriented goals of the social organization.

In fact, such an adaptation exists in the form of the Ignatian Awareness Examen from the Exercises: all that remains is to harness the potential of this process for the purpose of inviting laywomen and ordained religious men to be biographically
present to one another so that each worker sustains a SOOA necessary for effective collaboration. I describe this collegial process as the Organizational Examen, a process designed to monitor and remediate individual and organizational experience of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.

9. The Organizational Examen

Shano’s Communal Examen, an adaptation of the Ignatian Awareness Examen, is used within a community of ordained religious men (2009, pp. 250–260). In this context, Shano’s Communal Examen becomes an opportunity to “look back from the perspective of a week” (2009 p. 258) and to commend and affirm each other” (p. 258). Shano observes that the Communal Examen, as he proposes it, “may offer a better way of dealing with patterns of behaviour. It can be a time of gentle challenges to both individuals and community. It offers us the chance to take a long, loving look at our community living” (p. 258).

Shano’s purpose is to articulate an adaptation of the Ignatian Awareness Examen for use by priests and brothers, members of the Order, who live—not just work—in community, together. His adaptation could usefully be modified for use by work groups and teams comprising laity and members of the Order. I outline Shano’s process before arguing for amendments to this process that incorporate discussion of Antonovsky’s (1988) components of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, as applied throughout this study to the workplace as SOOA. Shano SJ proposes a “communal examen of consciousness” (2009, pp. 250–260) adapted from the general examen belonging to Exercise #32–43:

Though Ignatius’ definitions and rules in the Exercises apply primarily to persons’ relationship with God, they are also applicable to communal situations, to persons’ relationship with one another. The communal Examen, then, can help the community as a group to attend to its daily life in a prayerful way (2009, p. 251).
Shano, a Jesuit priest, describes his experience of participating in the communal examen within his (residential, Jesuit) community on a weekly basis for forty minutes:

The leader prepares the Examen a day or two earlier, prayerfully considering what has been happening. The leader asks himself: Where is the energy in the community? What are the Spirit’s movements? Do people in the community look tired, or are they energized and upbeat? Are they engaged, or are they withdrawing? The leader has tried to pick up the general flow of life in the community—at the dining-room table, in living-room conversations, in classes, at Mass, and so on. He does this not as an external observer, but as one of the community. He “listens” for subtle movements; he tries to be a discerning presence in the community. (The leader should probably be the superior or some other person of authority in the group) (2009, p. 252–253).

Shano explains that the first half of the communal examen period consists of the leader guiding the community through questions posed for the meeting’s consideration. The second part of the communal examen is reserved for the dialogue that emerges from reflection on the questions. Of particular relevance to the present study are Shano’s suggested questions for the community as a whole. These questions address both the positive and negative aspects of community life, for example, the recounting of experiences from members’ ministries, and relationships with one another and with others outside the community (2009, p. 254).

As I have listened to, and read, women’s comments about their experience of volunteering or working for the Order, I have noticed that women feel unacknowledged and, occasionally, deeply resented by members of the Order. Clearly, accounts that evidence resentment perhaps indicate problems that must be addressed by external professionals, such as psychologists. Accounts that describe the experience of being unacknowledged can, however, be addressed by simply drawing on a group or team process similar to that explicated by Shano (2009 pp. 250–260). Of particular interest to the present study is the opportunity Shano’s Communal Examen affords group or team members “to commend and affirm each other” (p. 258).
Rindfleish, Sheridan & Kjeldal’s (2009 pp. 486–499) paper arguing that storytelling can lead to action-oriented correction of workplace inequity is of particular relevance to this discussion. The authors describe their own experience of sharing experiences of gender discrimination in the workplace. A recommendation following from the paper argues that conversations must be extended to include men and women colleagues if “gendered organizational cultures” (2009, p. 486) are to be challenged.

It is possible to observe that, while discriminatory workplace practices may be acknowledged, this acknowledgement does not always lead to remedial action. As Rindfleish, Sheridan & Kjeldal suggest:

Continuous storytelling would allow for an understanding of the different interpretations of equity that exist among staff members in order to work towards “non-repetition” of inequity and “healing and healthy coexistence” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1996). Following Jabri (2004), we argue that differences in perceptions between individuals in a workplace can be used to create a greater awareness of issues affecting those individuals’ experiences of their work (2009, p. 491).

While some workgroups associated with the Order undoubtedly participate in group conversations from time to time, what has not, perhaps, been understood is why this, or a similar, process is so important to teams and workgroups. I argue that it is of significant concern that group conversations are considered, by some, to be optional. It is possible that colleagues who most need to understand their co-workers’ experience deliberately absent themselves from these conversations and/or dismiss the value of these conversations to the work of the organization.

As Shano (2009, p. 252) points out, the founder of the Order did not want his men to be obligated to participate in particular forms of prayerful meetings. Shano quotes the founder, “We remain free to have choir when and where it may seem to contribute to God’s greater service. Only the obligation is removed” (2009, p. 252). While this exhortation to free choice is admirable, it can, nevertheless, work against the team or work group that comprises both ordained and lay workers. For example,
if the ordained team member chooses to absent himself from meeting with his colleagues, the following consequences are likely:

- The absent member is biographically absent from the life of the group or team
- The absent member deprives co-workers of his or her affirmation for the team
- The absent member jeopardizes opportunities to reduce dissonance between espoused values and values-in-action unchallenged.

During the course of this study, I have observed that a process that gives individuals an opportunity to be biographically present and validated benefits the group as a whole. As Dyckman, Garvin and Leibert note of the spiritual direction interview, naming experience gives it life outside the self. This naming ensures that “experiences are not idiosyncratic” but that the person recounting the experience feels “that she belongs to a community of shared experience and articulates one unique aspect of it (2001, p. 5).

As I have explained, performance enables women to develop narrative solidity that can equip them to participate more confidently and effectively in the workplace. In this context, performance is understood as the opportunity for workers to speak about their experience, just as Shano’s (2009, p. 254) Jesuits find an opportunity to speak about their ministry and lives during the Communal Examen. Such opportunities for workers to be heard and validated would seem to be lacking, from the experience of women who have taken part in research group meetings associated with this study.

My observations allow me to conclude that an adaptation of the Ignatian Awareness Examen, which I describe as the Organizational Examen, regularly experienced by teams and workgroups, will provide opportunities for this validation with positive consequences for workers’ SOOA and organizational SOC.

The Organizational Examen would strengthen workers’ SOOA and ultimately result in more effective and productive workplace relationships. Questions posed by the leader of the Organizational Examen could elicit exchange within the group about
each worker’s experience of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. The Organizational Examen could be based on the following questions:

Table 3. *The Organizational Examen, based on Antonovsky’s Components of Sense of Coherence (SOC) and Arranged According to the Dynamic of the Exercises*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATE</th>
<th>REORIENT</th>
<th>TEST</th>
<th>TRANSFORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What experiences have helped you understand your role and your relationships inside and outside the workplace?</td>
<td>How can your positive experiences be validated?</td>
<td>How can your negative experiences be challenged?</td>
<td>What are the anticipated outcomes validating your experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What experiences have you found hard to understand or reconcile?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What are the anticipated outcomes of challenging your negative experiences?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Manageability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATE</th>
<th>REORIENT</th>
<th>TEST</th>
<th>TRANSFORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What experiences have given you the sense that you have adequate resources and support in your role?</td>
<td>How can your positive experiences be validated?</td>
<td>How can your negative experiences be challenged?</td>
<td>What are the anticipated outcomes validating your experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What experiences have given you the sense that your role is unmanageable?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What are the anticipated outcomes of challenging your negative experiences?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Meaningfulness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATE</th>
<th>REORIENT</th>
<th>TEST</th>
<th>TRANSFORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What experiences have helped you to feel a valued member of the organization?</td>
<td>How can your positive experiences be validated?</td>
<td>How can your negative experiences be challenged?</td>
<td>What are the anticipated outcomes validating your experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What experiences have led you to feel disvalued by the organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What are the anticipated outcomes of challenging your negative experiences?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I suggest that workers’ SOOA can be strengthened through honest exchange about experiences that increase workplace comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, through regular practise of the Organizational Examen. The
Organizational Examen could provide a forum for colleagues to address issues highlighted by participants taking part in this study (Fourth Week, No. 11, Participating in the Catholic workplace more effectively):

- Ongoing opportunities to develop more collegial relationships with ordained members of the religious order

- Access to communication that impacts on the worker’s ability to perform her job

- Acknowledgement by brothers and priests that gender discrimination exists and has been left unaddressed by the organization’s leadership

- Inclusion in staff meetings

- Action by the leader when abusive behaviour is reported

- Staff development and access to facilitation to resolve staff conflict

The Organizational Examen could be used in a diverse range of team-based workplace contexts—for example, health and education. Positive benefits of the Organizational Examen may include:

- Comprehensibility will strengthen when dissonance between espoused theories and theories-in-action is reduced

- Manageability will strengthen when all workers, or trustworthy others, have access to resources necessary for the satisfactory achievement of role expectations

- Meaningfulness will strengthen when all workers participate in decision-making conversations that directly affect their capacity to achieve role expectations
It seems likely that the Organizational Examen will strengthen both individual and group SOC, with beneficial follow-on for individual and group SOOA.

Attention must be given to comments offered by research group participants regarding their appreciation of the Icons as an instrument that organized the way they thought about their experience. Use of the Icons as a way of organizing, speaking about and acting on workplace experience would be a valuable alternative to the Organizational Examen presented above. Each staff member, having reflected on the Icons, might be invited to speak about his or her experience of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness in the context of the staff group and wider organization.

10. Chapter summary

In conclusion, I have argued that women who volunteer or work in paid roles in the context of traditional Catholic hierarchical, male-dominated religious workplaces can sustain a SOOA essential to collegial collaboration by participating in collegial conversations such as the proposed Organizational Examen.

The opportunity of speaking with a spiritual director in the context of the individually guided Exercises process is, for many women, a unique experience of being “seen” for who we are, an opportunity to build confidence by performing, during spiritual direction conversations, the persons we want to be. In my observation, it is this opportunity for performance that enables women to develop narrative solidity that can strengthen our global SOC.

However, although a “graduate” of the Exercises process may emerge from the process with a strengthened SOC, the dissonance provoked by a strong SOC and workplace gender discrimination may, nevertheless, result in the worker experiencing a weakened SOOA.

Organizations, such as the Order for whom participants in this present study volunteer or work, must understand that workers’ SOOA can be compromised by
discriminatory workplace behaviour. Unless the organization acknowledges the importance of collegial conversations, such as the Organizational Examen, as a way to sustain individual SOOA and group SOC, collegial collaboration—essential to effective organizational performance—will be limited.

The study has highlighted the need for further research into the relationship between the Exercises process, SOC and SOOA. In particular, an interesting further project would be to research the effects of the suggested Organizational Examen on individual employees’ and members’ SOOA and organizational SOC.

11. Afterword

I have drawn on my experience and training in the Exercises in order to develop the hermeneutic framework for this research. I have argued for workplace interaction that will sustain all workers’ SOOA. This research project has been a substantial “strand of coherence” (Peloquin 2006, p. 236) in my own life, insofar as the study has propelled me into my own processes of orientation, evaluation, reorientation, testing and transformation. I have expressed myself in the world, hopefully for the good of the world, and, in doing so, I have strengthened my own SOOA.
References


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apocryphal Christian literature.


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN TO RUTH MORGAN BY 5TH JUNE 2004

You may wish to write more lengthy responses to particular questions. Please attach extra pages to this Questionnaire, noting the question/s to which the additional pages refer. If you are handwriting your additional comments, please used lined paper. Please advise if you would prefer to complete an electronic copy of this document.

Catholic affiliation

How long have you identified with the Catholic faith tradition?

How long have you identified your spiritual journey within the Catholic faith tradition?
List your current association with recognizably Catholic institutions, organizations or groups – for example, diocese, parish, spiritual group, discussion group, work.

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Focus on one of these associations and describe your role or way of participating.

In what ways does your participation in this organization deepen your relationship with Christ?

In what ways does your participation in this organization inhibit your relationship with Christ?

Would you like your participation in this organization to change? How?
Identity and Spirituality

Describe the person you are.

Briefly describe one turning point in your spiritual journey which has played a significant part in forming who you are today.

Has this turning point changed your idea about yourself? How?

Would you say you have a strong sense of your identity?

What helps to strengthen your sense of identity?

What weakens your sense of identity?
Appendix B: Thecla Presentation

THECLA
EQUAL TO THE APOSTLES
Paul is on his way to Iconium after his flight from Antioch.

On the way he preaches in the ‘house church’ of a townsman; his sermon is similar to the Sermon on the Mount.

Thecla listens; her focus moves from her fiancé to Paul and his preaching.
Engaged to be married and destined to live out the cultural traditions so carefully kept by her mother, Thecla experiences an eager desire to be deemed worthy to stand in Paul’s presence and hear the word of Christ. Her “life plan” undergoes an extraordinary change.

Paul is jailed for distracting Thecla (dobbed in by his companions). Thecla bribes the guard so that she may visit him.
Thecla is discovered by her relations and is ordered to be burned - but is miraculously spared. She joins Paul and his followers, attracts the attention of a rich young man, rejects him and is threatened with death-by-wild-and-presumably-starving animals. While awaiting her punishment she is befriended by a local woman who has lost her own daughter and feels a connection with Thecla. Thecla is thrown to the beasts and, close to death, throws herself into the seals’ drinking trough and baptises herself.
Thecla finds Paul and tells him... ‘I have received baptism, O Paul; for he who worked with you for the gospel has worked with me also for baptism.’ Paul was amazed, others were strengthened. She told Paul... ‘I am going to Iconium.’ Paul answered, ‘Go, and teach the word of God.’ In Iconium she visits the man in whose house church she first heard Paul speak, and she visits her mother in a spirit of forgiveness. Her *ex-fiance* is dead – probably a face-saving alternative. Thecla then takes up her vocation of preaching the gospel.
THECLA’S JOURNEY
What are my “cultural conditions”? 
Who monitors these conditions? 
Which conditions aren’t useful? 
Am I sure of my “life plan”? 

“The essence of sin is other people telling me who I am, and I believing them…”
CHOICE

What do I really

Want?
Need?
Care about?
Value?

Whose values do I value?
What if my choice means suffering?
CONFIRMATION

When I live my freely chosen values, what happens to my close relationships and my interaction with society?

Can I be firm and forgiving?
THECLA DISCOVERED HER LIFE PLAN

Consciously or unconsciously, when I confront a situation I usually ask myself, “What can/will I do?”

(Episodic self-direction)

If I’m to answer this question from the standpoint of what I really want to do I need to consult what some authors call a “life plan” or “personal vocation”.

(Programmatic self-direction)
“How do I really want to live my life?”

This question asks me to consider what qualities I want to have, what sorts of interpersonal relationships I want to be involved in, what talents I want to develop, what interests I want to pursue, what goals I want to achieve, etc. These decisions, and how to effect the results, add up to a life plan.
Appendix C: Thecla’s story and the Exercises

THECLA

‘Who are you?’

‘I am a servant of the living God and, as to what there is about me, I have believed in the Son of God in whom God is well pleased’ (37).

1. Living at home, betrothed to Thamyris: following cultural norms (7). Much of what she does is mere imitation, springs from a sense of duty or preconceived notions of how people should behave.

2. Hearing Paul, she feels drawn to a different way of being; (7)

EVALUATION

REORIENTATION

3. Begins to live her holy desires in secret (18), begins to listen to her own rhythm and live by it; to discern her emotional states and how to balance the forces within her; to recognize the feeling she has when right attachments prevail.

4. Punished for forsaking Thamyris but saved by God (22).

5. Continues to live out her holy desires but not yet “baptized” (25); appears to continue to find her identity in Paul (25, 26).

6. Rejects Alexander (26) ‘Do not force the stranger…’ Has the sense that ‘the only certainties about what is right and wrong are those which spring from sources deep inside oneself.

7. Punished (32-33); baptized herself (34).

8. Finds and expresses her identity in Christ (37): the courage to speak God – what is going on in her.


TRANSFORMATION

TESTING
Appendix D: Participants’ worksheet

“Who are you?”

‘I am ……………………………… and, as to what there is about me,

…………………………………………………………………..

1. Evaluating my present circumstances when I’ve felt the chaos of tensions between authentic desires and my own and others expectations of me

……………………………………

……………………………………

2. Reordering my values so that they are my congruent with the person I am

……………………………………

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……………………………………

3. Testing my reordered values in the practical circumstances of my life

……………………………………

……………………………………

……………………………………

4. Transforming my life and the lives of others in my commitment to live according to my chosen values

……………………………………

……………………………………

……………………………………