How therapists understand their experiences of working at a depth of engagement in therapy:

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of

Professional Doctorate in Counselling

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Abstract

This research provides in depth analysis of how qualified and experienced doctoral therapists and graduates of the professional doctorate counselling programmes, understood and made sense of their experiences in working at a depth of engagement in therapy. A qualitative approach of interpretative phenomenological analysis is the methodology used. This provides rich, detailed analysis of individuals' accounts where idiographic focus and participants' lived experiences remain central.

Six Doctoral counselling therapists were individually interviewed via a semi-structured interview schedule. Participants' counselling orientations varied, with most describing themselves as integrative practitioners. Six accounts were examined separately and then analysed. Clusters and themes developed. Themes were also analysed to ascertain convergence and divergence in participants' accounts. Implications are discussed with data rooted in verbatim extracts and embedded within relevant literature.

The study presents super-ordinate themes of, 'the indefinable', 'spiritual in nature', 'levels of encounter', 'dissolution of boundaries', 'personally challenging', 'nourishing of the self' and 'professional questioning'. Findings show how participants called upon phenomenological perspectives, epistemological lenses, spiritual and neurobiological discourses and counselling theory, used interchangeably, to try and understand their experiences.

The study also points to practitioners crossing interpersonal boundaries, their fear of being judged by the counselling community and their reluctance to take certain aspects of the phenomenon to supervision. The implications of the research highlight whole areas of experiencing that are not being supervised and show challenges on many levels for the counselling community. Such an IPA study also highlights divisions and commonalities in how participants make sense of the phenomenon and a contribution is offered indicating where further research would be helpful. Overall this research study invites a greater awareness and greater openness to understand the ripples and challenges practitioners face from working at a depth of engagement.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Copyright Statement

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The Author

The author was awarded a Master of the Arts Degree in 2010 from The University of Manchester. She currently works as a therapist, for a large occupational health organisation in Manchester and for a safeguarding commission in Manchester. Prior to this, she trained as a counsellor in 2004 gaining The Diploma in Counselling from The University of Cumbria, working in the 'helping professions' for a number of years. The author has also been awarded The Diploma in Social Work and Social Policy qualification in 1995 from The University of Manchester. The author is registered and accredited with the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Dedication

To Jessica Marie Pye

'The Sunshine of my Soul'

Fore note.

<u>Structure and Presentation.</u>

The structure of this thesis will follow conventional norms. Throughout the thesis I use metaphor, imagery, quotes, journal extracts and verbatim extracts to reflect and bring alive the data. I also bring myself into the study in a very visible way, to provide transparency and openness as my reflexivity flows through this research study. The first chapter introduces depths of engagement and outlines the research question and secondary research questions. This chapter also explores my personal and professional motivations for undertaking this study.

This is followed by a chapter which examines past and present literature, illustrating depths of engagement in therapy. The scope of this sweep is very broad because elements and notions of depths of engagement have been observed in many different counselling orientations, over a considerable period of time. It is interesting to see how this has transformed over time with both similar and different notions attached to how depths of engagement are experienced and described.

The third chapter explores the methodology and methods used. It also contains a section on assessing the quality of the research and the ethical issues that arose from the study. Chapter four focusses on analysis of the findings. Chapter five discusses the findings of the data. As my reflexivity formed part of the analytical process, Chapter 6 summarises my reflexivity and examines how, as the insider researcher, I became the researched, as part of the process. Chapter seven offers limitations and implications of the research, contributions to knowledge, areas for future research and concluding thoughts.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Purpose of this Research.

As therapists, we work in a profession where efficacy, credibility and quality are seen as standard requirements. We often find ourselves in debates about the nature of counselling, and providing clear systematic evidence connected with evidence based practice that informs the delivery of service and which offers effective treatment with value for money. At the other end of the spectrum are the relational aspects of our practice, which are rooted in what we do and the counselling ethical frameworks we adhere to. An area of tension can be that what we learn on the job which may be intuitive, visceral or difficult to define, does not neatly fit into statistics. Neither are such understandings easily translatable into protocols and policies of public and private healthcare organisations. Working for a private healthcare organisation, a large part of my work is driven by CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), yet I strongly believe that without the relational aspects in the therapeutic alliance, outcomes would not be as successful. Reeves (2016) the chair of the BACP, suggests we develop practice-based evidence. This relates to evidence we develop from doing, capturing aspects of what is happening so that we can learn from practice and develop an evidence base, rooted in what we do. Williams (2016), Chief Executive of BACP, suggests we create a bridge that joins academic and practitioner knowledge. He also explains that from 1st July 2016 the BACP would put in place a commitment to monitor our work. This research hopes to honour these aims.

1.2 Defining Depths of Engagement.

Geller & Greenberg (2012), when examining the experience of deep therapeutic engagement, suggest that theorists, therapists and academics increasingly recognise the importance of bringing one's whole self in the counselling encounter, working on a multiplicity of levels: physically, emotionally, cognitively and spiritually. As such, counsellors, researchers and theorists have all sought to describe a particular kind of engagement in therapy, where there is a sense of oneness, fusion, merger,

togetherness and a fuzziness in counselling boundaries (Rogers, 1980; Knox et al., 2013; Mearns & Cooper, 2006). Different counselling paradigms refer to this as presence; relational depth; mutual inter-subjectivity; magic moments; moments of meeting; encounter; I Thou moments; and flow (Buber 1970; Geller & Greenberg 2012; Mearns & Cooper 2006; Stern 2004; Thorne 2003). Such moments are discussed across a variety of counselling approaches, and although this particular depth of engagement is given different names by counsellors and theorists alike, there might be similarities of experience being described. Non- counselling theorists, such as Csikszentmihalyi (1988), also discuss something very similar, and attribute more scientific notions for the reasons why this takes place and how this encourages optimal performance. The term 'depths of engagement', I use as an umbrella term to conceptualise the phenomenon which I define on page 18. The definition is very much a work in progress and although it does not crystallise the whole phenomenon, it has proved to be workable through the course of this research study.

1.3 Research Origins.

The next part of this thesis shares with the reader how both my personal and professional life have influenced the journey I have taken, to embark on studying this area of research.

1.3.1 My Personal Engagement with this Study.

Growing up, it was constantly reiterated to me how prized an individual was if they were intellectual, academic and achieved. I battled with such conditions of worth, (conditions transmitted from a parent or other carer that he/she is acceptable or loveable if he/she behaves, thinks and feels in certain ways (Tolan 2006)) for years, particularly after failing my 11- plus, always returning to my comfortable position of being creative. To add to this, I was an only one, growing up without siblings and at times feeling alone and isolated. Fletcher (2016), in her IPA study exploring adult reflections on being an only child points out that 'only children' can miss out on experiencing rich and complex relationships and as a consequence they also miss out on important sources of validation throughout their lives. At times I had felt starved of close family contact and I was fascinated by deep relationship, although opportunities for this were limited. I always followed my heart and, for me, there was

something about compassion, connection and love, that gave me a sense of belonging and which I found meaningful. As I embarked on this research study I considered the perspectives offered by Erskine (2001), Mander (2004) and Barnett (2007) who question, what are our unconscious motivations for working at a depth in therapy and are we seeking to look for the helper in the patient'?

Sussman (2007) emphasises that it is essential that therapists enjoy a reasonable degree of interpersonal intimacy in their every-day lives; otherwise they will be more likely to seek this inappropriately in the clinical setting. As I mused on these questions, I pondered, 'did I want to research depths of engagement out of some narcissistic need, or was it purely altruistic'? My personal engagement with this study was also driven by conversations I had with colleagues in my professional life and with fellow travellers at the university about how working at such a depth in therapy affected them. I was fascinated by their differing views over narcissism and altruism when working at this depth; thus I was also encouraged by my peers to embark on this project.

There was also something about could I be vulnerable without being judged? I felt it would take great emotional courage to risk myself at this level of commitment to a Doctoral research study, as I contemplated how my reflexivity would impact on the research project. I reflected on the work of Woskett (2011) and her notion around the impaired therapist. She contends that when we are fallible, we are at our most human and, we are most human when we are in touch with our greatest potential for helping clients. This also felt like familiar territory when I worked in the depths of engagement in therapy, and I wondered, did other therapists feel like this as well? Carl Rogers (in Baldwin, 1987) links the notion of the imperfect therapist with the potential for healing. He explains how the therapist needs to recognise that he or she is imperfect, with flaws that make him vulnerable. He observes it is only as the therapist views himself as imperfect and flawed that he can see himself helping another person. As I embarked on this research study, there was something about daring greatly not only in the depths of engagement, but also in the study.

In contrast, Finlay (2011) exhorts that the researcher should also tap into a passion, because passion and curiosity will provide motivation through the more intense, tedious stages of doing research. I wanted my research to be relevant, interesting and

make a contribution to knowledge. I am also committed to the BACP values of counselling and psychotherapy, enhancing the quality of knowledge and personal effectiveness in practice and the dissemination of helpful research. For me, there was something about embracing the heart and the head in research that could bring in the relational practitioner, at a time where a great deal of research is undertaken from the perspective of the medical model. I was so passionate about this research that I personally funded it and had a sixth sense that it was going to prove very challenging. I wondered what 'footprints' I would leave in its wake!

1.3.2 My Professional Engagement with the Study.

As a mature student, I left Manchester University 25 years ago with a qualification in social work and social policy. I started working for a large organisation with young people who had suffered from a catalogue of abuse, trauma, loss, bereavement and disadvantage. Nearly all of them had low self-esteem, were angry, violent, hurt, misunderstood and had poor social and communication skills. During this part of my professional life, I learnt CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), psychodynamic approaches and person-centred counselling. I was struck by the different levels of engagement I experienced within these approaches with clients; I started to notice moments where it felt we met at a specific depth and where change occurred. I found it difficult to make sense of what was happening.

After this part of my life cycle, I underwent a major transition. Feeling lost, and as a way of moving forward, I sought counselling. Through this process, I met a counsellor who I can only describe as a like- minded soul. I experienced a particular depth of engagement with her that was difficult to put into words. I recalled feeling as though we had seen each other on another level, where time stood still. Wilber (1980) describes a depth of engagement as near fusion, with a blurring of personal boundaries. I had now experienced this depth of engagement in both my professional life and personally, and I was moved and captivated by it.

Some years after my own counselling had finished I decided to grasp the nettle and honour my intuition to train as a counsellor, something I strangely believed I would always do. My fascination for working at a depth of engagement, began to grow over the years and I undertook work as a therapist in a safeguarding team working

with adults and young people who had been the victims of emotional and sexual abuse. Some of my clients would comment on their feelings of oneness and healing, and I was overwhelmed at times by the strength and power of working in deep engagement.

This depth of engagement for me was catalogued by a moving together in relationship, where lowered boundaries existed, in a dimension where time stood still and where I felt somehow joined with the client in a place of safety (I define lowered boundaries as a place where psychological, emotional and visceral merger of both parties could take place). I noticed this seemed to happen more where engagement was non-directive, meaning that a client was not guided, advised or influenced to find a direction in their therapy (Mearns & Thorne, 2013). As I shared my thoughts with colleagues and counselling friends, they also recounted to me profound moments when they had worked in the depths of engagement, the magnitude of which they also found compelling. It was these fellow travellers who were supportive and instrumental in giving me the confidence to embark on this research project. These personal and professional experiences informed my development of the research question.

"How do therapists experience and make sense of depths of engagement within therapy"?

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that the research question is directed towards phenomenological material, focussing on people's understandings of their experiences and the meaning it holds for them. In this research study, I was keen to examine how practitioners made sense of depths of engagement, not just how they experienced it. Although much has been written, for instance in person-centred literature, regarding relational depth and practitioners' experiences of depths of engagement (Mearns & Cooper, 2006; Knox et al., 2013), there is a lack of research into how therapists across different theoretical orientations understand their experiences. This was an important research question, because I also identified in my literature search that there was a gap of knowledge that existed in this area.

Smith et al. (2009) further point out that it is useful to identify secondary, theory-driven research questions, which will show that your research question has been

answered. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that such questions explore the meaning of the account. My secondary research questions are outlined below.

i   What discourses do practitioners call on in their sense- making processes?

ii   What motivates practitioners to work at these levels?

iii What is the personal impact of such work on practitioners?

iv   Are there professional issues that are raised for practitioners?

These secondary research questions were integral with one another. They gave me the scope to examine how participants might use different lenses to make sense of the depths of engagement and how they might root their meaning making in such discourses. Whilst the questions enabled the research to be broadened out, these secondary questions also helped me to frame and contextualise the analysis.

As I embarked on this research study, I pondered and contemplated many questions, personally and professionally. Will I find anything new? Will I gain a deeper understanding in the depths of engagement of what lies unexpressed and unspoken? What are the differences and commonalities counsellors experience at this level of engagement? What are the implications around boundaries in such work? Why are practitioners motivated to work at such a deep level of absorption and engagement, and what professional issues might be raised?

1.4 Rationale.

When considering my rationale for this research project, my research justifications were multi-layered. I wanted to broaden the level of inquiry that had taken place before. Thus this thesis seeks to go to further into the depths of engagement, asking therapists how they understand their experience, whilst examining their motivations and desires for wanting to work at such a level of immersion in therapy. My rationale was that the thesis would provide lenses, illuminating how therapists make sense of this process- a largely unexplored area. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a rigorous qualitative research methodology, I wanted to facilitate a depth in analysis of the data that had not existed before, and which would highlight professional and ethical issues relating to transparency and openness. From this

rationale, I hoped the findings would be beneficial to both practitioners and the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), encouraging review and developing knowledge and practice at a deeper level. Fundamental to this, the rationale was raising the profile of qualitative research findings and implications for consideration in public and private sector healthcare. Such a rationale for this research, it is hoped, will also bring to our attention complex issues, relating to training and supervision, and that the dissemination of findings will provide a basis for discussion, if we are to give the best service to our clients.

1.5 Definitions.

In this section definitions of some terms are presented to help clarify, conceptualise and discuss the type of experience being studied. I do not presume these to be the only definitions, but I feel that throughout the course of this research such definitions have proved workable.

Definitions of Key Terms.

'Depths of Engagement' & 'The Phenomenon': Terms I have used interchangeably that relate to deep moments where something happens that is transformative and can breach interpersonal boundaries in the counselling relationship. This conceptualises a wide range of literature, from both a therapeutic and non-counselling paradigm. In a well quoted passage Rogers (1980) seeks to conceptualise this kind of engagement;

> "When I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness in the relationship then whatever I do seems to be full of healing… I may behave in strange and impulsive ways in the relationship, ways which I cannot justify rationally, which have nothing to do with my thought processes. But these strange behaviours turn out to be right in some odd way."

> (Rogers, 1980:129)

'Spirituality': This definition is offered as something people experience that involves connectedness, faith and various levels of the self. I feel that West (2011) conceptualises elements of this well and it is in line with participants' experiencing. West (2011) suggests spirituality is;

> "Rooted in human experiencing rather than abstract theology… is embodied… involves linking with other people and the universe at large and involves non-ordinary consciousness....tends to make people more altruistic, less materialistic and more environmentally aware...deals with the meaning that people make of their lives…faces suffering and it causes…relates to God/ultimate reality and often uses the word 'soul' or 'higher self'".

(West, 2011:16)

'Boundaries': A respect and recognition of interpersonal limits relating to professional, ethical, personal and psychological factors in the therapeutic relationship. The definition offered here draws on the work of Tebbutt (2014) and his findings regarding boundary significance. Tebbutt (2014) suggests:

> "A broad respect for boundaries (professional/ethical and personal/psychological) as being a significant underlying factor in deep moment occurrence, ensuring a fundamentally safe place in which deep moments can unfold".

(Tebbutt, 2014:218)

CHAPTER 2 The Literature Review.

2.1 The Important Place of Theory.

The first section of this literature review will analyse theoretical perspectives from different counselling orientations, and a non-counselling approach that examines deep engagement. Although theorists all tend to use a different lens to describe depths of engagement in therapeutic encounter, there are many similarities shared in the descriptions of experience, impact and affect. An aspect of it that is also covered, and interweaves throughout this part of the review, relates to the concept of boundaries, which it is suggested profoundly affects this process.

As I wrote the literature review I paid attention to the chronology of its writing which was constructed in response to the findings. Hart (1998) posits that a two-fold function of a literature review is to help the development of the research question and to support the analysis of the findings. Dallos and Vertere (2005) also discuss a two-phase reviewing process which they state should aim to contextualise the research question and focus on contextualisation of the findings. This emphasised to me the importance of reviewing literature that would both contextualise and support analysis of the findings.

The review also examined literature from counselling orientations that research participants in this study practice from, and covers what is known in these approaches of the depths of engagement. This is relevant to consider because the findings in this study will highlight convergence, divergence, confirmation and new pathways that emerge with relevance to the existing literature. As part of an editorial decision I decided to leave out literature specifically around spirituality because this did not directly relate to participants practice modalities and instead was reflective of their meaning making processes. Alternatively the review contains literature relating to the transpersonal approach which embraced participant's perspectives.

In the next section, I will explore unconscious and conscious motivations relating to why counsellors might seek to work at this level of depth in therapy, an area which also proved key to this research study. The final part of this review will examine the professionalization of counselling, which influenced and affected participants' contributions and the research findings as a whole.

Firstly, I want to discuss how I conducted my literature search.

2.2 The Literature Search.

Smith et al. (2009) postulate that a literature review should help to identify a gap which your research question can then address. They assert that it should also introduce your readers to the field, informing them of strengths and weaknesses in the field, and show why your study can make a useful contribution. For this literature review, I drew on material that had direct relevance to this research study and participants' descriptions of it. I also focussed on literature that related to the specific orientations that participants practiced from. Although this sharpened the focus of my literature search, I also made sure that the depth of my research in terms of time was enough to achieve sufficient comparability. In addition, I wanted to draw on literature that would contextualise the findings and add depth to the discussion, and subsequent recommendations, offered. When writing the discussion chapter, I drew on additional literature that I had collected to emphasise and synthesise the findings further.

I covered a wide range of electronic databases from Manchester University, together with Web of Science, Medline and PsycINFO, whilst conducting the literature review. This gave me access to publications on science, social science, humanities, medicine and psychology. I filtered the results by searching for key terms that participants used to describe the phenomenon, such as inter-subjective experience, relational depth, moments of meeting, flow and linking, to name a few. I also networked with colleagues from other universities who had access to other databases and I accessed a wide range of international literature from organisations such as the American Psychological Association. Using Google Scholar increased areas of my data search, including further publications on science, social science, humanities, counselling, psychotherapy, philosophy, psychology and spirituality. I also drew on literature from related texts, journals, periodicals, recent research in other doctoral theses, seminars, and lectures and from the extensive medical library where I am a therapist. The scope of my search stretched from the 1930's to present day. So although this was vast, it was significantly refined by the use of key descriptive definitions. Related words that participants practiced from were used, such as relational depth, inter-subjective experience, moments of meeting and flow. In

addition, I also referred to publications and information from the BACP and used resources from their research department. I used a wide range of international literature and I also liaised and networked with my colleagues from the North West Interpretative Phenomenological Group, of which I was a member. All of these resources enabled me to have access to a wide range of material that proved relevant.

2.3 Psychoanalytic and Psychodynamic Approaches.

The psychodynamic approach forms a major part of thinking and practice for many therapists, and, in my experience, can also be adopted by those who describe themselves as integrative. Practitioners are influenced by Freud, one of the fore fathers of the psychodynamic approach. Freud referred to terms such as instincts and drives, which was a major part of his theory (Freud, 1930). Although this describes activity, the weakness is pointed out by Jacobs (2003), who asserts that such activity does not give weight to the relationship between people or the dynamic between them. Freud also refers to the unconscious, which by definition is 'unknowable', often linking feelings to the past, memories and unconscious communication, as opposed to being rooted in the here and now. I wondered, when thinking in these terms, how much practitioners' understandings of deep engagement can be embedded in Freud's (1930) concept of the oceanic feeling; a feeling of eternity, in which individuals feel connected to something much larger than themselves?

At this initial stage of oceanic feeling, Freud mused on this as being similar to the amniotic and oceanic oneness in foetal life, which he considered to be a desire for oneness connected to regression and infantile narcissism (Parsons, 1999). Freud's later musings in a discussion with Romani Rolland in Parsons (1999), reduced the oceanic feeling in counselling, to a sense of helplessness and powerlessness against fate and the need for a father figure (God) for guidance and a feeling of significance. It seemed to illustrate to me that Freud reflected a sense of boundlessness and oneness with the outside world and something larger, and drew comparisons stemming from an ego ideal and a longing for parental protection.

Tebbutt (2014), in a theoretical study of moments of deep encounter (an interpersonal/relational, intrapersonal/intra-psychic and transpersonal experience), explains meta-analysis on boundaries and that Freud took the view that lowered

boundaries in the therapeutic encounter resulted from projective or regressive processes and a desire for regression to infantile narcissism. Moreover, Rowan (2005) argues that Freud confused the pre-personal with the transpersonal. Literature also informs us that Freud (1930) viewed that weak, unclear, psychological boundaries indicated pathology, and he refers to the importance of professional and ethical boundaries. This notion of not violating professional or ethical boundaries is still referred to in recent contemporary discussion. Epstein (2007) informs us that psychoanalytic approaches should focus on an observing therapist who is detached and calm. I came to the conclusion that early literature appeared to emphasise the cognitive processing of the therapist, as opposed to maintaining a disciplined open state of awareness and that boundary crossing was discouraged.

Throughout the psychodynamic approach, we can trace different layers of understanding and ideas emerging with regard to depths of engagement. Winnicott (1971/1991) and Meissner (1984) suggest regression and ideas connected to religion and spirituality, in which therapy offers an opportunity for a third liminal area between inner and outer worlds, and hence a dissolution of personal/transpersonal boundaries. Alternatively, Ogden (1994) talks of projective identification, (the therapist feels something that the client unconsciously projects into the therapist) in which moments of deep encounter can occur. These are seen as unconscious projective identifications between the therapist and client, which generate an intersubjective analytic third field, (a joint and asymmetrically constructed and experienced set of conscious and unconscious intersubjective experiences, in which analyst and analysed meet (Ogden, 1996)). Jacobs (2003) suggests caution; that we are careful not to confuse the transpersonal relationship with moments that are not easily understandable, such as deep intuition, identification or projective identification. Such literature shows differences in how more contemporary theorists highlight a growing awareness of encounter in deep engagement, as being mutually owned.

Modern interpersonal psychodynamic approaches focus on the present interpersonal engagement between client and therapist. Stern (2004) in European literature discusses these approaches and contributes that the therapeutic relationship needs to be re-examined through the lens of the present moment experience. Stern (2004) refers to depths of engagement as moments of meeting; a concept, derived from

experiences of intense moments within the mother-child relational dyadic system. Stern explains that the counselling relationship is composed of present moments that are a critical starting point for therapeutic exploration and depth of engagement. Stern et al. (1998) describe non-interpretative mechanisms in psychoanalytic therapy, including moments of meeting and 'now' moments, which are seen as both, more personal or inter-subjective than interpretation alone. Stern et al. (1998), in their literature, seem to be offering an openness to suggest that when a moment of meeting is created, the therapist's response cannot be routine or technical, but rather he/she must use a specific aspect of his or her individuality to create this. I am left with a sense that Stern is suggesting that in such moments of meaning, something unique and authentic has to be contributed.

Stern (2004) also points out that when two people co-create an inter-subjective experience in a shared present moment, the phenomenal consciousness of one overlaps and partially includes the phenomenal consciousness of the other. Stern explains that you have your own experience plus the other's experience of your experience, as reflected in their eyes, body, tone of voice, and so on. Such experience and the experience of the other, he clarifies, need not be exactly the same because they originate from different loci and orientations. He reminds us that they may have slightly different coloration, form and feel but that they are similar enough that when the two experiences are mutually validated, a 'consciousness' of sharing the same mental landscape arises. Stern (2004) refers to this level of sharing in depths of engagement in counselling as inter-subjectivity.

He notes that such a depth of relating includes both the explicit verbal meaning of what one says, and the implicit meaning, which is non-verbal and more concerned with feelings. Sometimes, he reflects the more important action is in the implicit, sometimes in the explicit. Stern seems to be indicating that this mix is crucial. Such inter-subjective sharing, he emphasises, is the primary goal to facilitate depth of relating and moving towards the phenomenon. He defines the engagement in such depths as relational moves. Stern (2004) implies an intersubjective consciousness can arise and that if this is permeable, interpersonal boundaries will remain clear if the awareness of the other's experience is consistent with one's own. He also points out that self-consciousness is of significance because there is no confusion about who owns the phenomenal experience.

Stern (2004) also speaks of this inter-subjectivity as a shared voyage that can last for only seconds, but in that moment of meeting, it is enough. The strength of his contribution seems to be that he believes that the moment has to be lived through together and that, through this, the participants have created a shared private world. Stern characterises a world where once counsellor and client have experienced this depth in counselling and shared it, they find that when they leave it, their relationship is changed. He adds that coherence and complexity have been enlarged, and that in the therapeutic alliance they have created an expanded inter-subjectivity field that opens up new possibilities of ways of being with one another. Stern's discussion of inter-subjectivity suggests that in terms of boundary experiences, although there may be an intense sharing of experience, which is both intermingled and separate, there is also a retained distinction between parties.

Hadjiosif (2012), a psychodynamic researcher, questions to what extent the psychodynamic therapist could be seen as a blank screen in which the patient's conflicts could be shared. Hadjiosif asserts that psychodynamic therapists are much less likely to be themselves in response to their clients. He attributes this to the transference, (transference from the client of feelings and emotions with other people from their past onto the counsellor) which, he points out, is expected to manifest in therapy and become the locus of analytic enquiry. This could question to what extent, and how frequently, a depth of engagement might be achievable, if at some level such a concept highlights the importance to safeguard one's boundaries during this process. In contrast, Stern's (1998) literature points to moments of meeting as occurring in the real relationship because he asserts that transference and counter transference aspects (the emotional reaction of the counsellor to the client's contribution) are at a minimum in such moments. This reflects more of an authentic relationship rather than any transferential process affecting the depth of engagement. Examining psychodynamic literature that has a direct relevance to working at a depth of engagement, I discovered there was strength in the area of competing ideas about how this may be experienced but nothing that showed or recognised therapists' understanding of these processes. I also found a deficiency in psychodynamic literature relating to therapist vulnerability when working in such moments of meeting, and no clear signposting, regarding the tensions of boundary management, when working at this level of engagement.

2.4 Person Centred Counselling.

The person-centred approach is underpinned by Rogers' (1957) interconnected necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic personality change. The core conditions are explained by Mearns and Thorne (2003) in their earlier version of person-centred counselling, as relating to unconditional positive regard (a total acceptance by the counsellor), empathy (to sense accurately the feelings of the client), and congruence (realness and genuineness of the counsellor). These conditions cultivate a climate of non-directiveness and growth-promoting that respects a client's organismic valuing process (informing the person on how best to move forward) and their actualising tendency, motivation to grow and move forward (Merry, 2004). Rogers elaborated, in addition to the core conditions, of high importance, is the therapists' presence, which reflects Rogers' incorporating a more spiritual dimension in his work (Thorne, 2008). Rogers (1980) describes this as bringing one's whole self to the engagement and being fully with the client, in the moment, with little self-centred purpose or goal in mind. Rogers (1980) asserts that therapists use the essence of themselves as an instrument in understanding and responding to the client. It seems to me that Rogers (1980) is suggesting that such receptive and allowing states are central aspects of their way of being that optimize the client's potential for growth and healing.

Rogers (1986) also expressed that presence and depth of relating is not only a way of being but also a way of being with. Some authors who have developed the notion of presence are Geller and Greenberg (2012) Mearns and Cooper (2006) and Schmid (1998). Rogers's likened presence to a calm and receptive alertness that includes a letting go of self-concerns and needs, whilst feeling empty and open inside, so one can clearly tune in and receive the client's communication and felt experience. Lowered personal and psychological boundaries are suggested by Rogers (1980) who talks of 'oneness' and 'separateness' as being facilitative to deep engagement. Nevertheless, the potential significance of working at this depth highlights a tension, being the extent of merger and separateness, which could question professional and ethical boundaries.

Austrian therapist, Peter Schmid (1998), proposes that at the heart of the person-centred approach is a dialogical encounter. The perspective seems to be on the

relational aspect of this presence being a joint experiencing with the client. Schmid (1998) appears to be highlighting the risk of letting oneself go towards the other. He suggests leaving oneself behind, going forward, and in such an experience to meet oneself again coming from somewhere else. Schmid (1998) emphasises this involves plurity and unity. The underlying premise according to Schmid (1998) is to open up and expose oneself, but on the other hand to let yourself be you.

Thorne (2003), in British person-centred literature, explicitly associates himself with a spiritual approach to counselling. He acknowledges that at this deep state of relating, the relationship can transcend itself and become part of something larger, where profound growth and healing are present. Thorne (2008) conversely talks of self-love and risking tenderness as crucial to working at this therapeutic depth. Thorne (2003) also refers to magic moments, where a new level of understanding is achieved by both client and counsellor, which he asserts is embryonic of a new creative energy that emerges, as the power of love and spirit of hope are tapped into. Thorne's (2003) literature also indicates that such magic moments lead to an acceptance of powerlessness, a kind of 'I give up' syndrome that is unified between counsellor and client. This seems to share similarities with Rogers's (1986) views of letting go in presence.

Schmid (1998) also explores love in presence. He emphasises that love cannot be manufactured in encounter. Only love is adequate communication, it transcends the duality and opens up a third space for encounter. Wiggins, Elliott & Cooper (2012) concur with this, and provide recent research exploring the prevalence and characteristics of relational depth events in psychotherapy, to demonstrate the value of love that can facilitate deep relating. They appear to be suggesting that the emergence of love in therapy functions as a healing quality in the therapeutic relationship and that love correlates with such deep engagement. Wiggins et al. (2012) view this as consistent with the person-centred view of deep engagement being a combination of all six of Rogers's (1957) core conditions.

American theorist Kahn (1991), acknowledges that theories and experiences of depth of engagement are not only characterised by mutuality, in which genuineness, empathy and unconditional positive regard are conveyed in a real relationship, but that the depths of the healing relationship are conveyed by the therapist's agape- a

love that by definition does not burden or obligate. Kahn suggests that to understand Rogers is to recognise that what he was introducing to the field of therapy was the variable of love. He explains that for Rogers, neither a theory of personality nor the technique mattered, as long as the therapist found a way of conveying agape. This variable of love, he explains, is characterised by the desire for growth and fulfilment and demands nothing in return.

In the field of person-centred therapy, British theorists, Mearns and Cooper (2006), conducted research studies into the depth of therapeutic engagement. They refer to an extra-ordinary depth of human contact and have termed this relational depth. Mearns and Cooper (2006) describe that such relational depth consists of a blending together of high degrees of the three core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence. They liken relational depth to Rogers's notion of presence, moments in which the therapist's inner spirit seems to reach out and touch the inner spirit of the other, and where he or she is closest to his or her inner intuitive self .

Particularly poignant within this process is the interrelationship of configurations within the self (different aspects of the client), which was a move towards a pluralistic view of selves rather than the self. Mearns and Thorne (2003) in their earlier version of person-centred counselling, emphasise that it is not that the self has changed but that the interrelationship of configurations within the self has altered. Mearns and Thorne (2003) also add that when the interrelationship of configurations change, it is not that we are left with something entirely new - we have the same parts as before - but some which may have been subservient before are stronger, and others which were judged adversely are accepted. This literature makes me wonder if such integration of different parts of the self emerging to the client could be central to the type and depth of engagement taking place, in the therapeutic relationship.

Mearns and Thorne (2000) warn that boundaries and professionalism are seriously challenged if we meet clients at this relational depth. Mearns (2004) argues that to be open to meet the client at relational depth, the counsellor needs to be still inside and not afraid. Mearns (2004) expands on the notion of fear of the counsellor, which, he debates, appears to be related to what he/she may discover about himself/herself. He suggests perhaps, the counsellor will discover that they cannot sustain relational depth with clients, or even worse that they cannot trust themselves when working at

relational depth. There may even be a fear lurking that they will get lost in their own emotionality, when fully entering the affective realm of the client. I also wondered if such fears might inhibit, or even prohibit, the therapist's ability to engage with the client in deep engagement.

Currently, there has been a growing body of research into different aspects of depths of engagement. Via a grounded theory analysis and core evaluation measure, Wiggins et al. (2012) used a previously developed Relational Depth Inventory to measure the prevalence and characteristics of relational depth in psychotherapy. This has specific relevance to this research project because participants who responded as clients were therapists drawing on their experiences as clients, after having responded to an internet-based survey in which applications were invited from various directories of therapists. The research showed that transcendence appeared to constitute specific components of relational depth, which goes beyond everyday therapeutic encounters. The research also correlated with Stern's (2004) findings and the notion of moments of meeting, in which each party is aware of what the other is experiencing.

Currently, the major developments have come from within the person-centred approach, and Knox et al.'s (2013) research of new perspectives in relational depth. They found that letting go was an aspect of the experience that also concurs with literature offered by Rogers (1986) and Schmid (1998) regarding deep engagement. Further research was indicated as necessary and useful in this area. Results also suggested that there may be a need to be open to experiencing intimacy, love and transcendence, and that immersion was fundamental. Findings also showed a limited role for gender as a determinant of relational depth. As a result of their findings, Knox et al. (2013) also recommended that further research in relational depth would be useful on aspects of fear and vulnerability, and difficult areas to endorse, relating to spiritual experiences.

Cooper (2013), exploring new developments in relational depth, argues that there has to be an emotional charge to client and therapist experiences in deep engagement, which is accompanied by feelings of safety, happiness, optimism and hope. Cooper also suggests that mutuality, a symmetry of co-openness, co-acceptance and reciprocal bi-directional encounter, exists at those moments of relational depth and

that the client knows that the therapist knows them. Geller (2012) draws parallels to Cooper's (2005) work. Investigations showing that the process of therapeutic presence requires the therapist to be open and receptive to the client's experience, whilst inwardly attending to one's bodily resonance with the client's experience. From this place of receptivity, Geller (2012) points out that the therapist, in therapeutic presence, is grounded in themselves, immersed in the moment with the client, and connected to a larger sense of expansion, which is of service in the client's healing.

Geller and Greenberg (2012) also clarify that the most important theory of therapeutic response is to be grounded, fully open, and receptive to the client from moment to moment. Geller and Greenberg (2012) assert, from that place of receiving the client on a multisensory level, that therapists can tune into their own theoretical, learned, personal and intuitive understanding of the client and a natural synergistic relationship can emerge. This illustrates to me that they were suggesting that therapeutic presence goes beyond the level of mutual encounter and engagement, to touch a larger state of spirituality. Geller and Greenberg (2012) also talk of a relational therapeutic presence, where the therapist is in touch with what is poignant in the self. They theorise that the counsellor's presence invites the client's openness to become present, and that in the essence of each person a state of transcendence can emerge that is healing. I think that what Geller and Greenberg (2012) are describing is an expansion of consciousness which transcends the self, and a dissolution of the ego to a spiritual state, as opening up the possibilities to work in a depth of engagement.

Examining literature from the Person-Centred approach, I found many commonalities and overlaps in how theorists presented their understandings of depths of engagement in the therapeutic alliance. Although there was an acceptance of crossings and blurring of boundaries, this was overshadowed by a lack of literature addressing practitioners' concerns and fears of how much boundaries might be stretched, risked or broken and the ethical and professional implications of this for them.

2.5 Existential Counselling.

Martin Buber (1970) also brings the notion of presence, along with meeting and encounter. Buber's I –Thou relationship indicates the centrality of presence in the depth of deep relational meeting and deep engagement. From a dialogical approach, he indicates that this takes place in the between, a name for the common ground that occurs when a person becomes fully present to another. The between is greater than what each person brings and is different from each person's separate existence. The I- Thou is the natural connection that occurs when a person becomes fully present to another. It cannot be forced. Buber explains that it involves openness, directness, mutuality and presence. He speaks of the I-Thou moment, when there is a mutual sense of meeting and some kind of change. Kirschenbaum and Henderson (1990) in *Carl Rogers Dialogues* assert that Buber argues, that the I-Thou moment is not possible in counselling because he regards the counsellor/client as unequal and as such it focuses on the client's problems.

Buber (1970) also posits that all real living is meeting, and that healing emerged from the meeting that occurs between the two people, as they become fully present to each other. Buber maintains that it is the therapist's challenge to be able to fully and deeply appreciate, the client's experience and to maintain a sense of centeredness, even in the midst of difficult or conflicting experiences. Such centeredness he cites as being an expression of personal integration. A unity of body and mind carrying a paradox of detachment and involvement in which, in deep engagement, we need to be open and detached, in order to experience the fullness of the other.

Buber (1970) explains that this I-Thou relationship does not take place in the one or in the other, or in a neutral world including both, but in a dimension only accessible to the persons involved. Buber calls this sphere the inter(personal) and illuminates it further, adding this kind of real dialogue, is an exchange which aims to be mutual and comes from the existential centre of the person and a participating in and sharing the being of the other. Examining the literature, I am left with a strong sense in terms of boundary loss. The I-Thou relating is underpinned by being both connected and separate, and although in deep engagement either party may not be aware of their

separateness, when stepping out of it boundaries become clear again. Hycner and Jacobs (1995) also point out that the merger and softening of individual boundaries in the I-Thou meeting may result in being totally absorbed and engulfed.

American theorist, Hycner (1993) also comments on the significance of the spiritual dimension and concurs with Buber that practitioners should allow space for the numinous and spiritual dimensions to emerge. Reflecting the belief that we are part of a larger whole existence in which the therapist and client connect on a level that is larger than each individual, American theorist, Vaughan (2002), also observes that such a dimension or spirituality, in relating at depth, can also be viewed as the subjective experience of the sacred that appears to connect the personal to the transpersonal and the self to the spirit.

Van Deurzen-Smith (2002) in the field of existential analysis goes beyond Buber's theories and talks of the I-Me relationship, and the perfect merging of two beings who totally identify with each other, aiming at something that transcends their separateness and thus binds them together. Van Deurzen-Smith (1988) seems to be hinting at a transpersonal dimension unifying the I-Me relationship, and points to the pursuit of truth in client and therapist. Van Deurzen-Smith's (1988) perspective is of lowering transpersonal as well as personal and psychological boundaries. She also notes the importance of professional and ethical boundaries and talks of a balance of immersion in the client's world, whilst holding on to adequate boundaries to remain in charge (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1992).

Exploration of existential literature regarding working in the depths of engagement indicates layered dimensions of meeting and how a loosening of boundaries are necessary to meet at this level of engagement. Existential theorists talk of centeredness and balance, separateness and immersion in dimensions at deep engagement. Yet I was curious to hear more about the impact of this for therapists. I got a sense that therapists almost had to work things out for themselves, whilst at the same time having such a responsibility to remain within ethical and professional parameters. This feels scary to me. I feel there is a significant gap in literature that seeks to understand how therapists might view such ways of working and any fears they may have of such processes.

2.6 The Transpersonal Approach.

Some integrative therapists adopt a transpersonal dimension to their practice and link the transpersonal to moments in deep engagement, particularly where there is a loosening or melting of interpersonal boundaries.   The transpersonal (I define this as states of consciousness beyond the limits of personal identity) can often be related to, and put us in touch with, the sacred, numinous, holy, soul, spirit and the divine (Rowan, 2005).   These definitions are often conceptualised as spirituality. West (2004) examines such a definition in therapy and explains that often spirituality is a way of being and experiencing that comes through awareness of a transcendental dimension.

Although counsellors do not always specialise in the transpersonal, Rowan (2005) points out it can often be something referred to in therapy that specifies different states and stages of consciousness. Rowan (2005) has also written of a moment of profound engagement as linking, and in the psychoanalytic field explains that similarities can be drawn with Stern's (2004) work and his description of moments of meeting. Rowan and Jacobs (2011) further suggest that what might be an illusion of moving deeper into the transpersonal might also be understood by some psychodynamic theorists as regression.

Rowan (2005) debates that the transpersonal is not empathy, nor countertransference or identification but it can be confused with them. He explains this is not empathy because, even though we try to enter into another person's world we know very well, they are over there and we are over here. He asserts this is something different, which goes deeper into the world of the other and actually overlaps with ours. He elaborates that the depth of engagement is created by the therapist who sets up an ego state (move out of our usual ego to experience things in a different way) corresponding to the client and puts energy into that, so that the therapist can be with the client from the inside and share the client's subjectivity. Whilst Rowan notes such experiences involve a lowering of personal and/or transpersonal boundaries, Budgell (1995), from a transpersonal perspective, argues that a blurring of

boundaries is needed whilst separateness continues, and notes that some therapists will be able to risk more of their vulnerability than others at this stage.

This transpersonal realm acknowledges there is a level of consciousness, where we are spiritual beings in touch with our soul and spirit. Wilber (2000) explains to us that there are three levels of consciousness within the transpersonal. The first of these levels is self-actualization, which is often referred to as the existential level of consciousness and forms the basis of humanistic forms of therapy, such as the person-centred approach. It is regarded as equivalent to Rogers's fully functioning person. The second level of consciousness, the super-conscious, encompasses the realm of the soul, the heart centre, the intuitive mind, the psychic centre and antaratma. It illuminates the divine in the form of symbols and imagery and is explored by Jung (1964). The third level of consciousness gives up all symbols and images and moves into the deep ocean of spirituality. This level is seen as the causal, the bliss mind, the over-mind and pure self. It is a state that is much harder to attain and less often used in counselling and more embryonic of meditation.

From person-centred, psychoanalytic and existentialism there is a hugely increased interest in transpersonal aspects of therapy and how they all link to depths of engagement. Theorists such as Hart (1997) call it a deeper form of empathy, naming it transcendental empathy, whereas Buber (1988) talks about inclusion and imagining the real. He takes the view that one can experience concretely what the other person is thinking and feeling and the pain of the other. Samuels (1989) speculates that such a depth of relating is embodied countertransference. He talks of a physical, actual, sensual expression that is experienced in the client's life-world. Samuels emphasises that images take the place of language between the conscious and unconscious, and that these visionary states, given substance by the therapeutic relationship, may be regarded as religious or mystical. This realm he refers to as the subtle when working at deep engagement. In person-centred work, this could be referred to as intuition that Rogers came to rely on in the mature stages of his work (Thorne, 2008).

Rowan (2005) reminds us that there are different stages of intuition which correspond and relate to the development of the self. Some of these levels of intuition in consciousness warrant further exploration and have direct relevance to the intuition participants of this research project discussed when working at depths of

engagement. The child self-level of intuition is very perceptive with fewer inhibitions, giving a wider sense of possibility. Rowan (2005) asserts it is possible to get back into this level of intuition by lowering our barriers. The intuition of the autonomous self is an expression of the most central self and something that can be fully identified with, and in a sense, owned. Additionally, the surrendered self of intuition is seen as coming from a source other than the self, which one has to open oneself up to. Beyond this is the intuitive self, where the person has fully digested the otherness and identified with it entering into a concrete unity in terms of transcendence.

Wilber (2000) comments that this means going beyond meaning in life, giving up and letting go of self-autonomy. This level of consciousness, he emphasises, is the stage of the higher self, transpersonal self, deep self, soul. Wilber (2000) posits it corresponds with the Centaur stage, the highest point in the existential realm, and breaks the mould of the mental ego to a unified body-mind self. It is characterised by epistemological individualism and is hard to get to this stage without going through the process of psychotherapy or long-term counselling because it involves working through unfinished business in the past and bringing everything into the present. Tebbutt (2014) analyses theorists' notions of the use of the self and boundaries in transpersonal counselling. He summarises that a lowering of boundaries can access a form of awareness and consciousness that is particularly helpful therapeutically, and that it is possible for therapists to function on a number of different levels at once. As with other theoretical approaches previously discussed, he also acknowledges the challenge of still retaining ethical and professional boundaries.

Exploration of the Transpersonal approach discussing the depths of engagement appear to link in at various dimensions with other approaches. Yet there is a lack of substantial literature to call upon to explain how therapists make sense of such transpersonal or spiritual experiences in the phenomenon and the challenges they might face.

2. 7 Psychological Studies of Consciousness: The Flow Approach.

Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi (1988), in their psychological studies of consciousness, explore dimensions of the flow experience in various situations. Their theories are highly relevant to this research because some participants refer to the flow process as parallel and similar to their counselling experiencing when working at a depth of engagement.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) explains that flow is a narrowing of attention on a clearly defined goal, in which the individual feels involved, concentrated, absorbed and finds the activity deeply enjoyable. He points out that the dimensions of the flow experience occur when the person's skill is just right to cope with the demands of the situation. He emphasises that because flow produces harmony within the self, attention can be invested totally in the activity at hand, which produces a merging of activity and awareness. Csikszentmihalyi (1994) contends that in such situations attention can be freely invested to achieve a person's goals because there is no disorder to straighten out, no threat for the self to defend against. Csikszentmihalyi, after decades of research into the positive aspects of human experience, called this state flow because this was the metaphor given from people he interviewed, to describe their experience. He asserts that individuals explained, it was like floating and being carried away by a current - a flow. This shares similarities with Cooper's (2013) research, assessing the experiences of the self in relational depth, where the heightened self was described as being 'in flow'.

Examining Csikszentmihalyi's (1988) work on flow, it also draws comparisons to that of Carl Rogers's notions in person-centred theory of a transcendental depth and relevance of the self in facilitating such depth. In his discussion of flow, Csikszentmihalyi debates, as Carl Rogers (1980) does, that the self is fully functioning and at its most facilitative, not always consciously aware of what one is doing. Csikszentmihalyi's (1988) studies researching how to achieve happiness, report experiencing a transcendence of self. He attributes this to the unusually high involvement with a system of action so much more complex than one usually encounters in everyday life. He contends that those who attain it develop a stronger,

more confident self because their psychic energy has been invested successfully in goals they themselves have chosen to pursue and that define the person's self (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Csikszentmihalyi's (2002) research explains that central to this, is that the person is not afraid of losing their self and so their ego can slip easily out of awareness. He elaborates that in a flow state, one is actually not in complete control. If one were, the tenuous balance between challenges and skills would tilt in the favour of the skills and the intensity of the experience would decrease. Rather, he stresses, what happens is that one knows that control is possible in principle. Csikszentmihalyi's views show further comparisons to Rogers (1980) as he explains that what needs to be done to achieve flow is spontaneous, without conscious effort. In the characteristic dimensions of the flow experience, he contends there is a loss of self-consciousness, transcendence of ego boundaries, and a sense of growth and of being part of some greater entity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). He attributes a unified consciousness as the most telling aspects of the flow experience.

Csikszentmihalyi discusses the relevance of the loss of self-consciousness, when flow is experienced and how, in his studies, participants reflect that somehow the right thing is done without you ever thinking about it or doing anything at all (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). This shares parallels to Roger's (1980) allowing states of presence. Markedly, Csikszentmihalyi's research findings also share some similarities in that of Cooper's (2013) research regarding the moment itself, where therapists identified a sense of connection and flow at depths of engagement. Another component mentioned in connection with the flow experience relates to the distortion of the sense of time. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) indicates that because of the rhythms dictated by the activity, time no longer seems to pass the way it ordinarily does, and that most people report that time is distorted and seems to pass much faster. He explains how it seems that a whole story, can unfold in seconds, and that by virtue of total absorption, one can feel lost in it, almost like a dream state where in a small amount of time hundreds of things happen quickly.

Geller & Greenberg (2012), talking about timelessness in depths of engagement, concur with Csikszentmihalyi. They note;

> "There is a sense that the movement of time does not exist……… instead time and spatial boundaries seem to drop away and that the experience is one of merging with one's self, with the other and with a larger field of energy".

(Geller and Greenberg, 2012:122).

They suggest that it becomes a somatic experience that transcends temporal boundaries and spatial boundaries, so that the feeling of being with the other person is that of being in a timeless place. They argue that loss of awareness of time and spatial boundaries is akin to Csikszentmihalyi's flow process.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) explains that most flow activities do not depend on clock time because they have their own pace, their own sequence of events marking transitions from one state to another. Csikszentmihalyi (2002) suggests that it is not clear whether this dimension of flow is just an epiphenomenon, a by-product of the intense concentration required for the activity at hand, or whether it is something that contributes in its own right, to the positive quality of the experience. What is relevant, he suggests, is that whenever there is an activity that produces flow, a strong attraction to repeat that activity begins to operate and that it is intrinsically rewarding.

Csikszentmihalyi contends that the phenomenon of flow has much promise in psychotherapy because so great is the quality of the optimal experience that it promotes healing. Research in the area of flow and optimal experience is largely dominated by Csikszentmihalyi and his colleague's studies and therefore information in this section relies heavily on his findings. Such research concurs with counselling theory that foundational to immersion and experiencing depth of engagement is a level of consciousness that is influenced by the self.

2.8 Why are Counsellors Attracted to Work at Depth? Conscious and Unconscious Motivations.

In this research project, I pondered what are the unconscious motivations and gratifications for the practitioner working at this depth? I questioned what fuels this

desire and is this altruistic or does it have narcissistic elements? As participants examined how they understood and made sense of working at depths of engagement, such aspects were explored. Consequently, an overview of the relevant current literature surrounding: the wounded healer, the relevance of childhood trauma/attachment, survival/development of the self and motivations for personal growth and development are essential to examine.

2.9 The Wounded Healer.

Sussman (2007) posits that there is considerable evidence to suggest that those who seek to become therapists have gone through periods of psychological disorganisation themselves, and this might contribute not only to the desire but also to the ability to cure others. Burch (2004) exhorts that many of us come into this profession because we need this sense of contact with people but that we are frightened of knowing it. Banham (2004) concurs and adds that true compassion is expressed in the ability to lovingly sustain difficult feelings and a sense of helplessness and to survive periods of not understanding or not knowing.

Consistent with the wounded healer hypothesis, Cohen (2009) expands that those counsellors with higher childhood trauma rates may confer an added strength to the clinical skills of the practitioner working at depth and healing others. Coltart (1996) indicates that there has to have been trauma and that only those individuals who know they have been deeply helped by their own personal therapy have it in them to become healers. As expressed by Kafka (1989), he contends that through our willingness to go into patients' dark places, we transcend our own fears. He suggests that by holding patients' hands, we are able to explore unfamiliar regions of our being as well as theirs. Thus, the role of therapist provides an individual with opportunities to confront and master the unknown.

Wheeler (2002), exploring therapists as wounded healers, debates unconscious motivations, and questions whether the client group the counsellor works with represent projections of the wounded parts of the self. Wheeler (2002) emphasises that the important thing is not that counsellors have been wounded but how they have dealt with and explored these wounds. She asserts that wounded healers are those who have explored their own motivations and gained sufficient insight to help others.

Kohut (1971) reflects on narcissism and the development of the self and also debates if the intimacy typical of a therapeutic relationship, offering opportunities for the use of self-objects (clients), provides gratification for these wounded parts?

2.10 Childhood Trauma and Attachment.

In a qualitative exploration of the unconscious motivations of those who choose to train and work as psychotherapists and counsellors, Barnett (2007) comments on the relevance of experiences of loss and deprivation, especially in early life, and the failures of carers to meet the normal narcissistic needs of their children. She expresses that the resultant painful effects of early loss often lead to difficulties in respect of intimacy, dependency and separation, particularly where there has been narcissistic injury, to issues around control, selfless giving and a need to be needed. This, she contends, results in an underlying sense of vulnerability. Adams (2014) also questions the drive and pure motivation for training as a therapist. She points to a vicarious personal growth that may have echoes to how we have behaved, maintained, and struggled with relationships, which she suggests may emerge from an infantile deficit or need.

Barnett (2007) expands that therapists with early experiences of such narcissistic parenting may themselves have become parents to their parents, which she suggests, may give them a special sensitivity to the needs of their clients. Barnett (2007) also indicates that for some a reparative urge is in place at an early age and roots of a desire to heal and mend lay in the dynamics of the original family. Higgins (2016), in her research study relating to counsellors' experiences of being changed by clients, also talks of the value of posttraumatic-growth. She points out how the effects of posttraumatic-growth through challenging life crisis and interpersonal relationships can influences the choices we make. As I pondered what my research would reveal, I wondered could a practitioner's childhood vulnerability have any relevance when working with clients at depths of engagement.

2.11 Survival and Development of the Self.

Csikszentmihalyi (2009), in a paper discussing the promise of positive psychology, talks of the power of joy. He examines goals, challenges and motivations in which to

understand human nature. He explains that unless we have passion and joy in life, we are not going to survive long as a species. But the question remains, why should full immersion in a challenging activity be so rewarding? Csikszentmihalyi (1994) explores this notion further and argues that humans who experience a positive state of consciousness when they use their skills to the utmost in meeting an environmental challenge, improve their chances of survival. This raises another question. Could this not also be the case in counselling? That the survival and development of the self possibly become stronger during depths of engagement and therefore we seek out these connections? The link, Csikszentmihalyi explains, between flow and enjoyment may have been, at first, a fortunate genetic accident, but when it did occur it made those who experienced it much more likely to want to explore it. Csikszentmihalyi also makes some links into the psychodynamic approaches; that enjoyment derived from self-rewarding activities is really due to the fact that they serve as a disguised release for repressed desires.

Csikszentmihalyi (2002) debates the evolving self, evolution, and being immersed in a situation. He suggests that of direct relevance here, is the reported higher self-esteem people experience at such times. He asserts that people account being more successful, feeling better about themselves, and feel that they are living up to their own and other's expectations. He emphasises this is because when one is absorbed, one forgets the self and so self-esteem is suspended, but afterwards, in recollection, one is led to say that the experience made one feel successful. So while it's important not to over pathologise the wish to heal, it's naïve to assume that the wish to heal is one-dimensional.

2.12. Personal Growth and Development.

Lindner (1978) introduces that therapists choose an orientation and a way of practicing that reduces their own psychic tensions. As such, Lindner contends that under the guise of choosing the most effective therapeutic orientation, many psychotherapists derive personal benefits that satisfy their own intra-psychic needs. Csikszentmihalyi (1994) also asserts that fundamental to life satisfaction subjective happiness and positive effect are the benefits of stress reduction, during such processes of immersion. He explains that individuals report fewer health problems.

He attributes this to the ability to match the challenges of the job with personal skills, or at least the perception of doing so.

Banning (2012), in her recent research study, asked fellow counsellors and trainees what motivated their decision to train as therapists. She asserts that practitioners undertook counselling training to gain a sense of wellbeing, feeling more resourceful and resilient. She also outlines that life-changing events had served to motivate people to seek greater self-awareness via counselling training. Rosenfield (2016) more recently talks of life experience and discusses why people go into the counselling profession. She suggests there are multiple reasons, some good and some dubious, but that they are often underpinned by being a wounded healer.

Throughout my analysis of the research literature relating to why people are attracted to train as counsellors, I was really struck by a deficiency of literature examining it. This brought up more questions than I answered, and left me wondering how practitioners from various approaches would depict, define and make sense of their motivations for working at a depth of engagement. Did this represent a healing for the self or was it altruistic to work at depths of engagement? Was there something about satisfying an underlying sense of vulnerability from formative years? Or were motivations to work at depths of engagement underpinned by seeking to develop and strengthen the self and the therapist's personal resources? I also contemplated not just what the rewards might be but what the costs might be?

2.13 The Professionalization of Counselling.

It is important to analyse and put in context that therapists today face many challenges working at depths of engagement, and that this has to be set against a back cloth of political, organisational and boundary implications of working in practice. In this next section, I will explore some of these tensions, which were highly relevant to this research study.

2.14 The Political.

Proctor (2015) draws our attention to the regulators who produce national policies to encourage efficiency and accountability. She explores the political climate of professionals needing to prove that their practice is evidence-based, which is supported by service providers such as IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) and NICE (The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence). Such power dynamics of practice and compliance have to sit alongside theorists' notions of the depths of engagement and how practitioners make sense of this experience in their practice, whilst providing enough evidence through RCT's (randomised controlled trials), evidence-based practice and systematic reviews, to prove that their practice is efficient and effective. Proctor (2015) notes that as far back as 2002, counsellors were feeling judged and under scrutiny to show a 'gold standard' in work, that was measureable. Yet it can be argued that the phenomenon does not fit well with such expectations and is difficult to measure. This is drawn to our attention by West (2011) and Knox et al. (2013) who question how spirituality is measured at a depth of engagement. If we consider such qualitative tensions, they would seem to be frustrated if we attempt to measure them statistically and accurately quantifiably. This could be further exacerbated if we bring in the component of how do we make sense of spiritualty itself and do we make sense of this during such moments, of deep engagement, almost a double hermeneutic?

There are also competing ideas about what is right and what is wrong. Cooper (2011) explores methods of research and how the resultant rise of CBT can meet the quantifiable demand for evidence-based practice. Yet its more directive stance may not provide the opportunity to relate at a depth of engagement and can challenge some of our most cherished principles and values. Cooper agonises how in partnership we can develop and promote methods in research that will appeal and give credibility. In contrast, Rogers, Maidmen and House (2011) argue that although Cooper's views are well intentioned our congruence in relation to our core values as counsellors must prevail over fashionable fear driven expediency. They contend that

it is not possible to reconcile core values of relational work with new managerialism and an audit culture. They exhort;

> "There is a lack of imagination regarding how relational therapies might flourish beyond the NHS, presently engulfed as it is by 'Audit culture' and the so-called 'New Managerialism' whose values and practices are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile with the core values of relational work".

(Rogers, Maidman and House,2011:26)

Working in the depths of engagement would appear to provide a massive challenge in terms of balancing ethical issues, political issues and working pragmatically.

2.15 The Organisational.

Wenger-Trayner, Fenton-O'Creevy, Hutchinson, Kubiak and Wenger-Trayner (2015) discuss the landscape of practice and the organisational. They contend that in a landscape all practices are practices. They assert that;

> "Regulation, management and research are practices all with their own local regimes of competence and although ….. A mandate or a set of standards may give rise to a practice they do not produce the practice-the practitioners do".

(Wenger-Trayner, Fenton-O'Creevy, Hutchinson, Kubiak and Wenger-Trayner, 2015:16)

BACP (2016) (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) provide guidelines in an ethical framework outlining ethical and professional practice. They promote principles of beneficence (a commitment to promoting the client's wellbeing) and non-maleficence (a commitment to avoiding harm to the client). Both ways of working are in the best interests of the client and could be seen to hold value when working in the depths of engagement. Cooper (2011) also adds that in 2011/12 BACP committed £450,000 to developing RCT's to establish counselling

as an evidence-based profession in the eyes of NICE and to develop its credibility as an ongoing RCT savvy culture. However, there are no acknowledgment or firm guidelines relating to the depths of engagement which would achieve parity with NHS work and governmental national policies. Despite this, BACP as stated earlier, have advocated firmly this year the importance of developing practice-based evidence. Evidence we empirically develop from doing that captures what is actually happening at a grass roots level. This seems a really fundamental step and bridge to recognising the importance of both the relational aspects and the more clinical cognitive elements of our practice.

However Cooper (2011) and Rogers et al. (2011) highlight a culture of fear at the ground level. The view seems to be that the souls going out of counselling and creativity is being stifled because of measurability. Feltham (2007) reminds us that ethical agonising can be seen as both an inescapable and proper part of the profession of counselling. He draws our attention to a suggestion that counselling itself is part of a fear-generating and risk adverse culture. He discusses fear around complaints over crossing boundaries, risk and negative outcome and there seems a reluctance to discuss this. I further question and ask are boundary crossings in the depths of engagement also viewed with similar scepticism, and does risk-taking by practitioners increase their concern about their vulnerability, about how to ethically work in these dimensions. I ponder if this is the case. How do we reconcile it if we are to embrace working holistically at an organisational level?

2.16 The Boundaries of Practice.

Wenger-Trayner et al. (2015) also remind us that it is not just a simple matter of practitioners implementing regulations, mandates and evidence-based prescriptions but that meaning is produced in each practice. They further assert that boundaries of practice are unavoidable, and that a practice of any depth requires a sustained history of social learning, which creates a boundary with those who do not share this history. As such, they identify these boundaries as places of potential misunderstanding and confusion arising from different regimes of competence, commitments, values, repertoires and perspectives. If we analyse the wide range of counselling approaches we originate from, it is evident that we are not united communities and may have

divided values. This in itself could prove difficult when exploring the depths of engagement because not only do such discourses and values have to sit within a theoretical framework, but also within an ethical framework at a local level of practice and at a political level of national policy. So the landscape in terms of professionalism and working in the depths of engagement is complex and diverse. As I considered the competing aspects in the depths of engagement, I was in no doubt that data analysis would require a methodology and methods that had a pedigree such that it could accommodate all these factors, whilst examining individual personal meaning and how participants made sense of the depths of engagement.

2.17 Summary.

This literature review provides insights into the importance of theory to describe depths of engagement in therapy. Its focus having direct relevance to the orientations that participants practice from and the data analysed in accounts. It identifies that, from the counselling orientations discussed, there is a significant gap and lack of research into the subjective meaning-making of therapists working at this level of engagement. The literature review also emphasises that there is no firm research, from any counselling approach, regarding the issues it raises for therapists, as they strive to work ethically and professionally in the depths of engagement. It also highlighted the scarcity of information regarding therapist vulnerability when practitioners work at this level of engagement. Conscious and unconscious motivations, exploring why therapists might want to work at a depth of engagement, pointed to a shortage in literature relating to the costs and rewards therapists may experience. Consequently I also questioned what aspects of experience might be hidden or unknown. This research study seeks to examine these gaps and the reasons for them.

Chapter 3- Methodology & Methods.

3.1 Introduction.

Qualitative research is time consuming, labour intensive and emotionally demanding. Smith et al. (2009) explain that if you are going to expend all this effort then it is a good idea to care about the outcome. They inform us it is not so much a matter of choosing the tool for the job but more of identifying what the job is. It is important here to remind ourselves of the main research question and secondary research questions.

3.2 Research Question.

How do therapists experience and make sense of depths of engagement within therapy?

3.3 Secondary Research Questions.

What discourses do practitioners call on in their sense-making processes?

What motivates practitioners to work at these levels?

What is the personal impact of such work on practitioners?

Are there professional issues that are raised for practitioners?

In order to answer these questions, this next chapter examines how the constructivist epistemology provided the possibilities for new meaning to be constructed as individuals made sense of the phenomenon. It details why I choose a qualitative methodology and not a quantitative methodology and why IPA meets the needs of the research study. I also examine the relevance of IPA's theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Methodology.

3.4. Adopting a Constructivist Epistemology.

McLeod (2008) posits that when doing counselling research;

> "Historically counselling research had largely been carried out in the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry. Within these disciplines and professions there has existed a powerful adherence to positivist research, seeking one universal truth that is quantifiable, represented by objectivity and an accurate measurement of variables".

> (McLeod, 2008:41).

By contrast in more recent years many counselling researchers have adopted a stance that human knowledge is contextualised and localised. Constructivist qualitative researchers question the notion of objectivity and the epistemological integrity of searching for one universal truth. As Mahoney (1999) reminds us, constructivist therapists do not claim there is one true appraisal of reality or that any claims to knowing can be ultimately justified by unequivocal appeals to absolute authority.

Adopting a constructivist understanding for this research project gave me the potential to search for multiple realities and not just one truth. It also gave me scope to uncover and illuminate the complexity of the depths of engagement and its meaning to participants as they engaged with the world. My stance on this type of knowledge construction is that it is neither inside the person or outside in the world but instead seen to exist in the relationship between person and world. Mahoney (1999) adds that social constructionist thinkers seek to transcend endogenic and exogenic theories of knowledge by suggesting that knowledge does not reside exclusively in the minds of individuals (endogenic) or in the environment (exogenic). Epistemologically although social constructivist understandings shaped my knowledge formation, interpretatively, I also situated myself with symbolic interactionism (symbolic interactionism emphasises the construction of the social world and meaning through the use of symbols in communication and language).

Blumer (1969) conceptualises symbolic interactionism as individuals acting on the meaning things have for them that they have derived from social interaction and modified through interpretative processes as they encounter them. Such symbolic interactionist assumptions embrace both social constructivism and personal meaning making.

Examining methodology and epistemology West (2011) points out that a good question to pose is: In what way will a particular methodology cast light on my intended research topic? Critically analysing the literature, I was influenced by the following theorists' notions in my decision making process. Liamputtong (2007) when considering sensitive research reminds us that qualitative investigations are not explorations of concrete, intact frontiers; rather they are movements through social spaces that are designed and redesigned as we move through them. The research process she posits is fuelled by the raw materials of the physical and social settings and the unique set of personalities, perspectives and aspirations of those investigating and inhabiting the fluid landscapes being explored.

Charmaz (2010) also posits that the constructivist approach means learning how and when and to what extent the experience, is embedded in larger and often, hidden positions, networks, situations and relationships. Neimeyer (2010) expands on these aspects in constructivism and asserts that such positions help to elaborate the personal meaning making activities of the participant. Silverman (1993) further contends that only after establishing how people construct meanings and actions, can the analyst pursue why respondents act as they do. Mahoney (1999) emphasises that constructivism incorporates interrelated principles of human experience. He suggests that the vast majority of the ordering processes operate at tacit un-conscious or super-conscious levels of awareness. All these perspectives underpinned by a constructivist epistemology show how such qualitative research methods provide flexibility, fluidity and were suited to understanding the meanings, interpretations and complex human experience of this research study.

3.5 Choosing a Qualitative Methodology.

To access the rich density of the web of the depths of engagement I explored, required a methodology that had the depth, ability and theoretical underpinnings to

examine the richness and diversity of human experiencing and scratch beneath the surface of data. I felt that a qualitative method would provide the opportunity to hear stories, in a sensitive way that quantitative research might not be able to match or measure. My constructivist epistemological base also led me towards a qualitative methodology. I was also mindful that a quantitative research methodology could struggle with aspects of spirituality and things that were difficult to verbalise, which may be present in the experiencing of the participants and could not neatly be interpreted or defined. As I examined the choices of qualitative methodologies I was drawn to IPA.

IPA has detailed methods, which get experience closer to providing a fascinating, very rich way of engaging with and analysing data. The roots of IPA theory, suggest that there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover and alternatively that truth or meaning comes into existence, in and out of engagement with our world. The centrality of this methodology is meaning making and a concern with how individuals make sense of their lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). IPA researchers are especially interested in what happens when the everyday flow of lived experience takes on a particular significance for people.

In this research study I wanted to hear how participants engaged and made sense of their experience at depths of engagement in their therapeutic practice, as they began to reflect on the significance of what was happening. Through the lens of IPA I could produce, knowledge of what practitioners experience and think about the 'phenomenon', situating interpretations within a wider social context and with critical acknowledgement of knowledge co-creation. To meet the challenges and demands of this research study I decided that methodologically, IPA would provide the necessary tools to investigate the depths of engagement.

3.6 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (I.P.A.)

The phenomenological base of IPA enables an access of different dimensions where knowledge and meaning are co-created. This is conceptualised by Finlay (2005) who suggests that the relational space between participant and researcher is the site of disclosure of the other. IPA is concerned with something occurring 'in between', person and world. It is this 'in-betweeness' that the existentialist Buber (1970), Van

Deurzen (2002), Rogers (1980), Rowan (2005) and many other theorists talk of at depths of engagement and that is referred to in the previous chapter. Whilst my methodology is underpinned by a constructivist epistemology it could be debated that it makes 'the individual' disappear and misses the 'I' out in personal meaning making processes (Burr, 2015). This can be reconciled in IPA by Symbolic Interactionism that embraces personal agency and individual meaning making.

Burr (2015) explains that fundamental to reflecting on our experience is the ability to use language to represent events to ourselves and that language acquisition depends on social interaction, key in symbolic interactionism. This reflects the importance of me allying myself with a constructivist stance that embraced meaning-making at both the social and individual level, which was informed both by social constructionism and symbolic interactionism, searching for multiple meanings and acknowledging the complexity of meaning making. It is the embodiment of this constructivist stance and symbolic interactionism that fills this gap, of something in between that I am attempting to bridge. IPA with this particular character and through phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiographic focus (an understanding of how a particular event, process or relationship is understood from the perspective of the particular people in a particular context), is well placed to understand the sense making of participants experiences, facilitating a better quality and texture of rich, detailed data (Smith et al., 2009). Such methodological aspects reassured me that they would prove to be essential and necessary to explore the phenomenon.

To fulfil the requirements of this research study IPA would also take into account that there may be many differences between individual's phenomenological representations of the phenomenon. Reid, Flowers & Larkin (2005) remind us that people immersed in the same experience are likely to have different views. They expand on this and suggest that meaning making is embodied by emotions and cognitions that are always entwined and that IPA can clearly speak to cognitive psychology. So IPA has the ability to straddle the many counselling approaches participants come from, including those with a more cognitive element. Smith (2009) also proposes that IPA is compatible with a social cognition paradigm (a range of layers of reflective activity which make up part of everyday experience and which form the focus of phenomenological inquiry) because it subscribes to a belief in and

concern with the chain of connections between verbal report, cognition and physical state.

Considering how relevant these aspects are in counsellor's practice and when endeavouring to explore the phenomenon, I am convinced by Ballinger's (2012) view that IPA will elucidate the data required. She emphasises, that IPA aims to be a multi-faceted and holistic phenomenological approach that embraces all aspects of being, the embodied, the cognitive-affective and the existential.

Reid, Flowers & Larkin (2005) also assert that such a methodology, used within therapeutic approaches, must engage with the contextual and emotional nature of relating and how this can become visible. He indicates that language is the means by which participants attempt to communicate their experience to the researcher and that language provides participants with the necessary tools to capture that experience. Words we chose to describe a particular event, he points out always construct a particular version of that experience and thus the event can be described in many different ways. Willig (2009) argues that language can never simply give expression to experience. Instead she contends, it adds meanings that reside in the words themselves. Similarly the range of cultures and sub cultures into which we are born provides us with meanings. IPA is concerned with these experiences and meanings. From a phenomenological perspective IPA would benefit this research study because it has the capability to look at the phenomenon from the point of view of those who experience it, the aim being to explore the experience and unravel its meanings. It also takes into account that participants in the study could perceive and experience what happens to be the same in radically different ways.

IPA meets the needs of this study because it also brings together a, phenomenological approach, hermeneutic enquiry and idiographic focus. This next section will look at the connection between these aspects, which are embedded in IPA theory and interweave throughout this research project.

3.7 Theoretical Underpinnings of IPA & its Relevance to the Research Question.

Phenomenology

Smith et al. (2009) point out that if we look at an etymological definition of phenomenology, the word is made up of two parts derived from the Greek, phenomenon and logos. Phenomenon translated means to show or appear and logos can be translated as discourse, reason, judgment. While phenomenon is primarily perceptual, logos is primarily analytical. Together their complementary activities Heidegger (1985) expresses mean, that which shows itself or to make it visible in its self. Smith et al. (2009) neatly conceptualise, that for Heidegger phenomenology is;

> "Concerned with examining something which may be latent or disguised, as it emerges into the light… It is also interested in examining the manifest thing as it appears at the surface because this is integrally connected with the deeper latent form, which it is both a part of and apart from".

(Smith et al.,2009:24)

This philosophy fitted perfectly with my objective to reveal and explore the phenomenal experience in its totality.

As I embarked on the research project and explored the phenomenological territory, I felt like a traveller where nothing was fixed and yet I felt I needed to situate myself with theorists in phenomenology that would assist me on my journey and prove to be central to the philosophical knowledge collection of my data. It was important to get this base line correct, as it would inform and meet the needs of the IPA study, in which phenomenology plays a major part. Smith et al. (2009) explain phenomenology can be difficult to characterise and can often be seen as messy. The process felt to me like a pick and mix process where specific and particular strands of phenomenology and theorists notions, felt fundamental to the infrastructure and validity of the project. I couldn't just buy it off the shelf so to speak, it didn't fit! So for me the 'P' (phenomenological) in IPA needed to be clear, simple, provide consistency and be spelt out at the beginning of the project.

Central to existential phenomenologist Heidegger's view was of the person as always and indelibly a person-in-context, associated with Dasein and being-in-the-world.

Heidegger (1985) explains that our subjective worlds are not hidden mentally inside us because our fundamental being is to be in the world, related to meaningful context. Such focussing on the individual's particularity, incorporates a blending of personal and social perspectives. It is this idiographic element in IPA theory that also aligns itself with this philosophy, wanting to know in detail what the experience for this person is like and what sense the participant is making of what is happening to them. IPA does not ally itself with the Husserlian idea of an essence of a phenomenon that transcends such contexts and allying myself with Heidegger's viewpoint was in keeping with my philosophy and in line with IPA's general stance. Thus as a researcher and analyst, such a phenomenological stance, where there is also a focus upon the person-in-context, facilitates a way of not only getting experience closer but enriching data.

3.8 Hermeneutics.

Via hermeneutics, IPA also seeks to uncover meanings and the relationship between the text and its production, in terms of its historical components, cultural elements, language and its relationship to lived experience (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Because IPA is concerned with human lived experience it posits that experience can be understood via an examination of the meanings which people impress upon it. These meanings can illuminate the embodied, cognitive-affective and existential domains of psychology. Palmer (1969) views hermeneutics as the method by which, something strange, separated in time or experience is made familiar, present and comprehensible. He asserts that something requiring representation, explanation or translation is somehow brought into understanding and is interpreted.

In this research project I have aligned myself ontologically within a minimal hermeneutic realist stance. Smith et al. (2009) describe Heidegger from this complex philosophical position, explaining that such a position recognises that nothing is ever revealed as anything, except when we encounter it and then when it is brought meaningfully into the context of human life. Heidegger (1985) also reminds us that when something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon the fore-conceptions of the researcher such as prior experiences, assumptions and preconceptions. Heidegger (1927/1962) explains that when the

researcher has engaged with the text he or she may be in a better position to know what the pre-conceptions are, as such Heidegger's notions encourage bracketing.

Such notions of bracketing and phenomenological reduction are traditionally associated with phenomenology. An argument here is that bracketing in IPA can only ever be partial and that our pre-understandings are not always to be set aside (Smith et al., 2009). Such pre-understandings may positively sensitise us to potential experiencing by sensitising us to meanings that might be shared or relate to social rather than individual meaning making. Understanding these notions and adopting such methods enriched the hermeneutic process throughout this research project and the cyclical nature of the analytic process which connected with reflexive practices.

These dynamics within the model of the hermeneutic circle of this research process are relevant because the hermeneutic circle is concerned with the relationship between the part and the whole at a series of levels. Gadamer (1990/1960) insists that the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole. Our task he emphasises is to expand the unity of the understood meaning centrifugally. In hermeneutical tradition this circularity is not viewed as a vicious circle but rather as a spiral, which implies a possibility of a continuously deepened understanding of meaning. As such IPA recognises that access to experience is always dependent on what participant's tell us about the experience and that the researcher then needs to interpret that account from the participant, in order to understand their experience. Thus a two stage interpretation process or double hermeneutic is involved (Smith et al., 2009).

The participant is trying to make sense of their world whilst the researcher, through their experientially informed lens, is trying to make sense of the participant, trying to make sense of their world. Thus IPA is intellectually connected to hermeneutics and theories of interpretation whilst also combining an empathic hermeneutic (seeing what it is like from the participants view) with a hermeneutics of questioning (standing alongside the participant whilst looking at them from a different angle, puzzling over things they are saying (Smith et al., 2009).

The hermeneutics of my questioning aimed to look at the accounts from different viewpoints which allowed for a much deeper interpretation to be made and which challenged the surface account. I pondered would such a hermeneutics of questioning

introduce a third hermeneutic in the case of this research study. Participants were asked to reflect on the process of depths of engagement in the counselling relationship, which from a constructivist stance could be argued, is inevitably going to be entwined in some way with their client and with the researcher. The hermeneutics of empathy also attempts to reconstruct the original experience in its own terms, again would the empathy the participant, had for their client and the empathy of the researcher have any bearing on such a process? Crotty (1998) discussing Schleiermacher examines grammar and psychology in modern hermeneutics and asserts that there is a kind of empathy in the speaker-listener interchange, which extends to the interpretation of texts. He expresses that a text is not only shaped by the conventions and expectations of a writers own linguistic community but also by the individual work that he/she does with language, which could impact in the form of an interconnecting hermeneutic web.

It is probably fair to say that the individual element of meaning-making, embraced within symbolic interactionism (that meaning is derived from and arises out of the social interaction that we have with others), inevitably means that our understanding can only ever be partial. Shaw (2009) explains that we cannot escape the interpretative aspects at any stage of our endeavours but we can reflect upon our role in producing these interpretations and we can maintain a commitment to ground them always in our participant's claims and concerns. These notions were all aspects I was aware of as I embarked on interpreting the data.

McLeod (2007) further argues that phenomenology involves using language to describe what lies beyond language and in doing so invites criticism that it is attempting the impossible. Alternatively Schleiermacher (1986) in Garcia-Landa, (2002) reminds us that meaning can be extracted from interpretations but that those interpretations must also be accommodated in the wider context in which the text was originally produced. Smith et al. (2009) offer that the challenge is to balance the hermeneutics of empathy against the hermeneutics of questioning and to do so in such a manner that any balance struck, can be reconciled with the researchers commitments to understanding the participants life-courses, which is described by Sugarman (2004) as how life is seen in the psychosocial contexts of successive life stages. For me to remain faithful to the hermeneutic process was to be aware of my own pre-conceptions, whilst attempting to understand what it is like for someone

else, whilst analysing illuminating and making sense of their data. Such challenges in the hermeneutic process became evident in my piloting project which I will discuss in the next chapter.

3.9 Idiography.

Via adopting an idiographic approach, intensive, detailed engagement with individual cases, gave me the scope to focus on the interplay of factors specific to the participant. This concern with the particular required a thorough, systematic detailed analysis of data. Smith et al. (2009) and Smith (2009) contend that via such an approach it should illuminate how a particular experiential phenomenon, event, process or relationship has been understood from the perspective of the participant in that particular context, grasping the meaning and significance of this to the person. The emphasis of the idiographic approach focused on the illumination of the individual and the specific, rather than nomothetic analysis (general claims of a group where data collected is analysed such that it prevent retrieval from the origin).

As such a critique may be that because there was an emphasis on small samples this might have led to a lack of generalisability. Examining such viewpoints and the limitations of IPA highlighted by Willig (2009) I was mindful of being able to access the rich texture of experiences and how successfully participants may able to communicate this. This gave me the awareness to extend my lens wider to examine in meticulous detail, how participants used language and focussed on the interplay of factors, in a way that subtleties and nuances could be captured. This gave greater depth to the process of convergence and divergence of cases, as the interpretative process broadened out and prevented generalisability.

The chapter has aimed to show how the qualitative methodology of IPA provides the framework to search for multiple realities in the depths of engagement. It also explains how the epistemology, methodology and theoretical perspectives, are suited, via deep interpretation to uncover meanings and get experience closer to how participants made sense of and experienced the phenomenon.

3.10 Methods.

This next section of the chapter sets out sampling strategies, participant's recruitment, data collection and the interview schedule. It also examines the analytical stages of the methods I used within IPA guidance. This level of engagement is important to detail because it describes the process, illustrating the level of depth achieved in this analysis and how data was processed. As a result this leads to a section that examines and aims to demonstrate the trustworthiness, credibility and reliability of the research study. Ethical issues are then outlined because they are monitored throughout data collection as is analysis, requiring continued review. As I first open up this section of the chapter I consider my stance as a researcher engaging with the data and how the pilot study and my initial reflexivity guided my analysis.

3.11 My Stance as a Researcher.

Madill et al. (2000) contributes that reliability in qualitative analysis accepts the inevitability of bringing one's personal and cultural perspectives to bear on research projects. This invited me as the researcher to engage with the complex understanding of experience, which invokes a lived process, an unfurling of perspectives and meanings that are unique to the participants embodied and situated relationship to the world. Smith et al. (2009) discuss such connections and state that phenomenology and IPA are inextricably linked and stress the importance of how the researcher is situated in the data, when conducting analysis. As I considered where I was situated, I was aware that in this research because of my own experiences of the phenomenon as a counsellor, I was also an insider. One of the most commonly voiced concerns regarding insider research, is that of the researcher's subjective association with the topic being investigated and the enhanced potential for researchers to impose their meaning on the analysis of the data (Willig, 2009). Hence there is an increased need for reflexivity, something I interweaved and continually reviewed throughout data analysis and throughout the whole of the research study.

Nielsen (2014) argues that insiders are also trained researchers and subjectivity does not disqualify work as scholarship or science as long as data gathering procedures

and values are both made explicit. She also comments that biases or predispositions that are often attributed to insider research might well be sources of insight. This reflects an IPA stance whereby prior understanding can act as an important basis for dialogue and potential source of communally held understandings. As both a counsellor, researcher and insider whilst making phenomenological sense of the data, I sought as a researcher to be open to differing viewpoints and discourses. Gadamer (1990/1960) makes it clear that such phenomenological understanding also shifts and evolves with each encounter. Smith et al. (2009) extend this phenomenological perspective and also contend that such interpretation and meaning of accounts will also be influenced by the moment when such interpretation takes place. Using supervision as an aid to self-reflection and bracketing, I hoped this would ensure coherence of analysis and transparency, whilst enhancing the trustworthiness of the research.

Reid, Flowers & Larkin (2005) exploring lived experience also point to unavoidably bringing one's personal and cultural perspectives to research projects. In fact, the empathy provided by a shared humanity and common cultural understanding in terms of the counselling relationship and data sought, could prove to be an important bridge, between researcher, participant and a valuable analytic resource. So I did not want to totally separate out the world but through striving to heighten my awareness via bracketing (noting my own personal views), I hoped to hold in abeyance the classifications and constructs that Smith (2009) suggests we impose on our perceiving, becoming more aware of my conceptions and my projections on the data.

In terms of reflexivity this highlighted to me the importance of keeping a running commentary of my thoughts and feelings as I engage with the data. So through my academic supervision and counselling supervision I explored my connection with words and phrases of my data to heighten my awareness. I also deepened my knowledge of phenomenology, which influenced my processing and research, by sharing verbal extracts of my thought processes with other Doctoral researchers in the IPA North West Group. This broadened my knowledge and challenged my awareness of the person in context, whilst phenomenologically interpreting the data.

3.12 Pilot Study and Initial Reflexivity.

Via a semi structured interview and data analysis using the methodology of IPA, I interviewed a doctoral counselling student on her experience of depths of engagement within the therapeutic process. This produced rich exciting data. It also highlighted to me issues relating to my reflexivity and how this could influence the main research project. One of the methodological issues is highlighted by Willig (2009), who argues that even though IPA aims to explore the research participants experience from his or her perspective, it recognises that such an exploration must necessarily implicate the researcher's own view of the world as well as the nature of the interaction between researcher and participant.

Whilst examining the phenomenon with the participant, she described the physical experiences and sensations of the phenomenon as *'disorientation'*. To confirm my understanding, I offered back to her similar words, which although helpful and moved the participant on, to a deeper description of her words, on reflecting on the transcription, I wondered whether, my own life world (the world of concrete experience as it is lived by people (Langdridge, 2007)) and my own personal experiences had influenced my response. (This is an example of co-construction of data within the research interview).

Olsen (2011) reminds us that reflexivity has many definitions but it is essentially a strategy that focusses on the intersection between who, the researcher is as a person and how he or she represents the data. As I mused on this I also considered, epistemological reflexivity, which encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions of the world and about the knowledge that we have made in the course of research. For me I had to remember that I was a researcher and not to slip into a counselling role. My learning from this awareness, which I applied to the main project was that I would stay as closely with the participants language as I could via empathic and sensitive questioning, asking on occasions if they could say more rather than try and feedback my understanding of their dialogue because I did not want to overtly direct their language, in the interview.

Another methodological issue is noted by Shaw (2009) who contends that the self is indistinguishable from its roles, culture and relationships and is continually being

constructed through language and other systems of symbolic representation. She expands that such conditions can lie far beyond the moment and location of the experience itself and may be found in past events, histories or the social and material structures within which we live our lives. Evidence of the relevance of this aspect of IPA was verified again in my piloting study when discussing the depths of engagement in counselling and the contribution of the person of the therapist to this process. The participant was asked; do you believe this can be taught? To this question she elaborated a great deal on her background and upbringing and how this had formed who she was as a person, the construction of her personality and how she felt this impacted on her being when experiencing the phenomenon.

The piloting process confirmed for me that the questions that I had formulated accessed deep data and that the sense making process for the participant goes beyond the moment. I also learned from the pilot project that during the data collection process, such deep exploration of the depth of engagement, required a quantity of time for participant's to discuss, internalise and search for meaning in their responses. As a consequence this was reflected in the venue I later choose for the interviews and the extended time I put aside for the interviewing process and debriefing.

The epistemological aspect of interviewing proved to be an area where I felt myself and the participant reciprocally influenced one another. Based on my prior knowledge, throughout the semi-structured interview, both our interactions were influenced by Kvale's 'traveller' metaphor, conceptualising knowledge construction as collecting tales to be brought back and retold by the traveller, evidence of the double hermeneutic (Kvale, 2007). During this co-construction of knowledge I asked the interviewee questions and encouraged her to share her stories. The participant recollected a particular deep resonance she had reached with one of her clients, in which she talked about the 'deep thing'.

In the interpersonal relationship we both commented and noticed how it felt like together we were fellow travellers exploring the 'deep thing'. As we journeyed she found that the *'deep thing'* was *'scary'* and *'disorientating'*, which she noticed that she pulled back from in counselling sessions. This was new learning for the participant and had never been something she had reflected on before. Consequently

there was deep meaningful learning for her, as she considered why she might do this. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) assert that the journey may not only lead to new knowledge but the traveller might change as well and that the journey might instigate a process of reflection that leads the traveller to new ways of understanding. As part of the piloting process this reminded me how important it was to ensure that at the point of consenting to the research, participants were fully aware, that such research may encourage a process of personal change and a revised understanding of the self. This also confirmed to me that as a duty of care I had to ensure that all participants were provided with support networks and supervision to discuss such change, should this be the case.

During the pilot process I also trialled the use of metaphor to gain new meaningful data. I sought to use metaphor in my questions and also encourage use in dialogue overall. Siegelman (1990) emphasises that metaphor can be a particularly powerful component because it is basic to the language we use and embodies our conceptual understanding. This was evidenced as the participant was encouraged to find a metaphor that reflected a place where she shared, there were no boundaries. The participant described how a kind of *'melting point'* and a *'different frequency'* evolved. This then lead her to explore how she felt something neurological was going on at a depth of engagement in counselling, which she expanded on in great detail. Such power of metaphors in the pilot study reached new depths in the participant's understanding and experience of the phenomenon. This confirmed to me the importance of encouraging the use of metaphor during interviews in the main project, to unlock meaning and depth when exploring the phenomenon. With the fore knowledge of the issues arising in the piloting interview process I became more aware of tightening up aspects of my research design.

3.13 Sampling Strategies.

IPA emphasis is placed on sampling characterised by homogeneous sampling, using small numbers of participants, who share a particular lived experience and are selected for their ability to illuminate the specific research question (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Shaw (2009) expands on these requirements and points out that purposive sampling should identify and recruit participants who can offer a

meaningful perspective on the phenomenon of interest. She adds that homogenously participants are chosen that can offer insights from a position of shared expertise. She also suggests a small sample of 3-6 participants and recommends that the researcher expand the range of data, rather than the number of participants.

Smith et al. (2009) also provide guidance relating to professional doctorate studies and the demands of such a study. They note an ideal sample size of between four and ten participants as good practice. Although some qualitative researchers opt for larger sampling sizes, possibly out of caution and predicting criticism from quantitative colleagues, I decided on a sample size of 6 participants because the issue for me was about quality and not quantity, given the complexity of the phenomenon. I also wanted to honour IPA's commitment to idiography and the particular in the sense of detail and systematic depth of analysis. Too larger sample size would have made it more problematic to provide such rigour and thoroughness in such a study.

Via doctoral counselling groups and through my professional networks of university-based graduate doctors in counselling, which were university based, I invited counsellors, with a minimum of 10 years counselling practice, who were accredited and members of BACP, to take part in my research project. My primary reason for choosing practitioners educated at doctoral level, came from knowing they were happy to engage and reflect on their practice, in an in-depth, interactive dialogue, in which spontaneous creative, descriptive, linguistic and conceptual responses would have the optimal possibility of gaining new rich data. Interviews took place in a University setting. This ensured privacy and safety because all participants were familiar with this environment and felt comfortable in this setting. The interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. Interviews were recorded on a digital audio-recorder and data was subsequently transcribed by myself.

3.14 Participants & Recruitment.

After receiving ethical approval from The University of Manchester, I spoke to both doctoral counselling groups and individual graduate doctors, through my professional networks and explained the nature of the research and the requirements. A Participant Information Sheet, see Appendix (1) and a Participant Consent Form

see Appendix (2) were given to potential volunteers, to take away to reflect on the literature and peruse, whether it was something they would like to take part in. Six participants came forward, three men and three women. This was ideally the homogeneous sample size I had hoped for and that I had gained ethical approval for. All participants were counselling practitioners holding the Professional Doctorate in Counselling qualification, or in the last year of their Professional Doctorate in Counselling. They were professionally accredited BACP counsellors and three participants were also counselling supervisors.

Practitioners came from a variety of counselling orientations and I have changed their names to preserve anonymity. Although participants preferred limited information to be given about themselves, they were happy for brief, individualised portraits to be shared. This information is in line with IPA's idiographic engagement and can be found in Appendix 3. Within their work practice participants incorporated various counselling approaches. Some were also conversant with non-counselling approaches, such as hypnotherapy and one participant had a psychology background in addition to her counselling modality. Moreover I did not use theoretical orientation as a basis for homogeneity because the scope of paradigms participants practised was too diverse.

I was also looking for how counsellors from across different theoretical orientations might understand depths of engagement. Participants came from both private and public sector of counselling and each had in excess of 10 years professional practice. It was also given that because of the variety of theoretical models that formed their integrative knowledge, there would be both convergent and divergent opinions and beliefs of how they individually experienced depths of engagement in their counselling practice. Participants were also both passionate and motivated to add to this research. Smith (2009) contends that a good research study, with an insightful analysis of data, will emerge from a research topic that is of considerable importance to the participant. Smith sees the respondent's motivation as a key element to the quality of the research project.

3.15 Data Collection.

Smith & Osborne (2003) in their studies write about the use of interviewing in phenomenological research and describe semi-structured interviews as the exemplary method for data collection in IPA because of the emphasis in this approach, on exploring how people interpret their experience.

Given the personal and intimate nature of the material, I considered the use of semi-structured interviews, as the most appropriate form of data collection. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) posit that the interview is a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the interviewee's everyday world. Interviews they point out enable participants to convey to others their situation from their own perspective in their own words. Such a mode of understanding, in the qualitative interviews I hoped would encapsulate the interactions of the individual's lived experience.

A further epistemological issue of understanding in qualitative interviewing and data collection relates to meaning. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) discuss meaning in linguistic comments and note how language is the medium central to interpretation. Heidegger (1962) conceptualises this and writes, that our interpretations of experience are always shaped, limited and enabled by language. Knowledge is therefore constituted through linguistic interaction and participants discourses, reflecting the roots of symbolic interactionism. Via the methodology of IPA I hoped that both the interviewing process and the analytic process together would have the capacity to capture the quality and texture of individual experience.

3.16 The Interview Schedule.

Constructing the interview schedule I was guided by King and Horrocks (2011) who recommend that qualitative interviews use an interview guide, that outlines the main topic the researcher would like to cover. This is open, expansive and flexible to allow participants to lead the interaction in unanticipated directions. They also contend not only is it permissible to change your guide in the course of your study, it is generally advisable to do so. King and Horrocks (2011) emphasise that the aim of a qualitative interview is to elicit participant's accounts of aspects of their experience, rather than

to collate answers to specific questions as if they were variables in a survey. Thus the interview schedule, found in Appendix 4, was an initial one that acted as a guide and not the overall blueprint for all interviews.

My aim was that the interview would be an iterative process, that took account of participants own individual direction and recognised them as the experiential expert on the phenomenon. I did not under-estimate the process of interviewing and I was committed to thorough, rigorous exploration of participant's voices and experiences. I was guided by Smith's (2011) evaluations that getting good strong data requires good interviewing and that high quality data is integral to the success of an IPA study. Whilst I was mindful of being thorough, I adopted a person centred approach to my interviewing, prompting but being non-directive, allowing the dialogue to unfold naturally and in different directions. My awareness of this process was that participants valued the space and time to reflect on their understandings. This was confirmed by one participant Brian who shared that in supervision he had never reflected in such depth on his experience of the phenomenon. I felt that in many ways my style of interviewing, contributed to participants taking different understandings to their own supervision process.

Such design of the questions in the semi-structured interviews, sought to prompt individuals to examine how they made sense of their experiences of depths of engagement, the primary research question. Expanding and reflecting on any sensory or embodied aspects, commenting on their behaviour and feelings when in depths of engagement and discussing their opinions, values, and knowledge in the depths of engagement enabled data to be collected for the secondary research questions. Such categories are suggested by Patton (1990), as good practice because they can elicit different kinds of information. It was my intention that these questions would lead to data that would examine the lived experience of the phenomenon, discourses counsellors called upon in their sense making, their motivations and the personal impact of working at such levels and the personal growth and development for the practitioner that formed part of the process.

3.17 Data Analysis.

IPA is an intensive, meticulous form of data analysis. Doing such analysis is painstaking work and an experience I found to be personal, difficult, creative, intense and conceptually demanding. As Smith et al. (2009) remind us it needs to be undertaken descriptively, linguistically and conceptually, line by line. IPA also has a theoretical commitment to the person as cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being, assuming a chain of connection between peoples language, thinking and emotional state (Smith & Osborn, 2003). At the same time IPA researchers realise this chain of connection is complicated. As I applied the concepts of stages, strategies, circling and spiralling to the analytic process, and attempted to manage the burgeoning mass of data to be assimilated, I became aware of feeling vulnerable, overwhelmed and challenged by all the different connections.

Journal Entry 14th January 2013.

"I feel worn out by analysing the data, it feels too much. I've been interpreting this data now for 6 months, day after day and have just been diagnosed with the shingles".

This was a turning point for me and I feel worthy of note here. Feeling totally wiped out and submerged, I consulted one of my supervisors regarding my feelings. He asked me 'what has the illness shown you?' I mused on this and realised that the route of analysis was not linear and clear, it wasn't the nature of the methodology and that it would be messy. I was guided by Smith et al. (2009) who acknowledge, that such an analysis at this stage, is not definitive and instead, open to change and is only fixed through the act of writing up. They further expand that this dynamism is at the heart of good qualitative analysis and is what makes it exhilarating and also demanding. They assert that this is what allows for the possibility of a creative insightful and novel outcome. These reflections gave me the re-assurance that I was on the right track. Through the process of data analysis I have learnt it is not about learning a set of guidelines, it is about the initial ambiguity of not knowing and trusting intuitively in the process, that the data will emerge in its own time, through attention to detail and perseverance.

3.18 Transcription.

After each interview participants were all forwarded a copy of the transcript, invited to check the accuracy of its contents, in order to ascertain that the text was loyal to their memory of what they had said. Interview participants were also invited to examine interview transcripts for material that they felt would violate confidentiality, in case of published verbatim extracts. Interviewees were invited to make any changes they felt necessary to ensure confidentiality and accuracy. Several minor amendments were made to the transcript following participant's comments.

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) point out that researchers who transcribe their own interviews, will learn much more about their own interviewing style, with the benefit of having the social and emotional aspects of the interview situation, present or reawakened, during transcription and will already have started the analysis of meaning. This proved helpful to me as I started to familiarise myself again, not only with the data but also with the non-verbal utterances (such as laughter), significant pauses, hesitations and intonations of the speech interactions in the interview. Smith et al. (2009) emphasise, this is of key importance in terms of the focus in IPA on linguistic comments and its analysis. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) expand on this in relation to reliability, validity and ethics in transcription and suggest that the correct inclusion of pauses, repetitions and tone of voice, are also relevant for good psychological interpretations.

Being conversant and having a knowledge of IPA I was aware that even the exact same written words in a transcript can convey two quite different meanings, depending on how the transcriber chooses to insert periods and commas. This is another reason why I choose to transcribe the data myself. As an added layer of confidentiality, I also ensured that all data was anonymized and that the identities of interviewees were masked, so that participants would not be easily recognised. Recorded data was translated on to computer by myself and only accessed by myself. It was then locked away in a cupboard in my study which was also locked. After the thesis is approved all recorded material will be destroyed, as outlined on the Participant Information Sheet. Having an awareness of sensitive data via my safeguarding counselling practice has proved helpful and all data relating to this

research study will also be stored and destroyed in accordance with data protection guidance.

3.19 Analytic Stages.

The essence of IPA lies in its analytic focus, which directs out analytic attention towards our participants attempts to make sense of their experiences. Smith et al. (2009) provides a model of the analytic stages. I used these stages as a guideline leading to my analysis, which had proved useful when using I.P.A. in my previous M.A study. These are detailed below.

3.20 Immersion.

My initial aim of the first process of analysis was to actively engage with the data and attune myself to the participant and interview. Smith (2009) indicates that this involves immersing oneself in the original data. To re-familiarise myself I listened to the audio recording twice, imagining the voice of the participant, attuning myself to powerful recollections of the flow of intrapersonal and interpersonal experiencing in the interview. Overwhelmed and feeling saturated by possible ideas and notions, I kept a notebook to capture my thoughts, feelings and micro details that emerged. This process gave me confidence that my first impressions could not be lost and were something I could return to. Here is an example of one of my reflective notes.

Reflective Notes, Friday 10th August, 2012.

"We both met as fellow travellers in research. I am touched by her trust in me, to share, risk herself and go to unexplored territory that is scary. She discusses and examines her personal growth, past and present and how she feels this informs her practice. I am moved by the fact that she assumes total safety with me, to explore values, life-world and the role this plays in her being".

Identifying my thoughts and capturing them in writing helped me to re-engage more easily with data later and provided as an aide memoir of my own visceral feelings that were important to return to, in terms of my own reflexivity.

3.21 Initial Noting.

This level of analysis was the most detailed and time consuming. I began to identify specific ways by which the interviewee talked about, understood and thought about the phenomenon. Developing initial notes I was guided by Shaw (2009) who suggests that the researcher explores descriptive comments, which have a phenomenological focus, looking at language used, in the context of life world and lived experience and more abstract concepts.

For consistency, clarity and ease I photocopied each transcript leaving wide margins either side. In the left side I noted initial and exploratory comments and in the right side I started to identify initial themes. An example of this is given in Appendix 5. In a further level of annotation I examined the way in which content and meanings were presented i.e. descriptively, linguistically, conceptually, and also in terms of repetition, tone and metaphor. This focussed on interviewees over-arching understanding of the matters they were discussing. I then created further notes.

Attending to the participants' words and ensuring that the interpretation was inspired by their words I also used a strategy of de-contextualisation. As suggested by Smith et al. (2009), by taking a paragraph and reading it backwards, fracturing the narrative, I got a feel for the use of particular words. I became aware of the significance of the word *'that'* conceptualising a difficulty in articulation. Another word, captured the same way through de-contextualisation was, '*can't* which all participants used when trying to describe the phenomenon. With this strategy I was able to get closer to the embedded nature of participants reports and gain a sense of the importance of context and the inter-relationship between one experience and another.

3.22 Looking for Patterns and Themes Within Individual Cases.

This task required me to reduce the volume of detail in the transcript and my initial notes, whilst maintaining complexity, in mapping the interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes. Often themes were expressed as phrases which spoke to the psychological essence of the piece and contained enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual. Being mindful

of the hermeneutic circle, where the part is interpreted in relation to the whole and the whole is interpreted in relation to the part, gave me focus to capture what I saw as crucial. In addition through polarisation I looked for differences between themes and via contextualisation I identified connections that related to particular narrative moments or key life events. Although I followed Smith et al.'s (2009) guidelines I was also influenced by their thoughts that the analyst is encouraged to be innovative and exploratory in their research design.

3.23 Developing Themes Across Cases.

My next step was to bracket my thoughts for each transcript, in keeping with IPA's idiographic commitment. I also left a gap of time between each case so I approached each transcript afresh to do justice to its own individuality. In terms of rigour I decided to construct new themes for each case. Once this was concluded I then searched for patterns across cases, showing connections for the group as a whole. Through abstraction I identified patterns between emergent themes, putting like with like and developing clusters which were contained within an overall sub-ordinate theme, an example of this is given in Appendix 6.

Via the analytic process of sub-sumption, sub-ordinate themes brought together a series of related themes which created Super-ordinate themes, an example of this is given in Appendix 7. The hermeneutics of empathy guided this initial process. I also noted areas of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence, which sometimes led to a reconfiguring and re-labelling of themes. In line with IPA's idiographic concern the balance was with a commitment to understanding how particular, experiential phenomena was understood by counsellors, in their particular context of work.

3.24 Writing Up

As I moved to the writing up stage of my analysis I was conscious that with certain themes my level of interpretation developed, which involved drafting and re-drafting and fine tuning my analysis. Presenting verbatim extracts also supported and

enriched my analysis, bringing it to life in a transparent way. The surprise for me was that the emerging themes I found, were completely unexpected at the start of the analysis of the data, which for me demonstrated how patience, close engagement and re-drafting was fundamental to the process.

3.25 Validity, Reliability, Credibility and Trustworthiness.

When examining validity, reliability, credibility and trustworthiness in this research I have chosen to be guided by Yardley's (2000) notions. This is because of Smith et al.'s (2009) focus on her criteria and how the quality of her contributions, meet the requirements of an IPA study. In assessing the validity of an IPA study Yardley (2000) invites us to consider 'sensitivity to context'. She points out that the research may show sensitivity to context through an awareness of the existing literature on the topic, which continues through the researchers immersion and discipline through the analytic process. This she explains should result in a considerable number of verbatim extracts from the participants, to support the arguments being made. Smith et al. (2009) contend that in professional doctorates between 4 and10 interviews be adopted which should generate quality extracts from participants that can be provided as evidence. Honouring this process through my close, sensitive engagement with the idiographic and the particular, gave me both the quantity and quality of verbatim extracts offered in the findings section, bringing the data to life.

A second principle Yardley (2000) highlights relates to 'commitment and rigour'. She explains that there is an expectation that there must be sufficient idiographic engagement and that the analysis must be sufficiently interpretative, moving beyond a simple description of what is there, to an interpretation of what it means. She points out the skill is to keep a balance between closeness and separateness. Smith (2009) explains that analysis should be pointing to both convergence and divergence and that there should be a skilful demonstration of both patterns of similarity among participants as well as the uniqueness of the individual experience. The unfolding narrative for a theme he posits should provide a careful interpretative analysis of how participants manifest the same theme in particular and different ways. Capturing this nuance of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence he comments is the hallmark of good IPA work and one that I aimed for.

Linked to this second principle Yin (1989) suggests that one way of checking the validity of one's research is to file all the data in such a way that somebody could follow the chain of evidence that leads from initial documentation through to the final report. To ensure such validity and reliability in the study, I shared with my colleagues at the North West IPA, in a discussion group, my 'process of analysis' and welcomed their views from different angles and perspectives, which opened up the possibilities for alternative interpretations of data, providing a more detailed and multifaceted account. Such a process of convergence provides evidence of accuracy and trustworthiness and is recommended by Hunter (2013).

Yardley also emphasises the importance of a third principle, 'transparency and coherence', to show how clearly the stages of the research process are described in the write up of the study, reflecting hermeneutic and phenomenological sensibility. Throughout this process of drafting and re-drafting, I rooted the analysis in participant's words. I also sought to be transparent throughout by incorporating my reflexivity. My supervisor also rigorously challenged my interpretation of data and associated construction of themes, through mini-audits, systematically and transparently examining how they had been produced, in order to reflect that the account produced had validity, credibility and rigor.

The last principle Yardley (2000) refers to in terms of validity and credibility is 'impact and importance' and whether the research conveys to the reader something interesting, important and useful. It was my intention that this research study would, extend and broaden our understanding of the phenomenon, pushing the boundaries of knowledge further and asking where do we go from here? I intend to play a part in increasing its impact by disseminating my findings to the BACP and other associated professional bodies, through research departments, conferences, training modules and via networking groups.

3.26 Ethical Issues.

This research has been passed and given ethical approval by The University of Manchester. This research also adheres to ethical guidelines for researching counselling and psychotherapy set out by the BACP. Brinkmann & Kvale (2009) argue that qualitative research is saturated with ethical issues. They caution against

seeing the practice of ethics as rule following and suggest that ethical issues and concerns cannot be addressed and solved once and for all during the planning stages of research. Smith et al. (2009) also assert that in an IPA study, ethical research practice is a dynamic process which needs to be monitored throughout data collection and analysis, requiring sustained reflection and review. Willig (2009) sets out a professional code for ethical practice, which flowed throughout this research project and can be found in Appendix (8).

As I considered exploring the phenomenon in this research study and the fields of uncertainty, that lay ahead, I was aware that I had to become ethically attuned, throughout the whole process. This is particularly relevant in qualitative research and semi-structured interviewing because the open-endedness and exploratory nature of the collection of data can continually become an ethical challenge in terms of informed consent and confidentiality. West (2002) discusses 'knowing consent' and questions, is the participant fully aware of what they are consenting to when they agree to take part in qualitative research? King and Horrocks (2011) add to the debate and also question whether the interviewee agree to have their body language and other felt senses described and are they giving you the right to use this data? Both these issues were highly relevant in my research because although all participants were familiar with such an ethical process in doctoral research, there was a total uncertainty where the collection of this data would take us, in terms of the phenomenon being investigated and thus it was difficult to gage what participants might be agreeing to. For this reason I was guided by Rosenblatt (2000) who suggests 'processual consent' (constantly revisiting consent), something I adopted throughout this study, in addition to the Information Consent Form signed by participants.

Confidentiality was another ethical issue I was also aware of. To assure someone of confidentiality appears to suggest that what is said in the qualitative interview will remain private and not be repeated. It is hard to imagine how this might be done, when using qualitative interviewing, if what is said is not to be repeated. Nevertheless such data brings to the fore issues of confidentiality and a respect that participants may not wish certain aspects of the data to be disclosed. This surfaced in my pilot interview and in the main research project. On a few occasions I intuitively had the feeling that perhaps participants were saying more than they might wish to,

when they discussed boundaries in the phenomenon and BACP guidelines. At times like these I chose to check out if participants were happy to continue and share such experiences. Despite this I still felt concerned that the exploration of the 'phenomenon' could make some participants feel vulnerable.

I returned to IPA literature on issues of confidentiality and Kvale & Brinkmann's (2009) guidance relating to ethical issues and confidentiality in Qualitative Research. I also referred to the BACP Ethical Guidelines for researching counselling and psychotherapy (2004), which suggests that the research establishes relationships with participants that are consistent with the type of research being undertaken. Since participants were also fellow Doctoral researchers or Graduate Doctoral researchers, they all had a deep understanding of confidentiality and the complexity of ethical issues in research and all confirmed that as long as they retained anonymity they were pleased to have their experiences and voices heard.

Smith et al. (2009) explains that anonymity is all that qualitative researchers can offer and that to say that something is confidential is to say that no one else will see it and that is not the case. He suggests the counterpoint to this is representation and that although participants may be pleased to have their experiences represented and their voices heard, this should not be achieved at the cost of anonymity. It was important for me to continually reiterate to participants their right to withdraw at any time, throughout the research process. Such demands Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) suggest, go beyond the ethical guidelines and principles and focus more on the ethical capabilities of the researcher. This is where I feel my training as a counsellor served me well, as the ethical values, principles and my moral outlook, shaped by my training, as a registered and accredited member of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), influenced and flowed throughout this research project.

Another ethical issue that arose, related to openness and intimacy with the participants. Studying within Doctoral groups myself and my path crossing in similar environments with colleagues, I wondered if the interviews could possibly become seductive and lead interviewees to disclose more than they might have intended. Kvale (2007) discusses the personal closeness of the research relationship and contends that it puts continual and strong demands on the tact of the researcher,

regarding how far to go in his or her enquiries. He posits that the researcher may so closely identify with their participant that they do not maintain a professional distance and that the researcher should take care not to let this develop.

Homan (1991) also reports that once subjects feel they are expected to contribute certain data, they may feel likely to report such effects not because of the experience itself but as a function of the expectation. This highlighted to me that such a closeness in the participant/interviewer relationship and the curiosity participants had with the project, could become collusive, thereby influencing the knowledge and data produced. Literature provided by Brinkmann & Kvale (2009) has made me aware that interviewing practitioners who are on a similar journey to myself, requires an ethical integrity and that in turn requires a delicate balance between pursuing fascinating, interesting levels of knowledge, with a sensitivity that is helpful and not directive in any way.

An important starting point in ethical practice for any research project was avoidance of harm. The BACP's (2010) ethical principle of beneficence means that the risk of harm to a participant should be the least possible and promote a commitment to the client's wellbeing. I was thoughtful of this principle as I wondered how participants might change as a result of the research process and exploration of the phenomenon. This was evidenced in both the pilot project and main research project as some interviewees felt that the interview had prompted new memories or new perspectives on events and situations, in ways they had not anticipated.

One participant became aware of things in her practice she had not noticed before. In sharing this she developed a new understanding of herself in practice, which she then decided to take to her own personal supervision. I was conscious that through this deep engagement, the research process could result in participants changing. As a consequence I did not want participants to suffer any harm or feel exposed as a result. This prompted me to incorporate into my interview schedule a time for debrief and reflection at the end of the interview. The ethical attunement I developed I feel also served me well, as with forethought, planning, reflexivity and a thorough understanding of the ethical issues inherent in such a study, I took practical steps to inform, advise and act in the best interests of the participants.

This chapter has served to conceptualise the analytic methods of data collection. It also demonstrates how an understanding of my initial reflexivity in the pilot study and my learning of being an insider researcher has been crucial and constructive to maintain the balance of data analysis. Sampling strategies and participant recruitment is also shown to remain faithful to the requirements of an IPA study. I have also sought to highlight how sustained analysis and continued reflection, has underpinned the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of this research study. The care of participants has been of paramount importance to me and an understanding of this has been emphasised in the section relating specifically to ethical issues.

Chapter 4: Findings.

4.1 Introduction and Themes.

This chapter presents seven super-ordinate themes that show how therapists in this study, (from a range of counselling orientations), experience depths of engagement in the therapeutic relationship. These super-ordinate themes also illustrate the therapist's motivations for working at this depth, which they find both rewarding and challenging. This leads to reflection and professional questioning. An overall chart is presented below, that outlines the analysis as a whole.

Super-Ordinate Themes

Table 1.

Super-ordinate theme	Contributors	Sub-ordinate theme
The Indefinable	Louise, Brian, Gerry, Rachel, Mike & James	Difficulty in and resistance to articulating
	Louise, Brian, Gerry, Rachel, Mike & James	Multi-dimensional
	James, Rachel & Brian	Immeasurable
Spiritual in nature	James, Rachel, Gerry, Louise, Brian	Influence of souls meeting
	Rachel, Brian, Louise & Mike	Transformative
Levels of encounter	Rachel, Brian, James & Mike	Altered states of consciousness
	Brian, James, Louise & Gerry	Mutual immersion
	Gerry, Louise, James, Brian & Rachel	Matching
	Gerry, Louise, Brian, Rachel, James, Mike	Changes in vibrations and energy
Dissolution of Boundaries	Gerry, James, Rachel, Louise, Brian	Merging
	Gerry, Louise, Brian, Rachel	Letting go
	Gerry, Rachel, Mike, James, Brian & Louise	Timelessness
Personally challenging	Louise, Gerry, Rachel & Brian	Loss of self
	Louise, Gerry, Rachel,	Feeling vulnerable
	Rachel, Louise & Gerry	Overwhelming impact
Nourishing of the self	Brian, Louise, James & Gerry	Meeting personal needs and wants
	James, Rachel, Brain & Louise	Facilitates personal growth
	Gerry, Mike, Brian, Louise & Rachel	A sense of privilege
Professional questioning	Brian, James, Rachel & Louise	Supervision
	Rachel & Louise	Fear of being judged
	Brian, James, Louise, Gerry & Mike & Rachel	The 'person' of the counsellor
	Brian, James, Gerry, Rachel, Mike & Louise	Training

The beginning of each section will provide a table that outlines the super-ordinate theme, the sub-ordinate themes, and a list of contributors. This is followed by a column that denotes the participants initial, transcript page number and then line number in brackets, of the relevant data collected. Verbatim extracts from the research interview will illustrate the richness of data collected, showing at times a unity in views and at other times a convergence or divergence in data. Contradictions are noted and an overall analysis is offered for each super-ordinate theme. Firstly I would like to comment on aspects that show the complexity of this particular research area, in terms of construction of the themes and why thick description and metaphor were absolutely necessary components, to include in the process of data analysis.

As I interpreted data, and sub-ordinate themes were identified, I was struck by an immense task. Many of the sub-ordinate themes were entwined with one another. This reminded me of the puzzle blocks I use to play with as a child. I recalled that as I built up the blocks one side, to form a picture of a nursery rhyme, I would look on the other side of the cube and find that the picture there was messed up. This felt embryonic of my construction of the sub-ordinate themes because although I felt they were constructed neatly and formed a perfect picture under the super-ordinate themes, I also realised that some data also enriched, threaded through and influenced other sub-ordinate themes, which also formed part of another complete super-ordinate theme.

Smith (2009) recommends that themes are not selected purely on the basis of their prevalence within accounts but that other factors should include the richness of data and how themes help illuminate other aspects in the accounts. This suggestion of looking for higher ordered qualities informed my construction of themes, as I examined how much attention participants paid to a particular aspect and the significance of this in their story. This is evidenced in, for example, the identification of 'changes in vibrations and energy' as a subordinate rather than superordinate theme. Although the data could not be ignored because it was verbalised in all accounts, such aspects were only mentioned in passing with minimal focus and not embedded in accounts. Consequently such sub-ordinate themes were noted but not expanded on in the discussion chapter.

The importance and wealth of verbatim extracts, can also not be underestimated because they brought alive the depths of engagement in its entirety and gave voice, strength and clarification to the depth of participants accounts. Geertz (1973) supports this point of view and explains that such thick description in qualitative research, should provide detailed descriptions of the phenomena they study and their context. Geertz (1973) also reminds us that it is a good principle to try to provide as much detail about the focus of the research and its context as practically can be achieved.

I was also keen to encourage participants to use metaphoric expressions, that I felt would open up the possibilities for richly textured communication. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) refer to a process by which new perspectives on the world come into existence, via using metaphor. Eatough & Smith (2008) also concur and denote how IPA, facilitates this process with its joint underpinnings in phenomenology and hermeneutics, by which it attends to both the experiential dimension of metaphors, opening up the capacity of metaphors to make connections between disparate ideas and concepts.

4.2 Super-ordinate theme: The Indefinable.

Table 2.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
The Indefinable	Difficulty and Resistance to Articulate	All	L2(38), B36(824), L20(533), L20(550), B35(799), G1(10), R1(14) R1(17), M8(195), M28(705), J5(111), G17(396), R1(14), L20(550), G16(391), M9(204), M21(530)
	Multi-dimensional	All	B34(763), B35(790), L21(567), G12(287), R21(523) L10(256) L20(545), B11(250) B34(763), B29(646), G1(5), G13(305), M11(273), J1(21) J2(45), B37(838)
	Immeasurable	James Rachel Brian	J5(127), R31(740), B19(420)

This super–ordinate theme appeared abundantly in all six participants' accounts. The Indefinable conceptualises the depths of engagement as difficult to articulate and almost impossible to describe, deep dimensions experienced within it. There is also a sense of the depths of engagement being immeasurable. The following sub-ordinate themes capture this in more detail. Whilst participants struggled to make sense of their experiences, they hypothesised what could be happening and challenged themselves, whilst they tried to capture, something they found elusive and intangible. Although this super-ordinate theme stands alone the notion of the indefinable runs throughout other super-ordinate themes.

4.2.1 Difficulty in and Resistance to Articulating.

In the first sub-ordinate theme, the overall sense of meaning, from participants' accounts, reflected that they had a reluctance to find words and a difficulty in finding the words, to define depths of engagement. They all agreed that the depths in engagement were tricky to explain in language and beyond what words could convey. This is evidenced by the continual use of the word *'can't'*, highlighting the severity of participants struggle to exactly articulate depths of engagement. They also talked of their experience as something that was emotionally moving. This is offered in participants reflections; Rachel contributed;

" It's kind of unbelievable what happens there's something going on that you can't really explain in words but it's something about connectedness and deeper than that even and I can't think of a word".

Brian elaborated on these accounts with a sense that the depths in engagement were almost sacred and should remain in that realm. Brian shared;

"You just can't articulate it, it is so profound. There aren't words worthy of it; we are trying to expose something for which there are no words".

Brian also expanded on the fragility of the process and used the analogy of a 'bubble', to convey his sense of experience, he adds,

"At its deepest level sort of thing, it's that connectedness you have to try and look at and explore but don't capture it, if you capture it; it is like a bubble it's gone".

Louise's experience of depths of engagement shared similarity to Rachel's, of something really moving that was very special and hard to describe, whereas the emphasis that James adopted was of a depth of engagement that words weren't sufficient for and therefore he felt it was waste of time trying.

James contributed;

> "What's the point it's like talking a different language".

Gerry also summarises this by suggesting depths of engagement are probably;

> 'Impossible to describe'.

Commonalities were identified as participants became aware of their failure in the past to either express or explore their experiences of working at such at depth. Some participant's viewed the depths of engagement as sacred and something that should be preserved, feeling reluctant to examine it any further. Other participants felt depths of engagement were not intended for words and that our language would be unable to define it.

4.2.2 Multi-Dimensional.

Participants' sense of the complex multi-dimensional nature of the depths of engagement seemed to add to their difficulty in articulation and that by inviting the use of metaphor, this seemed to help participants find a way to illuminate the varying dimensions they hinted at. I hoped that, by using metaphoric expressions it would open up the possibilities for rich, textured communication, which would add a more vivid level of meaning. Via metaphor all participants strived to capture different levels of depth and dimensions.

Rachel added,

"It's like there are several doors to go through and you might not get there but you have opened another door and it's a maze because you don't know where you are going".

Mike's account shares similarities to that of Rachel's, of travelling through levels to the unknown, which he says is impossible to interpret. Brian introduces;

"It's almost another dimension…… no I don't feel comfortable with that, it's something in a realm…….the word is 'numinous', you just can't explain it….it is so profound. Sometimes people who are in love say they can have a 'numinous', it's just like nothing else, so numinous, rather than dimensions would fit better for me. It is that which cannot be articulated".

Finding the word numinous seemed to promote insight and deeper understanding as Brian was able to connect with his spiritual self, something that he felt had great relevance in the depths of engagement.

Gerry contributed it's something of a continuum, she shares;

"I think it's something that exists and it can get deeper and deeper Emm….. I guess when I think it's at its deepest there's a kind of sense for me, of losing yourself somehow".

Gerry attributes meaning in the depths of engagement to being immersed and absorbed, at a cost of losing her identity to some degree.

Louise offered the metaphor of a bubble, which she attaches a sense of safety to and captures that within this sphere, there is a sense of an in-betweeness where a togetherness but separateness from the world exists.

This is also highlighted by James who embodies similar nuances to depths of engagement.

James seeks to explain such dimensions. He contributes;

"It's like sharing the same little desert island with hardly enough room for anything else but the two of you and you are surrounded by ocean".

Rachel, Louise, Gerry, James and Brian identified that indefinable multi layered dimensions, created a going through something, to reach a place that was deeply bonding and that could transcend parts of the self. There is also a consistency in all participants' accounts, that they attribute the mind and soul as holding great meaning to this process. Describing such multi- dimensions and to get experience closer to such an essence in the depths of engagement seems only achievable via the use of metaphor, which seemed to help participants in their process of exploration and articulation.

4.2.3 Immeasurable.

Participants connected the difficulty in defining the depths of engagement with its immeasurability linked to its lack of concrete nature. Rachel discussing the difficulties of measuring the depths of engagement neatly evidences this in her responses;

"Because there are no words for the phenomenon, there can be no concrete statistics for it".

Brian and James's data also shares similarities, as they talk about not being able to measure the phenomenon because they are unable to verbalise or capture it. In other participants statements such as Gerry's, Mike's and Louise's there is a reluctance to compartmentalise, or contemplate how to measure depths in engagement. Brian conceptualises his sense of an essential nature throughout his data and adds;

"Its 'beauty stands alone".

The sub-ordinate themes in this section forming part of the indefinable strongly reflect participants struggle to find words to convey their experience of the phenomenon. It is via a felt sense, combined with cognitive exploration and experimentation with words, that participants get experience closer.

4.3 Super-ordinate theme, Spiritual in Nature.

Table 3.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Spiritual in nature	Influence of souls Meeting	James Rachel Louise Brian	J2(47),L2(39),R8(185), J5(125),J7(196)R18(445), L15(402),J1(20),L23(628), B35(798)B36(810),R24(587), R13(327), R5(111), R8(185)
	Transformative	Rachel Brian Louise Mike	R5(115), B8(182), L15(416) R11(274)L7(190)L11(307) M13(314)

Four of the six participants identified a Spiritual encounter as flowing through their experience in the depths of engagement. Some participants examined their experiences in terms of being part of a spiritual, almost mystical process and that's its spiritual nature connected to their difficulty in expression.

4.3.1 Influence of Souls Meeting.

In the interview, participants explored how they felt that there was a soul-to-soul encounter with their clients. As they searched for meaning, most participants' accounts talked of a numinous and the sacred, in the depths of engagement which they felt was influenced, by souls meeting in this way. Although Mike hints at this, his account is missing any firm contribution in this theme. This could be understood by his talking at several points in his account; of issues of transference that he feels can sometimes get in the way when experiencing the depths of engagement. Gerry

shared how she could see why people might feel it was spiritual but felt more strongly herself, that the depths in engagement were characterised by a different type of encounter, with neurological aspects.

All other participants discuss a spiritual aspect or connection they feel occurs during deep engagement. James conceptualises the presence of a higher self and that the connectivity of this in the depths of engagement relates to a spiritual oneness on a soul to soul level. He shares;

> "There's a spiritual aspect that you are kind of meeting at some high level as well, I feel as though my soul or my guide is meeting theirs, it's quite touching in a non-tactile way".

Louise talks about how it feels like a spiritual encounter, in the depths of engagement, where both client and counsellor can see the true essence of each other. She discusses this level as spirituality and elaborates further in her data, emphasising;

> "In this spiritual encounter you meet the real essence and core of a person".

Rachel concurs and expresses,

> "It's something spiritual that happens".

Rachel elaborates further;

> "It's almost like souls touching souls and I recognise you and you recognise me".

Brian reflects that for him, such depths of engagement have deep religious connotations which he conceptualises as the numinous.

4.3.2 Transformative.

In a second sub-ordinate theme, participants go deeper in their reflection to describe something that happens in a sphere of transformation. Rachael, Louise and Brain capture this. Rachel shares;

> "You can't explain or understand it and both of you understand that something has happened, transformed".

Louise also likens this to a connection that is made, where a breakthrough in the therapy occurs, at which point she knows she can heal the client. Louise shares;

"When you meet them in that place, as soon as I know that has happened, you know, I have made that connection, I know I can heal them, I know I can help them, it's almost like you have just grabbed their hand".

Louise links what happens, as making a massive difference, where a therapeutic shift takes place.

Brian takes the view that in this realm, numinous, something profound happens, that moves and shifts the counselling. He gives the analogy of a light going on, that illuminates and changes the perspective for both himself and the client.

So within this super-ordinate theme, participant's data denotes a powerful transformation, breakthrough and movement at the depths of engagement that results in therapeutic healing.

4.4 Super-Ordinate Theme, Levels of Encounter.

Table 4.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Levels of Encounter	Altered states of Consciousness	Rachel Brian James Mike Gerry	R11(277), B12(278), J2(53) J3(59), J6(162), M6(137) G3(56)
	Mutual Immersion	Brian James Louise Gerry	B30(684), J1(16), L7(182) G3(56) B33 (739)
	Matching	Gerry Louise James Brian Rachel	G2(46), L3(72), L22(591) L24(669), J7(177), B18(415) B19(428), R21(509),L24(664)
	Changes in energy And vibrations	All	G11(270), G12(271), L21(581) B28(631), B32(733), R21(509) J8(219), M14(348), B33(742) G13(303)G13(304)

Levels of encounter proved to be a powerful super-ordinate theme that incorporated sub-ordinate themes of, altered states of consciousness, immersion, matching and changes in vibrations and energy.

4.4.1 Altered States of Consciousness.

Rachel, James and Mike all talked of experiencing altered states of consciousness in the depths of engagement. In their accounts they all emphasise that an altered state of consciousness prevails, which runs parallel with an essential component, a calmness of mind. They all note that this state of being is required by both counsellor and client. I have chosen a quote from James who captures these experiences and perceptions, concurrently in his data. James expresses;

"There is definitely an altered state of consciousness going on in these tender moments. I think you are both in an altered state, an alpha state, I don't think that you would be able to meet at that level unless you were both in a relaxed state".

James also uses a metaphor to add depth to his thoughts and the nature of this engagement. He explains;

"You need to go through a calm door to get to a higher place with your client".

Gerry connects a dissociative perspective to her altered state of consciousness in the depths of engagement. She explains;

"It's like there's nothing else around you, the room is like sort of shrunk in, you are not aware of anything other than the person, so you could be sat anywhere and not aware of other sounds and not aware of Emm…. specific things in the room, it's just that focus".

In contrast Brian points out that he is also aware of an altered state and levels of a different heightened awareness, in the depths of engagement but that his current work setting prevents such experiencing. He explains that he requires a degree of alertness within his role and that consequently he feels because of this, it is rare that he experiences altered states in his counselling work, because of a reluctance to let go.

4.4.2 Mutual Immersion.

Participants' accounts also linked levels of chosen encounter to a depth of engagement in the moment that unified them with their client. Also noted was a mutuality, braveness, willingness and commitment that needed to exist in the process, where client and therapist immersion, was at the same level of consciousness.

Gerry captures this parallel and shares her experience of this with a client;

"He said this is getting all a bit too deep and scary for my liking, that would be his sort of comments on it and I know he use to pull back every now and again, I don't know if I want to go there again with that he would say because this is just too strange and weird and then he'd sort of go off and talk about music in the 80's to change things".

Louise explains;

"So you have to be willing and I think that's one of the things, you've got to be willing to go in there and face that and feel it with them and the real sort of empathy, you can really feel it and feel the depths".

Brian sums up this sense of immersion as;

There's a sense of going to get them, somehow absorbing something, I don't know how to capture that but it's there, it is real and for the client, something happens and something changes".

Brian also emphasises the level of commitment and demands on the self that is needed to access the level of immersion. He shares;

"I had to dig deep to match them"

Brian adds to this;

"I couldn't just go through the emotions and if I didn't meet it, it would have just evaporated".

Brian and Louise's accounts shared similarities in this kind of experiencing. Mike makes no contribution and locates levels of transference from the client, as being a preventive factor in this immersion.

4.4.3 Matching.

Some participants described what they experienced in terms of a neurobiological encounter and meeting. James, Gerry and Louise relate empathy, mirror neurons and matching levels of consciousness, as being strongly linked to the depths in engagement.

Whilst discussing this James contributed;

> "I think that you can explain it in a very scientific, neurological level of mirror neurons and empathy".

Gerry agreed that she felt;

> "There is something mirroring in our brains during experiencing the phenomenon".

Gerry also attempts to make sense of the phenomenon in terms of mirror neurons but feels she is only able explain to a point. She explains;

"I see it more as something logical, new, something resonating between the two of us neurologically, quite sciencey really, I think there's something mirroring in our brains that's going on".

Louise expanded on this and expressed;

> "I just rationalise that the science behind the mirror neurons is that I am actually matching the client".

Louise's sense making is captured here as she attempts to articulate some aspect of neurobiology but then decides to leave it; she shares;

"I just rationalise that the science behind the mirror neurons is that I am actually matching with the other one but …..this is going to sound a bit ……..this feels quite vulnerable……..."

Louise elaborated that in her experience she noticed differences in the depths of engagement, in terms of her breathing, heart rate, emotions and physical sensations that matched the client. Louise also talked of how in practice, matching creates the necessary conditions for depths in engagement to take place. In her search for meaning Louise also challenges her notions and stresses that although in some cases she believes that she has mirrored the client's neurons, she sometimes feels that at that point she hasn't got the real essence of the person, which is also crucial to work at a depth in engagement. Louise comments;

"Maybe the sort of general empathy with the mirror neurons and the stuff that helps us match heart beat and blood pressure and all of that is the road towards…. Cos that's what I had with that woman, I mirrored her neurons and what her body was doing yet I didn't have the real essence, so maybe that's the 'road map' that you have to get to that point and then, that's almost building the right environment…..creating that environment and then those other dimensions can be released."

Interestingly James is influenced by the client's language when he reflects interchangeably upon different discourses in neurobiology and spirituality, to explain the phenomenon. James explains;

"I think you can explain it in a very scientific neurobiological level of mirror neurons and empathy, emm…… right through to the spectrum of emm……spiritual engagement so…..yeah I think it is explainable at various levels, depending upon who you are talking to and I tend to speak the clients language so if the client isn't particularly spiritual then we can talk about the connection we have had and if they are spiritual it would be appropriate to talk about it in that way".

In both James's and Louise's account they suggest that there are other levels beyond mirror neurons, that can access further depths in engagement although they are uncertain exactly what these are and question whether they have spiritual underpinnings. Interviewees also tried to make sense of this via a link between brain wave changes, mirror neurons and energy, resulting in a further sub-ordinate theme emerging, pointing to the relevance of vibrations and energy, in accessing depths in engagement.

4.4.4 Changes in Vibrations and Energy.

Participants were united in the importance they attached to the significance of changes in energy vibrations, when experiencing depths in engagement and different levels of encounter. They also recognised a physical depletion after this process.

Gerry attempts to sum this up and shares;

"The word that comes to me is resonance, like we are sort of vibrating on a similar thing, similar frequency somehow".

Gerry wrestles further with her thoughts on energy in the depths of engagement She shares;

"I'm into this energy idea. I think I'm going back to that continuum idea. We are two people there, blended into one and kind of buzzing at the same frequency in some kind of weird neurological way, so I see it as a continuum that goes deeper and deeper".

On reflection Gerry also adds;

"I think later in the day there's a sense of exhaustion".

James also talks of energy vibrations being higher and how it takes it out of you, feeling tired later. This concurs with Brian's account that denotes a great deal of energy being expended at a cost of being exhausted after the counselling session. Brian expresses;

"Something quite profound is happening, there is no sense of it being hard work, it's intense without any effort but the effort must be somewhere Emm…. And I don't know how that energy is generated without some sort of energy pushing along. I don't know how to capture that but it's there, it is real and for the client, something happens and something changes".

Louise talks of neurological components in depths of engagement and links energy changes to brain wave changes. Rachael discusses this also and stresses that the two are adjacent. Mike acknowledges that the energy, in the depths in engagement

changes and at the same time notes his discomfort in talking about it, stressing it is something that he only vaguely understands.

Participants all felt there was a relevance to a change in energy experienced whilst experiencing different levels of consciousness.   Contributors also commented upon different and higher vibrations together with a feeling of massive energy being expended and generated at this point. Differences in perceptions of time and feelings of being exhausted were frequently noted as a commonality during this cycle.

4.5 Super-ordinate theme Dissolution of Boundaries.

Table 5.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Dissolution of boundaries	Merging	Gerry James Rachel Louise Brian Mike	G1(12), G13(303), J1(16) R17(426), L7(191), L18(479) B7(141), J6(158), G7(157) L23(629), L24(653) L16(444), G1(14), G13(302), G16 (392), L17(470), G2(32) L8(220), J6(162), M16(397)
	Letting go	Gerry Louise Brian Rachel	G13(320), L15(404), B13(294) G5(99), R22(538), L14(381) L25(691)
	Timelessness	All	R20(485), M4(101), J6(161) R3(54), R4(97), R13(329), L10(257), L20(556), B29(652), M8(181), B11(243) G4(81), B33(749), J2(44)

Another emerging Super-ordinate theme that interweaves throughout data is participants' experiencing, of an interpersonal dissolution of boundaries in the depths of engagement. This is entwined and overlaps at points with data contained in other super-ordinate themes. Moreover such aspects of a merging, a letting go and timelessness, where changes took place in boundaries, were so striking and complex that it was important for a dissolution of boundaries, to stand alone, and form a separate theme. Participants' accounts also connect such elements as instrumental in facilitating, deeper levels of the phenomenon.

4.5.1 Merging.

In the first sub-ordinate theme participants all identified themselves as having an incredibly strong connectedness with their clients, when experiencing the depths of engagement. In all responses there was a powerful sense for participants that a kind of merging and blending took place with their clients, where interpersonal boundaries melted. Brian, Rachel, James, Gerry and Louise all spoke of this in their accounts, with different nuances. James articulates his understanding as an us-ness and shares;

> "I think there is a deep human to human level of connectedness, when that moment is…. Emm…. you kind of feel like you are merged as one and there's closeness about the two of you, you understand each other at a very deep level".

Gerry tries to capture this merging and her personal experiencing. She explains;

> "I don't know how to describe it other than that weird kind of spaced out feeling, that comes from me but it's like we become one person somehow in that moment, so there's a real closeness".

Gerry talks further of her experiencing and shares;

> "Gosh the weird bit that keeps springing into my mind is about dissolving somehow about something melting away, it's like Emm… a distance has melted away between us, I'm thinking is there any other things I could say about it, I find it a very strange experience when you get to that kind of dissolving of the boundary, I think it's very weird I can't think of anything else that gives you that same sensation, I would

probably say that there's no boundary between us. I find it quite disorientating as well, so it's like……like being slightly drunk, maybe but not unsafe but slightly out of it somehow".

Louise linked the depths in engagement to levels of essences and merger. She agonised to explore the origins of the one-ness and summarised this by saying;

"It's the real essence of you meeting the real essence of them".

Louise also notes that as a result of shifting boundaries and merging, she recognises that on some occasions she needs to retreat and feels the need to restore interpersonal boundaries by restoring her personal ones. She offers;

"Yeah….. Like I need to put my barriers back up……..or I would feel overwhelmed and consumed".

Other male participants hinted at such merging and dissolving boundaries but did not elaborate in any specific detail. An example of this is provided by James as he contemplates how with some clients he has not always experienced the phenomenon. He points out;

"Maybe the barriers have been up".

Mike also reflects on merging and barriers and questions whether it is possible to get beyond the transference with some clients and wonders whether this is the reason he doesn't always experience the depths of engagement. Mike doesn't offer any further explanations.

In this theme counsellors attached an importance in meaning, to meeting the essence of their clients and that through this process they merged, boundaries diluted and a oneness emerged. They struggled to fully understand or capture the process and were aware that as they experienced this personally, there was a sense of having to let go, of interpersonal and personal boundaries, which is reflected in the next sub-ordinate theme.

4.5.2 Letting Go.

In this sub-ordinate theme participants pointed to interpersonal boundaries becoming blurred at the point of letting go and that only then could they experience the depths of engagement. Rachel views this sense of letting go, as being in a maze and not knowing where you are going and to allow this depth of engagement she explains, requires the counsellor to be out of control. Brian considers the flip side of letting go. He acknowledges only being able to let go of personal boundaries so far because of the environment he works in. He explains that for him, there has to be a degree of alertness;

"You can't really afford to wander off into never, never land, you can't totally let go, and because of the context of the prison you can't have that freedom".

Louise also talks of the importance of environment and concurs with this view. She confirms that it is only by being in and building the right environment that you can let go and then other dimensions can be released. Overall contributor's accounts were all linking something about letting go and being out of control, which involved a relinquishing of personal boundaries as facilitating depths of engagement. Some participants mentioned the importance of the counselling environment and that if a degree of alertness was required because the environment was unpredictable, then this would prevent different levels of awareness and consciousness from developing, which would impact on letting go and depths of engagement occurring.

4.5.3 Timelessness.

All participants made contributions noticing a difference in time, at the point where boundaries dissolved and an intenseness between themselves and client became apparent. Some contributors were surprised by the timelessness others couldn't explain it whilst some felt that timeless was part of the territory of the depths of engagement. In support of these notions Rachel, Brian and Mike experienced the timeless in the depths of engagement as counselling sessions being, over in flash.

Brian talked of the depths of engagement becoming deeper and deeper, to the point of timelessness and having no boundaries. He explained;

"The gauge I would use is when you don't know how much time has passed and you are really caught with, I can't believe half an hour has just gone, that's where it is massively intense".

Gerry in contrast talked of feelings of flow in moments of timelessness; feeling absorbed into something to such a degree that boundaries evaporated. Gerry noted;

"Everything can feel quite surreal".

Louise also linked timelessness and dissolving boundaries as being entwined. Louise shares;

"It's like being in a bubble, it's like the world has stopped and you are not aware that the world has stopped, it's a bubble around us and it's very, very, much here and now and the whole of the outside world is gone and just not there. It's very, very, sort of emotionally focussed like that Emm.. I've not thought of it as time standing still but it does feel like a different dimension, a different dimension into time and space".

Both James and Brian concurred with other participants that at such massively intense moments, they experienced timelessness and boundaries, completely dissolved. All participants' data also conclusively and vehemently agreed that such moments were emotionally moving, insightful, meaningful and became a significant point for positive change.

4.6 Super-ordinate theme, Personally Challenging.

Table 6.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Personally challenging	Loss of self	Louise Gerry Rachel	L25(691), G5(99), R2(41) R27(659)
	Feeling vulnerable	Louise Gerry Rachel	L15(397), G9(210), G10(226) G11(255), R11(280), G4(94) L17(473), L5(136), L8(209) R16(394), G7(161), L3(81) L6(156)
	Overwhelming impact	Rachel Louise Gerry	R20(500), L26(705), R11(276) L17(473), L18(486), G11(280) L15(413), L11(287)

Only three of the six participants contributed to this Super-ordinate theme, suggesting that experiencing the depths of engagement impacted on participants by way of personal challenge, in different measures, which served as a personal insight into participants considering the impact on their sense of self. Rachel, Louise and Gerry revealed how they felt personally challenged, recollecting feelings of loss of self and not being in control, feeling vulnerable and with a sense of being overwhelmed. This theme overlaps and shares some similarities with the last theme, dissolution of boundaries but it is important that these sub-ordinate themes are represented separately because they capture the different nuances participants refer to, in personal challenges they encounter and their development.

4.6.1 Loss of Self.

Loss of self was epitomised by participants as a perceived threat in which they felt they could lose themselves, not feel in control, be overwhelmed and consumed in the depths of engagement. Louise sheds light on this and shares;

"You can have empathy which is a step and then this is way, way, over there, just as far as you can go without actually merging with somebody, which wouldn't be good".

I ask Louise if there is any more she would feel comfortable saying. This results in the following extract from the research interview.

Louise: Yeah… Losing yourself there…… I think that's behind why I then need to put the barriers back up because at that moment of fusion…… it's almost like they own a bit of me…. so it's like that would be too much.

Louise captures a loss of self almost as though she could be eaten up, having little control over the process.

Gerry sums up the physical and emotional feelings of a loss of self and expands;

"I feel a bit panicky; it was a really bizarre feeling of not feeling in control of your own body, like being taken over by what this other person was sharing with me".

Rachel hints at the significance of a loss of self in the depths of engagement but struggles to articulate or capture this clearly. Data from participant's revealed that they felt that in the depths of engagement, losing control of the self and how the self should be were for them, part of the challenges. One of the surprises I found was a lack in the contribution, from the male participants, James, Brian and Mike about such feelings and the challenges to the self.

4.6.2 Feeling Vulnerable.

Participants also talked of a sense of vulnerability connected with their sense of personal exposure and blurred boundaries. They connected it with the challenges of working from different parts of the self.

I quote Louise here in detail as the strength of Louise's contribution is powerful. She shares;

> "I think because you are there making yourself very, very vulnerable in going into that place and meeting them where they are and revealing yourself …. There's that you see me and I've seen you sort of thing".

Louise indicates that this experience happens particularly when she is working with childhood trauma and suggests that the same feelings are also experienced by the client. She points out;

> "It tends to be very much when I'm working with the deep stuff, particularly with childhood trauma, it's almost as though you are connecting with that child". Emm. Like you are both stripped bare, which is incredibly vulnerable but actually Emm. it feels safe".

Louise's experience is tantalising and elusive as she talks in terms of the vulnerability that comes from accessing the 'wounded' parts of herself as part of working with the wounded part of others. Louise reflects;

> "I am using my wounded child to connect with their wounded child, so it almost feels like when I do that, I'm coming in, I'm the therapist and they are the client and we all have these ego states but wounded ego states are very good at spotting each other".

Louise considered her response for a while and then added;

"There is a sense almost of abandonment and I sometimes wonder if there is, maybe still a little part of me in there and is hoping for each person I pull out, I'm actually going to find that little part and pull that out, so it just feels quite you know Emm…."

Louise elaborated further;

"To take that part of me and re-conceal it, that can be hard and feeling very vulnerable. It's almost like I have to open myself up but the up side is, that changes things and so much satisfaction comes with it because of the healing".

Gerry makes reference to wounded child states recognising one another and the connection and vulnerability that can take place as a consequence. Rachel concurs with a vulnerability that can be exposed as different configurations of the selves form a deep connectedness.

In Rachel's data she emphasises feeling, exposed, stripped bare and vulnerable. Rachel also links this to configurations of the selves, taking the view that all the selves, when in depths of engagement are stripped bare and that you reach and show the essence, of who you are. I quote Rachel, she reflects;

"Yeah….and I was thinking about Dave Mearns configurations of the self, that maybe what has happened in the deep connectedness is that all these sort of self's are being stripped bare and you reach the essence of who someone really is".

Gerry, James, Rachel, Brian and Louise also talked of the relevance of different selves in the phenomenon and attribute this to Mearns and Coopers (2003) configurations of the self. Gerry also talks of pulling back in this place and finding the moment quite disorientating. She explains;

"It's hard for people to find the language for it, isn't it and I do think it's scary like we go in there and I find it a bit of a strange sensation".

In these accounts participants discuss a sense of unease, vulnerability and questioning how far they are prepared to allow their self to go, in the depths of engagement. They convey an understanding of their limits, whereas Louise sees meaning in her vulnerability, as helpful to the client and herself.

4.6.3 Overwhelming Impact.

Another common sub-ordinate theme that runs alongside other sub-ordinate themes in this section, relates to an overwhelming impact of the experience, in the depths of engagement which left participants feeling personally challenged. Respondents felt that the impact in the depth of engagement was so overwhelming that staying in the

place was time-limited. There was a sense for participants of having to close down, to return to normality.

Louise talks about how the impact in the depths of engagement is so powerful that she is aware that she cannot stay there for a long time. She explains;

"To take that part of me and re-conceal it, that can be hard and feeling very vulnerable……..it's almost like I have to open myself up and sometimes it's harder to shut down again, because you can't go out in the world like that…..You couldn't keep that up you know…. you have to go back out into the real world and you couldn't function like that".

The physical and emotional impact is noted by Louise when she points out;

"The wear and tear is such that you could not do it every day".

Rachel talks in similar terms and states;

"If it happened with every client you would just be exhausted".

Rachel reflects on such an impact and returning to normality after the session. She recalls;

"Maybe its intuition, it's you know, you just can't stay there".

Rachel also elaborates about being so overwhelmed, that after the client has gone, she stresses how reflection time is so important, to move the impact of the experience. Gerry places a slightly different emphasises on this personal challenge and connects it more with a heightened awareness. She explains that she does not experience this with every client but feels absorbed into something to such a degree, which reflects a different level of consciousness, which she knows can only be time-limited. Entwined also within some of the sub-ordinate themes in this section was an experience of tiredness and exhaustion, later in the day, terms attached by both male and female participants.

The majority of data in this section is given by female participants and indicates there is a significant strength of feeling that being with a client in the depths of engagement is personally challenging for them on many different levels. Equally in the next super-ordinate theme this is also seen as personally rewarding.

4.7 Super-ordinate Theme, Nourishing of the Self.

Table 7.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Nourishing of the self	Meeting personal needs and wants	Brian Louise James Gerry Rachel	B27(616), B38(852), L3(57) J3(69), G8(184), B10(216) J11(291), R15(362), L7(190)
	Facilitates personal Growth	James Rachel Brian Louise	J3(72), R13(315), R15(363) B16(359), B18(412), B19(422) L15(395)
	A sense of privilege	Gerry Mike Brian Rachel Louise	G13(318), M21(525), B38(856), L29(788), B7(160) B11(234), B15(348), R24(585) L15(415), B10(214)

In this Super-ordinate theme nourishing of the self , all participants commented that as a consequence of working in the phenomenon they found it satisfied their personal needs, promoted   personal and professional growth and gave them a sense of privilege.

4.7.1 Meeting Personal Needs and Wants.

Brian, Louise, James, Gerry and Rachel in the first sub-ordinate theme, talked of experiencing this level of the depths of engagement as a safe place, a place of healing and how they wanted to be there. Louise shared;

"It feels safe".

Gerry also discussed a sense of meaning of this place validating her own feelings.

James expressed;

"I think that's where the healing is…. personally…… that's where the healing is".

Brian expanded on this and also talked of a healing process, which he felt, was critical for him. Brian added how he felt there had to be some impact in truly wanting to be there he shared;

"That's the reality".

Both Louise and Rachel view themselves as empowered. Louise depicts herself as a key resource and adds;

"When you meet them in that place, as soon as I know that has happened, you know the really intensive stuff, I have made that connection, I know I can heal them".

Rachel appears to gain a sense of her own power. She captures the dichotomy between the personal challenge and reward when she talks of personal and professional growth. She attaches meaning to risk taking and the growth that is facilitated via this process. Rachel explains;

"I think the personal growth is knowing that you have to take risks and you will only really know someone if you can just be yourself and professionally too, I think if you don't take risks, I think that your work would never develop".

4.7.2 Facilitates Personal Growth.

In a second sub-ordinate theme, participants talked also of opportunities for their own personal growth and that of their clients.

James epitomises and calls upon a metaphor to illuminate this as follows;

"There's a growth opportunity for both …….. yeah I think it's, to use another kind of metaphor…… it's a kind of place of growth…… its fertile ground for you both to grow from, its creative, its engaging, its growing".

Brian talks about how in this place he has felt stretched as a clinician. He explains;

"It has made me more determined as a therapist and made me a better therapist because I have had to draw on sources I didn't know I had. I am a better therapist now than I was 3 years ago, in fact very confident because of the engagement and the level of this engagement".

Participants attached meaning to opportunities for growth and with this acknowledged an invitation to enter new territory, in which they attach meaning, to having to be yourself and not be fearful to take risks.

4.7.3 A Sense of Privilege.

A third sub-ordinate theme in the Super-ordinate theme, nourishing of the self, offers data that relates to participants feelings of satisfaction, when experiencing the depths of engagement.

Louise roots her sense of satisfaction in knowing that doing such work has special significance for her. She shares;

"It's a massive privilege when you do it. It's one of the most important parts of our work or some of our work….. I don't believe you need to do it with everybody but when you do meet somebody at that level it's a massive privilege and that feels really special and that's what makes it emotionally moving. It's quite humbling".

Brian also uses the same language to convey his feelings. He points out;

"It's a privilege, it's a gift, it's very positive".

Rachel also talks of her and the client changing as a result of the experience and uses the word gift to describe a special encounter. Gerry and Mike link their satisfaction to feelings of happiness, being invigorated and euphoric afterwards but not whilst in the depths of engagement. Overall participant's talk of it being an honour and personally meaningful to experience the depths of engagement and how it leads to positive change. This super-ordinate theme appears to demonstrate that therapists feel depths in engagement that are personally rewarding for practitioner and client and hold significant importance, in terms of healing and growth.

4.8 Super-ordinate Theme, Professional Questioning.

Table 8.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Professional Questioning	Supervision	Brian James Rachel Louise	B42(950),J11(282),R8(198) R11(255), R29(703), L27(745)
	Fear of being judged	Rachel Louise	R27(672), L18(500)
	The 'Person' of the Counsellor	All	B39(885), J10(263), J10(264) L27(727), G14(328), R27(662) M22(559), G15(344),
	Training	All	B40(913), J9(246), G15(354) L27(755), R29(688), M24(609) M24(610), M26(647) L28(770), R28(684), M25(620) M26(657)

As participants considered the challenges and rewards in the depths of engagement they also questioned professionally, issues relating to supervision, fear of being judged, how the person of the counsellor, impacts in the depths of engagement and questioned the whole ethos of training in this sphere.

4.8.1 Supervision.

A constant theme that kept emerging, as participants reflected on their experiences in the depths of engagement was that four participants realised, they rarely took experiences of the depth of engagement to their supervision. Brain, James, Rachel and Louise emphasised that this was because they felt there was a shortage of supervisors, to work with at this level. This was further impacted because some of the participants questioned to what extent their supervisor's experiences and perceptions of the depths of engagement were the same as theirs and they questioned how this would affect their own supervision process. Rachel pointed out that she had only ever found one supervisor to work with at such a depth. In contributor's accounts, there was a real sense of needing to respond to this, which was illuminated by the interview process, in this research project. Brian pointed out;

 "I've never had this level of reflection, I've had supervision which has usually been about issues and strategies and so forth but this doesn't come into supervision".

James also contemplated how becoming a participant had made him think about the levels he takes and engages with in his own supervision.

Rachel shared;

"I thought I took everything to supervision but the real depth of engagement I haven't. I think I have only ever had one supervisor who would understand and other supervisors might have thought this is not ok. That was the only supervisor that I could work at that depth with and be able to take this kind of work to without thinking she would question my practice".

Louise captures a sense of meaning relating to the development of the self in supervision and subsequent exploration of the depths of engagement. She questioned that she needed a sense of her supervisor having worked at that level to feel safe to

explore such depths in her own supervision. Making sense of this participants also questioned how their depths of engagement would be received in their supervision particularly if their experiences were different to those of their supervisors. This was compiled by the fact that they believed that it was impossible to stick to boundaries in the depths of engagement, as encouraged in training because boundaries dissolved and melted away. Another powerful strength of the data was that those who talked openly about this, had a fear of being judged, which is depicted in the second sub-ordinate theme.

4.8.2 Fear of Being Judged.

Louise conceptualises this sense of distrust and fear;

"As a professional we are very aware of all people who might judge us and BACP, who are always sitting on your shoulder, what do you mean by this? Are you getting past your boundaries? Are you manipulating? All this kind of stuff is going on in the back of my head as I am talking about it and you know the fear of being judged".

Louise accepts the risk of the territory she works in and states;

"You know that fear of being judged but on the other hand I know that I do it for the clients benefit and that's important".

Rachel also discusses the ethics of counselling and shares how ethically she takes the view that when exploring the phenomenon it leads to personal growth and development for the client. She explains;

"What I have spoken about, I can justify what I have done ethically because it was for the client's wellbeing".

Rachel also talks of a fear of being judged and as a person centred counsellor discusses the freedom she feels the approach gives her to experience the depths of engagement. She explains that what was really frightening to her was that she had witnessed a fellow colleague become the subject of a complaint because she had shared such an experience and that this resulted in a concern over her ethical boundaries. Overall the sense seemed to be from participants who had contributed to this section, that there is a greater acceptance of this way of working alongside a

nervousness, about the lived out lack of opportunity to talk about it because of a fear of judgement. Some participants shared with me that this is the reason why they chose to become involved in this particular research project.

4.8.3 The Person of the Counsellor.

Varying notions and thoughts were also expressed on whether the depth of the engagement in counselling depended more on the person of the therapist than the approach with which they identified. Gerry in her account, talks of her sense of being in the world and how she had been influenced by her upbringing, which is embedded in the meaning she attributes to the person of the counsellor. Gerry explained;

"I think it's my background, it's how I was brought up. I was brought up to listen, to be a really good listener and be empathic towards people and always try and put yourself in the other person's shoes".

Gerry took the view that who you are as a person is the most important thing. She reflected that after her training because of this, she was no different and that although the training gave her a theoretical framework to understand things, the 'person' of the counsellor, for her was of upmost relevance in experiencing, unlocking and working in the depths of engagement.

Rachel also felt that it was the person of the therapist, not the approach that was fundamental when working at depths in engagement. She points out that;

"Therapists should just be themselves and lose that control of how you should be working and to know a client as 'the person' that they are, is key and that counsellors should not convey that they are the expert".

James and Mike rooted a sense of meaning in something intrinsic that they were born with. As James internalises the question, he seems to saying that we are all born with this capacity but that some of us have it socialised out of us. He offers a metaphor to summarise his thoughts. He emphasises;

"Those blinkers would have to come off, if they could. It's like you are born with this thing and then you build up an immunity to it, some people do".

Mike contemplating the relevance of the person of the counsellor in accessing the depths of engagement offered a deep strength of feeling in his account, expressing the importance of the 'person' of the counsellor. He also notes something that needs to exist in both client and counsellor, to facilitate this. He contributed;

"Some people could never be that kind of therapist or work at that depth in the phenomenon. Man can't put in what God left out and I think that's probably the way to look at it, that there has to be something in both client and counsellor that can be built on".

In both James and Mike's account was a concern of how a counselling orientation such as CBT or a solution focussed model could block this natural instinct.

Brian captures this dichotomy and adds;

"If the person is there and they can hold that natural instinct, that giftedness, with the right tools that's great".

4.8.4 Training.

In a further sub-ordinate theme participant's questioned and explored, what training would be valuable to access and work at a depth of engagement and whether training could be counter-productive. Views differed quite substantially between participants. Louise connected this, to therapists being cut off from their emotions and exploration of the self being crucial, when working at a depth in engagement, suggesting that is why personal development work is so important. Louise took the view that possibly meditation could be helpful in accessing the self and attached a spiritual dynamic to her suggestions.

James shared that he thought the depth of engagement could probably be taught. He asserted;

"I think we all have the ability to connect at this level and the teaching of it maybe the unblocking of stuff that gets in the way of you being able to do it, or available to do it, or know you can do it. I think all humans have the ability to connect at this level".

James further conceptualises this as a kind of un-teaching and also attaches meaning to getting in touch with the true self again. Mike reflects that some of it can be taught and some of it can't. He shares;

"Technique can be taught and reflection can be taught but there is an element of it that is very difficult to teach".

Brian concurs with this and says that;

"It can't be taught from scratch".

He relates to methodologies and orientations as a learning box of tools that can help build a counsellor but also alludes, that something else has to be present from scratch. Gerry also takes the view that elements of it could be taught but questions, how you could be engaged at that kind of level, if you were doing CBT, which is set and prescriptive. Both Rachel and Louise's accounts share similarities in that they believe that not everyone can work at this depth of engagement in therapy. They both agree that it can be developed through training but as in the other accounts refer to something else being present in counsellors that gives them the ability to connect in the depths of engagement. Such were the overlaps and interweaving of data that straddled the different sub-ordinate themes, that I start in the next chapter, to chart how the relationship of themes become contextualised into specific areas.

CHAPTER 5 Discussion.

5.1 Introduction.

In this chapter, I move away from a hermeneutics of empathy, which guided the initial presentation of the Findings chapter, towards a more overtly interpretative position guided by the hermeneutics of questioning (Smith, 2009). The themes that became contextualised are discussed in subsequent sub-chapters and relate to:

*Making sense of the phenomenon.

*The lived experience- The self and boundaries.

*Costs, rewards and a duty of care.

*Professional questioning and Supervision.

These sections, discussed throughout this chapter, examine convergence and divergence in accounts, whilst being embedded within existing literature. In each section, similarities, differences and surprises are noted in data. As my reflexivity formed part of the analytical process, a sub-chapter is provided that examines how, as the insider researcher, I became the researched, as part of the process.

5.2 Making Sense of the Phenomenon.

This next sub-chapter is divided into four parts. Firstly, I apply a phenomenological perspective to illuminate why participants might struggle to articulate their experiencing of the phenomenon. Next, I focus on the lenses participants used to explain the different discourses and meaning systems they used to make sense of the phenomenon. These incorporated epistemological conceptions, spiritual elements, neurobiological components and counselling theory. The intense nature of therapist's difficulty in making sense of and measuring the phenomenon cut across all therapeutic orientations.

5.3 Phenomenological Perspective.

Participants struggled to conceptualise, define, explain and make sense in language, exactly what happened in the phenomenon. All participants viewed their language as insufficient to define the phenomenon and there was implicit questioning why this would be the case. Contemplating this, participant's attributed different meaning systems and discourses to such an enigma. Of significance was that all participants accounted that this was the first time they had explored the phenomenon in any depth and that they had not taken the complexity of it to supervision. Participants were trying to make sense of the phenomenon but also making sense of their speech as they spoke; struggling to find the words as they were engaging with their pre-reflective experience. Dilthey (1985) refers to this and suggests that lived experience in its most basic form involves our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life, a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself. This sense of struggle to develop and articulate their awareness was a characteristic of the interviews.

Smith et al. (2009) introduce a continuum of reflection which includes the pre-reflective state. Their emphasis is on how we might be placed at different points on the continuum regarding our experiencing at different times and for different aspects of experience. They explain these as follows:

1) Pre-reflective reflexivity. Even in the most immediate flow experience, there is a minimal level of awareness, as we are 'conscious of being conscious'. This is a minimal level of awareness, which does not interfere with the flow of experience and would not even be registered as awareness.

2) The reflective glancing at a pre-reflective experience. This involves intuitive, undirected reflection on the pre-reflective, as when we engage in daydreams, imagination and memory.

3) Attention reflection on the pre-reflective. Experience becomes an experience of importance as it is registered as significant and requiring attention.

4) Deliberate controlled reflection. This is phenomenological reflection. Analysis represents a phenomenological reflection on spontaneous reflection, on what has happened.

(Smith et al., 2009:189)

Whilst participants can be characterised as at points in a pre-reflective state of reflection, they can also be understood moving backwards and forwards on a continuum, attempting to make phenomenological sense of their data. For some participants, the hesitancy, stuttering and difficulty to find words could illustrate the first two stages of pre-reflective layers. Other participants could be understood as engaged higher up the spectrum, in deliberate controlled phenomenological reflection, in a dynamic similar to that of the hermeneutic circle, of not just moving from the whole to the part but via a step- by- step process moving from the particular to the more holistic (Smith et al., 2009).

Evidence of this reflective glancing, i.e. level 2, can be identified in Rachel's account as she tries to make sense of her experiencing. She can also be viewed as moving through the different layers. Rachel shares;

"I don't know why but at the moment a butterfly has come to mind. Almost like it comes to visit. You know that it's happening because the butterfly is there".

Rachel moves through some of these layers which Smith describes, as she finds a way of accessing her experiencing through a process that felt very live and dynamic in the room. Through metaphor and imagery, she becomes aware of the butterfly, which reminds her of working in the phenomenon. Rachel then becomes aware of the significance of the butterfly and how she feels emotionally and physically. Kopp (1995) emphasises the power of metaphor in processing phenomena, which can enable conceptualisation. This (attentive reflection of the pre-reflective) becomes an experience of importance for Rachel, requiring further thought, which she decides is something she wants to take to her supervision; to look at a formal analysis of these events (which we could understand as deliberate controlled reflection).

Through these layers, Rachel starts to make connections about the significance of the butterfly, which then leads to her making more phenomenological sense of the phenomenon. The complexity and intricacy of all participants' data indicates their

sense making of the phenomenon is not rehearsed or ordered, as they question through such processes, their meaning and understanding of the phenomenon.

Philosophers such as Husserl (1927) contended that phenomenologists should go out to capture the richness and ambiguity of the 'thing'. The process he outlined was one of reflecting on the visceral texture of the experience, as it is given to the experiencer, saturated with layers of implicit meanings. While IPA moves away from the idea of essence, for some participants the search for the essence seemed to drive their explorations. Other participants talked in different terms. Phenomenologically and their sense making processes can also be understood by Braver's (2012) notions. He discusses Heidegger's work and reminds us that attempts to put difficult to grasp knowledge into words can actually inhibit and distort it, something participants vehemently also suggested could be the case. Participants adopted different places on the continuum from pre-reflective to phenomenological reflection to examine the phenomenon, as they adopted a range of viewpoints to help them try and make sense of the phenomenon.

5.4 Epistemological Lens.

Participants' interpretation of the phenomenon can also be understood with reference to their meaning-making through an epistemological lens. Participants can be viewed as calling on different epistemological understandings in their sense-making processes, as they tried out different epistemological positions to try and understand their experiencing of the phenomenon. All participants were qualitative researchers and discussed how they had used both positivist and constructivist epistemologies in their own research studies. These explorations are in line with the lenses discussed by Kvale & Brinkmann's (2009) 'miner' and 'traveller' metaphors, in their process of meaning making. (The miner metaphor is understood as knowledge waiting in the respondent's interior to be uncovered which is uncontaminated and pure knowledge collection. The traveller metaphor analyses intertwined phases of knowledge in which many truths can emerge of the phenomenon and, as a consequence the traveller may change as a result of the knowledge construction).

Brian, Mike and Louise utilised a miner metaphor as they searched for phenomenological essences and hidden buried meanings. They sought to uncover a

truth and unearth an essence, also in line with Husserl's search for phenomenological essences and Freud's quest for hidden meanings buried in the unconscious and his archaeology metaphor for the psychoanalytic excavations of the unconscious (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Brian captures this and adds:

"You have to dig that bit deeper, bring that stuff to the table, it's fascinating, I've never thought of it like that and it's interesting to me and it absolutely rings true that exactly what's gone on".

Louise also gives the analogy of being in a big black pit rooting around in the dark, as she searched for meaning in an almost 'digging down' process and shared:

"You're a coal miner".

It can be argued that alternatively Gerry, Rachel and James connected more with a traveller conception; they wandered and travelled examining and unfolding different narratives. This relevance of different truths, influencing James's meaning systems is shared here:

"I can explain this spiritually but I can also explain it in a scientific way. Emm…. Yeah I think you can talk about it different ways".

Exploring meaning was underpinned by looking at participants processing through epistemological lenses, as they attempted to either uncover truths or piece together truths in various ways, offering different recipes to conceptualise the phenomenon. Despite such concentrated efforts and their striving and struggle to articulate the phenomenon there was no firm blueprint for their sense-making process.

Looking at the interplay between socially constructed and individual meaning-making systems through the lens of symbolic interactionism, I was struck how participants' experiences were complex and influenced by perceptions, attitudes and values of their varied relationships with others. This led me to question would it be impossible for two people to interpret and have exactly the same experiencing of the phenomenon, even if their processes were similar. Shaw (2009) points to this phenomenological viewpoint and how understanding experience is already enmeshed within language and culture. Such a dichotomy is reflected in data when participants talk, similarly, of levels of consciousness. How this central theme is integrated within

the phenomenon, but how, individually, the meaning and nuances they attach to it are different. Tebbutt (2014) in his research study of moments of deep encounter also reflects in terms of language and culture how verbalisation of a phenomenon can penetrate a layer of understanding to one person, whilst remaining impenetrable to others.

These first two sections discuss how you might understand participants processing, applying phenomenological and epistemological lenses, to help illuminate the difficulty of articulating their experiencing in the depths of engagement. I now turn the hermeneutic lens onto particular discourses (sets of statements that bring phenomena into view (King and Horrocks 2011)), that participants consciously called on to explain the phenomenon.

5.5 Spiritual Discourse.

Participants attached a spiritual notion to their understanding of the phenomenon. The word spiritual, and the meaning-making of this word, in the context of the phenomenon, widely differed in participants' accounts. Not only were participants trying to make sense of how a spiritual element was contained in the phenomenon but they were trying to explain at the same time, what the word spiritual meant to them. As Rowan (2005) and West (2004) articulate, one of the great problems around spirituality is that it is highly resistant to language, and the fact that spirituality goes beyond psychology and beyond any discipline that relies principally on language for expression. Tebbutt (2014) in a comparative and theoretical study of moments of deep encounter notes how theorists refer to spiritual and that it is a slippery concept without common definition and open to interpretation.

All participants talked of the phenomenon as though they were a witness, and that to describe their experience was beyond their range of ordinary speaking, entering into a realm of almost the unspeakable. There was something about engaging and making sense of the experience that James, Brian and Louise referred to as spiritual, which they saw as beyond their linguistic competency. I speculate that the pre-reflective might characterise what some might call spiritual, which would explain how both are described as difficult to articulate. It also parallels with noumenic, a thing as it is itself as distinct from a thing that is knowable via the senses phenomenologically

(Smith et al., 2009). This was strongly identified with by Brian who from a spiritual perspective contributes:

> "We are trying to expose something for which there are no words it is that which cannot be articulated".

West (2004) questions the truth of spiritual experiences and posits, if you are at one with everything is this not deeply problematic to describe and beyond words? Thorne (2003) similarly makes the connection between magic moments in the depths of engagement and the spiritual. These moments, he defines, are of a particular intensity of relating, in which a new level of understanding is achieved because of a creative energy that has been tapped into. In the search for meaning, he explains how as therapists we are plunged into the unimaginable despair, as we are unable to verbalise how to integrate our experience into our concept of reality. Despite the internal struggles in the search for meaning and the difficulties in finding the right language, specific concepts were used within the discourse of spirituality, as describing the phenomenon. These lenses were used interchangeably and comprised of an expanded awareness, something extra-ordinary and sacred and a transcendence, in which expansion and spaciousness occurred. This complements Tebbutt's (2014) meta-view of the literature exploring the constitutional elements of moments of deep encounter, which specifically identified the transpersonal and spiritual as key characteristics.

As Brian, James, Rachel, Gerry, Louise and Mike searched for meaning, Brian pointed to a divine force that was layered and accessed through an expanded level of awareness. Louise captures this and explains:

> "It is very special and I think that's why it's hard to describe because it does feel like a spiritual encounter you know like much higher, much deeper, much more intense".

Rachel also examines this when talking about the spiritual and what is happening in her body. She also contrasts the transcendental with a more immanent emphasis (existing or operating within/relating to God). She notices something intrinsic, which she states she just has to go with.   She reflects:

> "And that's why I said about the spiritual because it's the soul and something inside. Once I thought it was akin to Gendlin's focussing but it's much deeper than that".

Mike conceptualises:

"I think it's something like, I bind the wounds and God heals them".

Participants' data embedded within this spiritual perspective, is of a sense of expansion beyond the body, connecting and blending into all that is around them. The spaciousness Louise, Rachel, Gerry, Brian and James spoke of was accompanied by deep inner peace and an awareness of an increase in energy. These reported experiences resonate with Siegel's (2013) concept of spiritual resonance. Siegel (2013) talks in similar terms of a spiritual resonance that is realized through an experience of expanded awareness, usually brought about through spiritual practice and non-linear in nature, transcending time and space. Siegel further depicts this as a vibrational pattern of greater cosmic wholeness, which is experienced as being accessed by the soul.

Participants' meaning-making also extended to an expanded awareness in the phenomenon, that participants suggested transcended an egoic state of consciousness. Where they accounted that the spiritual came from a greater source than our limited thoughts, including what is not yet known to us. This is in line with Rowan's (2005) notions of the transpersonal which goes beyond the personal into the realm of the sacred, the numinous, the holy and the divine. This view is shared by Siegel (2013), who also contends that the vibrational range of spiritual resonance dis-identifies with the ego, changes perception and is transformative.

Participants' understanding and experience gathers hermeneutic significance. James's and Mike's accounts allude to something intrinsic that they feel individuals are born with that facilitates depth of engagement in the phenomenon. They both refer to a gift at birth, although they don't specifically identify it. I question if this can be connected to spirituality because Mike relates to some counsellors not being able to work at a depth without 'this', indicating that it is something that God leaves out. Siegel's (2013) heuristic study, which researches the therapist as a container for spiritual resonance and client transformation in transpersonal psychotherapy, also shares some comparisons. She comments how her participants (psychotherapists) referred to a connection to a divine source which they link to intuition, and perceive

as a gift, commonly reporting that they felt they were a vehicle or vessel for spiritual resonance.

Some participants in my study expand on this and provide a further lens in their meaning-making,   considering the extra-ordinary. It is via the word numinous. Brian illuminates this as he carries the idea of relating to the spiritual essence of things in a non-rational way; seeing things as being made up of a divinity that can be felt but not logically grasped by our human thinking. In this spiritual lens, participants suggest that the phenomenon is bigger than oneself and with oneself as a relational being. Any attempt to define divinity was seen as limiting because it reflected that our logic was weak and incapable when compared to that of the divinity. This is consistent with Walker's (2012) research, regarding the spiritual basis of science and life. He argues that such ascendant spirituality is achieved at planes at a higher altitude above everyday life, which he describes as having numinous constructs. The lens in this discourse conforms to an understanding of spirituality, as concerned with the Divine and the Sacred.

Within all the notions and questioning of what spirituality is and how it links to the phenomenon, perhaps the most notable commonality in data was that all participants viewed an awareness, of a timelessness, as flowing through the spiritual element of the phenomenon. Contradictions also emerged here, as timelessness is attributed to neurobiological components that facilitate the process. Pargament (2007) reflecting back on his research with clients, refers to sacred moments when immediate realities fade into the background, when time seems to stand still, and when it feels as if something larger than life is happening. Thorne (2003) talks in the same terms and contends that the spirit and the fundamental self transcends the boundaries of time and space. He further asserts that as spiritual beings we have access to levels of experiencing which transcend the narrow boundaries of our rational world. This interacts with the stance assumed by Walker (2012), who contends that entering into a numinous is timeless and that everything is interconnected into one. He stresses it does us no good to use earthly words such as timelessness because the true concept is in a different plane that we cannot see strictly through rational thought. All these theorists' explorations reflect with the sense-making notions of participants.

5.6 Neurobiology Discourse.

One of the most challenging tasks for Rachel, Gerry, Mike, Brian and James was how they interacted and attempted to make sense of how a scientific discourse could be linked to the phenomenon. This proved a slippery concept for participants to tackle as they tentatively grasped and explored their notions of neurobiology, albeit in a rather superficial manner, as underpinning their experiences when working in depths of engagement. Attempting to assimilate this information and have the depth of knowledge and vocabularies to articulate neurobiology in the phenomenon, emphasised a division between participants, as some had limited experience, whilst for others some experienced neurobiology as beyond their reach.

James used neurobiological and spiritual discourses interchangeably to conceptualise the phenomenon, which potentially can be seen at odds with the spiritual discourse participants called on and is in divergence to other participants' notions. Particularly poignant is that although participants talked in neurobiological terms, they were unable to unpack in any depth the significance of neurobiology in the phenomenon. Levels of encounter in the phenomenon were seen by some participants as being explained by altered states of consciousness; matching and making connections with mirror neurons, energy, vibrations and frequencies. This could be seen as consistent with Badenoch's (2008) neurobiology findings and the neurological flow of the brain. Her research findings appear to connect and resonate deeply with participants' accounts, which is a complicated area of neurobiology.

Badenoch (2008) explains that neurons with mirroring properties are activated during both the execution and observation of action, with convergent steams of information moving in tandem with the other person. Badenoch points out that we are sensing what is going on, and through the perception of intention, we can get a sense of accumulating streams, connecting us to the other person's inner world. At the same time, the flow of information from the mirror neurons she expresses is sent to the limbic regions and body. Holding them with one part of our mind, while resonating with as much true empathy as possible she explains, allows us to experience the internal state of the other. Badenoch refers to a strong resonance that develops,

echoing throughout the neurobiological pathways, which we often experience as a softening, calmness in the body accompanied by feelings of warmth.   This kind of process is consistent with the neurobiological discourse participants describe in their data. Of how they experience aspects of the phenomenon, although they do not have the neurobiological words to articulate this process.

5.7 Counselling Theory.

Another set of lenses that participants employed in making sense of the phenomenon related to very different, divergent theoretical counselling bases. Although counselling theory was consistently reported in participants' accounts, participants also simultaneously questioned its sufficiency as an explanation. Person-centred counselling was called upon by Gerry, Rachel, Louise, James and Brian, who suggested an immersion which incorporated dissociative elements. Their reported experiences shared similarities to Rogers' (1980) experiences of altered states of consciousness and strange behaviours, which links it simultaneously to a spiritual discourse.

When discussing the relevance of Rogers' (1980) theory, a significant centrality in participants' data indicated there was an identifiable move away from person-centred theory and understanding depth of engagement, as involving a state of being. Instead participants pointed to a direct sense of knowing that involved a shift in consciousness. This led Rachel, Louise, James and Brian to point to a specific form of consciousness, within person-centred counselling, containing spiritual undertones that had to be reached and held for the phenomenon to take place. This shares some similarities in the field of person centred therapy, where Rogers (1951, 1957) also discusses receptive and allowing states. Rogers sees such states as a central aspect of presence, which he attributed transcendental and spiritual dimensions to (Thorne, 2005). Interestingly the term presence was never used by participants in this research study.

Of significance is that some accounts are more in line with Mearns's (2004) and Cooper's (2013) literature, of a move away from a notion of an authentic self towards a pluralistic, dialogic model of selves; whereas other accounts demonstrate dualistic thinking in action, bringing the two understandings of pluralistic selves and

an essential self together. Evident from this research study was that Louise, Gerry and Rachel felt a sense of vulnerability that emerged as selves were stripped bare, which influenced the depth of the phenomenon therapists spoke of. It is interesting that although participants call upon contemporary person-centred theory as a discourse to understand the phenomenon, it is surprising that no-one specifically mentioned or referred to any literature on relational depth (Cooper, 2013; Knox, 2008; Wiggins, Elliott & Cooper, 2012). Instead, participants gave fractured accounts, and were unable to substantiate neatly how a person-centred lens might inform their interpretation of the phenomenon.

Exploring the phenomenon, some participants used what might be classified as psychodynamic terms or concepts, without attributing them as such, using words like the 'unconscious'. Mike was the only participant who directly attributed a psychodynamic lens in counselling theory, although he viewed this as potentially problematic, theoretically. The strength of Mike's observations is demonstrated below.

> "The depths of engagement are really quite a difficult concept in psychodynamic approaches. It's getting into areas that are slightly difficult to talk about but maybe quite threatening to talk about, that there is something deep and emotional taking place".

Mike explains that the phenomenon can be influenced by how you work with the transference and the connectedness. Mike comments that it is something he vaguely understands but can see how various theoretical models may shed light on it. Mike's making sense of how transference works against depths in engagement remained an enduring key concept. This coincides with literature offered by Hadjiosif (2012), who points to transference remaining the locus of analytic inquiry as opposed to the therapist's use of self.

Alternatively, Rachel existentially refers to Buber's (1970) 'I- Thou' relationship in trying to make sense of the depth of the phenomenon. Rachel then muses whether the phenomenon is deeper than the 'I -Thou' natural connection that occurs when a person becomes fully present to another. She expresses:

"Yeah… It's much deeper than Buber's 'I Thou' relationship and it doesn't happen with every client".

It is interesting that although the spiritual level is based around the I –Thou relationship in existential terms (Hycner, 1993), Rachel seems to be alluding to something deeper than this that informs her meaning of the phenomenon.

Some participants used the discourse of counselling theory to try and make sense of their experience, whilst acknowledging that the phenomenon goes deeper than what counselling theory is able to offer. Perhaps this is why some participants might be unwilling to take it to supervision. Other participants indicated that a counselling discourse was inadequate to convey their meaning of the phenomenon. These views are expressed by Brian, Mike, Rachel, Gerry, Louise and James. I quote Rachel here, who sums up participants' views:

"And I think as well as all the counselling theory and all of that I had learnt, that is kind of thrown out when you are working like this".

Applying a counselling theory discourse, participants tried to use counselling terminology and counselling theory to inform how they made sense of the phenomenon. They also recognised that the depth of the phenomenon could only be further understood by applying other discourses and lenses in their meaning-making. Even then, it felt at times participants were clutching at straws to holistically capture the phenomenon and it proved impossible to do. This could be pointing to a sense of the phenomenon as potentially trans-theoretical. While participants called upon potential explanations from within the differing camps, there was a sense that they struggled to conceptualise this as a whole. Making sense of the phenomenon, I have heard participants using phenomenological perspectives, epistemological lenses, together with spiritual, neurobiological and counselling theory discourses to engage in articulating the phenomenon. For all participants it was the first time they had reflected on their experience at such a depth. Despite the different discourses and lens they used, they still had a sense of not reaching coherent, complete explanations for their experience, stating a resolve to examine this further in their personal supervision.

5.8 The Lived Experience.

In the last sub section, I looked at how participants tried to conceptualise the phenomenon in its entirety. Now I move away from their meaning-making, to bring in theoretical lenses from counselling and related literature that might help understand their interpersonal and intrapersonal experiencing. In this section, I focus the hermeneutic lens on participants' questioning of the self within the phenomenon and the dilution of personal 'boundaries' that occurs. Participants identify a letting go of their identity and ego, as they worked at a depth of engagement, which highlighted a vulnerability that can exist. They also questioned how far they were prepared to travel with the client, in a place where boundaries melt and a merger and fusion can take place. Theorists' notion's shed light on the challenges that participants examine.

5.9 The Self.

Alongside participants having a sense of multiple selves that were stripped bare in the phenomenon, they were also indicating that there was a point where they reached the essence of who they were that was also stripped bare, and that a true self existed in the depths of engagement. Participants pulled on competing paradigms of self, versus selves and their lived sense of both being true for them. This might be interpreted as contradictory that they were carrying both aspects but this wasn't experienced or expressed by them as such. Moreover, Brian, Louise and Gerry discussed that in the depths of engagement, it required both parties to give up something of themselves while remaining separate. As participants utilised counselling theory to help explain their experience, it is possible to identify parallels within counselling literature. Their conclusions reflected the ideas of Mearns and Thorne (2003), who talk about the interrelationship of configurations of the self, and having the same parts as before but that some parts that may have been subservient before may have become stronger.

The terms that participants used to identify their experiencing can be understood in relation to counselling theory, when examining the lack of control they felt in the phenomenon. Almost losing themselves, and exploring the levels of disassociation

experienced, appears to coincide with Sussman's (2007) literature about how strongly one can give up one's identity and be totally at ease to travel, without fear, to places mutually with the client. Sussman (2007) contends the analysts' self-image has to be flexible and loose. Equally, he shares that those parts of the counsellor that are fragile may struggle to merge in the phenomenon, and consequently, counsellors may well back off, keeping at a safe level of intimacy.

Another important extra dimension to this research points to the fact that the depths of engagement depend not just on a letting go and a feeling of being out of control, but the therapist's subjective feelings of readiness to take it on. Exploring the different nuances of this readiness when talking about the phenomenon, Gerry and Rachel indicate vulnerability when working at a depth. Louise, Rachel and Gerry's data indicates that a, kind of, courage to be vulnerable is necessary and participants appeared to live with different levels of this. I'm reminded of Brown's (2013) notions (a research professor in the area of vulnerability) that our only choice is a question of engagement, and that being rather than knowing requires that we must dare to show up and let ourselves be seen.

> "Our willingness to own and engage with our vulnerability determines
> the depth of our courage and the clarity of our purpose; the level to which
> we protect ourselves from being vulnerable is a measure of our fear and
> disconnection".

> (Brown, 2013:2)

Such a challenge of the participants' experience of the phenomenon is captured well by Baldwin (1987). From a person-centred perspective, he takes the view that as a therapist you have to feel entirely secure as a person, to allow yourself to let go, confident in the knowledge that you can come back. He explains it is important to realise that one has a need and a right to preserve and protect oneself. He further conveys that a therapist has a right to give but not to get worn out trying to give, aspects reported by Louise and Rachel.

One unexpected finding in the data was that whilst therapists did let themselves go and become immersed in the inner world of the client, consistent with McMillan and McLeod (2006), Schmid (1998) Knox and Cooper (2011) findings on relational

depth, they also accounted that there was a small part of their self that they kept back, needing to preserve an observing part of the self that monitored processes.

As participants explored the lived experience of the self, they called upon counselling terms and counselling theory to explore the true self when working at depths in engagement. To understand the origins of the lived experience further, participants alluded to this demanding courage and yielding to an uncertainty, encouraging a different way of viewing boundaries that was not for the faint-hearted.

5.10 Boundaries.

One of the essential features of how participants understood their experiences of depths of engagement was how they accounted one's whole sense of interpersonal boundaries in the counselling sessions being radically revised. Entering into this kind of uncharted territory, all participants had a sense that their normal accepted boundaries disappeared. James, Rachel, Gerry, Louise and Brian spoke of a point in the phenomenon where they felt a fusion and a merging with their client, whilst at the same time being aware that to facilitate this process involved a letting go not just of the self but of boundaries. Participants also talked of this, as a safe place that was liberating and free. Louise movingly conceptualised a kind of safety zone, where separateness and togetherness were simultaneously experienced in all their depth and richness. James talks of something similar in his metaphor of a desert island, where there is hardly enough room for him and his client and that they are surrounded by ocean, safe but in an in-betweeness. Louise's account also captured moments where she and her client became profoundly united with one another, yet retained a singularly enriched sense of themselves. Louise, James, Brian and Gerry all reflected that on a surface level, they were separate but at a deeper level, they were one.

Their conclusions experienced in the phenomenon reflect the ideas of Winnicott (1965), who talks of a transitional space which can involve being joined and separate. Rogers (1980) also refers to a oneness and separateness; Schmid (1998) talks of unity without fusion; Hycner (1993) points to union and separateness; Clarkson and Lapworth (1992) depict overlapping and separateness; and Cooper

(2004) suggests that Buber refers to balanced independence-in-relation. Such notions are all aspects James, Brian, Louise and Gerry strongly identified with.

Brian, James and Louise talked of a healing and growth that occurred in an in-betweeness of the boundary. Participants' experiencing can be understood in terms of participants aligning themselves with Buber's (1970) I-Thou moments of an in-betweeness; the natural connection that occurs when a person becomes fully present to another (Geller & Greenberg, 2012) and which binds them together.   Participants also spoke of boundaries that melted and dissolved, attributing spiritual connections to the experience. The wider literature offered by Thorne (2008), from a person-centred perspective, may enlighten here. He describes a power of love, a spirit of hope and a resignation to a give-up syndrome that unites counsellor and client and is free of boundaries.

Psychodynamic understandings regarding regression can also be applied to this experiencing. Rachel talks of an evaporation of boundaries, in the phenomenon that reflects a kind of womb-like thalassal tranquillity, which draws on aspects discussed by Freud (1930) when he muses on his concept of the oceanic feeling.   James', Brian's and Louise's accounts all showed similarities to reports provided by Winnicot (1965), who allowed some of his clients to regress to a boundary-less oneness with him, so that the wounds of early trauma could be healed. At a certain point, he conveys how the therapist may need to allow the patient to enter the therapist's own inner world and become part of it for this to take place. This could also be seen as a Freudian view, that such experiences of regression to a boundary-less oneness are not adult.

From a non-counselling aspect and scientific paradigm, Csikszentmihalyi (2002) in his research, also explores boundaries in the flow process. He asserts that as a result of being egoless and losing a sense of a self, separate from the world around us, such feelings are often accompanied by feelings of union and an evaporation of boundaries in an encounter. He describes an intense and focussed immersion, where you lose all sense of time. This view is something all participants aligned themselves with; Gerry particularly highlighting the importance of the flow process. Therefore the phenomenon can be understood from a range of theoretical viewpoints, from both within and outside counselling. While there has been substantial emphasis in recent

times on relational depth, Cooper's (2013) alternative frameworks might shed light in different ways on how experiencing might be understood, some of which are drawn on by the counsellors in this study.

5.11 Cost, Rewards and a Duty of Care.

All participants experienced working in the phenomenon at a deep level as personally costly in terms of exhaustion but also deeply rewarding, facilitating personal development. Such costs and rewards were often intertwined. Participants unanimously attributed aspects of growth and satisfaction in the phenomenon as nourishing the self, personally rewarding, meeting their own needs and healing for both themselves and the client. Divisions and similarities emerged in how male and female participants linked different discourses to specific aspects of costs and rewards for themselves. Female participants talked more of a vulnerability in ego states and configurations of the self that underpinned a healing in the phenomenon. Male participants alternatively talked in terms of spiritual growth and neurological development as being responsible for personal development. Both female and male participants pointed out the immense depletion and exhaustion they felt after they had worked at a depth in engagement.

Rachel, Louise and Gerry linked their stripped ego states and configurations of the self, in the phenomenon, as making them feel exposed. It is this exposure that they identify, that reveals the true essence of their selves and facilitates the conditions for healing. Rachel, Louise and Gerry all talk of a vulnerability emerging as this process evolves. What may be understood by some therapists as a safe vulnerability is portrayed by other participants as challenging, and could be described as submitting oneself to an unknown, self- sacrificing process. Much of the self-sacrifice Rachael, Louise and Gerry discuss points to working at a depth of engagement that is meaningful to the counsellor.

Louise's, Rachel's, Gerry's, James' and Brian's data is unified as they highlight a dichotomy because working in the phenomenon requires yielding to an uncertainty and identity diffusion, whereas in contrast this kind of giving up and letting go also facilitates personal growth and a greater sense of wholeness. I am struck by participants unknowingly symbolising a hermeneutic circle. They talk of a whole that

is greater than the parts, yet the whole is strong, only by attending to each of the parts. Within this process participants had an internal sense of monitoring this balance.

Gerry and Louise, discussing an unease and vulnerability, question how far they would allow them-selves to go in the phenomenon. Louise gives a particularly vivid account of the depth of the phenomenon she experiences and how she feels this is facilitated by her wounded child's ability to reach out to another. This data shares similarities to research conducted by Rizq and Target (2007), who, in an IPA analysis, found that therapists' experience of recovering lost parts of the self appeared to give them a psychological map, or inner representation of their own world that helped them to imagine, stay and courageously remain present in clients' internal worlds.

Of central importance is the quality of the attachment. Louise links the importance of her wounded child connecting with the clients wounded child as therapeutically healing for both of them and giving her a sense of satisfaction. Wheeler (2002) explains that the important thing is not that practitioners have themselves been wounded but it is how they have dealt with these wounds. Wounded healer's, she contends, being those who have usefully explored their own motivations and gained sufficient insight to help others. Barnett (2007) also explores the unconscious motivations of psychotherapists, and found that a common experience was sensitivity to the needs of others and readiness to help that provided feelings of well-being. Both these theorists' notions shares similarities to Louise's, Gerry's and Rachel's account of the rewards they feel are offered through this kind of depth of engagement.

Louise explains how unknown parts of her-self became visible and were given substance, promoting a sense of wholeness. This perspective and its significance is theorised by literature provided by Alice Miller (1981), in which she argues that the child state has an amazing ability to perceive and respond intuitively. Rowan (1993) also talks of a level of consciousness and the child self, which is where the young child is very perceptive. He argues that it is possible to get back into this level of intuition by lowering our barriers and being childlike. Bringing such woundedness into play is of key importance here because Louise and Rachel indicated that child-like intuition led to fewer inhibitions and a wider sense of possibility. As such, they

attributed the rewards as being exploration, change, personal development and an ability to think about all aspects of themselves, leading to the creation of new meanings.

Using the self as a key resource, as stressed by Louise, Gerry and Rachel as facilitative in terms of healing the client, the repercussions are felt in personal gratification and growth for themselves. This shares some similarities to Siegel's (2013) findings of therapist transformation through spiritual resonance, and being a vessel for a higher range of consciousness leading to joy and spiritual development. Participants' views could also be seen in line with Marsh's (2016) debate. She argues that therapists can use an action called selfing, whereby the therapist is constantly in a state of learning, changing and re-creating the self. And despite this being exhaustive and painful, the therapist might choose this development, although it may be seen as a narcissistic view of the therapist. For example, when Louise conveys how, through the client she may rescue another little part of herself that is buried, the therapist role investment could also be viewed as altruistic in terms of the risk and the uncertainty counsellors expose themselves to.

This commitment to understanding self, Louise, Gerry and Rachel make sense of in their accounts, as having a positive impact on their personal growth and development in the helping role. Of high significance is that all participants had a deep down intuition and knowingness about how far they were able to be in the phenomenon with the client, in terms of their own safety, such a duty of care being paramount to them. Louise, Rachel and Gerry imply a safety, when experiencing the phenomenon despite the challenges. James and Brian's accounts convey the centrality of the importance of a safety, in experiencing the phenomenon and healing that also impacts on them but equally noted that when their intuition does not hold them, there is a an awareness of them putting their barriers up.

Louise, Rachel and Gerry also suggest a duality in rewards and challenge in the phenomenon, sharing their self with another self for the purpose of finding a higher level of fulfilment for both. Kafka (1989) a theorist of psychoanalysis, discusses satisfactions and psychological benefits derived from psychotherapeutic practice, and focuses on opportunities to confront and master the unknown. He emphasises that though our willingness to go into patient's dark places, we transcend our own fears

and explore unfamiliar aspects of our being. This is reflected in data offered by Louise, Rachel and Brian who emphaise how the exploration of the dark side and shadow side of our self leads to personal growth and development. Participants examined the growth opportunities and rewards that healing and wellbeing afforded them, as they worked in a depth of engagement. Participants' findings share comparisons with the work of Satir (1987). She argues that the whole therapeutic process must be aimed at opening up the healing potential, which is accessed through the meeting of the deepest self of the therapist, with the deepest self of the client. This is something participants all unanimously agreed on, which, they reflected, created an openness to change, offering rewards in terms of personal development.

Brian also linked healing opportunities and rewards, to a spiritual component in the depths of engagement, as did Rachel and Louise to a lesser degree. His account is consistent with Hamilton's (2009) notion of spiritual amnesia; that increasing our experiences is reflective of our levels of consciousness, which leads to healing. James, Brian, Louise, Gerry and Rachel also talk of being in touch with their intuition, with higher and more complex vibrations that accesses a state of higher and richer consciousness in which they experienced contentment and fulfilment. This aspect is further discussed by the non-counselling approach relating to the flow process Csikszentmihalyi (1988) which bypasses the ego and identity via absorption and immersion in the phenomenon, resulting in positivity, a sense of growth, and becoming part of some greater unity.

James, Gerry and Louise talk of the costs of working at depth in the phenomenon relating to the neurobiological link. Through levels of consciousness, they discuss how experiences of physiological and psychological synchronicity with the client, relating to empathy and mirror neurons in the brain, are deeply complex neurobiological processes, making considerable demands upon the self. Louise, Rachel, Gerry, James and Brian exploring this depth of engagement noted a change and boost in energy during the phenomenon, which they were keen to point out was at a cost after the session, of feeling totally exhausted and wiped out. This identifies strongly with literature provided by Skovholt & Mathison (2011) on optimal attachment and the resilient practitioner, where they link deep attunement and energy in therapy to being deeply taxing as well as deeply rewarding.

The contradictory side of this is that during the process in the phenomenon, participants also appear to seek out such opportunities to work at this depth and attribute, feelings of relaxation, calmness and contentment. Badenoch (2008) points to such a correlation, which is reflective of the experiences that participants describe. Badenoch explains that because of mirror neurons and the process that takes place, the therapist often experiences this as a relaxation in the body, which is accompanied by feelings of warmth and reassurance. Such a state of mind that engages with the other in this neurobiological encounter, Badenoch argues is full of healing opportunities.

As I reflected on the accounts of participants, I found myself digging deeper and started to ask questions. How much can we control the outcomes in these dimensions? What are participants saying about a duty of self-care? Is this ethical and how do we manage complex variables of costs and rewards with burnout (emotional exhaustion)? Brotheridge & Grandey's (2002) work points to the connections between emotional labour and burnout. They explain that long interactions with clients at a level of intensity and variety of emotional expression will define the dimensions of emotional labour and predictors of burnout. These notions share similarities to participants' understandings. The central point emerging from this research relates to the levels of exhaustion corresponding with the amount of emotional control and energy that is required by the therapist, to regulate and hold various processes when working at a depth of engagement, and the amount of emotional control that is needed by the therapist to regulate this process during therapy. The challenge seems to be how we can learn to manage the complexity of demands when working in the depths of engagement. This area is broadened out in the next section, where participants agonise with professional integrity and being supported adequately.

5.12 Professional Questioning and Supervision.

Participants feared being scrutinised when working in the depths of engagement. They felt to do so could expose their vulnerability, which in turn might question their practice and competence. Counsellors were also concerned that their boundaries may be perceived as sloppy and strip away their professional veneer, resulting in their

professionalism being questioned. Lambers (2006), talking about relational depth from a person-centred perspective contributes how supervision should involve a real dialogue around the shared experience of the phenomenon. Participants' experiences in this research study, of actually taking the depth of the phenomenon to their supervision, were of anxieties, tensions and fears. They felt that they may be judged by sharing the whole experience, which was not neat and ordered, and that could dilute boundaries and question ethical practice.

The BACP Ethical Framework (2016) advises that the practitioner should give careful consideration to the limitations of their training and experience and work within these limits. Conversely Bond (2004) reminds us that some of our major challenges come from difference, risk and uncertainty. Louise and Rachel highlight this, as they reflect on the fear of being judged by the BACP and getting past boundaries when working at a depth of engagement. There was a sense of fear of judgement alongside a sense of certainty that such work benefited clients. Louise and Rachel conveyed that they were prepared to take the risk of working in the phenomenon because it was in the client's interest and supports the ethical principles of beneficence.

Surprisingly, the data revealed that in two male participants' accounts there was much less exploration of a lack of control or shifting boundaries in the phenomenon and some sense of inconsistency. There was a reluctance and fear, at some level, from some male participants to talk about aspects relating to boundaries and boundary-lessness in their practice and how this would be perceived. Words from Mike such as 'uncomfortable' and 'slightly threatening' were banded around, as male participants appeared to install a self-censorship about how blurred boundaries might be viewed, in the therapeutic community. James's account contained some metaphors relating to his understanding of boundaries in the phenomenon, and there were indications that he did shift his boundaries, yet on exploration he moved away from any firm discussion. In James's and Mike's accounts, there was a self-monitoring and risk attachment to their sharing of data in this area.

Conversely, Brian, James, Louise and Rachel questioned their own supervision of the depth and quality they would like to support them when working at a depth of engagement. Brian, James, Rachel and Louise considered whether their supervisors'

experiences of the phenomenon may not have been compatible with theirs, particularly if they were defining the phenomenon in spiritual terms and their supervisor was not sympathetic with this paradigm. Practitioners felt unwilling to take something they define in spiritual terms to supervision, something identified by West (1995) in his research regarding the culture of psychotherapy supervision. West (1995) also found that touch, prayer and spirituality were all problematic for supervision hence many counsellors didn't talk about these things. West further emphasises that therapists were reluctant to talk about spiritual experiences with their supervisors, as differences in the language and articulation of what actually happened made it more difficult. A centrality and commonality in this research study, as these practitioners demonstrate, comes from the way that, while having experienced and valued the depth of engagement, they lack developed and coherent individual explanations and justifications, in counselling terms, to articulate it.

Dansey (2014) draws our attention to the dilemmas in seeking a supervisor, and argues how there may be no choice of supervisor, or limited choice when an organisation or training course requires a supervisor is chosen from a list. Dansey expands on this and points out that even with free choice, there may be a limited range of supervisors to choose from in some parts of the country. West (2011) concurs with this, which is similar to Brian's experience of working with spiritual aspects within the phenomenon. As Brian reflected on his allocation of supervisor, he drew attention to the supervision process, as feeling like it had always been corrective, about issues and strategies and that he would have felt very uncomfortable discussing the phenomenon in supervision. Scott (2011) examines the counsellor's experience of integrating Christian faith with clinical practice and taking various spiritual aspects of work to supervision. Overall she posits, the picture was one of some difficulty for counsellors in accessing support. There was a hesitancy to discuss something that may be perceived as spiritual, or different, for fear of being judged and seen as unprofessional, with counsellors often left to work it out for themselves. Verbatim extracts offered from Scott's research also concurs with my participants' views. Noting there was a limited choice in supervisors to work at this depth, with some aspects of work being avoided and contentious material being omitted from the supervision process.

All participants in this research study questioned the levels and depth that supervision had offered them to explore the phenomenon. Louise and Rachel felt there was potential for being scrutinised and almost felt supervisees could hide aspects of the phenomenon, in their supervision, for fear of being judged. A criticism of counselling ethics could be that they continually stress the importance of solid boundaries, and fail to recognise that when working in the phenomenon, boundaries often dilute and dissolve. Totton (2010) draws our attention to the concept of appropriate boundaries, and in particular its codification in legal and quasi-legal structures, which he suggests forces therapists and counsellors into avoiding vulnerability on the basis of misconduct hearings. Totton (2010) cites Gutheil and Gabbard (1993) who developed a distinction between boundary violations which they see as always harmful and boundary crossings, which may be neutral or beneficial. Totton points out that they also argue that even boundary crossings which are justified and consistent with good care should be avoided on the basis of their possible adverse appearance in court. In an analysis of complaints to the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy Khele et al (2008) in their article indicate that 12% of complaints related to boundaries, with 76% of these complaints being upheld at a adjudication, a far greater proportion than in any other area. In a further report on serious professional misconduct in counselling, Symons et al. (2011) emphasise how male members of the association are over-represented in complaints, and how such complaints are brought about by people who are themselves involved in counselling.

Rachel spoke of this tension and a paradox in person-centred counselling that gives you the freedom to work at that depth yet can ethically question boundaries when working in the phenomenon. In her account, she shares how a person-centred colleague had been the subject of such a complaint.

"There was a counsellor who was very person centred and subject to a complaint and I thought well I could have done what he's done".

Rachel expands on this aspect in her account, questioning the experiences of the self' in the phenomenon, and the fear that this may not be understood by the supervisor, if they themselves have not had such experiences. Rachel discusses how some supervisors might have thought, this is just not okay. This is in line with Ankrah's

(2002) findings in a study on spiritual emergence and counselling. This would also challenge traditional psychodynamic approaches and the necessity for firm boundaries.

Louise's, Rachel's, James', Brian's and Gerry's data reflects higher levels of consciousness, of transcendental proportions, being instrumental in the phenomenon reflecting a higher self, as opposed to the individual self that they took to the supervision process. There was a recognition that such levels were impossible to work with authentically in supervision, if participants had a sense that they had not already been discovered by the supervisor themselves and consequently could have been discouraged. Tudor and Worrall (2004) consider the extra dimension, that supervisors may become remote or disempowered if they have fears of their own about certain matters that their supervisee is bringing to the relationship. As a consequence, would it be impossible for supervisors to help their students to recognise where they lie on such a spectrum, if their experience had been different and not on the same level as the supervisee?

The big surprise in this research was that some of the participants who have highlighted these issues are themselves supervisors. They comment that when they bring the depths of the phenomenon to their supervision and different discourses of understanding emerge, they feel that without careful consideration of who their own supervisor is, they may well be judged, resulting in criticism of their own practice.

This questioned whether the supervisory climate was able to create an environment where practitioners felt safe enough to explore their feelings, anxieties and vulnerabilities of working at depth, in the phenomenon? Exploring the wider literature, Teitlebaum (1990) comments on the reluctance on the part of many supervisors, to look beyond the therapists' learning problems and to consider their own motivations, teaching problems and the emotional sources from which they spring, and their understanding of themselves. Brightman (1985) also argues that such a process can be disruptive when supervisors have not come to terms with their own grandiosity and present themselves as all-knowing or lacking in the capacity for uncertainty. It has been said that the therapist can only take the client as far as he or she has gone. Would this not also be true of the supervisee/supervisor relationship?

Lawton and Feltham (2000) also acknowledge problems and possibilities in supervision and suggest that the individuals' needs may be more important than focussing on developmental stages. Louise also questions the supervisors wounded healer vulnerability, raising the issue that the unconscious agenda of the supervisor is an important topic in its own right and one that could have been neglected. Louise sees this as providing huge challenges as well as huge opportunities in the supervisory relationship, when working with aspects in the phenomenon.

This sub section sheds light on the fact that participants feared being judged and their ethical practice questioned, as they worked at depth in the phenomenon. There were concerns expressed on what constitutes ethical practice and appropriate boundaries. Difficulties in finding the right supervisor and quality of supervision were highlighted, as participants accounted a vulnerability that exists at this level of working in the phenomenon. This raises the question of how the normative function of supervision can operate in a context whereby we obviously choose what to present in supervision and often are our supervisor's paymasters. Of significance was that participants were prepared to take risks for the benefit of their clients and in terms of their own personal growth. Yet despite their understandings of the phenomenon and research undertaken by theorists such as Mick Cooper, there still remains a sense of secrecy and fear to discuss aspects of it.

5.13 Pulling it Together.

For many therapists this was the first time they had explored how they understood experiences of depths of engagement in therapy. Interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon was challenging, as participants struggled and agonised to make sense of it through various discourses and lenses. Different truths combined and intermingled as spirituality met science, phenomenological and epistemological conflicts of interpretation emerged and there was a sense that no one counselling theory could be relied upon to get experience closer. Moreover, although relational depth connected with person-centred understandings and carries a high profile, concepts from a range of different paradigms were applied by therapists to shine light on how they made sense of experiences when working at a depth of engagement. Yet divisions were evident between the different major schools. If we add to this the

complexity that comes with the growth of integrative counselling, as evidenced within this studies sample, practitioners' understandings can be viewed as diverse and wide-ranging and there is no coherent, unified way of making sense of the phenomenon.

Participants' accounts of making sense of the depths of engagement and their notions were also entwined with ethical concerns of boundaries being crossed, and in the age of evidence-based practice, this opened up fears of being seen as unprofessional. Such boundary crossings in the phenomenon not only challenged participants' sense of self and their identities but how boundary crossings may be perceived, and can be viewed differently from various modalities with no firm blueprint to work from. Despite this, many participants viewed a lack of control and vulnerability in the phenomenon, alongside risk taking, as instrumental to healing, developing resilience, and validating their own needs and those of the client. However, there was a sense from participants that they felt isolated and unsupported when working in the depths of engagement; fearing consequences if they were to totally share the extent of their experiences because of blurred interpersonal boundaries. Working with such risk, participants questioned their fear of taking the depths of engagement to their own supervision, often hiding their experiencing. They contemplated how they were making sense of it, questioned whether they would be judged adversely, and if their supervision could sufficiently support them. There was, overall, a sense of fear of being seen as working unethically and as a result I question are there whole areas of experiencing going unsupervised?

Such research has to be seen in context with the wider picture. And although this study seeks to answer the main research question and secondary research questions, the research actually raises more questions than it answers. I propose the following:

In terms of making sense of the phenomenon, are we trying to define the indefinable, and as such, how does this fit within an ethical framework? Furthermore, how can we be held accountable when we can't describe the phenomenon with any sense of clarity? It is interesting to note, that this study illuminates there is a bravery in discussing the phenomenon on a research basis, even though there is a reluctance to take it to supervision. I question if this is also about commitment and should we not be seeking out and creating resources to grasp the nettle? As Skovholt and Trotter-

Mathison (2011) posit, does fear not stop all forward movement? I argue it is hard to imagine, without a sense of unity politically, organisationally and at a grass roots level, how we can work pragmatically and creatively when boundary management is central to professional competence. And yet, the phenomenon remains indefinable, difficult to make sense of, and necessitates crossing interpersonal boundaries. As a fellow practitioner working in the depths of engagement, I have felt a sadness to see therapists' nervousness at being fully transparent because they feel they have no firm footing to stand on, and that their professional ethics may be questioned. Ironic really, as it is something we give overriding importance too and feel has such value.

CHAPTER 6 Reflexivity.

6.1 Reflexivity.

As I too became a traveller in this research project, I was stuck by how my reflexivity became a fundamental part of the process. In this next section, I draw on my experiences of vulnerability; the struggles of being an insider and how my own personal growth and development has been influenced, as I interpreted participant's data.

During the process of analysis, I became aware of my own feelings of a kind of vulnerability and feeling out of my depth, trying to make sense of the phenomenon and participants' accounts, as they struggled to make sense of it themselves. The process of hermeneutic interpretation felt overwhelming and torturous, as sub-ordinate themes were so interweaved with one another. I found myself meticulously going over and over data, checking it out with my supervisors and IPA colleagues. Rowan's (2005) metaphor of a spiral staircase on a mirrored floor came to mind, as in the hermeneutic spiral, my attention shifted from the part to the whole and then back and forth. Kvale (1983) offered me some reassurance, as he confirmed the process as a continuous back and forth between parts and whole and how perseverance was necessary. During the analysis, I found there were parallels in my process as a researcher to those that participants described, as they endeavoured to conceptualise the phenomenon. For me, there was something about letting go, levels of consciousness, and a not knowing that was part of the process of interpretation. Surrendering my psychological thoughts and feelings to the unknown, themes appeared to emerge more spontaneously, although the process was arduous. I was reassured by Heidegger (1985), who reminds us that when we actively engaged with the world around us, it is apparent that when we are able to cope skilfully in a particular situation 'thought' is very rarely an issue at all.

Another parallel occurred mysteriously as I conducted a research interview with Rachel, and I include my diary entry from my journal to illuminate this point.

12th August, 2012

"Rachel today discussed a circumstance in which she experienced the phenomenon with her client. The more she described, the more I felt absorbed into all she was saying. There was something about a shared familiarity of the depth, she knew that I knew. The moments became very intense and I got a sense that all though I was anchored in the room with her, we were meeting on a different level of consciousness that had an almost transcendental feel about it. Suddenly there was a knock on the door and we both 'jumped out of our skin' as though we had been wrenched out of something. We were both emotional and then had to take a break. (Rachel has confirmed that this account is correct and as she experienced it too)".

Edge (2009) when discussing reflexivity conceptualises the feeling I have, and explains that when we experience something we act upon it; we do something with it and then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to 'the thing' and then it does something to us in return. Such is this peculiar combination. This experience brought to light a parallel in experiencing the phenomenon in a different setting, and raised question, for me, as an insider was I was standing too close, in the interviews and to the data? As Dey (1999) points out, even if we accept the doubtful proposition that categories are discovered, what we discover will depend to some degree, on what we are looking for. I wondered if this might be the case in this research, professionally and personally, for me; being so close to the phenomenon and data, culturally and socially, I might not see the wood for the trees! The complexity of the data led me to examine, through the supervision process, the danger that, at times, I might assume a common shared understanding with participants.

In supervision, I examined if I might be subconsciously relating to some discourses and lens more empathically than others, and thereby imposing my own meaning systems in interpretation. For me, there was something about distancing myself yet retaining a connection with the data that was questioning and critically subjective. There was also something about working on a different level, in a different zone, almost in transition, which felt paralleled participants' descriptions of working in the phenomenon. This is in line with Sugarman's research (2004) relating to counselling and the life course of being in transition and surrendering the self. She depicts a state

of being betwixt and between, and argues that we must, at least to some extent, lose our current identity before we are free to enter the neutral zone. This was very reflective of my process of interpreting the data.

Willig (2009) posits that knowledge is also reflexive, in so far as it acknowledges its dependence on the researcher's own standpoint. She argues that although IPA recognises the importance of the researchers perspective, it does not actually tell us how to incorporate this insight into the research process, and it does not show us, how exactly the researcher's own conceptions, are implicated in a particular piece of analysis. Alternatively, Larkin, Watts & Clifton (2006) reflecting on IPA methodology, takes the view that when discussing hermeneutics and reflexivity, that "…reflexivity is a tool for positioning interpretation in context". Shaw (2009) also reports that we cannot escape the interpretative aspects at any stage of our endeavours but we can reflect upon our role in producing these interpretations and we can maintain a commitment to ground them always in our participants' claims and concerns.

In terms of rigour, validity and credibility I was guided by Calman's (2011) lecture at the University of Manchester, who suggests that it is how prior knowledge is used that can inform analysis and make the difference but warns against us using it to direct analysis. For me, there was a balance to be struck, and as Calman (2011) reminds us, when undertaking research the researcher should have an open mind not an empty head!

Through the supervision process, I also became aware of an epistemological incongruence in my construction of knowledge. During my professional development and becoming a researcher, I viewed that I came from a constructivist standpoint, believing that there could be many truths. As Crotty (2012) points out, truth or meaning, comes into our existence in and out of our own engagement with the realities in our world, and different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. I interpreted data from this premise, which resulted in me choosing the constructivist methodology of IPA for data interpretation. In supervision, my supervisor reflected that although my interpretation of accounts followed this process, there was something in the language I used that was positivist. I became aware that such positivist words leaked out, giving a sense,

ontologically, of my being coming from an inference, of believing in one truth. My supervisor suggested I think about the source of it.

With her recognition, I realised that my positivist use of language was rooted in my upbringing and of a faith that recognised one truth. As a child, certain philosophies were drummed into me, with expectations that I would carry this through my life, although now, my view is different. It was this idiographic engagement with my world in my early years that I found was influencing my writing. Smith et al. (2009) recommend that IPA is idiographic because it is committed to understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people in a particular context. With this having been brought into my awareness, I was able to remain faithful to IPA as a methodology, whilst also becoming aware of how my own idiographic engagement with the world, had influenced my epistemological construction of knowledge. Awareness of this strengthened my reflexive practice.

I noticed another parallel in terms of my own personal self, similar to that described by the participants, who had been part of this research project. In terms of my reflexivity, I became aware that I too had probably not taken all my experiencing of the phenomenon to supervision. This led me to contemplate, why this would be and how I could ensure that I changed it the future. Willig (2009) urges us to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon, and informs such research. Reid et al. (2005) in contrast suggests it is, nonetheless, inevitable that we will fall short of this target, for being a person in context (hence an observer, indelibly situated with the meaningful world that we observe) we can never fully escape the preconceptions that our world brings with it. Recognising this, I decided, for the meantime, to bracket off my thoughts and take the matter to my academic supervisor. My supervisor gave me space and time to reflect and question how I was going to meet and facilitate my own future needs in supervision, in terms of exploring the phenomenon. Such sharing with my supervisor resulted in me feeling freer to have an open mind to interpret and translate data again, without the influences of my own process affecting my analysis. It also enabled me to consider how I could meet the needs of my personal growth and development in my own supervision.

Throughout this research study I have had to continually examine my own motivations for working at a depth in engagement, and examine my lived experience of how this translates into my practice. I ask myself, why would I do this kind of work, actively seek it out, as well taking on research at a doctoral level? Through this process, I recognise that I have been both narcissistic and altruistic in my desire to work at depth with individuals. I have also noticed, a sense of development, both as an individual and practitioner, and indeed, fulfilment through completing this research study. I am also struck by my growing awareness of carrying different notions of self, like my participants as I have worked in the depths of engagement. Taking this to my own supervision and letting other parts of my deeper self, emerge, I feel has created in me a more rounded sense of self that is resilient. Moreover, this process has required me to be willing to open myself up, be vulnerable and brave, and to expose my true being and take risks. Yet through this, I am able to deepen my practice; travelling to new places with the client that I believe can have mutual benefits.

My reflexivity has had a major impact on this research project, on my development as a researcher, and has informed my learning as a counselling practitioner. The struggles and demands of the process of interpretation of data have made me feel both challenged and vulnerable. I have learned the process of rigorous scrutiny of my own meaning systems and how these could influence data. I have questioned my own views and perspectives of working in the phenomenon, and examined how in the future I will manage, cope and seek the necessary support and supervision I require to work at depth in the phenomenon. Brown (2013) conceptualises my thoughts when she suggests there is no effort without error and shortcoming and no triumph without vulnerability.

CHAPTER 7 Conclusion.

7.1 Contribution to Knowledge.

This study attempts to build on research in terms of how therapists experience depths of engagement in therapy. The research reinforces that therapists have concerns about how far to give up their interpersonal boundaries in the phenomenon for fear of being judged by the counselling community. The study also adds to literature showing that participants derived joy and found nourishment from working in the depths of engagement; and, despite this being challenging on different levels, it was a risk they were prepared to take because of the benefits to their client and the personal growth and greater sense of wholeness they themselves gained.

The study also provides new original knowledge relating to how therapists understand and make sense of depths of engagement. The findings show how phenomenological perspectives and epistemological lenses, together with spiritual, neurobiological and theoretical discourses, were used interchangeably to make sense of the phenomenon, but that no one lens or discourse could be relied upon to understand it.

A key finding of this research also found that some counsellors used their vulnerability within the self to facilitate depths of engagement. Most current research and that of Cooper (2013) on relational depth, focusses and concentrates on client vulnerability; and, despite sections on the therapists' experience of relational depth, there is little up to date research on therapists' vulnerability of working in the phenomenon. There is also a significant gap in psychodynamic research, understanding how experiences in the phenomenon can coexist when seen alongside transference and counter-transference in the therapeutic relationship.

The research also provides new data that practitioners often have a reluctance to totally share all their experiences of the phenomenon, and that a self–censorship exists about how far to share one's experiences because of how boundary-crossing may be perceived. The contribution to knowledge is that therapists are often hiding their experiences from supervision for fear of their professionalism and ethics being

questioned. The unique contribution to knowledge is that there are whole areas of experiencing in the depths of engagement that are going unsupervised.

7.2 Future Research.

Future research could explore supervisors' personal development in terms of working in the phenomenon, and understanding their dispositional tendencies as helpers and unconscious motivations for working at such a depth in engagement. Sussman (2007) posits that the unconscious agenda of the supervisor is an important topic in its own right and one that has been largely neglected. This could be further expanded on with additional research that examines depths of engagement that can happen also in the supervision process between supervisor and supervisee.

Future research could also investigate transpersonal and spiritual therapists' and supervisors' experiences of the phenomenon; examining the complexity of their experiences, understandings, and interpretations of working in the depths of engagement. This could further be expanded on by inviting Buddhist psychotherapists and practitioners from different cultural backgrounds to participate in such research. Incorporating such racial and cultural diversity in a future study may not only highlight different experiences in the phenomenon but could also examine the bandwidth in layers of pre-reflection. At the other end of the spectrum, new research could also explore the experiences of CBT practitioners, whose experience of the phenomenon and sense making, may be influenced by more neurological and neurobiological understandings of their experiences.

7.3 Critical Considerations.

Examining the implications of this research study, participants incorporated different counselling approaches as they attempted to describe, measure and capture the essence of the depths of engagement. I question whether the phenomenon can ever be uniformly defined because accounts will always vary not so much on orientation and theoretical school, but on epistemological knowledge construction, the level of phenomenological understanding, pre-reflective levels of reflection and the influence of symbolic interaction.

As I reflect back on this research study, I also question and wonder if the changing sense of who we are and our own personal development relates to how we perceive and employ lenses to make sense of the phenomenon. It highlights that perhaps there is a parallel between the layers of the phenomenon we are able to explore, in conjunction with the levels of our own personal development and how we make sense of such experiences in depths of engagement. (This would also be influenced by symbolic interactionism in which language, culture and narrative discourses are constructed). So how confident can we be to say that we can ever definitively define the phenomenon?

Accorded high significance by participants, was trying to articulate the phenomenon through the lens of neurobiology, which questioned whether this was because it is seen as the growing area to apply in our work as counsellors and to be competent in. Yet it is fair to say that most counselling practitioners who took part in the research study shared they had little or no training in neurobiology. A dichotomy could exist that new counselling training courses may expose trainees to scientific paradigms, so a basic knowledge of neurobiology may be possible. Older counsellors may not have been afforded this luxury of knowledge in training and thus, unless self-motivated, their knowledge could be limited.

Such conclusions could mean that being able to exactly translate the phenomenon into meaningful language that adequately describes and represents it, could become more difficult because the scientific discourse participants used could be understood in various ways, depending on the extent of their knowledge and their level of exposure to neurobiology. Similarly, whilst doctoral counsellors from different theoretical and integrative orientations were representative, and the phenomenon can be viewed as being trans-theoretical, the extent of participants' neurobiological knowledge in this research influenced their sense-making processes. Therefore, although we can gain awareness of the lenses participants use to make sense of the phenomenon; it seems that it may be impossible to ever understand the phenomenon fully.

West (2011) talks about the counsellor who is psycho-spiritually aware and suggests that if one is going to work on another level this requires supervision on two levels. This raises the question, if we are to work ethically in the phenomenon then should

practitioners not strive to facilitate this, whether the focus is on spiritual or neurological components of the phenomenon? The dilemma being that an individual or organisation may not have the resources to provide such provision. Conversely, I question how many supervisors specialise in the area of exploring the phenomenon, and what would be the mechanisms by which to evaluate the supervision experience of working in the depths of engagement. A further consideration could be, how could a supervisor and supervisee, work at a depth of engagement in supervision if the supervision was offered online? I wondered if this would catch all the nuances of the depths of engagement, or in contrast, if via interpretation of the written word, it would open up new levels of interpretation and different avenues for exploration?

7.4 Limitations and Achievements.

Using an IPA approach, the aim of this study was to explore the lived experience of participants, amplifying and illuminating meaning. An achievement of this process also sparked such a close engagement with the data that participants stated that they had found their contribution rewarding in terms of their own personal growth and development. The interview and the transcript of the interview that participants were given to validate also encouraged participants to delve deeper into their understanding and awareness of the processes of the depths of engagement. It was this involvement that acted as a catalyst for all participants to take their deeper experiences of the phenomenon onto their supervision. The study also facilitated a wider debate, on boundaries and professional questioning in doctoral groups.

When recruiting for this research, it was the more clinically experienced and seasoned practitioners that were willing and motivated to engage in such a project. This could also be seen as a limitation of the study because the age range of participants did not include younger therapists with less clinical experience. Another limitation of the research was that at the beginning participants had requested that they would all prefer to remain anonymous and not provide specific information about themselves for fear of being identified. This was something they often reiterated. As a consequence and to preserve the confidentiality of participants, their privileged accounts were treated respectfully and ethically, with minimal personal data given about them in the Methods chapter and the section entitled

Participant Recruitment. However, this carried limitations as important and interesting qualitative information about individual participants was removed from the analysis.

The interview process was also designed to elicit episodic, autobiographical memory. To describe how participants felt at moments in deep engagement, data relied on the retrospective recall of participants' experiences. A limitation could be participants' memory of such experiences and how they internalised such processes over time. Although in contrast, participants, through the interview process, were able to broaden their awareness of pre-reflective layers of reflection, which, through metaphor, allowed for greater access of data.

In this study, participants represented many counselling orientations; however this did not prove to be an impediment, as the meaning participants attributed to the phenomenon and outcomes they experienced, shared similarities. A limitation of the research could have been the lack of racial and cultural diversity of the participants, as they were all white, middle aged British. It would have been interesting to have seen diversity in language and meaning of the phenomenon from counsellors from other ethnicities, to examine commonalities or differences.

A strength of this research was that all participants had an interest in qualitative research, and as such, passionately engaged with the project, to the extent that the data provided was detailed, complex and substantial. The suitability of accounts is an aspect Willig (2009) examines, as she asks how successfully, are participants able to capture the subtleties and nuances of their experiences? This research study shows that participants were able to communicate the rich texture of their experiences in a way that added quality to the analysis.

A limitation and deficiency of the methodology could be argued that IPA isn't really phenomenological because it relies on cognition, on reflection at a distance, rather than exploration of immediate lived experience, seen traditionally as the realm of phenomenology. IPA also tends to concentrate on the more reflective stages of deliberate controlled reflection, and questions to what degree participants could make sense of their words if they spoke in a pre-reflective stage.

7.5 Evaluation.

Finlay (2011) evaluates phenomenological research and indicates that good research can be evaluated in terms of the 4R's: rigour, relevance, resonance and reflexivity. This research meets the requirements of *rigour*. Data has been systematically worked through and has been opened up to internal and external audit. It is also *relevant* in terms of its applicability and contribution, and adds to the body of knowledge relating to the phenomenon. It is *relevant,* identifying gaps of knowledge and looks at directions for future research. The research enriches our understanding of the phenomenon and has also been growth enhancing for the participants involved and, it is hoped for readers alike, to offer guidance and improvements for practice. The textured findings also seek to r*esonate* with the readers' own experiences and understandings and push the boundaries of the taken for granted. The research alludes to the idea recommended by Polkinghorne (1983), of creating resonance in vividness, accuracy, richness and elegance as a way of judging the trustworthiness of the research. The research also recognises the broad area of r*eflexivity* and to what extent I have shown self-awareness and openness about the research process. Through my reflexivity, I demonstrate ethical integrity and also acknowledge the limitations in the knowledge claimed.

This research study is shaped by all these evaluative dimensions. And I believe its strength is the special contribution it makes to explore and capture how practitioners understand and make sense of their experiences of depths of engagement in therapy. It also provides insight into issues unspoken by practitioners, of a fear that they may be judged as working unethically because of blurred boundaries, which is further compounded by issues relating to supervision.

7.6 Recommendations.

The new BACP Ethical Framework (2016) posits that it will enable practitioners to "engage in a more meaningful way, and that a move forward in the new ethical framework is to view our ethical responsibilities as commitments. There is an emphasis on accountability and responsibility together with flexibility and growth. The document states:

"By accepting the statement of ethics, members and registrants of the BACP are committing themselves to engaging with the challenge of striving to be ethical, even when doing so involves making difficult decisions or acting courageously".

(BACP Ethical Framework, 2016:14)

Best practice guidelines in this literature also outlines that in building an appropriate relationship, boundaries are consistent with the aims of working together and benefiting the client. The document also sets out that when supervising qualified or experienced practitioners, the responsibility for ensuring professional standards primarily rests with the supervisee. Guidelines also emphasise a 'commitment' to research, highlighting the value of providing an evidence base for practice. As I reflected on the document and the views of participants from this study, I was struck by a real absence of guidance on how to manage challenges and dilemmas when working in the depths of engagement, and no specific arena where colleagues could discuss the complexity of the phenomenon.

Wenger Trayner, Fenton-O'Creevy, Hutchinson, Kubiak & Wenger Trayner (2015) examine boundaries, identity and knowledgeability in practice-based learning and look at the trajectory tensions of such work. They point out that effective and supportive for practitioners was being part of a process where individuals could engage, with the support of others, explore crossing boundaries, imagine their future selves, and align their practice and sense of self with the global concept of 'being professional'. This exploration, it was suggested, would be more beneficial when opened up between those practicing from different paradigms and domains of practice.

This prompted me to think how it might prove helpful for research to be conducted specifically by the BACP, via anonymous questionnaires. To look at the whole slippery concept of boundaries in the phenomenon, and to gain an understanding of the fear practitioners face of being judged, by being open and transparent in this area. Seminars and debates rubber stamped by the BACP, could also raise the profile of this sensitive area. Asking for therapists' experiences of boundaries in the phenomenon, to understand how the impact of such disclosure is very much kept under wraps for fear of being viewed negatively, professionally.

On an even more fundamental level, a section might prove useful in BACP publications, providing a balance of supervisors to choose from who are happy to work and explore the phenomenon in counselling practice. It may also be beneficial if practitioners and students received instruction on how to make optimal use of their supervision. Familiarizing students with the issue early on in their training may change professional attitudes relating to the fear of disclosure. In view of being part of diverse communities of practice, I would also suggest opening up this debate in Therapy Today and considering the benefits of a forum for therapists from all different counselling approaches to share their experiences. Offered by the BACP, this could remove the suspicion practitioners may feel of being ridiculed and judged. Other areas for discussion could examine, how do we understand the complexity of the phenomenon in terms of evidence-based practice? And how can we measure something that is unmeasurable, yet offers unique opportunities for personal growth, resilience, and a greater sense of wholeness for use of self in practice?

As a fellow traveller working in the depths of engagement, I feel the way forward also requires bravery and courage on our part as practitioners; to be proactive and invite dialogue and discussion on all levels. This could be multi-layered through our membership of professional organisations and associations, in our workplaces, and in our supervision. This would allow us to feel supported and understood, and more able to talk freely about such a major, but hidden, area of our work, that in terms of continuing professional development and commitments to our clients is necessary.

7.7 Concluding Thoughts.

My findings suggest that the counselling profession needs to increase its awareness of the phenomenon in all its entirety, so that practitioners feel comfortable discussing their experiences and different discourses they attribute to the phenomenon. Inviting more research in the areas of supervisor/supervisee experiences of the phenomenon would also encourage counsellors and supervisors to come forward and share their experiences. Sending such a message, would highlight that these experiences are not viewed as unethical, as some may feel, but profoundly the catalyst for healing, when working in deep engagement in the phenomenon.

For the therapist who comes to rely on the use of self, spiritually and neurologically, when experiencing the phenomenon, boundary management may increasingly come to mean a reliance on internalised and intuitive holding structures. Not only knowing oneself but what one is capable of containing and sustaining. Far from being unprofessional and unethical, relaxations and flexible boundary management in the depths of engagement, may promote therapeutic mutuality, and facilitate development and growth in both client and therapist. Moreover, the practitioner has to be able to meet the client in the depths of engagement and not act purely on the basis of his or her own needs or desires, rather the client's best interests.

In this research study, participants describe their experience as, the self opened up to be enriched, stronger and at peace, which leads to a unified wholeness where healing can take place. All participants reflected shifts in their personal and professional growth and development, which resulted in them feeling more resourced. Another important finding is that as a consequence of working in the phenomenon, participants became more resilient. Vanistendael (2008) points to resilience becoming the capacity of an individual to grow and develop in the face of difficult circumstances and transform a negative event into an element of growth. It could be said in this research study far from participants being narcissistic in nature; altruistically practitioners risked themselves to develop their own resilience, in service to the client. I contemplate is it not an ethical imperative, and an essential part of our professional identities, to enhance our development for those we serve?

As I summarise the many aspects of participants' experiences, as they searched for meaning in the phenomenon, and moved beyond previous understandings, the sense and magnitude of their contribution is evident. I quote Van-Deurzen Smith (1997) who in my view, conceptualises the journey participants encountered as being part of this study.

"Our…. journey requires us to be touched and shaken by what we find on the way and not to be afraid to discover our own limitations….., uncertainties and doubts. It is only with such an attitude of openness and wonder that we can encounter the impenetrable everyday mysteries of our world".

(Van- Deurzen Smith, 1997:5).

Through all this data it remains clear that the phenomenon is multi-faceted, multi-layered, trans-theoretical and defies any attempted to completely articulate it through interpretation. Maybe we are expecting too much to define it and should honour that in the invisible there is learning to be made. It also seems that to work in, explore, and try and make sense of the phenomenon, and all its complexities, requires us as practitioners, to work with our own vulnerability, take risks, requiring bravery and courage, that challenges us on many levels.

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APPENDIX 1.

Participant Information Sheet.

MANCHESTER
1824

The University
of Manchester

Title of Research

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study as part of a doctoral study that aims to explore how counsellors from differing orientations perceive the 'depths of engagement' within the therapeutic process.

A substantial body of evidence suggests that the quality of the therapeutic relationship is one of the key factors in determining a positive outcome. Profound feelings of 'connectedness' and 'moments of meeting', are thought to be at the heart of good therapeutic practice. Yet most counselling orientations label such experiences differently and their descriptions vary. This project looks to explore the ways in which therapists comment on this occurring and the ways in which it manifests itself in the counselling relationship within different orientations. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

Joan Margaret Pye-Counselling Doctoral Student

Title of the Research

How counsellors from differing orientations perceive 'depths of engagement' within the therapeutic process.

What is the aim of the research?

To collect data on the following;

   a) What are the counsellor's views of the depths of engagement within therapeutic work?
   b) How do counsellors see these 'depths of engagement' as influencing the quality and healing taking place in the counselling session.

Why have I been chosen?

Because you are a seasoned practitioner reflecting and practicing in an in depth way as you continue your Doctorate studies.

1

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

Attend a 30-40 minute semi structured interview giving responses and feedback to 15 questions relating to 'depths of engagement' in the counselling relationship. You will also be asked to confirm accuracy of transcribed data. You can withdraw from the research process at any time should you wish to do so. The work undertaken adheres to the BACP code of ethical practice.

What happens to the data collected?

Data will be transcribed and then analysed via Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, descriptively, linguistically and conceptually, with subsequent themes emerging from data translated. Full anonymity will be given and any verbatim extracts used for publication will be from reflections on practice and therefore afford full anonymity given to the counselling client.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Recorded data will be translated on to computer and kept locked away in a cupboard in my private office at home, which is also locked. After the thesis is approved all recorded material will be destroyed.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

You are free to choose to withdraw from the research process at any time.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

No payment will be given for participating in the research. .

What is the duration of the research?

The interview will last approximately of 30/40 minutes duration. 2 weeks later it is asked that the participant reads through the transcribed recorded material to confirm its accuracy.

Where will the research be conducted?

The University of Manchester.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

Yes.

Criminal Records Check (if applicable)

Interviewer CRB cleared

2

Contact for further information

Joan Margaret Pye, Counselling Dept, School of Education, Manchester University.

Supervisor: Dr Clare Lennie 0161 275 8627

What if something goes wrong?

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093

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APPENDIX 2

The University of Manchester

MANCHESTER

Study Title

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio/video-recorded

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes

6. I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers

5. I agree to my GP being informed of my participation in the study

6. I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers

7. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant	Date	Signature

Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

4

APPENDIX 3

Pen Portrait of the Six Participants Interviewed for this Research Study.

Louise.

Louise is a psychotherapist and supervisor who originally trained in the humanistic approach and some C.B.T. She now views herself as integrative. Louise works independently in the private sector.

Brian.

Brian describes himself as leaning towards a Person Centred Modality, although his background is C.B.T. He works pastorally as a counsellor in an institutional setting.

Gerry.

Gerry comes from a psychology background and is a trained integrative therapist who has worked in the voluntary and private sector.

James.

James considers himself to be an integrative therapist. Initially he trained with an Egan approach in solution- focussed therapy. He later incorporated other approaches to his work such as psychodynamic, person centred, existential and gestalt therapies. James is both a qualified therapist, hypnotherapist, and supervisor, working in private practice.

Rachel.

Rachel describes herself as a person centred therapist but not a purist. She has worked for organisations in the private sector but is now in private practice as a therapist and supervisor.

<u>Mike.</u>

Mike describes himself as an integrative therapist with his orientation as quite strongly psychodynamic and psychoanalytic. Mike has worked in both voluntary and private sectors.

APPENDX 4

Interview Questions.

1) Please could you state your therapeutic orientation?

2) How have you experienced working at deep engagement as a therapist?

3) Do any metaphors come to mind to illustrate this?

4) How do you understand such a phenomenon and how would you describe it?

5) Has there been any impact for you when working at this depth?

6) Do you view working at this depth as beneficial or challenging in any way and why?

7) Have clients commented on such a depth of engagement in therapy and how has this affected your understanding of the phenomenon?

8) Does a depth of engagement in therapy, in your view, have any connections to the therapeutic outcome?

9) How soon does this depth of engagement happen in a session and how long can it last?

10) Would you say there are any varying dimensions within the depths of engagement?

11) How did you feel at the end of the session?

12) Do you view your therapeutic orientation as facilitative to working at this depth?

13) Would you say that the depths of engagement in therapy depend more on the person of the therapist than the approach with which they identify?

14) Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX 5.

Working with a Transcript- Identifying Initial Themes.

Illustration of some of the stages of Brian.

Initial Exploratory Comments & Free Coding	R (Researcher) B (Brian)	Identifying Initial Themes
	R. So just going back to the question what you are saying is that, that has impacted on your personal growth as a therapist.	
Determined & challenging	B. It has yes ….. and it's made me more determined as a therapist and made me a better therapist because I have had to draw on	Personal growth & Development
Drawing on new sources	sources I didn't know that I had and I had to dig deep to match them because they were coming with stuff and I wouldn't want to be blasé I couldn't just	
Recognition and awareness that he couldn't just go through the motions	go through the motions and if I didn't meet it like it would have just evaporated so it's certainly not the intention but they would draw me out and stretch me as a clinician with no intention of doing because they wouldn't know how to.	Needing to match

(Evaporated).	R. and it sounds like that meeting is there but you really had to reach and grasp for it.	
Stretched to go to next Levels. Impact?	B. You've got to match it to, keep it, then it goes to the next level.	Working at different Levels
	R. And that matching like you said earlier also impacts on yourself in terms of going that bit higher.	
Working at optimal levels Stretching self. Had to step up to the mark	B. or dig that bit deeper because you have the wherewithal so to interconnect you have to bring that stuff to the	Connection/encounter
New thinking/awareness Stimulated/interested No choice? Responsibility	table. I've never thought of it like that and It's interesting to me and it absolutely rings true and that's exactly what's gone on.	Questioning Growth and Development as a Professional. Challenging

APPENDIX 6.

Sub-ordinate Themes	Contributors	Themes
Difficult to Articulate	L2, B36. L20, B35, G1, R1, M8, M28. J5 G17, R1 L20, G16, M9, M21	Words aren't worthy Hard to describe it. No language for it. An experience beyond words.
Levels of Dimensions	B34. B35, B36. L21, G6, G12, R21, M16 L10, L20, B11, B34. B29, G1 G1, G13, R13, M8, M11	A realm A numinous Levels/scale to it. Different plane/Dimension. Deeper & Deeper continuum.
Timelessness	B25, G1 R20, M4, B11, J6, R3/4, R13 L10, L20,, B29, M8 B11, G4 B33, J2	Takes you somewhere. Loose sense of time. Distorts time. Time flies. Time goes at a different pace
Can't be measured	B36, J5, R31 B19	No words or statistics for it. Unable to capture it thoroughly.

APPENDIX 7.

Super-ordinate Theme	Contributors	Sub-ordinate Themes
The Indefinable	L2, B36, L20, B35, G1, R1, M8, M28, J5, G17, R1, L20, G16, M9, M21	Difficult to articulate
	B34, B35, B36, L21, G6, G12, R21, M16, L10, L20, B11, B34, B29, G1, G13, R13, M8, M11	Multi-layered dimensions
	B25, G1, R20, M4, B11, J6, R3/4, R13, L10, L20, B29, M8, B11, G4, B33, J2	Timelessness
	B36, J5, R31, B19	Immeasurable

APPENDIX 8

Professional Code for Ethical Practice;

Outlined by Willig (2009:19).

1) <u>Informed consent.</u> The researcher should ensure that the participants are fully informed about the research procedure and give their consent to participate in the research before data collection takes place.

2) <u>No deception</u>. Deception of participants should be avoided altogether. The only justification for deception is when there is no other way to answer the research question and the potential benefit of the research far exceeds any risk to the participants.

3) <u>Right to withdraw</u>. The researcher should ensure that the participants feel free to withdraw from participation in the study without fear of being penalized.

4) <u>Debriefing.</u> The researcher should ensure that, after data collection, participants are informed about the full aims of the research. Ideally, they should also have access to any publications arising from the study they took part in.

5) <u>Confidentiality.</u> The researcher should maintain complete confidentiality regarding any information about participants acquired during the research process.

   To summarise, researchers should protect their participants from any harm or loss and they should aim to preserve their psychological well-being and dignity at all times

List of Tables.

Table 1

An overview of Super-ordinate themes & Sub-ordinate themes.

Super-ordinate theme	Contributors	Sub-ordinate theme
The Indefinable	**Louise, Brian, Gerry, Rachel, Mike & James**	**Difficulty in and resistance to articulating**
	Louise, Brian, Gerry, Rachel, Mike & James	**Multi-dimensional**
	James, Rachel & Brian	**Immeasurable**
Spiritual in nature	**James, Rachel, Gerry, Louise, Brian**	**Influence of souls meeting**
	Rachel, Brian, Louise & Mike	**Transformative**
Levels of encounter	**Rachel, Brian, James & Mike**	**Altered states of consciousness**
	Brian, James, Louise & Gerry	**Mutual immersion**
	Gerry, Louise, James, Brian & Rachel	**Matching**
	Gerry, Louise, Brian, Rachel, James, Mike	**Changes in vibrations and energy**
Dissolution of Boundaries	**Gerry, James, Rachel, Louise, Brian**	**Merging**
	Gerry, Louise, Brian, Rachel	**Letting go**
	Gerry, Rachel, Mike, James, Brian & Louise	**Timelessness**
Personally challenging	**Louise, Gerry, Rachel & Brian**	**Loss of self**
	Louise, Gerry, Rachel,	**Feeling vulnerable**
	Rachel, Louise & Gerry	**Overwhelming impact**
Nourishing of the self	**Brian, Louise, James & Gerry**	**Meeting personal needs and wants**
	James, Rachel, Brain & Louise	**Facilitates personal growth**
	Gerry, Mike, Brian, Louise & Rachel	**A sense of privilege**
Professional questioning	**Brian, James, Rachel & Louise**	**Supervision**
	Rachel & Louise	**Fear of being judged**
	Brian, James, Louise, Gerry & Mike & Rachel	**The 'person' of the counsellor**
	Brian, James, Gerry, Rachel, Mike & Louise	**Training**

Table 2.

Super-ordinate theme-The Indefinable.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
The Indefinable	Difficulty and Resistance to Articulate	All	L2(38), B36(824), L20(533), L20(550), B35(799), G1(10), R1(14) R1(17), M8(195), M28(705), J5(111), G17(396), R1(14), L20(550), G16(391), M9(204), M21(530)
	Multi-dimensional	All	B34(763), B35(790), L21(567), G12(287), R21(523) L10(256) L20(545), B11(250) B34(763), B29(646), G1(5), G13(305), M11(273), J1(21) J2(45), B37(838)
	Immeasurable	James Rachel Brian	J5(127), R31(740), B19(420)

Table 3.

Super-ordinate theme-Spiritual in Nature.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Spiritual in nature	Influence of souls Meeting	James Rachel Louise Brian	J2(47),L2(39),R8(185), J5(125),J7(196)R18(445), L15(402),J1(20),L23(628), B35(798)B36(810),R24(587), R13(327), R5(111), R8(185)
	Transformative	Rachel Brian Louise Mike	R5(115), B8(182), L15(416) R11(274)L7(190)L11(307) M13(314)

Table 4.

Super-ordinate theme: Levels of Encounter.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Levels of Encounter	Altered states of Consciousness	Rachel Brian James Mike Gerry	R11(277), B12(278), J2(53) J3(59), J6(162), M6(137) G3(56)
	Mutual Immersion	Brian James Louise Gerry	B30(684), J1(16), L7(182) G3(56) B33 (739)
	Matching	Gerry Louise James Brian Rachel	G2(46), L3(72), L22(591) L24(669), J7(177), B18(415) B19(428), R21(509),L24(664)
	Changes in energy And vibrations	All	G11(270), G12(271), L21(581) B28(631), B32(733), R21(509) J8(219), M14(348), B33(742) G13(303)G13(304)

Table 5.

Super-ordinate theme: Dissolution of Boundaries.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Dissolution of boundaries	Merging	Gerry James Rachel Louise Brian Mike	G1(12), G13(303), J1(16) R17(426), L7(191), L18(479) B7(141), J6(158), G7(157) L23(629), L24(653) L16(444), G1(14), G13(302), G16 (392), L17(470), G2(32) L8(220), J6(162), M16(397)
	Letting go	Gerry Louise Brian Rachel	G13(320), L15(404), B13(294) G5(99), R22(538), L14(381) L25(691)
	Timelessness	All	R20(485), M4(101), J6(161) R3(54), R4(97), R13(329), L10(257), L20(556), B29(652), M8(181), B11(243) G4(81), B33(749), J2(44)

Table 6.

Super-ordinate theme-Personally Challenging.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Personally challenging	Loss of self	Louise Gerry Rachel	L25(691), G5(99), R2(41) R27(659)
	Feeling vulnerable	Louise Gerry Rachel	L15(397), G9(210), G10(226) G11(255), R11(280), G4(94) L17(473), L5(136), L8(209) R16(394), G7(161), L3(81) L6(156)
	Overwhelming impact	Rachel Louise Gerry	R20(500), L26(705), R11(276) L17(473), L18(486), G11(280) L15(413), L11(287)

Table 7.

Super-ordinate theme: Nourishing of the Self.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Nourishing of the self	Meeting personal needs and wants	Brian Louise James Gerry Rachel	B27(616), B38(852), L3(57) J3(69), G8(184), B10(216) J11(291), R15(362), L7(190)
	Facilitates personal Growth	James Rachel Brian Louise	J3(72), R13(315), R15(363) B16(359), B18(412), B19(422) L15(395)
	A sense of privilege	Gerry Mike Brian Rachel Louise	G13(318), M21(525), B38(856), L29(788), B7(160) B11(234), B15(348), R24(585) L15(415), B10(214)

Table 8.

Super-ordinate theme: Professional Questioning.

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate theme	Contributors	Page and line reference
Professional Questioning	Supervision	Brian James Rachel Louise	B42(950),J11(282),R8(198) R11(255), R29(703), L27(745)
	Fear of being judged	Rachel Louise	R27(672), L18(500)
	The 'Person' of the Counsellor	All	B39(885), J10(263), J10(264) L27(727), G14(328), R27(662) M22(559), G15(344),
	Training	All	B40(913), J9(246), G15(354) L27(755), R29(688), M24(609) M24(610), M26(647) L28(770), R28(684), M25(620) M26(657)