

INTO THE INTANGIBLE

An Exploration of Gravity Dream Motifs among Psychotherapists

GUIDED BY VAN MANEN'S 'PHENOMENOLOGY OF PRACTICE'



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Suspended and Dreaming by Jude Griebel

Flying Inside Your Own Body

*Your lungs fill & spread themselves,
wings of pink blood, and your bones
empty themselves and become hollow.
When you breathe in you'll lift like a balloon
and your heart is light too & huge,
beating with pure joy, pure helium.
The sun's white winds blow through you,
there's nothing above you,
you see the earth now as an oval jewel,
radiant & seablue with love.
It's only in dreams you can do this.
Waking, your heart is a shaken fist,
a fine dust clogs the air you breathe in
the sun's a hot copper weight pressing straight
down on the thick pink rind of your skull.
It's always the moment just before gunshot.
You try & try to rise but you cannot*

By Margaret Atwood (2019)

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my husband, my fellow gravity dreamer, who always believed that this incredible experience had to have meaning. Without him, I would never have had the strength or determination to carry on.

I would also like to thank my participants, who also believed enough in this intangible topic to give up their time for me.

Abstract

This study explores seven therapists' phenomenological experiences of the gravity dream motif, as well as their lived experiences at the times they had these dreams and the impact the dream sequences had on their lives and practices. The 'Phenomenology of Practice,' as described by Van Manen was used to guide the methodology.

Three final thematic aspects were established through the interviews. The first was essential to the experience of the gravity dream: *The necessary dream, the changing motif and the journey of the developing self*. This theme highlighted the fact that the dream served a purpose in some way. The motif changed alongside the developing self, particularly through the search for a sense of authenticity and identity. Two further themes were essential to the interview process, the first of which was: *An emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance*. All the participants derived new understandings of their dreams through the use of metaphor, life parallels and their felt sense of their dreams. The final theme: *The therapy space - reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream self*, materialised through the interview process. The invitation to talk about an intangible subject, the reflective distance from the dream space and then the phenomenological interview itself, all enabled the participants to reconnect with their dream selves. They were also able to retrieve new awarenesses and revive their interest in working with dreams. In addition, the study also discovered that the seven participants were employing a reductive way of working with dreams and it calls for an enhancement of dream training, with more attention paid to the value of working with dreams in therapy. Finally, it suggests greater attention should be paid to the significance of a dream motif.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

'I fly in my dreams, I know it is my privilege, I do not recall a single situation when I was unable to fly. To execute every sort of curve and angle with a light impulse, a flying mathematics – that is so distinct that it has permanently suffused my basic sense of happiness.' Friedrich Nietzsche (unpublished fragments relating to Fall 1881).

The night before I began my doctorate, I had a really vivid dream. I was a tiny, insignificant little person in a foreign land of giants. I was in the kitchen of a large, aggressive male giant and was hiding behind a big green pepper pot. At some point in the dream, the giant noticed me, and I was filled with absolute terror as he swept his arms towards me in an attempt to squash me like a fly. I flew, fast and high, well above his head, around the kitchen and then out through a window, into a beautiful giant land.

The next day I spent some time reflecting on the dream's metaphors, trying to make sense of what they meant. I realized that I did indeed feel small and insignificant as I embarked on my academic adventure. The giant was perhaps a metaphor for the doctorate, which felt overwhelming, impossibly big and incredibly foreign. However, what interested me most was my response to that scary, hulking, hurdle. I had the ability to fly. And that flight had been spectacular: I was almost rocket-like and incredibly competent at negotiating the various items littering the kitchen. The dream had left me with a sense of intense thrill and excitement. I had awoken feeling like the victor. I had not only escaped the giant, but I had also beaten it!

The following day, as I sat in a sofa-strewn room in Metanoia, discussing potential doctoral subjects with my peers, I couldn't help reflecting on the flying experience I had had the previous night. I was struck by how my ability to fly somehow enabled me to feel less overwhelmed by what I knew lay ahead. It was at this point that I began to feel a sense of

'wonder', something van Manen says a good phenomenological study should start with (van Manen, 1990). It wasn't 'wonder' in the sense of 'amazement' or 'awe'. Rather, I felt something deep stirring within me, some semblance of the beginning of a very profound question that I had yet to find. As van Manen puts it:

the wonder of that thing takes us in and renders us momentarily speechless... from this moment of wonder, a question may emerge that addresses us and that is addressed by us. It should animate one's questioning of the meaning of some aspect of the lived experience, It also should challenge the researcher to write in such a way that the reader of the phenomenological text is similarly stirred to the same sense of wondering attentiveness to the topic under investigation (van Manen, 2002).

When I mentioned my dream idea on the first day of my course, I came across three other gravity dreamers in the cohort. I had happened upon something I wanted to understand further -- and that I believed I was not alone in experiencing.

As I began to speak to colleagues about my doctoral interest, I found their responses were polarised. There were the avid gravity dreamers, who could not believe this area is still only rarely explored within the psychotherapy tradition. But there were also those who raised an eyebrow, unaware of the existence of the phenomenon.

Gravity dreams are described as dreams in which we fly or fall or experience some sense of changing gravity (tsunami dreams, for instance, have also been described as gravity dreams). The chances are that you have had one of these dreams. Flying and falling dreams have been listed amongst the most common dreams (Maggiolini, Persico & Crippa, 2007), they are estimated to constitute between 65 per cent and 80 per cent of all examined dreams. Falling

dreams are more common, having a prevalence of 73.8 per cent, while flying or soaring dreams are estimated to occur at a rate of 48.3 per cent (Saul & Curtis, 1967).

This final study, along with my Practice Evaluation Project (PEP), have emerged from my own profound phenomenological experience of gravity dreaming. This began at a time in my life when I was experiencing substantial religious, physical and psychological constraints. I believe that if it were not for my ability to fly in my childhood dreams, I might not have psychically survived. These dreams, however, remained buried beneath a fear that these were experiences that confirmed I wasn't normal.

As a psychotherapist I was heartened by hearing my clients' stories of gravity dreams and this fuelled my interest in studying them further. As a phenomenologist I was aware that my experiences might also be similar to the experiences of others.

1.1 Myself in relation to the research

The following is an extract describing my personal experience of gravity dreaming. It was written prior to this study.

I am young. I am so pleased to be asleep and I know that I am within a dream. My ability to fly is laboured. It feels so similar to my school swimming lessons, where I have to do breaststroke. I pull my hands towards myself and arc my arms in circular movements. It is a struggle to get off the ground. I hover literally a few inches above my bedroom carpet. As I descend the stairs, I can hear Mum and Dad arguing in the kitchen. The white Labrador dog hairs that are matted through our paisley, burgundy carpet on the stairs fascinate me. I don't seem to have noticed them before. Mum really should Hoover. I enter the sitting room. I do not go into the kitchen where the shouting is

coming from. I assume they would see me, and I would get into trouble. I find myself hovering behind Mum's salmon coloured armchair. There I find the hairclip that I have been looking all day for.

The next morning, I retrace my steps and retrieve the hair clip from behind the chair. I know that I found it whilst flying. I have no idea how I am able to do this.

Some nights later I find myself hovering over the lawn outside. I have to work so hard to stay buoyant. I am puffing with exertion. I don't feel happy or sad, I just feel as if I am escaping. I have to be in bed, asleep before Dad comes home, so that we are not in the way. However, when I am asleep, I am no longer confined to my bed, listlessly listening to the sounds of long summer evenings drifting into my room, I am at one with the dusk. I notice how long the grass has become. I notice the life that lives within it. I still haven't managed to lift myself high enough above the ground. I still feel as if every movement is a hard struggle, and I don't know what is propelling me to keep it up.

I am eleven. I can now fly with ease. I spend a lot of time either on the top of the barn in the next field or on the top of the roof of my house. I am not affected by the weather or the cold. Tonight, I notice the stars. The sky is so brilliantly lit that I am in utter awe. I feel part of the universe. If I could fly up into the stars, I know that I would be safe, that in some way I am the stars, and they are me. I feel a huge sense of love. This is something that I only feel here.

When I am awake there is little love. There are just rules, orders and criticisms. My mother suffers from depression and my father is bipolar. They are very, very religious. I go to church three times every Sunday. I am a good girl at the Catholic girls' school I

attend. Well, I try to be. I am scared of the nuns and bullied by a girl who tells me her Dad has sex with her. I spend a lot of time in the school sick bay with very bad stomach-ache.

Tonight, I find myself in a house that I do not know. I stand at the large sitting room window and watch the sea crash on the shore below. I study the layout of the building, recognising that the kitchen will be a little small for Mum to cook in, and that I want to sleep in the top bunk of the children's bedroom at the back of the house.

On the way to our holiday home in Scotland, as we are stuffed into the car, with pillows and walking boots filling the back seat, I tell Mum of the house we are going to and that I want the top bunk. I tell her I would like her to take the room next to it, as I don't want to sleep near Uncle Peter. She humours me, I think. When we arrive, she looks at me squarely and simply asks 'How did you know?'

I am 13. I am in a dream. The landscape is different. It is far brighter, almost surreal. It is not like this world. I notice the differences. It is more like a scene from an American sit-com. The houses are in cul-de-sacs. They all look very similar, but brightly coloured. The earth begins to shake, and I am scared. I run out of the house that I am in and I become aware of a lack of gravity. I am lifting off the ground. Other people run from their homes and also begin to lift off the ground. We start shouting to each other. There is a sense of enormous urgency. If we don't grab onto those we love, they will be lost into space. I manage to grab onto my family, and we join with our neighbours. I notice the people I know and care for and we all exert ourselves to join hands with them. I take my time to look around me at the enormous circle of people clutching each other's hands. I notice also, with great sadness, the people who no one grabs. I understand

that they have no one to love them, that people are quite deliberately deciding whom they want to save and who is being rejected. The earth continues to vibrate beneath us. Humans, animals, cars are all thrown from its surface. A bright light comes from the heavens and gravity is pulled back towards the earth. Those that have created links and bonds with others gradually begin to lower to earth. The unloved have flown into space. I feel an immense love for my neighbours, the smiling faces of those around me, aware that judgment has been made. With the light descends what I believe to be an omnipotent God. He tells us that we have found love. He tells us that this is the meaning of life, to forge connection, forgiveness and love. I am aware I have been chosen.

This dream gave me great relief. It was as if it didn't matter that I was not overtly loved in my family home; the universe and an omnipotent presence loved me. I believe this was pivotal to my psychic survival.

1.1.1 Context: aspects of my childhood

My days were spent at a strict Catholic girls' school and I was expected to attend church four times a week. At home and at church I had been indoctrinated to believe that I was a sinner, that there was a fiery furnace of hell and that the world had been created in seven days. However, at school I learnt about Darwin and evolution. I remember telling my mother that I believed the world had formed over many, many years, and that we knew about fossils and the remains of our ape ancestors. I was smacked and sent to bed. My cognitive dissonance was profound.

At home, life was strict, with many rules about what we could and couldn't eat. There was no television as it was 'of the devil'. When my friends chatted about characters and plots in their

favourite TV programmes, I could never join in. I was not allowed to shave my legs, pierce my ears or go to parties. Bedtime was early. Music was rationed according to the level of depression in the house. My mother was volatile, and my father was either manic or locked away in his office.

My nocturnal experiences helped keep me buoyant. They enabled me to push past the many boundaries that were placed on my life. At night, I was powerful; I had agency; I could go where I wanted.

1.1.2 Thinking about my dreams

Reading through my accounts of my dream experiences, I wonder whether some of my earlier ones were out-of-body experiences. Or were they gravity dreams? The sensation of being weightless, powerful and emotionally light was definitely a theme that ran through all of the dreams. I always flew alone, apart from my more transcendental, apocalyptic dream, in which I was weightless, no longer flying with purpose.

In the dream with the giant that I had the night before I commenced the DPsych programme, I was able to do what I needed to do, despite the fact that I was small and insignificant. Not only was I able to survive, I managed to 'beat' the giant/process of the doctorate. I see this as an example of my unconscious belief that I would struggle and that the project was too big. However, some other part of my psyche was challenging the intimidating project head-on and telling me that I could survive. This was the part of me that had always stepped in when I was struggling. Upon waking I felt resilient. All would be okay, even if I was scared.

For many years I never shared my nocturnal experiences. I think this was because, while I felt that they were very normal, I sensed they were not everyone else's normality and that great

effort would be required to describe them. I also sensed that the way in which they were likely to be received could be very shame inducing.

As I fought to bring these experiences into the scientific arena, I felt more shame. Not everyone experiences dreams of this type, and it proved easy for others to take my curiosity and unwittingly squash it, much like the giants in my dream. This, I realise, has been a parallel process.

I realised that the biggest question that I was trying to answer was: what do these dreams say about me? Also, based on my own experiences, I felt it was paramount to ascertain what general assumptions I had regarding gravity dreams.

The fact that, in some way, I felt saved by my experiences sets up my first assumption about other gravity dreamers. My childhood was physically, emotionally and spiritually constrained. Being able to fly free in my nocturnal hours provided me some psychic freedom, as described by Todres (2007). I also felt that my experiences were helping me to work through certain issues, such as the lack of love from my mother. The transcendental dream allowed me to feel loved, even if in real life I was shown very little affection. Was I perhaps not only demonstrating resilience but also sourcing other ways by which my developmental deficits could be met?

I have experienced other interesting dream phenomena, including at least four pre-cognitive dreams. At the age of 11, I dreamt that a neighbour of ours was involved in a car crash (an event that later came to pass). I told my parents about this dream before the crash actually happened. As an adult I have had three pre-cognitive dreams: of a friend getting skin cancer, of a marriage ending, and of my nephew getting meningitis (all three events transpired).

I have also had shared dreams. When we were children, my sister and I regularly had the same dream at the same time. In this shared dream there were two 'Mums': one was a lovely mother while the other was scary and evil. Another such shared dream involved me meeting someone on a bench and having a full conversation with them about their life and other matters. I later found out that the individual involved had had the same dream and the same conversation at the same time.

I have also experienced after-death contact dreams (vivid dreams of dead people who have passed), including ones involving long conversations with my grandfather. Such paranormal experiences may say something about me. Am I open to fantasy, or am I open to experiences we still know so little about? While all the phenomena I have described have been documented and are included in my literature search, they will be unfamiliar to many people. For that reason, I will make a point of asking the participants in my study whether they have had similar experiences.

1.2 Gravity dreams as a psychological tool?

As a therapist, I have always been very curious when clients mention gravity dreams, perhaps because of the significance such dreams have for me. I have understood my dreams to be existential and reparative in nature and have sometimes wondered whether such dreams might constitute a psychological tool that can be expanded upon or explored more closely. Inviting dreamers to recount their dreams in the first person (as described by Marmor, 1996) has allowed my clients to deepen their understanding of their unconscious, developmental concerns and has contributed to their healing process.

My first study helped me to identify that there was a process involved in my gravity dreams, as there was among my participants. In my early years, I was conscious of struggling with my ability to fly and would often wake up exhausted. As I grew older, it was as if I had finally learned a skill that I could practise with ease. It felt as if I were struggling to find the means by which to escape my psychic chains, that I was caught up in a process I had to go through and learn. Flying for me was a learned skill that, as I matured, came to feel as natural as walking.

While therapists know something about personality correlates and gravity dreaming, we have much more still to understand about the experience. Many of my early childhood dreams were lucid: I knew that I was asleep; I knew that I could only do what I was doing when I was asleep, and that it brought me great joy. If this is a skill that can be learned, it might be an extremely powerful resilience tool. Perhaps we could encourage nocturnal gravity dreams through the use of virtual reality. We know that experiences we have during our day are more likely to enter our dream world (Montangero, Ivanyi & de Saint-Hilaire, 2003).

As an Integrative Psychotherapist, I participated in a training workshop at which we were encouraged to describe our dreams in the first person and the present tense - to relate the dream as if it were actually happening. We were asked to concentrate on the most significant aspects of the dream, the imagery and the emotions, and work with them as projected aspects of ourselves. The model we used derived from the Gestalt approach (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951). I was inspired by what I had learned from my own dream the night before and its message has stayed with me to this day. I was fascinated by my mind's ability to work so succinctly with metaphor; my inability, in my dream, to pass through a doorway into a beautiful garden seemed to be my psyche's way of telling me I wasn't living life to the full.

I believe that my gravity dreaming experiences make me more open to discussing existential dream phenomena in the therapy setting. I sense the relief my clients feel when they find me ready to listen – and full of curiosity about their dream experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature review



Friend,

Many and many a dream is mere confusion

A cobweb of no consequence at all.

Two gates for ghostly dreams there are: one gateway

Of honest horn, and one of ivory.

Issuing by the ivory gates are dreams

Of glimmering illusion, fantasies,

But those that come through solid polished horn

May be borne out, if mortals only know them.

Homer (c.9th century BC), The Odyssey, Book XIX

2.1. Search strategy

I conducted a preliminary literature review before establishing my rationale for this study. After deciding upon the title of the research I conducted an extensive, critical literature review of the subject of gravity dreams as discussed in psychotherapeutic, psychological and medical texts. My search used key words including: 'dreams', 'gravity dreams', 'lucid', 'existential', 'phenomenology', 'dreams', 'dreams in psychotherapy', 'dreams and metaphor' and 'embodied dreams'. I referred to various websites, including Mendeley, EBSCOHOST,

Academa.eu, Google-scholar, PubMed, ERIC and the website of Middlesex University library and the Metanoia Institute, to keep abreast of the latest literature.

I am aware that no electronic search is going to be totally comprehensive and that my field of research is extensive and dynamic. I have thus focussed on aspects of dreaming that are relevant to this study.

2.2 Dreams: definitions and perspectives

Dreaming is a major, recurring, non-pathological, modality of consciousness. It is a ubiquitous activity that we engage in for many hours of our day. It is a universal feature of human experience that has fascinated many throughout history.

Dreams have been defined as a 'high frequency cognitive activity' that occurs during sleep and that has distinctive properties (Webb & Cartwright, 1978: p.237). Contrary to the popular belief that our brains actually go offline while we dream, our baseline energy expenditure in the brain is actually higher when dreaming than during ordinary consciousness (Jouvet, 1993), as are our oxygen levels (Swanson, 2003).

Dreams have been described in numerous texts, from the Epic of Gilgamesh to the Iliad and the Bible. They have often been thought to contain messages for the recipients (Brook, 2009). Transcriptions of significant dreams date back to biblical times, when it was thought by the early Judaeo-Christians that God used them to communicate with human beings. Up until roughly the nineteenth century, dreams were considered to belong in the context of spirituality rather than science. Some scholars argue that religion itself has its origins in dreams and our attempts to understand them (Robb, 2018).

Belief in the healing function of dreams goes back to the ancient Greeks, who believed that the appearance of Asklepios, the Greek god of healing, in the dreams of the sick signified an epiphany that provided the potential for healing to occur. Hippocrates himself recognised the divinity of dreams; he regarded the appearance of Asklepios as signifying deliverance from foreboding sickness and plague (Kearney, 2017).

2.3 Modern theories of dreams and dreaming

2.3.1 The interpretation of dreams: Freud and Jung

Freud's famous early 1900s work *The Interpretation of Dreams* was pivotal for psychodynamic practice, setting the scene for the Viennese thinker's theory of the unconscious. He described the dream as 'the royal road to the knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind' (as cited in Lambert, 2018: p.168) and he believed our psyches were in some ways trying to communicate with us through our dreamworld (Freud, 1900). Dreams, for Freud, were like mini-pathological events that occurred a couple of times a night, when a wish arose that might disturb our sleep (Blechner, 2013). This view was revised when scientists found that we dreamt throughout the night (Aserinsky & Kleitman, 1953). Freud proposed that dreams have both surface 'manifest' and hidden 'latent' content; in other words, they attempted to disguise hidden wishes and desires (West, 2011). His view of dreams was that they were largely responsible for protecting sleep by distorting their own unconscious meaning. Freud believed that dream images were not literal translations but were rather figurative units in a rebus (Freud, 1900).

Freud's view that dreams are about wish fulfilment and personal censorship has been criticised as interpretive and reductive in the context of more recent conceptualisations of dreams that are based on empirical research and which I will go on to discuss (Condrau, 1993b).

For Jung, dreams were unveiled, unexplored aspects of ourselves that spoke to us through the language of metaphor. He described them as revealing 'the unvarnished, natural truth' that could help us challenge the limited views we have of ourselves (Jung, 1995: p.31). For Jung the primary function of the dream was that of compensation: keeping a healthy balance between our conscious and unconscious. Jungian analyst Hall tells us that:

Dreams are compensatory in all states of psychological functioning – in ordinary life (where they compensate the individuation process), in psychosis (where they attempt to produce a stable ego), and in neurosis, where they are active in bringing the ego out of a neurotic byway or impasse and into the mainstream of individuation.

(Hall, 1983: p.101)

Jung described dreams as a 'spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious' (Jung, 1933: p, 31). He also argued for a divine presence in dreams, believing that in their dream sleep humans are immune to psychic noise. For Jung, dreams were a multifaceted phenomenon reflecting both individual and universal influences (Hill et al., 2013).

Jung believed that dreams revealed aspects of the unconscious, and that parts of one's personality could individuate through the transcendent function (Roesler, 2018). Jung also discussed archetypal dreams, which are distinguished by imagery of an impersonal nature.

These dreams occur at a time of emotional crisis, with the motifs themselves common to myths and religions across the world (Sharp, 1998).

Jung regarded 'big' or numinous dreams as a means of tapping into what he called 'the collective unconscious'. This inborn, psychically shared aspect of human unconsciousness is constructed through universal symbols and instincts that predate time and history (Robb, 2018). He also described the presence of universal archetypes in our dreams, such as shadow, persona, trickster, anima/animus and self. These dreams facilitate personal transformation (Bulkeley, 2016).

Working in the Jungian tradition, the analyst Marie-Louise Franz argued that dreams might be expressive of an autonomous dynamic healing of the psyche:

As is generally known, we cannot manipulate dreams: they are, as it were, the voice of nature within us. They show us therefore the manner in which nature, through dreams, prepares us for death. (as cited in Kearney, 2017: p.139)

Jung proposed that the first step of working with a dream was to clarify the dream in its relationship with conscious life through free association, and then ascertain what the image meant to the dreamer (Bontempo e Silva & Sandström, 2020). The goal of Jungian analysis is thus 'the fruit of joint reflection' in which one may use imagination in the interpretation of dreams, from drawing, dancing or acting out the dream to providing a new ending to the dream (Sharp, 1998: p.117).

2.3.2 Function-related dream theories

In contemporary theories of dreaming it is widely accepted that dreams contain meaning that is closely related to the waking life of the dreamer and that the dream serves some function (Roesler, 2018).

According to those who subscribe to threat stimulation theory, dreaming serves an evolutionary function: it helps us to deal with threat in our waking life (Zadra, Desjardins & Marcotte, 2006). For the Finnish philosopher Antti Revonsuo, it is difficult to believe that humans would enter the highly hazardous state of dreaming without it having an evolutionary adaptive function, one that enhances survival and promotes reproduction (Revonsuo, 2000). Other evolutionary purposes could involve social simulation (Revonsuo, Tuominen & Valli, 2016), while nightmares may represent the fear of extinction (Nielsen & Levin, 2007).

Dreams are also thought to serve more physiological functions, such as maintaining sleep or discharging energy from the brain (Hill et al., 2013). Another theory of dreaming views the process as facilitating the propagation of our species and solving problems faced by our evolutionary ancestors (Cosmides & Tooby, 2010). Other concepts involve our dreams' role in formulating 'extra-linguistic thoughts' that cannot be assimilated in waking thinking (Blechner, 1998) and the necessity of the dream for mood regulation (Kramer, 1993).

McNamara argues that dreams serve a purpose in social bonding by reactivating the systems infants use to attach to the primary caregiver, and that dream content reflects bonding themes (1996). McNamara et al. found that insecurely attached participants were more likely to report having a dream frequently, and to report more intense images (2001). They suggest that

dreaming might shape daytime behaviours via the processing of persistent attachment-related themes that occur in dreams.

Adopting a cognitive theoretical approach, Hall described dreams as the embodiment of our thoughts and as the medium by which cognitive thoughts could be transformed into perception (1953). He saw dreams as providing material for the analysis of our conceptual systems as they portrayed our prototypic conceptions.

The neuro-structural model of dreaming states that dreams are actively generated by the neural circuitry that connects the mesolimbic-dopaminergic pathways, the ventromedial-orbitofrontal cortex and the inferomedial-temporal-limbic pathway as a consequence of widespread disengagement of the prefrontal convexity (Yu, 2018). However, such insights into the physical mechanisms involved in dreaming offer few clues as to their possible functions.

The continuity hypothesis states that dreams reflect our waking concerns (Hall & Nordby, 1972), waking thoughts (Strauch & Meier, 1996) or waking life experiences (Schredl & Hofmann, 2003). The fact that many of our waking concerns are carried into our dream world is not really contested, although there is much hypothesising about how we can dream about things we may not have experienced in our waking world (flying being one example) (Hobson & Schredl, 2011). References to the symbiosis between waking and dream concerns are also made by Van Deurzen (2012) who argues that dreams are inhabited by the same intentions and worries as our actual world.

Wright and Koulack (1987), in their Disruption-Avoidance-Adaption Model, argue that incorporation (disruption), non-incorporation (avoidance), and adaption of emotions are all points along a dream adaption continuum. A stressor occurs during our lived experience, which

then disrupts sleep and is incorporated into our dreams. The dream's purpose is to re-find emotional homeostasis. The disruption/incorporation and avoidance/non-incorporation will oscillate along the dream material until it has been emotionally mastered.

Hartmann (2011) argues that dreams facilitate our emotional processing and are a hyper-connective form of normal mental functioning. In dreams, connections are made more easily than when we are awake. These connections are made by the emotions of the dreamer, which form a language that is mainly pictorial in character. Dreams are seen to serve the function of making connections that are guided by emotion; they take in new experiences and weave them into our memory function, building and rebuilding our emotional memory system (Hartmann, 2011). Studies supporting the function of memory consolidation through dreaming also highlight functional aspects of dreaming (Wamsley & Stickgold, 2019). Rather than being a passive experience, dreaming is seen as active, something that involves a creative replay of global units from our past experiences (Foulkes, 1982).

There is evidence to support the importance of sleep and dreaming to emotional functioning in waking life (Malinowski and Horton, 2015). Some contemporary dream theorists suggest that dreaming aids the process of emotional adaptation (Scott, 1994; Hartmann, 1998; Levin & Nielsen, 2007). Recent research indicates that some dreaming involves rational thinking and reflective awareness and that our dream content changes and responds according to trauma we may experience (Bulkeley & Kahan, 2008). Dreams involving analytical and executive processes have been termed 'higher-order' (Wolman & Kozmová, 2007).

Levin and Nielsen (2007) argue that the principal purpose of the dream is to regulate fear. They identify three stages to the dream process: memory-element activation, memory

element recombination (in which the memory elements are re-organised to form the dream narrative), and emotional expression (which they believe mostly involves fear).

Neuroscientist Hoel (Hoel, 2020), hypothesises that the purpose dreams is to improve our generalisation and performance of tasks in waking life, meaning that skills such as juggling can be learned in our dream sleep. This Hoel tells us ‘takes the phenomenology of dreams seriously, rather than some sort of epiphenomenon or unexplained by-product of some other background process’ (Hoel, 2020: p. 38).

2.3.3 A cognitive-experiential approach

One of the best-researched and empirically-supported models of dream work currently in use is the cognitive-experiential model (Pesant & Zadra, 2004). This model conceptualises dreams as the result of an autonomous process by which our sleeping mind tries to incorporate waking events with cognitive schema from our past history. Dreams are therefore seen as reflecting the concerns of waking life, and the use of dream work in therapy may bring challenging topics into the room – topics that might otherwise lie dormant (Hill et al., 2013).

2.3.4 Theories refuting a meaningful function of dreaming

Although more recent dream theories posit the existence of an emotional or cognitive function to dreaming, this was not the case at the end of the 70s and 80s. Foulkes viewed dreaming as the random activation of semantic and episodic memory during sleep, unlikely to serve any adaptive functions (Foulkes, 1982).

The scientific activation-synthesis theory viewed dreams as interpretations by our forebrains of random activity transmitting from our spinal cord to our cerebellum during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) Sleep (Hobson & McCarley, 1977). Hobson argues that many dreams which

are thought to be meaningful are actually the simple reflection of sleep-related changes in the brain state. This model of dreaming proposes that gravity dreams enable us to reawaken our self as agent and integrate maps of self-representation (Hobson, 2005).

2.3.5 Neuroscience and dreams

For some neuroscientists, dreaming is involved in memory consolidation; it allows emotional content to be processed, transformed and then integrated into a wider memory system (Montangero, Ivanyi & de Saint-Hilaire, 2003). Human dream recall studies also indicate that the contents of dreams are often infused with thematic elements from the previous day's activity, particularly if one has experienced particular stressful or demanding situations (including playing intense computer games) (Stickgold et al., 2000). Quantitative researchers have argued that sleep is beneficial for both memory and emotional consolidation (Malinowski & Horton, 2015).

2.4 Dreams in practice

The models and means of working with dreams are extensive. I could not cover them all in this literature review. A questionnaire sent to 500 members of the Florida Psychological Association to assess how their members worked with dreams demonstrated that most practitioners used Freudian and Gestalt methods. However most respondents also felt that they gained experience on working with dreams through their self-study rather than their training (Keller et al., 1995).

Pervious research indicates that most psychologists who use dream work in their practice consider it to contribute therapy in a significant way, especially if the initiative to do so has come from the client (Lempen & Midgley, 2006). Walker describes dreaming as an overnight

therapy, taking the sting from painful, traumatic events that have occurred during the day (Walker, 2018). Many of the dream techniques reported by therapists are based around psychoanalysis and Gestalt approaches (Keller et al., 1995). Psychotherapists reported listening to the client's dreams and the majority described using more exploration-orientated strategies than problem-solving ones (Hill et al., 2008). Psychoanalytic therapists are reported to use dream work in therapy sessions **more often** than those of different modalities (Schredl et al., 2000).

The use of dream work in practice has been found to be beneficial, with most psychologists considering it to contribute to therapy in a positive and significant way, especially if the initiative to do so has come from the client (Lempen & Midgley, 2006). Walker (2018) describes dreaming as an overnight therapy, a process that removes the sting from painful, traumatic events that have occurred during the day (Walker, 2018). Many of the dream techniques therapists reported using are rooted in psychoanalytic and gestalt approaches (Keller et al., 1995). Psychotherapists reported to listening to the client's dreams, the majority using more exploration-orientated strategies than problem-solving ones (Hill et al., 2008).

A review and synthesis of clinical case reports has found that dream work produces three gains: client insights, increased client involvement in the therapeutic process and a better understanding of the clients dynamics and processes (Oswald, 1963; Weiss, 1964; Kuiken, 1995; Hill, 2004). Although some therapist perceive dream work to be a distraction from more significant lived events (Dimaggio et al., 1997).

Research on 228 practitioners' use of dreams in their private therapeutic practice found that 17 percent of participants used dreams occasionally in therapy, 57 percent reported using dreams moderately, 17 per cent said they made frequent use of dreams during therapy and 9 per cent reported using dreams in almost every session. Psychoanalysts were the most likely to work with dreams, perceiving it as beneficial and basing their dreamwork around Freudian positions. Humanist and cognitive behavioural therapists tended to make greater use of the Jungian approach. There was also a significant correlation between the likelihood that therapists would work with dreams and their personal history of discussing dreams in their own therapy (Schredl et al., 2000).

From an existential therapeutic perspective, dreams are not minor, truncated, spectral reproductions of waking life but rather modes of experience that are autonomous and authentic in their own right (Stern, 1977). Van Deurzen recommends doing a full Structural Existential Analysis (SEA) in order to get a handle on the dream material, the goal being to distil the essential meaning from the reported experience. SEA involves looking at the dream in its physical, social personal and spiritual dimensions in search of existential challenges and quests.

2.4.1 Therapeutic approaches to dream work

The Gestalt approach to understanding dreams is based on the belief that each part of the dream is a projected aspect of the personality. Here, the goal of dream work is to facilitate the client to identify and explore aspects of themselves presented in the dream imagery. For the Gestalt therapist Perls dreams were 'existential messengers'. Perls believed that by taking the client back through the dream in the first person, the individual's authorship of their dream increased, facilitating a deeper understanding of the unconscious (as cited by Yalom, 1980).

Accordingly, gestalt practitioners encourage clients to relate their dreams in the first person and the present tense in order to bring them to life (Mackewn, 2014).

A Jungian approach would be to look at content in relation to the context of their life, using amplifications of the dream image; personal, archetypal and cultural to assist with interpretation (Hall, 1983). The existential-phenomenological approach emphasises emotions of the dream content to allow client to relive the dream in the here and now, suspending all preconceived beliefs or ideas (Boss, M., & Kenny, 1987).

The Cognitive-experiential model relies on joint collaboration between client and therapist and involves three stages: exploration, insight and action, using the acronym DRAW (description, reexperiencing, association, and waking life triggers) to summarise the exploration phase (Hill, 2004).

Dream activities that were endorsed infrequently among psychotherapists are the use of archetypes, interpreting dreams in spiritual terms and helping clients to change their dreams. Conversely approaches that are more regularly employed are: listening to dreams, encouraging dream image associations, collaborating to construct an understanding of the dream meaning, reliving the dream, looking at waking conflicts and looking at dream images as metaphors later on in therapy (Pesant and Zadra, 2004). This study also reported that the sheer number of therapeutic approaches when working with dreams leaves clinicians often feeling overwhelmed and confused.

2.4.2 Recurrent dreams

There is little data on the changes in dream motifs, and no phenomenological studies looking at changes in motifs in dreams. However, some research has explored the content of dreams,

which sheds some light on the concept of a dream motif. Freud himself observed the phenomenon of periodically recurring dreams (Freud, 1900b). Evidence in literature links depression to recurrent dreams (Beck & Ward, 1961) as well as trauma (Ross, 2018). It is believed that recurrent, or repetitive dreams 'repeatedly challenge the dreamer with the vital problems of his life, until these are confronted and solved' (Weiss, 1964: p.23).

Cartwright and Romanek hypothesised that recurrent dreams 'may be important landmarks in the defining of the self developmentally, and their recurrence indicators of issues of competence under review' (Cartwright, 2016: p.176). They later go on to say that the cessation of recurrent dreams may be related to the solution of a conflict. This belief is reiterated by Domhoff (1993), who states that recurrent themes in dreams have functional values, such as serving as an attempt to resolve emotional preoccupations. Jung also considered recurrent dreams to be 'of specific importance for the integration of the (overall) psyche' (cited in Adler, 2017: p.93). The link (or lack thereof) between recurrent dreams and psychological well-being has been proven, with recurrent dreamers describing psychological conflict in their lives (Brown & Donderi, 1986).

Interestingly Brown's study showed that previous recurrent dreamers achieved higher well-being and dream content scores than present-day recurrent dreamers, highlighting the importance of recurrent themes to our mental health. There is also something of interest in dreams that we remember. Why are some remembered so vividly, and others are not?

Hartman tells us that in his experience recurrent dreams are rarely repetitive, there are usually changes in the dreamer's life and emotional state meaning that although they may contain a recurrent theme, they tend to have certain content differences. This may not be the case for

someone suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, who can replay the same dream over and over again (Hartmann, 2011).

A longitudinal study in which the dreams of children ages 3 to 15 years were collected over 5 years in a sleep laboratory, found that the developmental changes that occurred in dream content mirrored children's cognitive and emotional changes in waking life (Bass, 1983). This is perhaps suggestive of the idea of a motif change developing alongside the individual and their lived experiences.

A study by Roesler (2018) talks about repetitive patterns in dreaming, which were seen to be closely linked to the current psychological problems' dreamers were experiencing in their lived world. They also reported changes in the dream series that corresponded with therapeutic change. This is echoed by Cartwright who demonstrated the existence of a change in dream themes as clients go through therapy (Cartwright, 2016).

There is also data to suggest that there is substantial continuity in dream themes over time (Levin, 1990), suggesting that if you are a gravity dreamer, you may have these dreams over a consistent period of time. There is also data to show that these themes can change when clients go through therapy (Cartwright, 2016).

2.5 Existential dream phenomena

2.5.1 Gravity dreams

Flying at Night by Ted Kooser

Above us, stars. Beneath us, constellations.
Five billion miles away, a galaxy dies
like a snowflake falling on water. Below us,
some farmer, feeling the chill of that distant death,

snaps on his yard light, drawing his sheds and barn
back into the little system of his care.
All night, the cities, like shimmering novas,
tug with bright streets at lonely lights like his.

Gravity dreams have been documented throughout history. They appear in art, poetry and literature. The term 'gravity dream' comprises flying dreams as well as dreams that include falling, climbing, descending and floating through air, water, stairs and elevators (Maggiolini, Persico & Crippa, 2007). An unassisted gravity dream is a dream in which we fly or fall without assistance. Dreams of enormous waves are also considered to be gravity dreams. Gravity dreams have often been categorized as typical dreams (Freud, 1900; Ward, Rascoe & Beck, 1961; Hall & Nordby, 1972; Hampton, 1997) but there is still no consensus on the meaning of such dreams (Maggiolini, Persico & Crippa, 2007).

Gravitational dreams have been described as being concerned with the forces of physical reality, reflecting an existential awareness of the dangers posed by these forces and the limitations of our existence. Such dreams have been described as emotional and pivotal, invoking in the dreamer an awareness of life and death and producing significant vertiginous bodily sensations that carry over into waking awareness (Bulkeley, 2016).

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, some European psychologists believed gravitational dreams could be explained as being the internal effects of external causes such as an arm falling from a pillow (Bulkeley, 2016). Freud argued that falling dreams stem from our early childhood memories of being tossed around by an adult (Freud, 1900), and that flying dreams enabled adults to re-experience the childhood pleasure of being swung around in the arms of a grown-up. He also drew a parallel between flying dreams and the pleasure of having an erection (Gutheil, 1951).

Jung, in contrast, believed the flying dream was synonymous with an individual's tendency to overcome difficulties in life (Jung, 1948): that is, to overcome the gravity pulling us down to the ground. He believed in the dream's therapeutic value to help patients overcome their suffering, describing big dreams as one of the ways that individuals could tap into the collective unconscious of the human psyche and encounter universal archetypes, such as the shadow, trickster, anima/animus and self (Bulkeley, 2016).

The prevalence of gravity dreaming in dream studies varies. Saul and Curtis estimated the frequency of falling gravity dreams to be between 65% to 80% of all examined dreams, with falling having a 73.8% prevalence and flying or soaring a 48.3% prevalence (Saul & Curtis, 1967). Griffith, Miyagi and Tago (1958) found similar incidences of falling dreams in college students, with 78.9% reporting them in dream studies. Maggiolini looked at the dream content of 685 individuals, both male and female (aged between 10 and 32) and found that gravity elements comprise a far lower proportion – 38.1% – of recalled dreams, with a suspension element (flying or falling) only being in the content of 23.2% of dreams and floating in water occurring in just 10.2% of dreams. They also found that men were more likely to experience falling content in dreams (Maggiolini et al., 2007: p.7). Nielsen et al. (2003) looked at the dream reports of Canadian students and found falling incidences to occur at 73.8%, flying or soaring to be at about 48.3% and swimming at 34.3%. Regardless of the exact prevalence of the gravity dream, as a phenomenon it is widely recognised in dream journals.

Maggiolini has looked at the emotional content of these dreams, believing falling dreams to be connected with fear and flying dreams to be globally associated with happiness (Maggiolini et al., 2007). Flying dreams have been associated with low neuroticism, openness to experience, boundary thinness, dream recall frequency and playing an instrument (Schredl,

2007). They are also associated with a strong bodily content (Maggiolini et al., 2007), as well as being related to the incidence of creativity (Brink, Solis-Brink & Hunter, 1977). Gutheil, on the other hand, associated falling in dreams to loss of temper, low self-control and falling from a moral standard (Gutheil, 1951). Harris suggested a coincidence between dreams of falling and one's personality traits, including difficulty in expressing defiance, especially in the mother-child relationship, a tendency to naive, uninhibited expression of feeling, and a tendency to use defensiveness as a method of protecting self-esteem (Harris, 1948). He later wrote that mothers of patients with falling dreams had been under-involved with them, intimating a defensive introjection (Harris, 1960). Saul and Curtis believe falling dreams can be associated with the sensation of falling asleep, as a symbolization of the real risk of falling from bed, as a repetition of traumatic experiences of falling, the loss of control, the renouncement of responsibility, or the playing out of life experiences, such as flying in a plane (Saul & Curtis, 1967).

Falling dreams have also been associated with higher neuroticism scores (Schredl, 2011). This reported link to gravity dreams and our emotionality demonstrates a need to validate the experience and understanding of gravity dreams within a psychotherapeutic frame. Hobson hypothesized that the fundamental function of the flying dream is to reawaken our sense of self as an agent, integrating maps of self-representation (Hobson, 1988). I believe that there may be some link between personality correlates and gravity dreaming, however, from a psychotherapeutic perspective, our history forms who we are and who we become and the relationship between our waking and nocturnal worlds may be more intricate than a straightforward correlation would suggest.

Gravity dreaming and lucid dreaming are closely linked. Scientific studies have shown that when we have a lucid dream our brains exhibit high frequency gamma waves, as seen in meditative and hypnotic states (Morley, 2016). This may suggest the possibility that important psychological growth can take place during such dream states.

The phenomenology of gravity dreams remains largely unexplored. Although there are many empirical studies looking at how personality correlates with gravity dreaming (Schredl, 2002, 2007; Schredl & Goritz, 2017), there is little published research into the situated-ness of the gravity dream in the context of the life of the dreamer. There is also no data on how we are influenced or affected by these dream phenomena.

Thus far, there has been little phenomenological exploration of such dreams (Schredl, 2004: p.31). This suggests a gap in the literature when it comes to the lived experience of a gravity dream.

2.5.1 Big dreams

The term 'big dreams' was coined by Jung who used the word 'numinous' to describe important and significant dreams. Hartman has described these dreams as being memorable, in that they are often remembered over time; important, as they are identified by the dreamer and significant and impactful, in that they may lead to a scientific or artistic achievement. He also tells us that positive emotions, such as awe, wonder and mystery are linked to big dreams.

Bulkeley also discusses talks about big dreams (a term used for here gravity dreams), the memory of which does not flee with the dawn:

These unusual dreams possess a special vividness and intensity that makes them difficult if not impossible to forget. They burst across the threshold of waking

awareness and seize conscious attention, imprinting themselves so deeply into memory they can be clearly recalled weeks, months, or even years later. (Bulkeley, 2016: p. 1)

2.5.2 Lucid dreaming

The subject of lucid dreaming has fascinated poets, philosophers, mystics and scientists for millennia. Each individual appears to have had a different perspective on the value of lucid dreaming, and their explanations of the phenomena vary from the transcendental to the biological. All of these explanations differ wildly from one another. The enigma, of course, is that in studying lucid dreams, it is not the subconscious that we are trying to unpick, but the consciousness itself, while the body is disconnected from it. Is the task therefore to describe the experience of reality or to define the experience of an altered reality? Does it make any difference if it is experience?

There is a recognised association between lucidity and flying dreams (Snyder, 1988). The Oxford English Dictionary defines lucid as 'sane, rational, clear minded or easily understood'. Barrett found that dreamers who report flying dreams are significantly more likely than others to report lucid dreams. Five out of the six gravity dreamers in my feasibility study fitted a lucid dreamer profile. Barrett describes the relationship between flying and lucid dreams by saying that the lucidity usually precedes the flying, rather than being triggered by it (Barrett, 1991).

The lucid dreaming brain state is similar to that experienced in meditation (Sparrow, Thurston & Carlson, 2013) and lucid dreaming has been positively related to well-being and psychological resilience (Soffer-Dudek, Wertheim & Shahar, 2011). Induced lucid dreaming has also been linked to a reduction in psychopathology, and increased psychological well-being

(Knox & Lynn, 2014). Lucid dreaming may also have had a function in accelerating psychological integration, dream ego responsiveness and personality development within the dream state (Sparrow, Thurston & Carlson, 2013).

Lucid dreaming has been described as more likely to emerge in REM sleeping than non-REM sleep. The lucid dream phenomena being recorded and documented cross-culturally (Bulkeley, 2014). Lucid dreams are used in the ancient tradition of 'faith healing' in Shamanism (Bulkeley, 2014). Snyder (1988) and Gackenbach & Snyder (1988) concluded that, by a conservative estimate, 58% of the entire population, across the whole of the demographic spectrum, has experienced a lucid dream at least once in their lifetime.

Lucid dreaming is described by Hurd and Bulkeley as a hybrid dream that falls between REM sleep and waking. During REM sleep, the dreamer is robbed of his ability to think logically due to the increased activation of the prefrontal cortex. However, during a lucid dream, the dreamer is closer to waking and has access to higher-order consciousness, enabling him to reflect on his present state, while having some control over the landscape of the dream (Hurd & Bulkeley, 2014).

Gackenbach and Schillig proposed that lucid dreamers represent a subset of people whose vestibular system in the inner ear is subject to intense activation during sleep (Gackenbach & Schillig, 1983). However, a subsequent study found that subjects can lucid dream without vestibular stimulation (Leslie & Ogilvie, 1996). Stumbys (2014) supports this view, describing spontaneous, passive, lucid dreams as well as active lucid dreams in which he suggests we can actively encourage ourselves to become lucid dreamers.

Voss and Voss (2014) describe dream consciousness through the following factors: 1) insight, 2) realism, 3) control, 4) memory, 5) thought, 6) positive emotion, 7) negative emotion, 8) dissociation. In lucid dreams we see higher scores in insight, thought, control, positive emotion and dissociation, the last of these being a key factor in lucid dreams.

There is a correlation between lucid dreaming and successful smoking-cessation (Morely, 2016), as well as athletes being able to increase muscle mass and patients with recurrent nightmares seeing reductions in the frequency of their bad dreams (Zadra, 1997).

2.5.3 Potential therapeutic benefits of lucid dreaming

The belief that the human ego is capable of self-healing and growth creates the opportunity of self-reflection in a lucid dream state (Schredl, Stumbrys & Erlacher, 2016). Self-awareness, whether during a lucid dream state, or when one is awake, provides an opportunity for reflexivity and change. Paul Tholey (1988) describes actively encouraging clients to engage with threatening dream characters or dream aspects, demonstrating that reconciling or dialoguing with a dream character can help resolve conflict in the waking state. He states that if we can achieve lucidity in our dream state, the dream ego will be less afraid of the threatening dream character or situation, as the dreamer is aware of the dream state. He believes that through dream work, changes in the personality structure can be achieved. This is particularly powerful if the dreamer maintains full command of his intellectual abilities and has control over the activities within the dream. The dreamer is able to explore and have a dialogue with the projections, as I did during my dream workshop, while I was within the dream. Foley was able to demonstrate in his study that 66% of dreamers were able to resolve problems and conflicts through their lucid dreams, with 62% of participants being less anxious in their waking life, 45% being more emotionally balanced and 42% more open-minded. This is echoed by Gackenbach

and LaBerge who have also shown lucid dreamers to be less tense, anxious and neurotic, with greater strength of ego, higher levels of creativity and more comfort with risk taking (Gackenbach, 1980; Gackenbach & LaBerge, 1988). This has implications for practice. Considering the average person spends four years of their life dreaming, and we are aware of the potential benefits of lucid dreaming and dream reflection, surely it is irresponsible not to give the dream world adequate space in the therapy setting?

2.5.4 Depersonalisation in dreams

Dream depersonalisation, as described by Ming-Ni Lee is a form of reflective awareness, in which the dreamer's sense of self seems unreal or strange (Lee, 2017). I believe this depersonalisation was present in some of the dreams recalled from my feasibility study, in which participants described their gravity dreams as being not of this world, or that in the dream space they possessed an altered way of perceiving the world. I attributed a 'transcendental' theme to these dreams. There is evidence to suggest that those who experience depersonalization during trauma go on to experience fewer trauma-related symptoms (Shilony & Grossman, 1993) and this depersonalization is believed to be critical step towards self-transformation and psychosynthesis (Moss, 1975), especially as we now understand that reflective awareness continues across waking and sleeping states (Lee & Kuiken, 2015).

2.5.5 The psycho-spiritual

Jung proposed that dreams may be inspired by transcendental forces outside of the dreamer and he believed that our dreams were related to our spiritual life (as cited in Hill, 2013). He also linked the experience of the numinosum to the process of healing (Corbett, 2005).

However only about one third of clinicians express confidence in dealing with matters of spirituality (Genia & Shafranske, 1998).

A dissertation by Greene (2017), showed that 10 out of 13 participants in her study could not find therapists who welcomed the inclusion of spiritual beliefs in their therapy. They noted that they sensed their therapists' discomfort when they shared spiritual or religious experiences. This, I believe, is why it is paramount to allow experiences such as gravity dreams and transcendental phenomena into our therapy room without judgment, but with curiosity and interest.

Counsellors are often uncomfortable working with dreams in psychotherapy yet studies demonstrate their therapeutic relevance and emphasize the importance for counsellors to increase their awareness and work with dreams (Wright et al., 2014).

Hamilton talks about dreams that come from the spiritual realms, from a higher consciousness (Hamilton, 2014). These are not personal dreams, concerning un-reflected- upon matter. Assagioli also described a higher consciousness as the sphere of aesthetic experience and creative inspiration. He believed our higher-consciousness denoted our higher potentialities, which sometimes expressed themselves, but which we often repel and repress (Assagioli, 1965). Perhaps this is a consideration for gravity dreaming? Brogaard says that during lucid dreaming we are aware of more than just our physical body, that our agency is expanded to include a higher self (Brogaard, 2012). This was something that I witnessed in my interviews with participants.

Dreams have been found to be a very useful tool for clients confronting their mortality. They have been demonstrated as being psychologically and existentially significant, with 87% of

study participants experiencing end-of-life dreams (Kerr et al., 2014). These dreams have been found to evoke peacefulness, comfort and a sense of wonder. Clinicians have often discounted these experiences as hallucinations, caused by medications, fever or confused states. However, end-of-life dreams can be experienced among patients with clear consciousness and heightened acuity. These dreams reduce the patient's fear of death, creating new insights around the subject of death (Grant et al., 2014).

2.5.6 The transcendent function

According to Jung, the 'transcendent function' is the heart of 'individuation', the process by which one is guided teleologically towards the original potential wholeness of the self (as cited by Sharp 1998). Greene revealed a range of religious and spiritual experiences that strongly and positively impacted participants' lives by providing new and heightened experiences of hope, spiritual nourishment, open-heartedness, compassion, an urge toward faith and belief, clarity of life purpose, closeness to nature, sense of belonging, revelations of identity, a more spacious place and a gift. Green also talked about clients not always being able to find therapists who welcomed or encouraged the inclusion of religious or therapeutic experiences in therapy, some clients described a sense of discomfort in their therapists and fears of being misunderstood if they shared spiritual or religious experiences. Participants reported that connections with the spiritual or religious dimensions of their lives provided them with renewed energy and inspiration to persevere through personal losses, deaths, personal struggles, depression, anxiety, trauma etc. (Greene, 2017).

2.5.7 Dreams of the dead and the dying

These are called 'After Death Contacts' (ADCs) and are generally recognized as being spontaneous and occurring randomly (Streit-Horn, 2011). An ADC is considered to be an experience in which an individual feels or senses that they have had contact with a deceased person. This quite often happens during a dream. Hufford described these experiences as occurring within the context of a lucid dream (Hufford, 2014). I have personally experienced ADCs within the context of dreaming.

Barrett tells us how dreams about someone who has died have a higher lifetime remembrance than dreams about a dreamer's death. She talks about the significance of 'Leave-Taking Dreams', which enable the dreamer to resolve their grief in waking life through a dream of the deceased (Barrett, 1991b). This appears to be a vital part of acceptance in the stages of grief and something that was demonstrated in Louise's dream.

A study by Kerr et al found that dreams of a deceased loved one just before their death can be psychologically and existentially significant, evoking a sense of peacefulness, comfort and wonder in the dreamer and it was found that 87% of study participants had experienced end-of-life dreams (Kerr et al., 2014). Clinicians have often discounted these experiences as hallucinations, caused by medications, fever or confused states. However, it appears to also be the case that this phenomenon can be experienced by patients with a clear consciousness and heightened acuity. These dreams appear to reduce patients' fear of death and create new insights around the subject (Grant et al., 2014).

2.5.8 Mutual dreams

There are many interesting dream phenomena that are relatively unexplained. A mutual dream occurs when at least two people claim to have had the same dream. Most mutual dreams occur between two individuals in a close intimate relationship, although this phenomena has also been recorded in the case of strangers (McNamara, Dietrich-Egensteiner & Teed, 2017). This phenomenon is different from a shared dream, in which dreamers meet one another in the exact same place and time within a dream that occurred on the same night. A mutual dream is one in which the dream is felt to be the same.

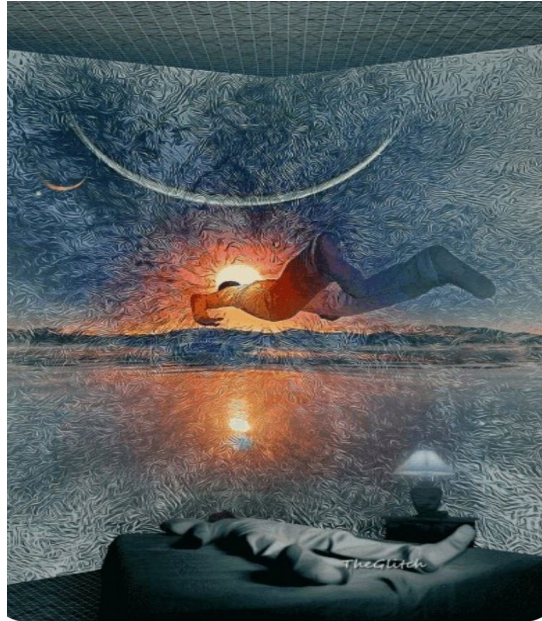
2.5.9 Precognitive dreams

These dreams tell seem to suggest events that later come to pass in outer reality. Robert van de Castle studied 413 pre-cognitive dreams, with death being the most commonly predicted phenomenon, followed by accidents and injuries (Van de Castle, 1994). British psychiatrist John Barker found systemic examples of precognitive dreams preceding a coal mine disaster, with one girl telling her mother there would be no school as it would be covered in black just before an event in which 118 school children, including the precognitive dreamer, were killed (Barker, 1967).

2.5.10 Dream synchronicity

Dream synchronicity is described by Jung as a meaningful coincidence of two events without any probable outer causality. One of Jung's patients described a dream in which she was given a golden scarab broach. As she was recalling the dream a rare swiss golden beetle was tapping on Jung's windowpane. Jung believed that these parapsychological experiences were mediated through the collective unconscious and typically occur in archetypal situations (Jung, 2013).

2.6 Metaphor and dreaming



Human beings are natural metaphor makers, we use metaphors many times a day without even realising it. Metaphors can express abstractions, memories, thoughts, ideas and feelings. The psychiatrist Modell said that metaphors enable us to grasp feelings, which is a vital element of reflexive practice. We don't always understand our metaphors at first, but when we do they can be astonishing (Bolton, 2014a). It is through metaphor that we make emotional connections, and these are especially prominent in dreaming. Our symbolic and metaphoric thinking is generally attributed to the right hemisphere of our brain, which is more active in dreaming than in waking life (Vedfelt, 2017).

Dream symbols can be found in common metaphors that we find in everyday life. According to Vedfelt these bring abstract concepts to life and put our own practical intelligence and lived experience into context. However, in the dreaming world symbols appear much more visibly and literally to the dreamer (Vedfelt, 2017).

Hartman argues that metaphors used in dreams are particularly emotionally powerful. In a sense they speak to us, 'the metaphor is a way of simplifying or explaining a complicated idea, or emotion' (Hartmann, 2011: p.55). He uses the metaphor of a tidal wave to demonstrate feelings of being vulnerable, scared and swept away, saying that the picture-metaphor in the dream attributes the feeling-state or idea directly into an image. The picture itself may not be a perfect translation of the idea but it provides an approximation.

The most well-known theory of metaphors is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which suggests that metaphors rather than merely figures of speech are actually matters of thought that characterise our thinking, contribute to the structure of our knowledge and are deeply embedded in our personal, interpersonal and cultural dynamics (Bolognesi & Biscicchi, 2013). Casonato has analysed the use of metaphors that emerge during psychotherapy and demonstrated that it is possible to track the process of cognitive transformation during clinical discourse by monitoring how metaphors change over the therapeutic journey (Casonato, 2003).

Eynon (2002) suggests metaphors that appear in dreams reveal crucial information for the therapist. This view is endorsed by Lakoff, who believes that the function of metaphor is to map the dream onto the meaning of the dreaming, thereby providing relevant knowledge of the dreamer's life, along with an opportunity for both dreamer and therapist to come to a concrete realisation as to the dream's significance (Lakoff, 1993). Bolognesi, Bichisecchi and Schredll believe that the emotions that enter our mental life through our bodies get shaped in the form of primary metaphors, which are believed to derive from recurring correlations between particular types of perceptual experiences that allow these emotions to be

transferred into mental objects. They believe that metaphors that are present in dreams are structures that can be interpreted (Schredl *et al.*, 2000; Bolognesi and Bicisecchi, 2013).

There are also differences between personal associations with certain symbols or metaphors, a dove for one person may be a symbol of peace, for another it may be an annoyance. This will be embedded in a cultural context. Ullman tells us that the dream metaphor is entirely personal, only the dreamer can know what the message it signifies means. In the dream world we are totally immersed in experience and metaphor but, later in life, when we contemplate our dreams, they interact with our imagination, which becomes creative, and subsequently allows for experiential dreamwork and interpretation. The metaphor is 'not simply the bottomless ground, the empty core, the final destination of language. By way of metaphor, language can take us beyond the content of the metaphor towards the region where language speaks through silence, this is the speaking of thinking, of poetizing' (van Manen, 1984: p.48). The metaphor can help the poet to transcend their limit and give a richness to what they are describing that words alone cannot portray.

The use of metaphor in dreams is hypothesised as being the assimilation of waking life experiences (Malinowski & Horton, 2015). Insight, in terms of enabling, is to know something about ourselves that we do not know (Ellis, 2013) and hyper associativity (the intense connectivity between loosely associated memories) is an imaginative activity that is hyper connective, fluid and flexible that helps the integration of newly learned memory representations into new or pre-existing schema (Stickgold & Walker, 2013).

Ullman provided many examples in which dreams appear to metaphorically picture an important problem or concern. He describes one dream that a patient had of his wife's temper

being depicted through a metaphor of a hurricane. He believed the metaphor provided a picture of the emotion as it was felt and that it was not simply a figure of speech but also a way of learning (Hartmann, 2011). He went on to develop the experiential dream group, or 'The Ullman Process', which relies upon the associations and projections of group members onto the dream content provided by the dreamer. They enter the dream space of the dreamer, with their own eyes as if it were their own experience. The emphasis is not just on cognitive interpretations it is also an experiential exercise (Ullman, 1990)

The dictionary definition of falling is 'to drop or descend under the force of gravity, as to a lower place through loss or lack of support, to come or drop down suddenly to a lower position, especially to leave a standing or erect position suddenly, whether voluntarily or not: *to fall on one's knees*; to become less or lower; become of a lower level, degree, amount, quality, value, number, etc.; decline'. Flying, other than the obvious, is defined as floating, fluttering, moving swiftly. The definition also includes 'to change rapidly and unexpectedly from one state or position to another, to move or pass swiftly, to be acceptable, believable, or feasible'. The idea of flying is therefore seen as something incredibly positive. As a connotation, a metaphor, it invokes power, movement.

2.7 Personality, gender and culture



Everybody dreams and everybody dreams differently. However, it has been found that certain aspects of one's personality are related to one's dream recall. Those who are described as having 'thin' (as opposed to 'thick') boundaries are more likely to have a greater dream recall. The concept of boundaries is vast and there are many boundaries: perceptual, bodily, memory, sexual etc. However, the basic premise is that someone who has thin boundaries will tend to let a lot of sensory material in at once, they are aware of thoughts and feelings together, they will be aware of being half awake, or half asleep, they will daydream and the boundaries between their dreams and fantasies may be unclear. They are more likely to experience synaesthesia. According to Hartman, people with thin boundaries are more likely to be creative, musical or artistic. Someone with a thick boundary keeps their thoughts and feelings entirely separate, they know whether they are awake or asleep, they have a clear sense of separation from what is past, present and future and they will tend to see the world in black and white. It has been shown that, while everybody dreams, those with thin boundaries have a much higher dream recall frequency (Hartmann, 2011).

One universally apparent difference between the dreams of men and women is that in the dreams of men there are two men for every woman in while in the dreams of women there is one man for every woman (Domhoff & Schneider, 2008). Furthermore, men's dreams are more

object-focused than women's and men have fewer dreams about social activities. Women also tend to use more nuanced language such as 'I am aware that' or 'I realise that' to describe their dreams (Tartz & Krippner, 2008). The disparity between the number of men and women in the dreams of people of different genders is also evident in the dreams of children. Children who live in more dangerous areas are more likely to have dreams of aggression and being pursued than their counterparts in safer areas (Garfield, 1984).

Gender had been related to dream recall frequency, with women being found to have greater recall of their dreams more than men (Schredl & Piel, 2008). This has been found to hold true cross-culturally, and it is stable over time; age is not a factor in these gender differences (Schredl & Reinhard, 2008). Women also report gaining more from dreamwork, with men experiencing less insight (Blume-Marcovici, 2010). Indeed, women have been shown to be more interested in dream interpretation (Schredl & Piel, 2008). However, there are no differences with regard to the emotional content or creativity of male or female dreams (Hill et al, 2003). Men and women appear to report negative content in dreams at similar rates, with men seeing a heightened amount of aggressive dream content (Blume-Marcovici, 2010).

Stevens (as cited in Hampton, 1997) tells us that although men are more likely to have antagonistic dreams and women more hedonistic dreams, a more significant variable than looking at gender is determining the kind of family that the individual grew up in. Ultimately, the nature of one's waking concerns is more significant to the nature of one's dreams.

It is believed that dreams are recognised in reference to culture, which supplies the templates for dream imagery, interpretation and expression (Keith, 2011). Cross-culturally, the content, understandings and use of dreams vary to such a degree that attempting to document this would prove to be a literature review in its own right. However, it is important to acknowledge

that our dreams are embedded in our cultural mode of reality. For example, native-born Americans believe that dreams can predict the future (Wogan, 2017). Studies looking at the role of culture in dream content have found that factors such as violence are more likely to affect one's dream content, with children from Palestine describing more external scenes of anxiety, than those of Finnish children, who reported greater numbers of internal anxiety scenes (Punamäki & Joustie, 1998). Lohmann tells us that 'culture and dreams are parts of the process by which humans generate and update shared models of reality, ways of doing things and ideals' (as cited in Keith, 2011: p.339).

2.8 Dreams and the body



There is very little to be found in Jungian, gestalt or psychoanalytic literature on the nature of the body in dreams. It is mentioned very briefly in the cognitive-experiential model of dreaming (Hill, 2004) and the Ullman Process (Edwards et al., 2015), which focus on our body-sense of the dream and our 'felt sense'. This is described by Gendlin as our bodily awareness, an internal aura that encompasses everything you feel about a given subject at a given time: it 'encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail' (Gendlin, 2003: p.32).

We know that gravity dreams are associated with strong bodily sensations but little attention has been paid to this area of dreams in psychotherapy (Maggiolini, Persico & Crippa, 2007). A study by Domhoff looking at 143 dream reports made by a widower over a period of 22 years supports the hypothesis that dreaming can be a form of embodied simulation. The study asserts that dreams embody conceptions primarily through literal enactments, making them somewhat similar to theatrical play (Domhoff, 2015).

Hall hypothesised that dream images were the embodiment of thought. They are conceived rather than perceived as part of an autonomous process requiring no external sensory data (Hall, 1953). Both waking and dreaming cognition are embodied in the sense that the areas in the brain supporting visual and sensorimotor imagery are activated. They are also embodied in that our dream imagery is often subjectively felt as our body in action (Gibbs, 2014).

A study exploring the use of embodiment and psychophysical exploration (Bontempo e Silva & Sandström, 2020) in group dreamwork, alongside suggestions found in the Ullman process regarding dream narration, external observation and group reflections has proved to of great benefit in terms of deepening dream work (Ullman, 1994). It has helped individuals and practitioners to incarnate nonverbal experiences and process dream work through the body rather than through rationalisation (Bontempo, Silva & Sandström, 2020).

Vedfelt (2017) describes a supramodel of the 'felt sense' when working with dreams, suggesting that the dreamer describe the bodily experience in terms of size, shape, consistency and sensation. The author cautions that certain body sensations in dreamwork can create unforeseen associations to negative traumatic experiences and therefore suggests the need to establish a safe place within the body before finding the 'peak' of the physical experiences

where sensations are most intense, thereby allowing the somatic experience to provide a language for what the dream is trying to communicate.

Bulkeley (2016: p.178) describes gravity dreams as producing 'intense, vertiginous bodily sensations that dramatically carry over into waking awareness'. I feel that this makes the bodily experience of these dreams all the more interesting to explore.

2.9 Dreaming and the traumatised brain

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the only psychiatric disorder to be unquestionably linked to lived circumstances, produces significant disruptions in dreaming, most notably manifesting in the form of recurrent nightmares. Sleep disturbances and dream-related disturbances are some of the most commonly reported symptoms among trauma victims, with patients also experiencing higher recall of dreams when facing stressful situations. Trauma-related dreams may depict a replication of the traumatic event or contain modified versions with metaphorical representations that may evolve over time (Duval & Zadra, 2010). Emotions are viewed by many dream theorists as playing a key role in the structure of dream content (Hartmann, 1998). There is now considerable evidence that it is during our rapid eye movement (REM) sleep that we benefit from emotional processing and memory consolidation, and that this is interrupted in the traumatized brain (Diekelmann, Wilhelm & Born, 2009). REM sleep provides a neurochemical and neurobiological brain state that allows the transfer of hippocampally mediated episodic traumatic memories and amygdala-dependent salient effects into cortically distributed semantic networks (Duval & Zadra, 2010). This has led to theories about the importance of REM sleep to emotional regulation and the processing of life events that occur within our dreams. The function being to process the negative emotions and memories attached to life events (Walker, 2009). Although we know that dreaming can occur

outside of REM sleep, there are propositions that only REM sleep dreams are real dreams that include nocturnal thoughts, emotions and images, with REM dreams being longer in duration and easier to recall and having more impactful content that is often described as more bizarre (Nielsen, 2000). The association between REM sleep and dreaming has led to studies looking at the traumatized brain alongside the emergence of EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing), an eye movement that replicates the bi-lateral eye movements found during REM sleep (Davidson & Parker, 2001). EMDR is a widely-used first-line treatment for trauma (American Psychiatric Association, 2004). It is believed that trauma is stored within the brain, interfering with the information processing system and leaving images, emotions, physical sensations and beliefs inherent to the original experience to remain with the individual (Shapiro, 2001). Rapid eye movements, alongside the therapists' attempts to help the client recall the events are used to help reduce symptoms (Triscari, Faraci, D'Angelo & Catalisano 2017). There are a multitude of randomized studies confirming EMDR's efficacy as a therapeutic intervention on civilians (Lee, Gavriel, Richards & Greewald 2002). The effects of this have been shown to persist in clients 15 months later (Wilson, Becker & Tinker, 2017).

2.10 Implications of gravity dreamwork on practice

The exploration of dreams has lost favour in certain psychotherapeutic traditions, following reductionist models that relate dreaming to neurochemical changes in the brain (Hartmann, 2011). Shifts in cultural and spiritual traditions have also impacted our openness to existential dream phenomena. However there has been a recent resurgence of interest in dreams following studies demonstrating their role in understanding our mental health (Robb, 2018). Studies demonstrate that patients with depression experience more nightmares (Hublin et al., 1999; Mume, 2009), patients with personality disorders have more negative dreams (Schredl

et al. 2012) and shifts in dream content can be indicators of psychological progression in therapy (Beauchemin & Hays, 1995).

Data on the benefits of working with dreams in therapy is extensive but the gravity dream motif has not yet been explored. I believe this research will provide more intricate data on our clients' existential concerns and histories, allowing a deeper narrative to emerge as to why these dreams can be lifechanging. It will hopefully also shed light on how these existential experiences shape the therapist.

Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing therapy (EMDR) is a proven intervention for trauma, which replicates the eye movements found in REM sleep. It is during these REM cycles that we experience most of our dreams (Davidson & Parker, 2001). Perhaps we are generating our own EMDR as we dream? The gravity dreaming sequence may perhaps tell the story of our struggles and our healing.

Studies demonstrate that memories formed during engaging, interactive, visuo-spatial learning tasks are clearly incorporated into the dream experience (Wamsley & Stickgold, 2019). This means that if there is a value to gravity dreaming, then its utility may be encouraged and developed through the use of virtual reality; as a tool for mindfulness, resilience training or letting go of our lived concerns.

Studies show that people who dream about mazes navigate new ones more efficiently and clients who dream about traumatic events are more likely to heal from them (Robb, 2018). By exploring gravity dream motifs in practice, we may not only be facilitating the healing process but enabling our clients to make new realisations, function at a higher level, and become aware of their own moods. This study aims to discover how we are affected by these existential

dreams and whether this affect impacts the therapy as well as the therapist, thus informing psychotherapy practice.

It has been shown that dreams and dreamwork hold tremendous therapeutic potential (Schredl & Wittmann, 2005). As mentioned above, Walker describes dreaming as an overnight therapy, taking the sting from painful, traumatic events that have occurred during the day (Walker, 2018). Dream recall can aid in the raising awareness of life concerns, identity or the meaning of the dream. Our emotional brain during sleep is more active than during our waking life (Gottesman, 2007). Patients with a leaning towards a loss of their sense of reality or a narcissistic personality disorder may lose themselves in their delusional self-perception.

The sharing of dreams has also been found to be a very valuable tool for enhancing empathy in the therapeutic relationship, with Blagrove et al., reporting that those who listen to others recount that their dreams experience a positive emotional impact and may form an empathetic bond with the dreamer. This suggests that the role of dream work goes beyond interpretation. Blagrove also suggests that dreams can provide new understanding of self-perception and insight, offering clues to both parties as to what the client is disavowing (Blagrove et al., 2019).

It has also been shown that during the process of sharing our dreams we can enhance our relationships and alleviate our emotional stress (Schredl & Schawinski, 2010). More significantly, we may be able to tell something about our clients and their primary carers through their dream recall. McNamara demonstrated that insecurely attached participants were not only more likely to report a dream, but that they describe their dream frequency with more intense images. He concludes that it is quite likely that we conduct serious attachment resolution in our nocturnal dreamscapes, as our dream content may well reflect bonding themes (McNamara et al., 2001).

Blagrove's study on trait empathy demonstrated that through the process of sharing our dreams with others we can increase our empathy to others. This highlights how important the therapy setting is, not only for bonding in the I-thou sense (Evans & Gilbert, 2005) , but for opportunities to understand disavowed content.

2.11 Literature review summary

This literature review has identified some of the many theories on the function of dreaming, although it does not draw any conclusions as to a final consensus. More recent qualitative neurological studies, conducted since the discovery of REM sleep, have looked at the traumatised brain and concluded that dreaming is important for memory and emotional processing. However, its exact function is still very much debated. It may well be that we never achieve a conclusive view of the exact role dreaming plays in social, cognitive, evolutionary, biological and emotional contexts and that a more pluralist approach to the function that values all of these theories may be required. There is, however, little doubt as to the benefit of working with dreams therapeutically.

It has been stated that there is a lack of good phenomenological studies in psychotherapy. (Halling, 2020). There are currently no phenomenological studies that look at the gravity dream experience. There are also no studies that look at the gravity motif, hence my belief that a study exploring these experiences among psychotherapists would be of value to the psychotherapeutic community.

Chapter 3: An introduction to my assumptions

Vedfelt (2017) lists ten key qualities of dreams that integrate knowledge from both the psychotherapeutic and dream schools and natural scientific research, including contemporary neuroscience and I have based my assumptions around these qualities.

1. Dreams symbolize.
2. Dreams deal with matters important to us.
3. Dreams personify.
4. Dreams are trial runs in a safe place.
5. Dreams are online to unconscious intelligence.
6. Dreams are pattern recognition.
7. Dreams are high level communication.
8. Dreams are condensed information.
9. Dreams are experiences of wholeness.
10. Dreams are psychological energy landscapes.

This phenomenological enquiry has arisen from my individual sense of wonder at my experiences of gravity dreaming. This was then substantiated by seeing the same wonder in the faces of my clients and in the individuals, I spoke to on the first day of my doctoral program at Metanoia about their experiences. There was a sense that those who had experienced this phenomenon, had carried their dreams with them for many years. Van Manen eloquently described this reaction by saying 'Momentarily, we are speechless as when the mouth hangs open while being taken in by the wonder of something' (van Manen, 1990: p.223). The wonder in the subject animates one's questioning of the meaning of a certain aspect of the lived

experience, inviting the researcher to write in a way that draws the readers of the phenomenological text towards the wonder of the experience. I hope you as the reader, will join me on my wonder-full journey.

Finlay describes the dance that exists between reduction and reflexivity (Finlay, 2008), as the movement between reflexive self-awareness and the reductive focus. In order to achieve this reflexivity it is important that as I sit well within the research subject and that I detail my assumptions and engage in the reduction of the phenomenon by, as Van Manen says, removing any 'barriers, assumptions, suppositions, projections, and linguisticities that prevent the phenomena and events of the lifeworld to appear or show themselves as they give themselves' (van Manen, 2016: p.221). This is also known as the 'prereflective lifeworld'. I have aspired to make contact with the lived world of my participants through reduction and not deduction or induction. I have engaged in an openness as to what I may have experienced and what I may believe. I have attempted to do this through writing my own experiences down, long before I interviewed my participants, and by detailing some of my concrete assumptions, which have emerged through my engagement with the literature on dreaming. For Husserl (as cited by Finlay, 2008) this reduction, or bracketing, involves the following steps: 1) the epoché of the natural sciences, bracketing what I have read in my literature search, 2) the epoché of the natural attitude, which is the reality that is naturally taken for granted in the lifeworld, 3) the transcendental reduction, which involves standing aside from my subjective experience as a gravity dreamer and, finally, 4) the eidetic reduction. This last step is also called the intuition of essences and involves me freely changing aspects of the phenomenon in order to distinguish which essential aspects are only pertinent to what I am looking at, rather than being merely incidental. An example of this for me would be a wounding in the history of the gravity

dreamer. How could I assume that the wounding is relating to the gravity dream, knowing that that wounding can be related to a myriad of other phenomena, such as becoming a healer (psychotherapist) in the first place. Many of these assumptions are grounded in my literature research, are derived from my previous experience as discussed in Chapter 1 or are drawn from my previous study. My aim is to 'bracket' these assumptions as I go forward. As Van Manen says, such reduction of my own pre-understandings, frameworks and biases, will help me to avoid premature, wishful, or one-sided understandings of this particular experience as it is lived through (Van Manen, 2002). For further information on my reflexivity see Chapter 6.

My assumptions about gravity dreams are as follows:

- That they are memorable, numinous and significant dreams that have meaning making potential to the dreamer.
- That dreams allow glimpses into our unconscious, undiscovered world, which tells us something of the dreamer and their lives at the time of the dream.
- That there is some scepticism among psychological and psychotherapeutic traditions of phenomena that are not tangible or easily explained.
- The self is not contained within the constraints of our body; it is multi-dimensional and exists outside of time and space.
- That clients respond well to the exploration of dreams in therapy.
- That certain gravity dreams contain existential and transcendental elements.
- That our dreams provide us with opportunities to engage in our disavowed emotions, providing a gauntlet to overcome, or an invitation to engage.
- The gravity dreaming motif changes overtime.

- An understanding of the importance and significance of gravity dreaming can be reached.
- Gravity dreaming may be a defence or depersonalization
- There is a reason why we gravity dream.
- That psychological healing can transpire during our dream world and be personally transformative.

Chapter 4: My feasibility study

4.1 What I have done so far?

My Practice Evaluation Project (PEP) 'An Exploration of the Gravity Dream' set the scene for this project and enabled me to satisfy my first question, which was existential in nature: 'Am I alone in my gravity experiences?' I quite quickly realised that I wasn't. There were many other therapists who had had similar experiences to me. I didn't, however, have any sense of what this meant.

The aim of my feasibility study was to explore the lived experiences of six gravity dreamers. I used a phenomenologically orientated qualitative thematic analysis to examine the idiographic experience of the embodied self of six gravity dreamers during an unassisted gravity dream. The following data is taken from my paper, which can be found in Appendix 1 (Mitchell, 2019).

4.2 Methodology of the PEP

The methodology used for my PEP was a phenomenologically orientated qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The intention of the study was not to explain or interpret the phenomenon of gravity dreaming in a positivist manner but to get a sense of the experience of the participants' subjective reality, using rich and emotive descriptions. I used thematic analysis to identify emergent existential themes without interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2017).

Certain existential dimensions have been identified in relation to an individual's experience of the world and I used these to shape my interviews. Binswanger (1987) highlighted physical, social and personal dimensions (*Umwelt, Mitwelt, Eigenwelt*). Buber spoke of spiritual/temporal dimensions (*Uberwelt*), (1923) as did Japers (1931) and Tillich (1952), (as cited in Van Deurzen 2012). Merleau-Ponty described how ontology, epistemology and ethics

come together in our bodily being; embodiment, for him, could not be considered separately from being and knowing (as cited in Todres, 2007). Van Manen echoed this, calling embodiment a central feature of human experience, encouraging Heidegger's use of temporality, relation with others, and spatiality as further ways of understanding the complexity of human experience (Van Manen, 2016). In my pilot study, I sought to explore the gravity dream experience using these existential dimensions of human experience.

The interviews I conducted during the PEP were each an hour long and paralleled the therapy setting, focusing on the participants' reconstructions of their experience in retrospect. The questions were designed to allow the participants to describe their experiences, using the existential dimensions they experienced during their dream, their degree of emotional connection to the dream and the sense they had made of their experiences.

An advert was placed in the *Psychotherapist* magazine, published by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) requesting the participation of gravity dreamers in a 60-minute interview. Eight people replied to the advert, of whom six followed through to interview.

My decision to use thematic analysis to identify, analyse and report on emergent themes was influenced by my desire to unravel aspects of the participants' dream reality via a semantic, inductive approach, rather than to look for latent themes in the data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After the first interview, I added three more questions to the interview schedule to enable participants to focus more directly on their physical experiences (Gendlin, 2003). I realised that

this would enable them to go into greater depth during their descriptions of the experience. The schedule was adhered to as closely as possible to avoid my slipping into a therapeutic role. The thematic analysis used an essentialist method. I intended to report the experiences, meanings and reality of the participants in order to 'unpick or unravel the surface of reality'. Themes that captured a patterned response from the participants were then coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.81). A process of coding and reviewing the codes ensued before the themes were named and defined. The data sets were coded separately and I made comparisons across all the interview transcripts (Saldana, 2016).

A 'critical friend', who was a respected and trustworthy colleague and who understood my philosophical perspective and could shed light on my 'blind spots' (Bager-Charleson, 2014) was invited to read through the transcripts and make her own suggestions regarding the emergent themes. This enabled me to 'bracket' some of my assumptions, and also allowed themes independent of my own gravity-dreaming lens to emerge. Data extracts were taken for the results section of the PEP. Participant names were anonymised.

4.3 Findings

Recruiting through a psychotherapy magazine provided a relatively homogeneous sample. Four of the participants were female and two were male; all six were between 35 and 65 years of age. Among the participants were a consultant clinical psychologist and psychotherapist; two psychotherapists; two doctors of psychotherapy; and a company director who had experienced being in therapy. However, it was understood that the participants had varying philosophical orientations and socio-cultural backgrounds, and that this would have an impact on the data.

A few of the initial themes were linked to the questions in my interview schedule, and to that extent they began as 'top down' themes (Hayes, 1997) fed by the existential nature of the questions. However, the final five major themes, none of which bore much relation to interview questions, emerged through an inductive approach (Patton, 1990)

My findings were published in the European Journal for Qualitative Research (Mitchell, 2019). See Appendix 1 for the full paper. I have used the same data excerpts as my publication to illustrate the six final themes I generated. These final themes were all attributable as they either explicitly or implicitly applied to all the interviews. I reduced the number of initial themes, leaving out themes such as 'embodiment and physical sense of gravity' and 'positive emotion to the dream' as, although they said something about the gravity dream experience, they did not feel fundamental to the gravity dream over and above any other dream phenomena.

4.4 Theme one: Boundaries

This theme was not anticipated, and yet it came up in every interview, with participants using terminology like 'escaping', 'dissipating' and 'transcending boundaries'. When I asked Monika whether she had a sense of life or death in her dream, she told me that told me that it had been about:

Breaking free, breaking boundaries, going beyond. But I see those actually much more about life and affirming life and wanting more from life, rather than death.

The participants used terminology suggestive of breaking free of emotional or psychological constraints such as 'escaping' constraints and 'dissipating' boundaries. Bridget told me:

I have been working in therapy and thinking about my wisdom and archetypal things, my sense of self and my creativity and freedom. I've seen it more as me seeking to be free and somehow without the kind of fettered everyday living and script and all of that kind of stuff and shame and everything, without that, this part of me is alive and powerful.

In some way the participants were breaking free of something, with Rebecca believing her dream was about breaking free of her unhappy relationship, while Mark saw his dream as being about breaking free of his work issues and making the decision to change job. There appeared to be a transcendental explanation to breaking free for some participants and a more practical element to the theme of boundaries for others, reflecting what was happening in the lived world.

4.5 Theme two: Not of this world

This theme was generated inductively as the participants described their dreams as transcendent in nature, believing their dream content to derive from outside of themselves or from a higher part of their normal functioning.

Five out of the six participants described their dreams as not feeling like normal content-driven dreams but being 'other-world' experiences. One participant described a very moving dream in which she was flying with her recently deceased daughter. Sarah spoke of her belief that her dream contained an After-Death-Communication with her daughter (Botkin & Hogan, 2014). She believed that during the dream she had real contact with her daughter. She described meeting her in a different realm, a place in-between where death was no longer an obstacle

to contact. This fits with a psychospiritual dimension of an existential dream, which is what some would call mystical (Bulkeley, 2016).

When I later asked Sarah about the emotion connected to her dream, she replied thus:

That joy of connection and recognition and being with XXXX, and she was happy, which you can imagine was really important for me...I believe that I did have contact with XXXX, yes.

The personal impact of this interview was profound. The dream had enabled Sarah to experience real comfort and solace during her period of intense grief. The belief that her daughter was safe and happy and that they had enjoyed precious contact together facilitated her process of grief.

When describing his gravity dream, Mark spoke of being:

Absolutely convinced within the dream that it is not a dream.

He believed a higher consciousness was assisting him through his work difficulties.

Monika believed her gravity dreams were different from her usual dreams as she said:

I am aware of the fact, that this is not like, you know, just a regular story or something that I saw last night that trickles into my subconscious and brings something up. You know, it's separate; it belongs to itself.

Bridget's spoke of her dreams as being a 'private' place where nobody could hurt her. Once again, they were very much separate from her earthly experiences and were obviously pivotal for her psychic survival.

Other participants referred to a sense of the 'unreal' or 'otherworldly'. Lee (2017) described depersonalisation in dreams as a form of reflective awareness, which can be related to past traumatic experiences and in which the dreamer's sense of self seems unreal. Evidence suggests that individuals experiencing depersonalisation during their dreams develop fewer trauma-related symptoms subsequently (Shilony & Grossman, 1993). During her interview, Bridget described this:

The meaning I make now is that somehow that was, that's a place of safety for this part of me that, sadly my history and the people involved in my history would have... unfortunately would not have cherished, would have been very destructive about it, so I feel I am very fortunate to have somehow found this place, to keep this part of me, but somehow this part of me cannot be kept, can't be squashed down in that way, because at night this part of me is exercising itself.

The requirement for control or power in the dreamscape would make sense if the participants' waking worlds lacked agency. Four participants recalled being aware that they were dreaming and feeling they were in control of their dream. This supports previous findings from lucid dreaming research (Gackenbach & Schillig, 1983), however it cannot necessarily be generalised across gravity dreams.

4.6 Theme three: Being more than oneself

I asked participants whether they were themselves during their gravity dreams and they all affirmed that they were. However I was not anticipating that the participants would describe themselves as being 'more than themselves.' There was a sense that the dream enabled a way

of being that was different from their normal experiences of themselves. Monika put it thus:

I am me. I am absolutely me, but I am me without the weight of the world, I think I would probably say that I'm more spiritually or soulfully connected and I'm inhabiting that part of myself that's hampered in the everyday-ness of living. I'm much more... uhh... I can feel my own wisdom, or that part of myself, that just knows that without any sense of doubt or without any of the drama of my internal inferiority, without any of that. I just am, it's almost as if I am in touch with a part of myself that is really not so lively in everyday living.

This was echoed by Bridget:

I don't feel mortal. I don't feel of this world. I feel like the essence of me is connected to the dream world in such a different way, there isn't any sense of beginning or end of life or death.

4.7 Theme four: Temporality

This theme was generated from a question about mortality in relation to the experience of flying. I had not expected the responses I received, with participants describing a sense of infinity or 'forever-ness' about the dream experience, reflecting an existential transcendental element to the dream content. Four participants made explicit references to temporality.

There's a forever quality about this. It is something that you've done before that you're doing now that you know you will do again in the future and it doesn't end... (Monika).

Sarah echoed this sentiment when she said:

For me, we know that the body will die, but I guess the dream, it had a real - almost like you could touch it - a real sense of being more than the body, so there is a sense of eternal in it.

4.8 Theme five: Locus of control

This theme was coded as all the participants described being in control of their gravity experience, suggesting a strong internal locus of control (Woodward, 1982). All six participants also mentioned having a sense of power during their dream: four used the term 'powerful' to describe how they felt, while two referred to 'empowerment'.

The 'locus of control' coding also fits with a lucid profile (Barrett, 1991a); four of the six participants were aware that they were dreaming.

4.9 Theme six: Gravity dreaming as a process

This theme was picked up by my critical friend, who noticed something of this motif among my participants, while I had totally taken it for granted. Five participants described learning to fly over time, and of having experienced flying dreams since childhood. Monika captured the experience in vivid terms:

I've gone all shivery now. I could feel like, oh, it's such an experience, because it's very vivid for me, so I've been doing it since I was a very small child, so I had a real sense of the earth below me and so exhilarated and kind of powerful and I could see the trees... I know that I've done this before, and what are the steps and so then I realize, actually, I'll just begin floating, although in my recollection of trying to remember how I did it, I remember that at one point I thought I needed to run and jump, but now that is seem

to have mastered it, or whatever it is, I don't need to do that... It does involve concentration; it's not involuntary stuff.

Bridget also described her long history of gravity dreams:

I know that I was a child, a tiny child, flying, because of the whole experience and the flying experience as a grown-up is very different because I remember, in the dream when I was a child, that I was in a watering can, a green watering can, and I was really low down to the earth, so I could see the detail of the soil as I flew (Bridget).

Sarah described something very similar:

I'm feeling emotional now because I've done it since I was very, very small and I feel like it is part of me and its part of the historic aspect of my life.

Mark was able to describe a difference occurring in the motif over time when he said:

Very early in my life I remember in my childhood I had a lot of flying dreams, which were very low level, just skimming along the ground, and I suppose those are the two contrasting types of gravity dreams I've had in my life, and there is some of the same feelings but not nearly the same kind of exhilaration, perhaps more of a frustration, but that was when I was a child really.

Adam noted his change in motif as being due to a locational shift of his dreams:

I am wondering if they started indoors and I got more powerful and started going outdoors.

4.10 The impact of these themes on my final project

As a gravity dreamer, I was aware that I had assumptions about the themes that might be generated during my pilot study. I acknowledged the active role of the researcher in identifying themes and reporting them (Taylor & Usher, 2001). However, I did not anticipate the more inductive codes, even though they did fit with my experience. My PEP enabled me to get a sense of what was happening for my gravity dreamers during their dreams without understanding anything of their lived experiences at the time of the dreams, or reaching any hermeneutic conclusions, or providing any clarity of the psychotherapeutic implications of such experiences.

The transcendent 'Not of this world' theme felt important in that dreamers believed their experiences came from a spiritual realm or a higher consciousness (Hamilton, 2014). For Spinelli, these were not personal dreams, concerning un-reflected upon matter (2005). As demonstrated in these interviews, the dreams were psychologically impactful to the extent that the participants had not only remembered them vividly, but they had also felt strongly enough to bring their dreams to the research. Some participants in this study referred to a sense of the 'unreal' or 'other-worldly'. Lee viewed depersonalisation in dreams as a form of reflective awareness related to past traumatic experiences, in which the dreamer's sense of self seems unreal (2017).

During my feasibility study, four participants described themselves as being 'more than' what they were during waking life while they dreamt. They appeared to gain something positive from their nocturnal gravity experiences. Todres (2007) uses the term 'freedom-wound', which he believes is a soulful space we can occupy where we are grounded in great freedom and great vulnerability. My final study seeks to get a better sense of the lived world experience of

gravity dreamers, potentially enabling a deeper understanding of the role that dream motif can play on the development of the psyche.

Assagioli defines the higher consciousness as 'the sphere of aesthetic experience, creative inspiration, and higher states of consciousness... denoting our higher potentialities which seek to express themselves, but which we often repel and repress.' Perhaps this has relevance for gravity dreaming? (Assagioli, 1965: p.5) This could potentially highlight a purpose for the gravity dream, and it is something this study seeks to explore prompting questions such as what does the gravity dream say about the individual? What does the motif or dreams series mean to the gravity dreamer in the context of their lived world? What do they get from the experiences of the gravity dream over time?

This concept of a gravity dream series or motif was, for me, the most interesting finding of the PEP and it is now the cornerstone of my final project. I believe the theme 'gravity dreaming as a process' suggests a learned skill that develops alongside our emotional and psychological development. There are many psychological explanations for a dream series or motif that involves developing a skill such as flying. Such an experience might be associated with a freedom-wound (Todres, 2007), a personality trait (Schredl, 2007), an avoidant attachment pattern (Bowlby, 2005) a creative adjustment (Evans & Gilbert, 2005), or some form of psychic compensation (Smith, 2015). Certainly the notion of 'the wounded healer' is well known in psychotherapy (Sharp, 1998). Further research might shed more light on our clients' existential concerns and histories, enabling a deeper appreciation of why these dreams are so significant and numinous for certain individuals (Mitchell, 2019).

Further study in this area also has wider implications for the field of psychotherapy. My PEP did not explore the impact these dreams may have had on the therapists' journeys, how the

dreams impacted them as practitioners or whether they had shared their dreams in therapy before and to what end? It also did not explore how they worked with dreams in therapy, the personality of these dreamers, their personal histories at the time they had the dreams and whether they experienced any other existential phenomena. These are areas that this final project seeks to explore. I realised that I was thus missing vital information that could inform the field.

The clinical relevance for bringing dream work into psychotherapy is well documented, however my PEP was the first phenomenologically orientated study ever conducted on the experience of gravity dreams. While the available literature sheds some light on the prevalence, functions and possible benefits of gravity dreams, it reveals little about them in terms of an individual's lived experience, until now.

I believe the exploration of existential phenomena such as the gravity dream takes the shame out of the intangible and pushes the boundaries of psychotherapeutic research, assisting the development of our discipline. Robb defines the challenge thus: 'If we fail to take the simple step of remembering and understanding our dreams, we are throwing away a gift from our brains without even bothering to open it' (Robb 2018: p. 18).

Chapter 5: Research objectives

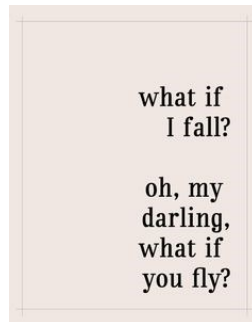
The objective of my final study was to explore the gravity dreaming motif and how it changed along with the developing self of seven therapists. I wanted to look specifically at the lived experience of the motif as well as the lived experiences of the participants' lives at the times of their dreams. I also wished to study impact the dreams may have had on their therapeutic journey and practice.

The study was designed to elicit more detailed descriptions of the gravity dreaming motif through the use of my own personal narrative and a brief piece of narrative from the participants. The project used three methods of data collection: a participant narrative (Appendix 2) a semi-structured in-depth interview (Appendix 3) and a post-interview questionnaire (Appendix 4).

The research areas are as follows:

1. An exploration of what creates a gravity dreamer in terms of the individuals' self-descriptions and their lived experiences at the time of the numinous dreams?
2. An exploration of the experience of the gravity dream and how these existential experiences have impacted the dreamer.
3. An exploration of the changing motif, in terms of the participants embodied experience and sense making of these experiences.
4. An exploration of any other existential phenomena experienced by the participants.
5. An exploration of individual therapeutic backgrounds, and the impact these dreams may have had on the participants as therapists and individuals and the implications for psychotherapy.

Chapter 6: Methodology



By Erin Hanson

6.1 My philosophical position

Consolidating a philosophical position has been difficult. I have found myself identifying as a critical realist and assuming that my participants' accounts reflect their subjective perceptions. I have also identified with a relativist approach that assigns multiple meanings to subjective realities. In addition, I would describe myself as an interpretivist, having the belief that all data is subject to interpretation. I realise that my philosophical underpinnings must exist along a relativist continuum. However, I have seen how phenomenologists are split in their epistemological positions and, while considering myself a phenomenologist who has post-modernist, post structural, feminist positions, I am more closely aligned with the pluralist position. I believe that there is no single answer to the central questions of human existence, that it is not possible to find an absolute or fundamental truth and that different sources of knowledge have their own validity (McLeod, 2017). I recognise that this reality is mediated through individual experience and is socially and culturally situated. The data in this study reflects the stories of the subjective perceptions of my participants (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006).

6.2 Why phenomenology of practice?

There are many qualitative methodologies available that I could have used in this study. Grounded theory, which is underpinned by more post-positive, realist assumptions and focuses on the publishing of empirical work, moves away from descriptive accounts of a phenomenon and into the realms of explanatory, theoretical frameworks, which was not something I wanted to achieve (Charmaz, 2014). Discourse analysis, would have necessitated a similar philosophical standpoint, leaning more towards critical realism and seeking to find how the gravity dream was constructed. This methodology may have involved a similar vein of interview, to that of phenomenology, but it is not designed to illicit lived experience in quite the same way. Transcriptions would have also been coded, but I believe the data would look very different, in terms of the essential themes and would not have included the use anecdotes. A structured dream analysis would have perhaps analysed the meaning of the series in isolation, but it would not have provided contextual information on the participants' lived experience at the time of the dream, nor any information on the dreamer themselves (Roesler, 2018).

For me, due to the fact that I was aware of the need to embed myself in my own phenomenological experience of gravity dreaming, my question was not what qualitative methodology to use, but which phenomenological methodology to use. My personal experiences were phenomenological in nature and, as Van Manen says, I was 'aware of the phenomenal phenomenality of a phenomenon' (Van Manen, 2016: p.31).

The subject of gravity dreaming, as a numinous and physical experience, lends itself to many different types of phenomenological study. The methodology had to enable an exploration not only of the emotional experiences of my participants but also their embodied experiences. It

needs to investigate the human experience on an individual, not collective, level and understand it to be complex, contextual, emergent and transpersonal. Gravity dreaming is a subjective individual experience and not a concrete reality.

The first question was therefore whether to pursue a dualist or non-dualist phenomenology. Phenomenological traditions follow either a descriptive (Husserl, 1980), or a hermeneutic methodology (Ricoeur, 2004; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Thus, my main consideration was whether to adopt a descriptive or hermeneutic phenomenology or seek a methodology that explored both of these elements.

The main reason for rejecting a purely descriptive methodology was that I realised that this project started from a position of interpretation. This began in my fore-understanding of the subject of gravity dreaming based on my own experiences and then evolved through my implicit pre-understandings, as I conducted the literature research during my pilot study. There were also the implicit pre-understandings of my participants to consider. I realised that there was already a hermeneutic cycle (see figure 2) and that I did prescribe to the Heideggerian view that there is no such thing as an un-interpreted phenomenon and that both descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology exist along a continuum (Finlay, 2011).

Finlay describes nine hermeneutic phenomenological methods that I could have adopted (Finlay, 2011). Among the methodologies I considered was existential hermeneutic methodology, which would have fitted well with the subject, perhaps through the use of the four existential dimensions (physical, social, personal and temporal) to shape my participant interview schedule (Binswanger, 1987). However, I had already used these dimensions in my PEP, and I did not feel that the present study was a purely existential enquiry. The only other

phenomenological method that I seriously considered using instead of the phenomenology of practice was Todres' embodied enquiry approach (2007). Although I used aspects of embodied enquiry in my interview, this methodology would not have fitted as I was asking questions based on the participants' situatedness and lived experiences that would have detracted from a purely embodied approach to interviewing.

If I had used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), I would have had a clearer framework to follow, which would have been easier and epistemologically congruent with my desire to explore the gravity dream phenomenon as a lived experience. However, IPA does not place as much attention on the writing of anecdotes or the description of personal narratives and reflections, which for me is what really helped to bring the phenomena alive. I was also aware after my PEP that the gravity dream experience began from a place of wonder. Something happened to me that I was deeply affected by, that caused me to pause and reflect. I therefore chose a phenomenological methodology that was congruent with both my philosophical position, my research question and my desire to 'bring to light that which has previously remained hidden' (Thayer, 2003:86). I sought to grasp the essential meaning of the gravity dream motif, following the approach of van Manen (2015), who states that phenomenology is interested in anything that presents itself to consciousness, whether the object is real, imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt. It requires a hermeneutic ability to make sense of the lifeworld, through the description of what may have been taken for granted.

As the phenomenology of practice is both descriptive and hermeneutic, I was able to use my own description to set the scene of my project, while simultaneously drawing hermeneutic conclusions and using vivid description to bring the project to life. The methodology

advocating data to be generated both through enquiry and in through the writing. I knew my experience was deep and that my experiential reality wasn't necessary rational or logical but was rich in description and poetry. 'Phenomenology, not unlike poetry is a poetising project; it tries an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling, wherein we aim to involve the voice in the original singing of the world' (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in van Manen, 2015: p.13). It has been described as the reflective study of pre-reflective experience (Adams & van Manen, 2017), and it begins with a true sense of wonder, of suspension between what is known or unknown. It then involves the collection of accounts of lived experience through interviews, written descriptions and literature that may breathe life and understanding into the phenomena. And finally, it requires the re-writing of these accounts to form stories, or anecdotes.

According to van Manen, a phenomenological text is successful when the readers feel directly addressed by it (van Manen, 1990). Another reason for choosing this phenomenology is because good studies read well. They cause the reader to reflect, often on things that they have never considered before. So, even if you, the reader of this project is not a gravity dreamer, you may be a psychotherapist, a mother, a father, a victim of trauma, or affected by my interviews in some other way. There will hopefully be some tie that draws you towards this research, that speaks to you, on some level.

I was also drawn to phenomenology of practice as, according to van Manen, it 'does not assume that our experiential reality is necessarily rational, logic, noncontradictory, or even desirable in propositional or scientific language' There is something of the intangibility of the gravity dream, that lends itself to this methodology that 'tries to be sensitive to moments of insight, and even moments that we may experience our world in terms of mystery, confusion,

disorientation, strangeness, or incongruity' (Van Manen, 2016: p. 68). This has definitely been the case with this subject as I have certainly felt the full plethora of emotion described.

The phenomenology of practice (van Manen, 1990) prescribes that I put all of myself, my thoughts, feelings, assumptions and experience into this work. It is necessary for me to be immersed in the subject, that I live and breathe it. This was my position from the very beginning of my doctoral project. Although I aspire to bracket my assumptions, this subject is something of which I have personal experience. The methodology does however lack a clear framework 'unlike other methodologies, phenomenology cannot be reduced to a "cookbook set of instructions". It is more an approach, an attitude, an investigative posture with a certain set of goals' (as cited in Hycner, 1985: p.279).

I was keen to set the scene in my phenomenological interviews within the context of my participant narratives. Handy and Ross have stated that there is an 'almost unacknowledged assumption' that the best data can only be obtained through in-depth interviews. However the use of 'semi-structured written accounts of experience can also provide highly focused, descriptively rich, reflective data' (Handy & Ross, 2015: p.40). For this reason, I decided to begin my research by asking my participants to write a few words on their experiences (Appendix 3) that would help deepen the interview. This meant that there was a qualitative mixed method aspect to my enquiry in that I used a narrative account of the phenomenological experience in addition to in-depth face-to-face interviews. I also followed my interviews up with a very short post-interview questionnaire (Appendix 4).

Van Manen describes hermeneutic phenomenological research as an interplay between the following six activities, with which this study has sought to engage (Van Manen, 2015).

1. Turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world.
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it.
3. Reflecting on the essential themes that characterise the phenomenon.
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

6.3 Method

This study explores the experiences and changes in the gravity motif of seven therapists and their lived experiences at the time they had the dream. I used three participants from my pilot study and a further three participants who approached me via my advert in the UKCP magazine (Appendix 5). One participant approached me through a colleague who had heard about my research subject. In total, seven gravity dreamers were interviewed, all of whom had a motif in their history. The remaining participants from my original cohort were either too busy to participate in a further study, felt that didn't have anything further to add, or, in the case of one participant, wanted to withdraw after reading the published paper of my PEP (see Chapter 12.7).

Initial contact was made via email or phone to assess the suitability of the participants and flag up any ethical considerations. They were given a letter of intention and (Appendix 6) and asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix 7).

To be considered for the study participants had to be adult psychologists or psychotherapists, either male or female with no leaning toward a loss of a sense of reality. This was an assumption based on the fact that they were UKCP or BACP accredited and practicing at the

time of interview. I realise that a subject such as gravity dreaming can be open to fanciful, imaginative descriptions. It was an important consideration that the study presents a true reflection of the embodied lived experience of the gravity dreamer.

It was understood that the sample was not representative of the general population and that assumptions were made about their stories reflecting real experiences and being drawn from their memories. The following diagram takes you through the major steps of my methodology.

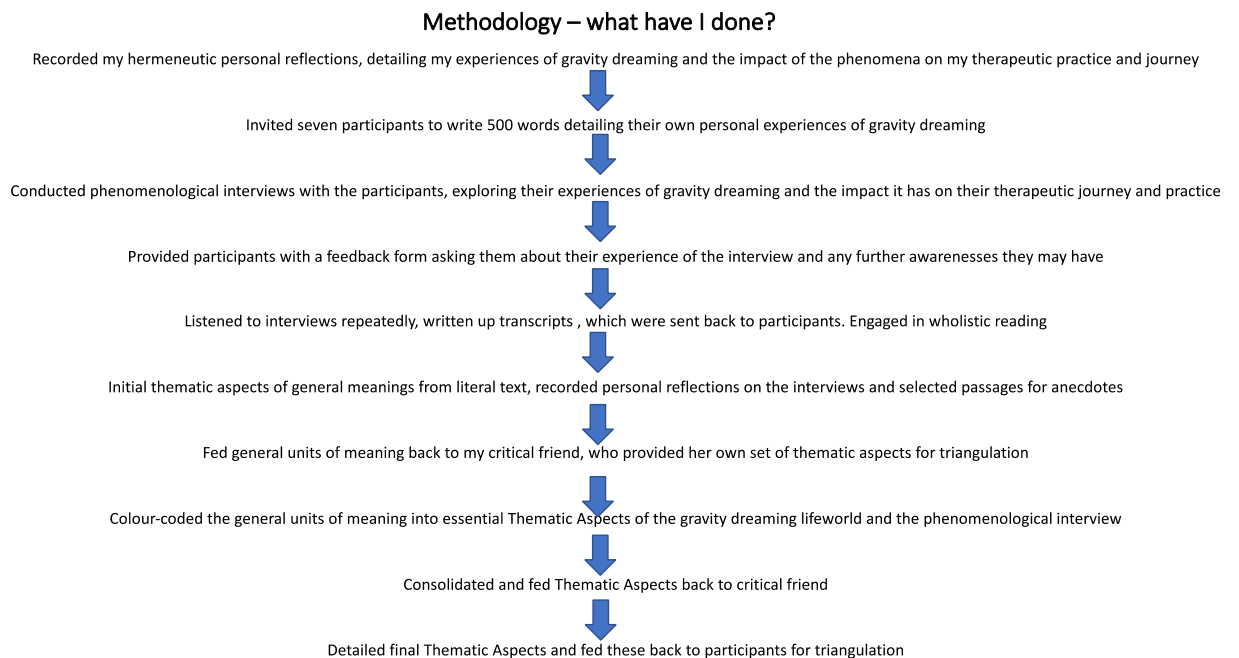


Figure 1: What have I done?

Participants were initially asked to write 500 words about their personal experience of gravity dreaming. This was followed up by a semi-structured face-to-face interview (see appendix 3), which was used to gather rich, first-person accounts of the participants' gravity dream motifs, how they have occurred over time, the situatedness of the dreams within the lives of the dreamers, as well as information of the participants' histories and the impact of the

phenomena on their therapeutic journey and practice. The participants were encouraged to make sense of their dreams and motifs themselves. The interviews were designed to elicit the lived experience of the gravity dream phenomena, using open questions to encourage descriptions of emotions, embodied feelings, personal experiences and sense making.

All the interviews were approximately one hour in length. Two Interviews were conducted face to face and the remaining five interviews were conducted over the internet, using the preferred service of the participant. The interviews were auto-recorded and saved on an encrypted, password-protected computer until the thematic analysis was completed, at which point they were destroyed. The dataset was drawn from the memory of the individual; paralleling the work we do every day as psychotherapists and using the client's reconstructions of their experience (See Appendix 14 for Stakeholder Analysis).

Participants were asked to fill in a post-interview feedback form and were given the opportunity for a debriefing interview as part of a participant checking procedure, to ensure that they were adequately supported. Participants were asked whether they wanted copies of the transcripts and were invited to make changes, should they see fit. Participants were emailed the thematic aspects of the gravity dreaming lifeworld as well as the final thematic aspects found and asked for feedback. All the participants' names were changed in order to maintain their anonymity.

6.4 Summary of method analysis and hermeneutic cycle

My hermeneutic cycle oscillated between my fore-understanding as I began with my sense of wonder, to my implicit pre-understanding as I conducted my literature research. My hermeneutic understandings were then met with those of my participants, who all had implicit pre-understandings themselves. We then engaged in reciprocal hermeneutic exploration with the phenomena through mutual reflection, dialogue and resistance if the participants challenged any ideas, I may have had that they did not agree with. The cycle, while concluding with my explicit understandings of the phenomena, was continually looping back to my fore-understanding and my implicit understandings that I described in my own narrative and assumptions.

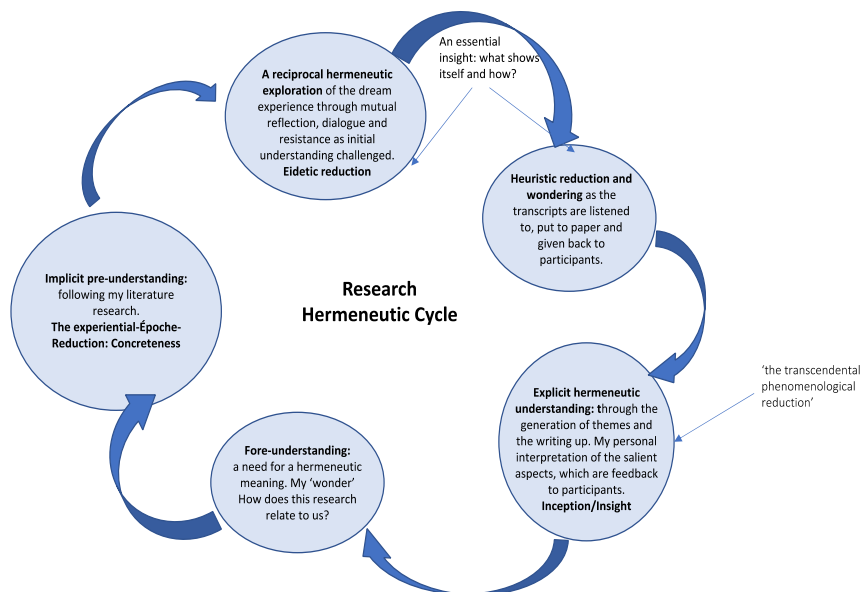


Figure 2: Research hermeneutic cycle

My method analysis therefore involved the following steps:

1. Hermeneutic self-reflection, by way of a journal and through contact with my critical friend, my academic consultant and supervisor.
2. Hermeneutic self-reflection through my personal written experiences of gravity dreaming prior to the interviews.
3. Written lived experience descriptions from participants (Van Manen, 1990, 2014)
4. Phenomenological interviews with seven participants.
5. Post-interview questionnaire.
6. Transcripts generated and sent to participants for feedback.
7. Transcripts sent to my critical friend for her to generate her own themes.
8. Thematic aspects analysed and sections of text highlighted for annotation.
9. Thematic aspects sent to participants and critical friend for triangulation.
10. The writing of anecdotes, putting myself in the stories of my participants and reflecting on their experiences as if they were mine.

6.5 Generating themes

A thematic analysis was conducted following the methodology of Van Manen. Generating themes in the phenomenology of practice is the experience of focus, of meaning, of point. Theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon that we are trying to understand. It gives shape to the shapeless (Van Manen, 1990).

Van Manen refers to the process of theme analysis as recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work (Van Manen 2015: p.88). It is not, according to Van Manen, a rule-based process but rather a free act of 'seeing' meaning. Themes can be understood as structures of meaning, an attempt to grasp

the pedagogical essence of the lived experience. Van Manen provides a series of statements, which outline some of the phenomenological qualities the themes should contain:

1. The needfulness or desire to make sense.
2. Theme is the sense we are able to make of something.
3. Theme is the openness to something.
4. Theme is the process of insightful invention, discovery, disclosure.

Van Manen then suggests we look at the how the theme relates to the notion of the phenomenon, for example through giving shape to the shapeless.

As I was following Van Manen's guidelines on 'theme analysis', I started with a 'wholistic reading approach', attending to the text as a whole. I completed this repeatedly, even listening to the interviews over and over again in my car as I was driving. At this point I was staying close to the literal data and coded themes only as I saw them appear in the text. It was also at this point that I followed Hycner's advice to code all general meanings, even ones that became redundant at a later date. I coded themes here 'regardless of whether they were essential, contextual, or tangential to the structure of the experience' (Hycner, 1985: p.282). These general themes from the literal text can be seen in Figure 6 in the Results section.

I then engaged in a more 'selective reading approach', looking at which statements seemed to stand out as being essential in revealing something of the phenomenological experience of the gravity dream and also the participant's lived world at the time of the dream. I was trying to capture units of meaning relevant to the essence of the experience by using more evocative thematic expressions, or 'gems' of description, selecting areas of text that I felt gave life to the phenomenon I was investigating.

I next began a more ‘detailed reading approach’. This involved line-by-line reading, asking myself what each sentence said about the phenomena of the gravity dream experience and capturing specific phrases, narrative paragraphs or thematic expressions that told the story. I then highlighted the most poignant sections of text and converted them into anecdotes. It was at this point that I also clustered the units of relevant meaning under essential themes, which I started to colour code (see Figure 3).

In order to reveal the experiential structures making up the participants’ descriptions of gravity dream motifs, I looked for themes that related to what was universal (the general meaning that can be derived) and the particular (the meaning for the participants in a specific context) (Langdrige, 2007, p.123) and eliminated any redundant, incidental themes that appeared ambiguous. This was part of my eidetic reduction. For example, there were many themes that could apply to the participant as a wounded healer, rather than as a gravity dreamer.

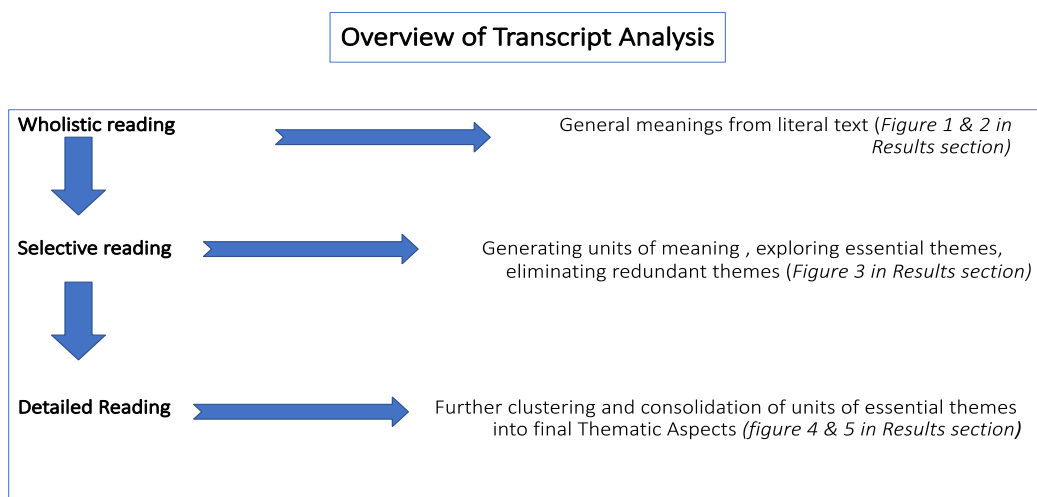


Figure 3: Overview of Transcript Analysis

In phenomenology of practice a distinction is drawn between incidental themes and essential themes. In order to uncover the essential themes, it is important to provide themes that describe essential qualities of the gravity dream experience without which the phenomenon could not be what it is. In essence I asked myself 'what statements or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the experience being described?' (Van Manen, 1990, p.93).

Van Manen also defines phenomenology as being a philosophical method of questioning, not a method for answering determinate questions. He does not advocate the use of computer programs that involve calculation, ethnicization, comparison of outcomes or trends, or the indexing of data. It was for this reason that I didn't peruse NVIVO or engage in inter-raterability indexes of themes with my critical friend. Nor did I numerate the number of times themes were mentioned as this was not congruent with my methodology.

A critical friend was engaged to look at the transcripts. This critical friend then attributed her own themes. The critical friend was a researcher in psychiatry by profession and, as it happens, a gravity dreamer. She was not engaged to be essentially 'critical' but as a respected researcher in her own right, who understood my philosophical perspectives and was able to shed light on my 'blind spots' (Bager-Charleson, 2014). My critical friend came up with her own themes, which I compared to my own and I used this as a means of triangulation to enable me to make sure that the themes I generated were agreed with by an independent person.

6.6 The writing of anecdotes

When it came to write my anecdotes, I adhered as closely as possible to the recommendations of Van Manen (2016: p.256) which I have outlined below.

1. Remain constantly oriented to the lived experience of the phenomenon.

2. Edit the factual content but do not change the phenomenological content.
3. Enhance the eidetic or phenomenological theme by strengthening it.
4. Aim for the text to acquire strongly embedded meaning.
5. When a text is written in the present tense, it can make an anecdote more vocative.
6. Use of personal pronouns tends to pull the reader in.
7. Extraneous material should be omitted.
8. Search for words that are 'just right' in exchange for awkward words.
9. Avoid generalising statements.
10. Avoid theoretical terminology.
11. Do not rewrite or edit more than absolutely necessary
12. Maintain the textual features of an anecdote as described above.

I aspired to choose more evocative examples that portrayed the lived experiences of the gravity dreamers by writing the anecdotes in the first-person and the present tense, showing rather than telling the reader about the participants' lived experiences. It was during this process of rewriting that I made leaps of phenomenological insight, taking the experiences as my own, owning them as my own, feeling them as my own.

The attitude needed when writing anecdotes requires a slow, meditative way of thinking that attends to, and even magnifies, all the details. I have found that the process of writing my anecdotes, albeit that I am re-writing the participant stories, enabled a deeper level of empathy as I wrote in the present tense and first person, fully engaging with their experiences. The concept of empathy with my participants also parallels what we, as therapists, aspire to in the therapy room as we leave our lives behind us and enter the I-thou dialogue (Buber, 2010).

Van Manen describes the approach as being one of openness, in which there is a need to reflect on one's own pre-understandings, frameworks and biases, subjective feelings, preferences and inclinations. These pitfalls may seduce us towards a wishful or one-sided understanding of a phenomena (as cited in Finlay, 2008), which is why I felt it was imperative to detail my experiences, before unveiling the experiences of others.

Finlay emphasizes the need for the researcher to 'twist and glide' through a series of improvised steps when conducting phenomenology. She describes the following steps that assist with embracing the phenomenological attitude: to enter into the lived world, to dwell with horizons of implicit meanings, to explicate the phenomena holistically and integrate frames of reference (Finlay, 2013). 'The researcher strives to leave his or her own world behind and to enter fully... into the situations of the participants. The researcher empathetically joins with participants, in their lived situation(s). This sharing of the experience is the basis for later reflection on meanings and experiential processes. This attitude involves an extreme form of care that savours the situation described in a slow, meditative way and attends to, even magnifies, all the details.

6.7 The writing of my personal experience

In writing my own experience I followed van Manen's guide to producing descriptions of lived experience (van Manen, 2015: p.64), as outline below.

1. I described the experience as I lived through it.
2. I described the experience from the inside: the feelings, moods and emotions.
3. I focused on particular examples.
4. I attempted to focus on experiences that stand out for their vividness.

5. I attended to how my body felt.
6. I tried to avoid beautifying my account with fancy phrases.

6.8 The interviews

The interviews were designed as a means to explore the lived experience of the gravity dreamer and the experience of the motif, as a lived experience, looking not only at the lived experience of the dream, but the world of the dreamer at the time of the dreams. The interview was used as a vehicle for starting a conversational relationship with the interviewees about the meaning of their experiences.

As a practising psychotherapist I am used to using observation to gain experiential material from my client work and to recording anecdotes in my notes. This was something I have used in my methodology. The use of anecdotes was not merely by way of illustration, but as a methodological device to make the phenomenon of the lived world of the gravity dreamer more comprehensible. It was used as a tool to not only compel to the reader to be more engaged, but also a means to further my personal reflections and deepen my emotional responses to the stories of my participants, so that I could deepen my understanding of the experience and make interpretive sense.

Van Manen (2014: p. 317) describes two types of interviews: the phenomenological interview which 'is used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential material' (ibid.) and the hermeneutic interview. This is used for 'exploring the ways that fundamental phenomenological notions and methods can be understood'. My desire during my interviews was to engage in the personal experience and meaning making of each of the participants, to encourage them to look more deeply at the metaphor, their felt sense, and their emotional

connection to the dream. If for example some said, 'falling, just feels like being dropped', I would ask, 'what sense did you have of that? Where is that in your history? What would it have felt like to be dropped, to fall?' This meant that I found myself in many ways straddling what I might have asked a client in therapy. I would be seeking to get to the root of the experience, the fear. It was only as my fear of asking the right question and not missing an area of interest dissipated that I gained the ability to be more phenomenological.

Chapter 7: Reflexivity and reduction

Reflexivity has been described as ‘finding strategies to question our own attitudes, theories-in-use, values assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions; to understand our complex roles in relation to others’ (Bolton, 2014: p.6). Finlay calls it an attitude of sustained critical self-reflection, focusing on the ways that a researcher’s social background, assumptions, values and unconscious processes affect the research: ‘rather than striving to be unbiased, distanced or detached, the researcher aims to be fully engaged, involved, interested in and open to what may appear. The researcher subjectivity is prized and the intersubjectivity is embraced’. (Finlay, 2011: p.23). The goal is to juggle the contradictions that can be found in being ‘open to’ and ‘aware of’ while also being immersed in the experience of the interpersonal worlds of the research participants.

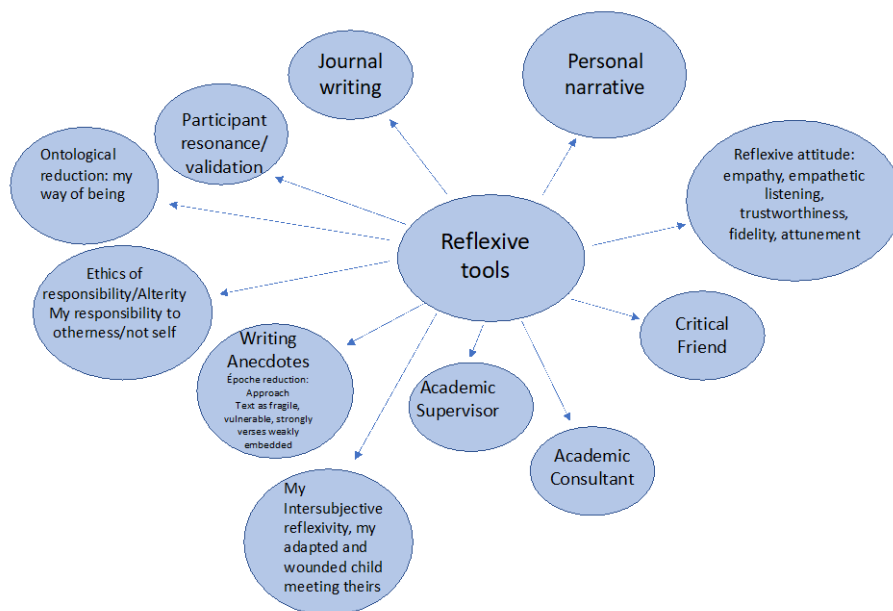


Figure 4: Reflexive Tools

As a gravity dreamer, my primary concern is my intentionality and thus my conscious reduction. I used the basic principles of phenomenological reduction in the first instance. This comprised locating and describing my own experiences, the process of which is detailed in Chapter 2. This was then followed by listing my assumptions, based on my own experiences, deriving from my feasibility study and from my literature review. Throughout the thematic analysis I aspired to bracket my assumptions as a gravity dreamer and report only the essential themes that I generated from the data (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006).

One of the main opportunities for reflexivity and reduction is in the act of writing up. It is the process of writing that serves the pedagogy, bringing the pedagogic experience into a symbolic and poetic form. Van Manen (2016) tells us that a true listener is able to attune to the deep tonalities of language that normally fall out of our accustomed range of hearing and that it is through the writing that we are able to create the reflective stance. This has certainly been the case for me, it is as if the words become far more alive and profoundly personalised when they are written as anecdotes. The words become your own, you feel the experience as if it is yours.

7.1 Journal writing

I made use of a dialectic notebook throughout the study to detail my journey and aid in my reflexivity, enabling me to be both witness and author of my research (Finlay & Evans, 2009). Keeping a research journal has been recognized as a crucial aspect of personal and professional development (McLeod, 2015). It also provided an opportunity for introspection that relied on my ability to 'look within' as a form of self-exploration (Gross & Stevens, 2016).

I used my dialectic notebook to articulate my positions and provide transparency regarding the processes that I have undertaken, allowing you, the reader, to follow my journey. Keeping the

journal involved prewriting, scribbling and note taking, as well as writing down ideas that came to me and noting journal articles that I read that I felt had relevance. It also includes references to my emotional reflections of the research process, my personal struggles with an overload of the data, and my rewriting with the feedback loop in mind (Bager-Charleson, 2010), this last aspect involved noticing how I felt on re-reading my journal and my journey. My journal has also provided an invaluable tool for 'relative permanence' (Smith, 2004), by freezing on paper some of the ideas that I may have forgotten that I could go back to at a later date.

The use of my journal has assisted my reflective self-awareness, enabling me to own my involvement while considering the 'lens' that I look through (Stiles, 1993), assisting me with bracketing my assumptions.

7.2 Empathy as a phenomenological attitude

Wertz (2005) describes the phenomenological attitude as being one of empathy, saying that 'the researcher strives to leave his or her own world behind and to enter fully... into the situations of the participants. The researcher empathetically joins with participants, in their lived situation(s). This sharing of the experience is the basis for later reflection on meanings and experiential processes. This attitude involves an extreme form of care that savours the situation described in slow, meditative way and attends to, even magnifies, all the details.'

Empathy was used as an observational strategy during the interview process, enabling me to draw on my own personal experience and self-knowledge to attune to the participants during the interview (Atwood & Stolorow 1984). Examples of my empathy can be seen in my annotated, coded transcripts in Appendix 8.

7.3 Empathetic listening

In order for this study to adhere to an explorative reflexive approach I attempted to stay as close to the participants' experience as possible. In order to achieve this, I aspired to use an actively empathetic mode of listening, while at the same time relating to the otherness of the participants' world (Binder, Holgersen & Moltu, 2012), as I have highlighted in my transcripts. This involved statements of affirmations and reassurance, such as 'How was that for you?' or 'Gosh, that must have been difficult'. My empathetic listening did not just make use of auditory skills, it was also demonstrated through 'mirroring' (Kahn, 1997) my presence and understanding by reflecting the participants' body language, or expressions. This allowed for empathetic listening on a bodily, cognitive emotional and intentional level. As Rogers tell us:

An empathetic way of being with another person (...) means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness of confusion or whatever that he or she is experiencing. To be with another in this way means that for the time being, you lay aside your own views and values in order to enter another's world without prejudice.

(as cited in Binder, Holgersen & Moltu, 2012: p.7)

As well as an empathetic feedback, I used an empathetic silence, a 'listening reading' attitude while I re-read the transcripts. There was something in the ability to read slowly, to re-read, to search between the lines of text that enabled a reflexiveness that can only come after the event.

7.4 Reflexive bodily empathy

This is a research tool that involved me engaging in an embodied intersubjective relationship with my participants. I used this as a tool to 'be with' my participants, as empathy is not just in the listening but is an embodied form of understanding, used to intuit what the other is positing (Finlay, 2006). Finlay talks about 're-membering', which is not just a cognitive function: it is about reiterating responses in the body's reflection, which can occur during and after the encounter. A bodily reaction demonstrates the limits to the intersubjectivity I am able to attain. The aim of this reflexivity is to see through fresh eyes (Finlay, 2008). This tool enabled me to appreciate the ontological reduction, as a way of physically being in my participants' experiences.

7.5 Attunement

Siegel describes attunement as being alert, astute, attentive, aware, careful, heedful, thoughtful, wary, watchful, wide-awake and wise. In educational terms it is the avoidance of prematurely closing off possibilities or being judgemental (Siegel, 2010). The act of attunement seems at first to be an ideology, and yet, with careful attention to the other, and by attempting to take their essence into our own world, the practice soon becomes quite habitual. This is something I noticed after the first few minutes of the interview process. I took for granted that as a psychotherapist, I maximise contact by using eye contact, paying attention to facial expression, tone of voice, posture, gesture and the timing and intensity of the response of my participants. Through my training, attunement had become not only a research goal but was something I aspired to and often achieved in my clinical practice. This is something that has been described as 'healing involvement' the therapist being 'inflow' with the client (Orlinsky *et*

al., 2005). I realised that although this was not a research goal, it may well be a research outcome.

At times, my preconceptions and preunderstandings may have got in the way, as is always the case when one human being meets the boundary of the other. However, with careful attunement and very careful listening, I was able to pull myself away from the other, to find the participant's hermeneutic truth. This being achieved in co-creation. I am aware that the aspiration of attunement and deep dialogue comes from an ideology of I-thou relatedness, that I believe I was able to achieve in all my interviews (Buber, 2010). This was accomplished through the sharing of a phenomenon that was powerful and emotive, through my attentive listening and affirmatory feedback, through the power of mirroring, through the 'between' of the interview in which both myself and the participant were wholly engaged, and through the participant's vulnerability and their exposure of the content, which for very few of them had ever seen daylight or been discussed before.

It is also important to talk about my attitude of openness. This is something that I strive towards as a therapist and researcher. It is not just an openness in my way of being, but an attempt to be open to the subject itself. I am aware that my realities might not be the realities of others and that each participant may well have an entirely different reality from each of the others. I have sought to keep a balance between scientific openness, my own personal prejudices and the social, historical and cultural embeddedness of the subject. In attempting to see this phenomenon with fresh eyes, I am reminded of the following passage.

When we encounter familiar objects, we tend to see them through familiar eyes and thus often miss seeing novel features of familiar situations. Hence by understanding

that the given has to be seen merely as a presentational something rather than the familiar 'object that is always there', new dimensions of the total experience are likely to appear. This is what is meant when phenomenologists say they want to experience things (Giorgi, 2016: p.249).

7.6 Resonance and validation

One of the goals of my interviews was to reach some form of resonance with my participants. This, as Siegel tells us, achieves the 'coupling of two autonomous entities into a functional whole. A and B are in resonance and as each attunes to the other. When such resonance is enacted with positive regard, a deep feeling of coherence emerges with the subjective experience of harmony' (Siegel, 2010: p.54). This is part of the process with 'participant validation' and is one of the ultimate tools for validating the conclusions of my research. Participant validation was used during the interviews, in the questions and the feedback, as well as in the process of feeding back the transcripts and the themes. It was sought both overtly through the linguistics used in the interview transcripts and emails, but also covertly through witnessing of participant behaviour, affirmations and body language. Resonance was one of the major means by which I have validated this research.

7.7 Reflexive analysis during and after the interview

During the interviews I was aware of myself as the researcher. There was also something of myself as a therapist, as I noticed myself asking questions, such as 'What was that like for you?' I was aware that as the participants were re-telling their dreams, which were being re-lived and that I was witnessing their dream unfolding into the 'now'. Todres tells us that at this point of the interview the researcher needs to stay with this and *stand-with* the participant to

encourage more description. This is where, as a novice researcher on my first PEP study I fell down. I was so anxious about achieving success in the interview and asking the questions verbatim that I did not allow for free flow. In hindsight I have been able to rectify this in my final project. I have been able to be attentive and 'be-with' the participants in their experience (Todres, 2007). It is hard to appreciate when reading the transcripts as there is no indication of the length of the pauses, but it was something I tried hard to achieve.

It is also important to detail my intersubjective reflexivity (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006) in terms of my transference responses to my participants, but also in terms of the intersubjective realm that existed between both parties. At times my 'wounded child' will have almost certainly met the participants' own 'wounded child' just as the therapist in me, met the therapist in them. Detailing my responses was pivotal in order to be transparent.

In the aftermath of the interviews, I was impacted many times at different stages of the process. In listening to the interviews for example, when I no longer had the 'ego' function causing me to worry what I was saying or if was going to miss something vital. After the interviews, as I listened again to the audio recordings, I was far more capable of fully immersing myself in the participants' experiences. I saw things from different aspects of my own lived experience as a gravity dreamer, an optimist, a spiritual individual, a mother, a daughter and partner. Finlay talks about five mutually dependent and iterative processes for doing phenomenology and, alongside embracing a phenomenological attitude (which I felt came more naturally to me as time went on), she discusses entering the lifeworld of the participants and dwelling with horizons of implicit meanings (Finlay, 2012). This can only be achieved after considerable time. I found that my head was full and confused for days, I felt as if there was something at the tip of my awareness, I wasn't able to sleep properly, I would return, again

and again to the texts, waiting for something to reveal itself to me. I realised that it is impossible to find implicit meanings without this process of dwelling.

Chapter 8: Ethics

8.1 Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Programme Approval Panel in June 2019, after my learning agreement was re-submitted. A stakeholder analysis was completed as part of my submission, providing a picture of the impacts the study would have on the participants in terms of concerns and potential risks (see Appendix 14).

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that addresses questions about how we should act towards each other, pronounces judgements of value about actions and develops rules of ethical justifications. It is in essence the philosophical study of morality (Kitchener, Anderson 2000). My ethical values are defined by my identity as a psychotherapist who is bound by the code of ethics of my governing bodies the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) and Metanoia and Middlesex Universities as well as my philosophical principles, which are integral to a reflexive process in research. The foundational ethical principles of any medical practice are *nonmaleficence*, which means to cause no harm, *respect for a person's autonomy*, meaning freedom of action and freedom of choice as well as *fidelity*. Qualities of loyalty, faithfulness, integrity and honesty fall under this last heading as well as the value of trustworthiness.

One of the reductions described by Levinas is that of Alterity. In never truly being able to know the other, we attempt to leave behind our personal categories and terms. In the experience of alterity, I am addressed by my ethical responsibility to my participant. My ethical requirement to attempt to see their appeals to me, that which is not my 'self' (van Manen, 2016).

It goes without saying that *trustworthiness* is central to the role of a psychotherapist. Trusting someone implies that we can rely on their character, their intention and their morality.

Trustworthiness is also central to the role of the researcher. Kitchener and Anderson tell us that if the researcher is not trustworthy, neither is their research (Kitchener & Anderson, 2000). I realise that this is also an important aspect of my research. I believe that my trustworthiness is demonstrated through my transparency in my journal writing, in my self-reflectivity and transparency with my informed consents and my transparency with my attitude and openness during the interviews themselves. Other values that are considered ethically important are prudence (or practical wisdom), this is perhaps best seen in knowing when to intervene with a line of questioning, as well as in integrity and care and compassion (Kitchener & Anderson, 2000). These moral values are integral to both the therapist and the researcher and are values that I aspire to live by daily.

8.2 Informed consent

Participants were given copies of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix Seven), which they signed and returned, as well as a Letter of Intention (Appendix Six) detailing the study requirements. This notified the participant of their right to withdraw from the study and the personal risks to themselves as well as my details and information. Participants were advised that they didn't need to answer all the questions, should they feel uncomfortable doing so. At the end of each interview participants were invited to make contact with me, should they require further emotional support, and they were offered a subsequent debriefing interview. Josselson suggests that participating in the process of sharing one's life during research stirs up a welter of narcissistic tensions in both the participant and the researcher (Josselson, 2007). It was important therefore to consider the impact that the interview may have had on the participant in terms of their wellbeing. A stakeholder analysis was conducted to assess the possible impacts that my research would have on all parties involved (Appendix 14).

8.3 Data protection

Participant data was stored in keeping with the Jersey Data Protection Act (2018). Data files were kept in a password protected 'Dropbox' folder on a locked hard drive. The original transcripts and audio files were deleted but the annotated versions will remain on my computer until the end of this journey. All the participants' names were changed and information relating to their stories and any personal identifiable information was anonymised. They are saved on my computer under their pseudonyms.

During the interviews I considered the potential for increased disclosure, as this has been described as a possible consequence of an online interview alongside ensuring that time boundaries were adhered to and that interviews could not be overheard (Anthony, 2004).

Chapter 9: Results overview

	SILVIA	BRENT	LOUISE	MATHEW
Orientation of therapist	Psychologist Body psychotherapist	Drama psychotherapist	Psychotherapist Psychodynamic	Psychologist Psychodynamic
Nationality	Polish	American	British	British
How does the therapist deal with dreams?	Not much success or confidence	Gestalt and acting out dream	Gestalt: parts of self/ transference	Transference/ countertransference
	SARAH	SALLY	JO	
Orientation of therapist	Human integrative psychotherapist	Play/child psychotherapist	Integrative psychotherapist	
Nationality	German heritage, living in UK	British	Australian	
How does the therapist deal with dreams?	Gestalt: parts of self	Drawing dreams, Gestalt: parts of self	Gestalt: parts of self	

Figure 5: The cohort

The cohort consisted of two human/integrative psychotherapists, a psychologist/psychotherapist (who specialised in psychosomatic illness and the body), a psychodynamic psychologist (with no formal training in dreams), a child psychotherapist, a drama psychotherapist, and a psychodynamic psychotherapist.

I initially started recording themes using NVIVO. This worked, up until the point at which I needed to get the general themes and highlighted text to my critical friend, which I found was not possible with this application. I realised that it was far easier to conduct my line-by-line thematic analysis using a Word document, so I repeated my efforts with that software. This meant that I could highlight my personal reflections as well as themes (see Appendix 1 for all my transcripts). My initial themes were vast in number, as you can see overleaf. As I progressed through the theme analysis, I realised that many of the themes could be consolidated. It was at this point that I applied a colour coding system to my analysis.

Due to an inconsistency across the participants in terms of full data sets, only the interviews were assessed thematically, with the personal reflection pieces and post-interview questionnaires used to enhance descriptions of themes alone. For further information see Chapter 12.5 The full thematic analysis of the participants can be found in Appendix Eight.

	BRENT	LOUISE	JO	SARAH	SALLY	SYLVIA	MATHEW
Narrative	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Interview	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Feedback	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

Changing motif and developing self	A change in motif Becoming grounded, satisfaction From falling to flying New motifs through exploration Recurrent dreams Becoming more competent From swimming to soaring From flying to levitating A deep wish to be seen
Why? The necessary dream?	A freedom wound Connection to something bigger Processing lived world events A need to survive Trying to progress A transcendental experience A state of grace Disassociation Agency Need for freedom Nostalgia Creativity Letting go, letting go of fear Achievement I wish I had been more powerful
Power/control/oppression Personal agency	Powerlessness and falling Power and control Repression Rising to the challenge Strictness and boundaries Responsibility Relinquishing fear Powerlessness Agency
Finding oneself/Identity Existential concerns	Being 'other' Being authentic Being different Where am I Finding an authentic self Identity Individuation My voice Being watched and judged
Existential concerns	Who am I

	Falling and ceasing to exist
	Falling and failing
	Not belonging
	Being part of something else
	beyond ourselves
	Lack of boundaries, infinity
	A need to escape
	Limitless
	Being part of the universe
	Not being seen
	Life and death, not creating life
	Body potency
Embodiment	Body-less
	Relationship with body
	The embodied dream
	An endless fall
Transcendental	Part of the universe
	Part of something else
	State of grace
	Primal and elemental
	Creativity
	Beyond ourselves
	Infinite universe
	Transcendental experience
	Emotional potency
Emotional potency	Positive emotion
Life parallels and embodied metaphors	Fear of falling/failing
	Exposure
	Fear of flight in life
	Letting go
	Life stress
	Moving forward
	Healing
	Responsibility
	Becoming more grounded
	Powerlessness and incapability of helping
	Not being held in mind, let go of
Loneliness/disassociation and loss	Splitting off
	disassociation
	Loneliness
	Not fitting in
Dreamwork in therapy	Passion for dreamwork
	Limitations of dreamwork

	Lack of confidence
	Tell me more?
	Lack of success in therapy
	New awarenesses through interview
	Lucid dreams
Other existential experiences	Recurrent dreams
	After death dreams
	Predictive dreams
	Shared dreams
	Tsunami dreams
Culture, superstition, fairy-tale	Witches on broomsticks
Imagination and creativity	In language, poems, songs
AN AHA	New connections and understandings

Figure 6: General themes from literal text

From this thematic list, I then developed a map of the general thematic aspects, grouping themes together. This is illustrated in Figure 7.

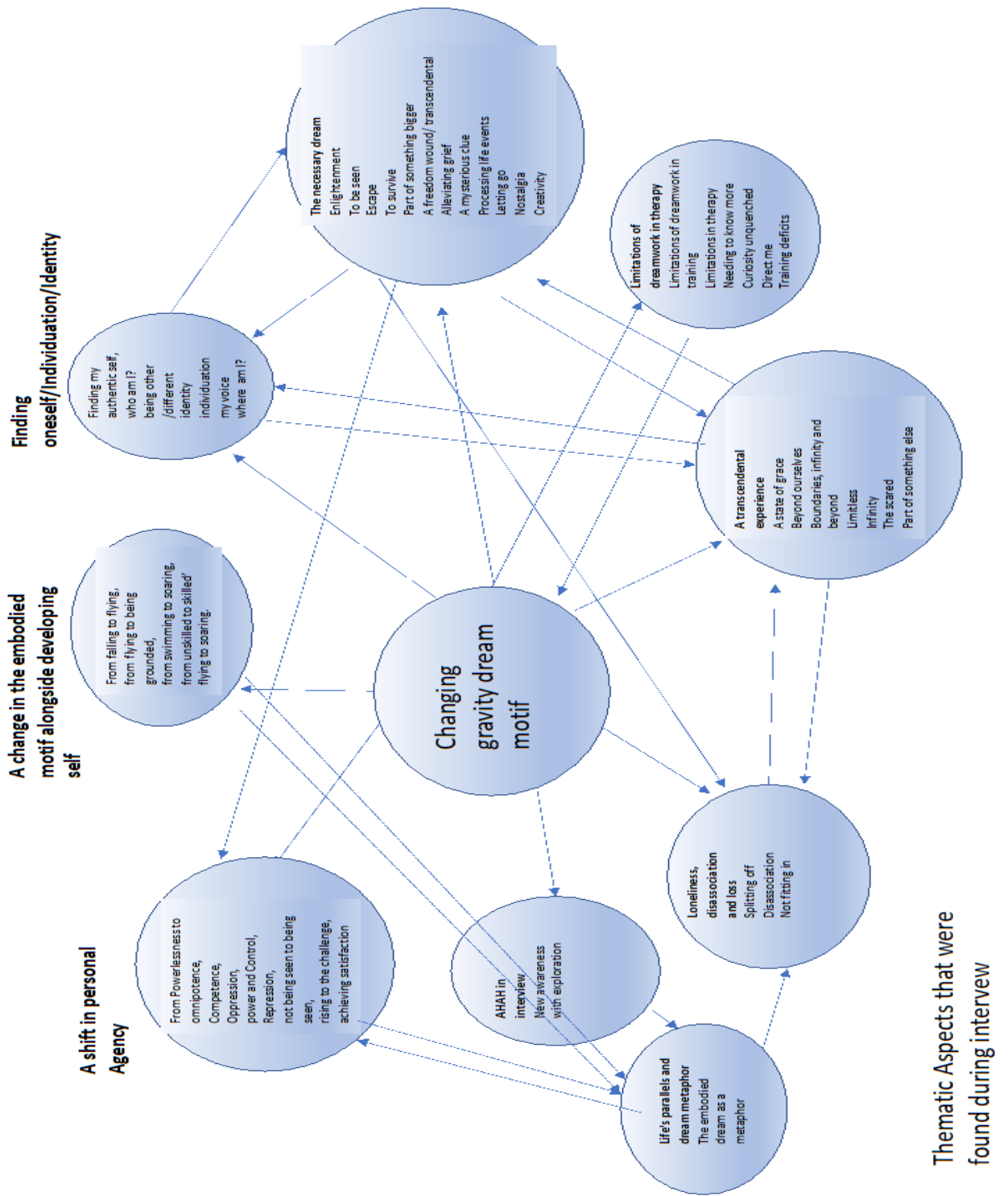


Figure 7: General thematic aspects

After I had gathered my initial themes, I spent time looking at their relatedness and seeing which themes fitted or could be clustered with others. I had termed one theme 'A necessary dream', this was due to the fact that all participants felt as if there was some reasonable explanation for why they would have such a dream series and what they actually got out of their experiences, or what the dreams were attempting to express.

In looking at theme relatedness, I began to cluster the nine themes that were non-redundant and could be related in some way. I realised for example that 'The necessary dream' could be clustered with 'A transcendental experience' and 'Finding oneself/individuation/identity'. 'The motif as a metaphor for life' could be clustered with 'Loneliness, dissociation and loss', 'A time of turbulence' and 'Personal agency'. So, I colour-coded the related themes (Figure 8), consolidated those themes into units and strengthened the names attributed to the units by describing their essential meanings, as seen in Figure 10. Examples of all these themes are provided in the following chapters. Each participant had differing parallels and metaphors, differing changes to their motifs and differing experiences of the hermeneutic understanding of their dreams and their purpose.

The limitations of dreamwork in Psychotherapy was an essential theme, which I gathered less inductively as I specifically asked the therapists how they worked with dreams in the interviews. This was not however an anticipated theme it emerged tangentially from the structure of the exploration of gravity dream phenomena. This question fed back into the therapists' training and their modalities. I was not anticipating that I would encounter a deficit in working with dreams, in terms of their confidence, personal experience in therapy, or how they worked with dreams, especially due to the fact that they were avid dreamers. This theme is expanded upon in Chapter 12.

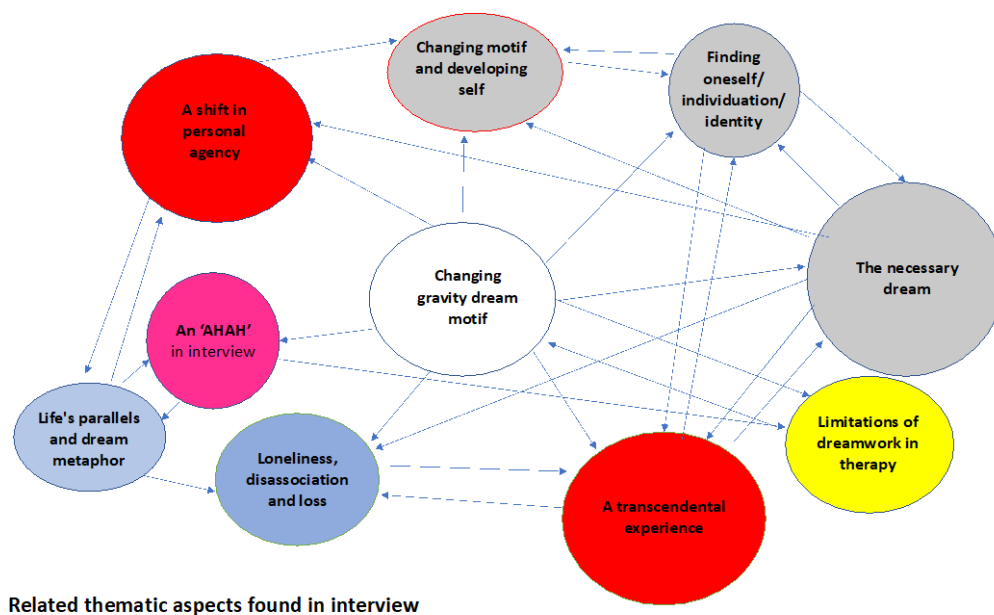


Figure 8: Clustering units of essential meaning

I realised that an initial theme relating to other existential dream experiences that my participants had experienced was not significant as it did not say anything about the gravity dreaming motif itself, perhaps it said more about the individuals. I also rejected the theme relating to culture, superstition, fairy-tales, imagination and creativity as it was not homogenous across the cohort. Some participants intimated that they were spiritual or creative in nature, therefore they may have been more open to existential experience, however there was not a theme on personality that I could apply to all of my participants, so I did not include this finding in my final thematic aspects.

Consolidation of Thematic Aspects

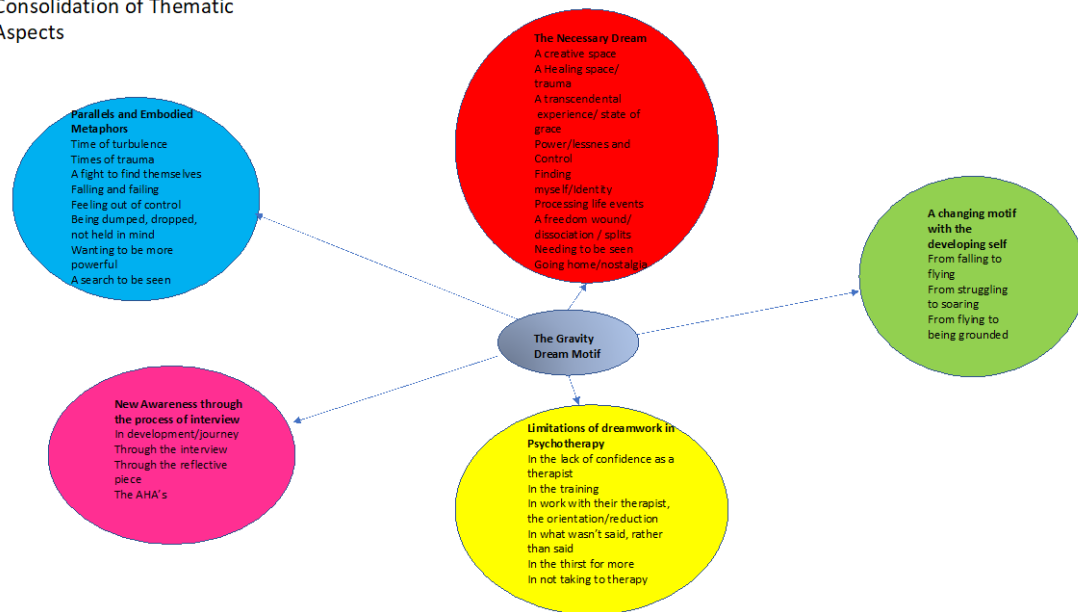


Figure 9: Consolidation of essential thematic aspects

For my final three essential themes I consolidated 'The necessary dream', and 'A changing motif with the developing self'. This felt important due to the fact that there appeared to be reasons why the dream had a certain motif, why this motif changed and the metaphor this motif provided in understanding the parallels that were happening for the participants in their lived world. The final theme thus became 'The necessary dream, the changing motif and the journey of the developing self.'

I also clustered 'Parallels and metaphors', with 'New awareness through the process of interview'. This felt very important as it was through the sense of an embodied metaphor during the interview that participants made sense of the dream. It was as if the dream was explaining its significance through its imagery. I therefore coded these two themes together to form 'An emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance'. It is important to say at this point that ALL the participants derived new understandings of their

dreams as a result of the interview. These new awarenesses were either made through their felt sense of the embodied dream, through the metaphor itself, or through their immersion back into the dream experience. I coined the term 'embodied metaphor' for this theme as I realised participants felt the imagery of the metaphor.

The theme 'The therapy space: reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream self' was related to the participants essential experiences of taking dreams to therapy, as well as their essential experience of dream training. The retrieval, revival and reconnection with their dream selves was essential to the interview experience. This was a bi product of the interview process and was not anticipated. I realised that this theme was not essential to the gravity phenomena. It was about what the interview brought to the participant. I became aware that through the interview process the participants were retrieving their experiences; they were reviving their dreams' memories and significance and they were making new connections to that significance. All of the participants expressed gratitude at the opportunity to work with a motif of which they had not made complete sense. I coded the word 'reduction' because I realised that there was something in what the participants didn't say, rather than what they did say. I realised my expectation was a wealth of creative ways in which these avid dreamers worked with dreams, and yet what I was seeing was a reductive experience of training, of working with dreams and of taking dreams to therapy. Participants either felt unconfident or wanted me to suggest further resources. This is expanded upon in Chapter 12.3.

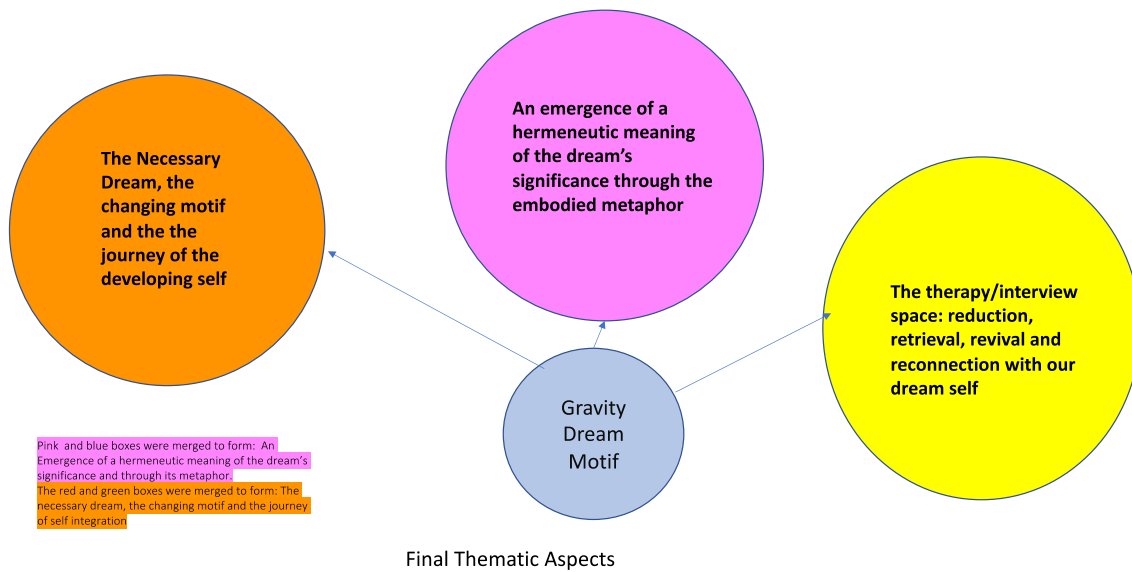


Figure 10: Final essential thematic aspects

My final thematic aspects were fed back to the participants as well as to my critical friend.

Although, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was unsure how many responses I would receive, two of the participants returned feedback. Brent said:

I love how the three slides progress toward integration and extracting key themes and learning. These phrases stuck out for me in particular:

The interview as a place to retrieve and reconnect with memories and gather new awareness's of the dream's significance.

The interview as a place to renew interest in the significance of dreams and the benefit of working with them.

This was what I valued most about our two (three!) interviews. And a lot of that was down to your skills as an interviewer and psychotherapist.

While Sarah said:

Thank you very much for sending this. It was interesting to read the themes and to get a broader view of what other participants contributed. I do see my themes in the presentation, and I am really looking forward to reading more when it's ready.

My critical friend conducted her own separate analysis on the transcripts, and the initial themes she attributed are detailed below, in Figure 11. She was able to agree with the themes I had attributed, saying:

The themes you have come up seem very well chosen and integrated with the participants' unique gravity dreams. With regards to the 'Aha', I would keep it under 'An emergence of a hermeneutic meaning of one's life, one's existence and one's self through the embodied dream metaphor.'

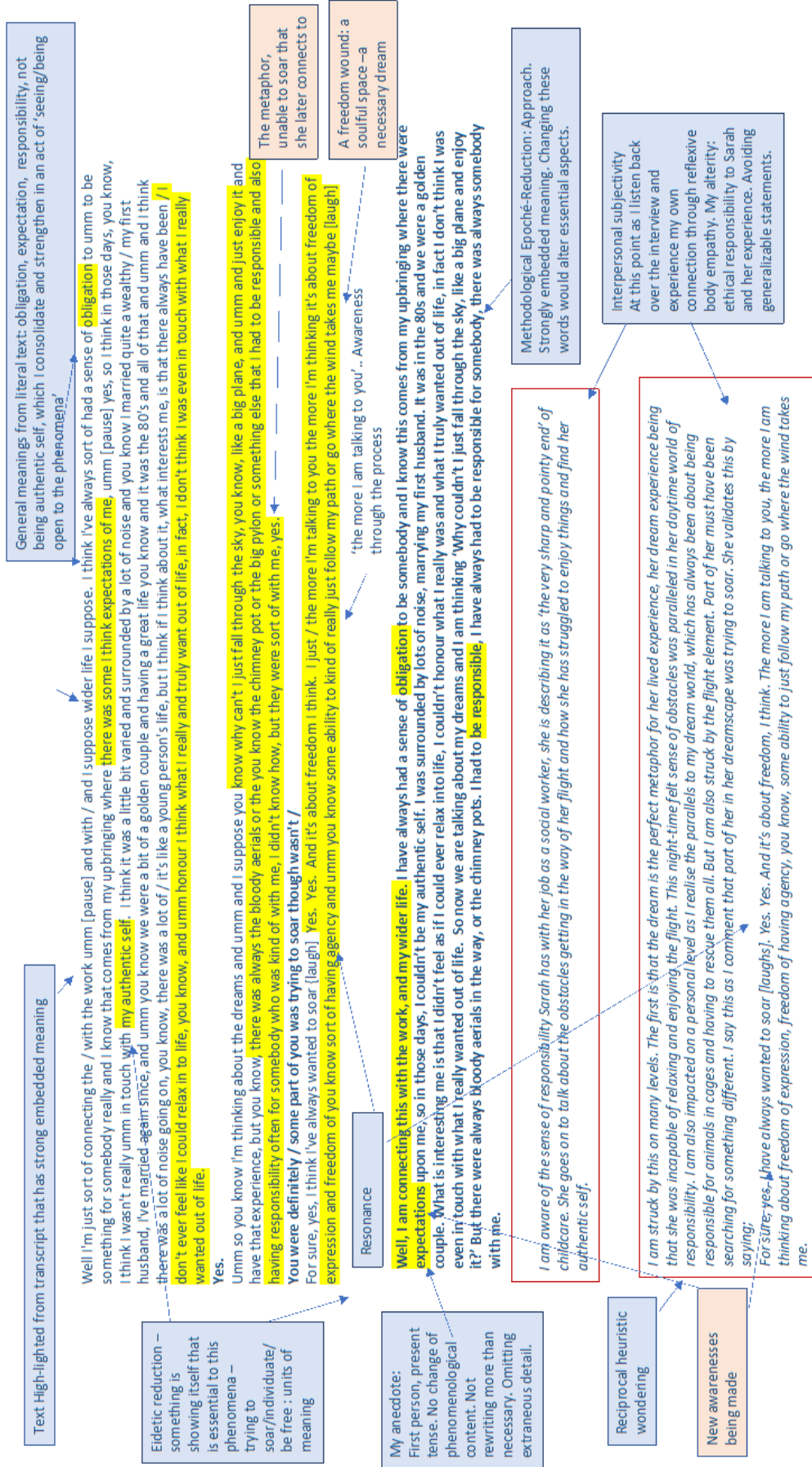
Participant	Themes
Jo	Feelings of not belonging, not being seen as a child, not feeling appreciated in romantic relationships, dreaming very vividly, feeling valued whilst flying, dreams as a vision of oneself thriving.
Mathew	Feeling powerless, elemental and primitive dreams, lack of agency, anger, dreams of a genetic memory (lost languages), trying to reconnect with things he was denied, being one with the universe, recurrent dreams, being authentic to his true self.
Sally	Confusion about own identity, fear of not being able to care for others, shift from falling to flying, feeding dreams into creative work, dreams as prediction of what's to come.
Sarah	Recurrent dreams, desire to be seen, desire to meet high expectations, not in touch with authentic self, sense of responsibility for others' expectations of her, dual meaning of dreams, dreams as part of herself.
Brent	High expectations of himself, internal value system of exceling, being more grounded, after death dreams, flying associated with reconnecting with past, flying dreams as a way of travelling back to dear places, feelings of achievement and competence.
Silvia	Unhappy childhood, being one with the universe, flying as a healing experience, body-less sensation, change of identity, sense of pressure and immense responsibility, constantly living in fear, anticipating the worst, state of grace, moving forward, loneliness, lack of boundaries, recurrent dreams.
Louise	Awareness of dreaming, lack of understanding from family, emotional neglect, not feeling appreciated, not fitting in, becoming grounded, life as a journey to recovery, losing control, dreams as a liberating experience, after death dreams.

Figure 11: Critical friend initial thematic aspects

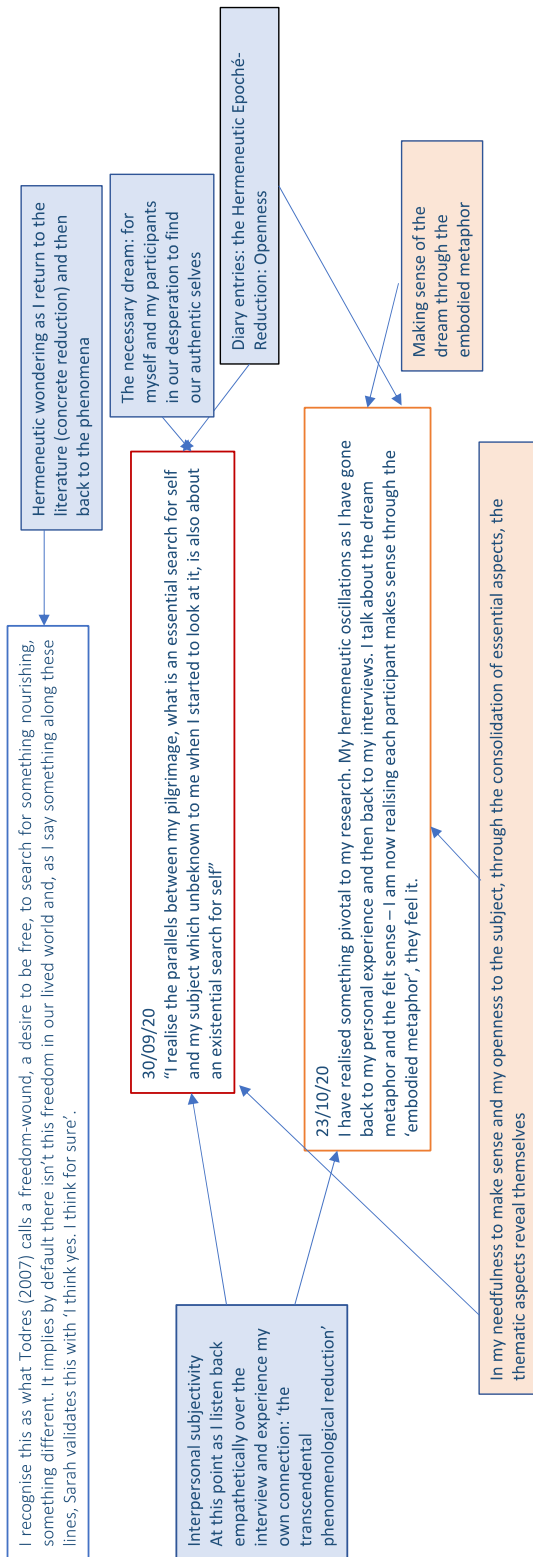
It was very reassuring to see that my critical friend saw the same initial themes that I did. I was unsure as to whether I could relate trauma, emotional neglect etc. to the gravity dream phenomenon specifically, these things also being relatable to psychotherapists in general. However, in the context of a dream metaphor and changing motif, there were elements of the dreamer's history that could be attributed to the journey of the developing self. My critical friend saw the same themes relating to authenticity and the fight for identity that I had found.

However, she only attributed essential themes to the phenomenon of gravity dreaming and did not include any that were essential to the interview experience.

Examples of reflexivity and reduction (1)



Examples of reflexivity and reduction (2)



The essential thematic aspects are consolidated into my final thematic aspects. You can see the extract provided, demonstrates the essential thematic aspect of the necessary dream in terms of assisting Sarah's individuation and feelings of responsibility. You can also see she makes new hermeneutic awarenesses through the interview through an embodied metaphor.

Figure 12: Examples of reflexivity and reduction

Chapter 10: Participants' gravity stories

10.1 Brent

Brent is a mature drama psychotherapist from North America, now living in the UK, who I had interviewed before, during my PEP. He has a wealth of gravity dream motifs in his history, all of which we explored in our interviews together. He has reached a stage in life where he feels happy. He tells me, in his American accent, that he is doing some of the best work as a therapist he has ever done. He tells me in his written piece that he feels grounded. He hasn't had any new gravity dreams since our last interview two years ago, where he was flying over his childhood home. We meet on a face-to-face internet call.

In his written piece Brent, intimates that his dream about going home was about reconnecting with his roots, his sense of identity. I ask him how he had made that connection and he tells me it was an insight he gained as a result of our last interview. His written piece also informs me that he has had new gravity dreams since our last interview. However, after our second interview however he emails to let me know there has been a further change in his motif, and we have a third interview.

Today, Brent is truly satisfied with life. He doesn't want to use the word smug, but I get the sense that he just knows he is doing good work with his clients. I find myself joining in with the sense of satisfaction he feels, perhaps feeling a parallel process in the work that we do in our interviews, which are easy-going and stimulating.

During our second interview he divulges a little of his childhood, which he spent growing up in a violent area in North America, with a younger brother who is very naughty and a sister who he described as having a 'litany of problems'. He tells me that he had very high expectations of

himself, that he learned to work hard for his high-achieving stepfather and that doing well is how he got attention. He begins to tell me about his early memories of gravity dreaming, and how they included dreams of falling in his childhood, which he found consistently upsetting, saying that the sensation of falling felt as if it were 'impossibly long'.

I ask Brent what is felt like for him to fall and he tells me that it was terrifying. I ask Brent if falling was a metaphor for him at the time, whether it would have meant anything to him in his teenage years, when he remembered having them.

Terrifying to fall, ahh, yes, ok. Terrifying to fail, very closely related word.

He laughs.

Yes, I think that links very nicely with the floating one. Yes, terrifying to fall, to fail, to be embarrassed, to lose face, to all of that stuff, yes reputation management as a teenager.

I am aware of the fact that Brent describes these dreams as terrifying and how he says that they feel impossibly long. I feel empathy for him as I realise the power of this sensation from a physical perspective and the fact, he has them frequently as a child. These dreams are known to contain really strong bodily sensations (Bulkeley, 2016).

Brent tells me about another dream motif in which he would be running but not touching the ground. I ask him what he feels that his felt sense of falling means to him and what it would be saying if it were a metaphor. At this point Brent becomes aware of a new connection to the dream's meaning and has what I would call an 'Aha' moment. He connects with his 'felt sense' of falling: the embodied metaphor. He unites the physical sensation of falling to his real fear of

failing, of losing face. Brent also links the feeling of failure to the float-running dreams he had when he was younger. In these dreams he describes losing gravity for some time before touching the earth again. He tells me there were two aspects to the experience.

On one hand it felt wonderful, because I had this special ability, but it was also frustrating. I would try very hard to make progress, but I couldn't actually move forward. This I think is what I found especially disconcerting. I would know that it wasn't a dream, it was real, and I could not make progress. I have had hundreds of these dreams in my childhood.

I ask Brent whether he feels this had any significance to his life at the time, whether not progressing meant anything to him as a child. Brent tells me about his high internal value system, his need to do well and how, although he did very well, he feared not progressing as he would wish to.

Later in the interview he spoke of a dream in which his flying was mastered. The motif changed with his life's circumstances yet again. It occurred during his later adolescence. He is recalling his dreams as we talk, saying they link thematically with his experiences, but that he cannot tell me the exact timeline. In his written piece, Brent described his mode of flying as a 'superpower' and I am very keen to explore this with him in our interview. He tells me that he has never been obsessed by superheroes, but he asks:

Could I have been a rescuer? Could I have intervened? Well, I think having superpowers in my childhood would have come in useful a few times growing up in a violent city. I suffered from violent crimes at quite a few times. Everyone in my family suffered from violence in the community, some of them really extreme and serious violence. So, I

suppose there might have been part of me that, well I know there was a part of me that would have liked to be more powerful or been able to get revenge against the perpetrators.

Brent tells me about a violent crime against his sister, which he doesn't want to go into. He tells me that he kept silent about it for fifteen years. I am really coming to appreciate why his sister has a 'litany of problems' and how powerless he must have felt at this point in his history. He then goes on to tell me that he got noticed at home by being a super-kid, through his achievements. I am struck by the fact that his dreams of having a superpower and rescuing perhaps fit with his lived experience of being a good boy, a super-kid. He tells me that he didn't want to ever have attention for being vulnerable or messing up.

We then move onto talking about the change in the motif; the fact that he hasn't flown in a while. He says:

I really appreciated the opportunity to reflect on that in my written piece. There is a part of me that is reticent to the notion of having arrived somewhere, because a deep part of my ethos is the fact that we are always learning, so I don't want to rest on my laurels. But I am at the point in my life and my career where things feel quite stable. When I was in my 30s our child was young and I got divorced, I was really trying to establish my career, trying to finish my psychotherapy training, training in a new specialism which added quite a bit to my expertise and it's only in the last three or four years that I have felt not only competent but relatively relaxed as a psychotherapist and just having the confidence, that I have knowledge, I've got experience and now I can relax and just be fully present in the moment and not worry about the inner scripts;

my really high personal expectations and my perfectionism. Just in the last two months, I think I am doing some of the best work I have ever done.

I smile at Brent and say, 'Well that does sound grounded!' He is very happy about this. I am celebrating his success, the holy grail of actually achieving satisfaction in the gestalt sense (as cited in Marmor et al, 2006). When reflecting on not having gravity dreams, he says:

How can I make sense of it? So maybe I don't need to float and fly and be a superhero, I am more grounded. To me that makes sense.

I feel very impacted by this. Brent has had a difficult violent upbringing. He has worked hard all his life to be the straight-A guy and he has had a lot of tough internal drivers. Today he looks relaxed, he seems happy, and I feel a deep connection with him.

I am also struck at this point by the parallel process we have going on. I am finally feeling a little more relaxed in my interviews and it is because of this that we have been able to attune. I am also struck by the connections he has made through the process of the interview. I ask him how he has found talking about his dreams. He tells me he loves it.

I love it. Yes, I'm really fascinated, and you have caused me to reflect on aspects of my dreams that I have never thought about before. I am grateful to you. I am grateful to you that you are researching this area, which sounds like pretty fresh territory in dream science?

I realise that it is not just the dream space that he has been given but the encouragement to look at things in a different way, and even look at an aspect of his life he has perhaps never given space to. Brent tells me that he hasn't taken his gravity dreams to therapy before.

Other than yourself I haven't taken these dreams to therapy, which I think is interesting in itself. This is possibly because my float running dreams were disconcerting and I didn't understand them. I would have felt that it may be troubling to the other person and it wasn't so troubling that I needed help with it. The main feeling when I woke up was relief.

I am struck by the fact that he has had these dreams all his life, it is only at the age of 50 that he has stopped having them and yet he has never shared them. He says that he has only ever done three or four psychodramas with dreams in personal therapy. He says this is may be due to the orientation of his therapist, who was Kleinian. I then feel incredibly grateful that he has wanted to finally share them, and I also really get a feeling that there is something about the topic of my study that is giving permission for Brent. He doesn't need to worry about me finding the content unsettling. I am inviting it.

I ask Brent whether he has had any clients who have had gravity dreams and he says that he had a client who was very disturbed by a rollercoaster dream. He tells me the dreamer's emotions were incredibly intense as they were thrown around the air, seated next to her partner. I realise again the power of the embodied metaphor. It feels as if the embodied dream metaphor parallels what they are experiencing in their embodied lived world. Brent tells me that when they worked with the dream, his client realised it was a metaphor for her relationship at the time. We talk about how the brain in our dream world seems to work in metaphors as the right hemisphere, the metaphor maker, stays online.

I say that I notice the changes in his gravity dreaming motifs and how they began with falling and failing, then struggling to progress and float-walking, followed by a more powerful superhero flying. I suggest it looks as if he was learning a skill. Brent validates this:

That makes a lot of sense actually. I haven't thought of it in those terms but yes, the scurrying just above the surface could be thought of as an apprenticeship, of the falling and then learning to fly. There is some part of me that wishes I had perfected it more, so that I could have wonderful journeys. On Google Earth there are certain ways that you can fly through cities.

I am glad that that I have finished my apprenticeship. Okay, I have just made another connection, thank you very much. You work in a very skilled way, because we have talked about apprenticeship towards flying and I finally feels like I am at the point of my career where I have finished my apprenticeship, so those things have come together very nicely, thank you.

A few days later I receive an email from Brent telling me that he has had another two gravity dreams and we set a date for another interview. He says:

I am high over the top of a sport stadium. I think it was baseball and I am watching for about five minutes or so. I remember having a thought that I might fall, but I realised I was suspended in mid-air, just looking down above the field of play, and I remember feeling impressed in the dream thinking, well, I'm not flying, and I am not falling and then I thought, I must tell Claire. I wanted to contact you because it happened so soon after our biggest phone call. I think there had to be a connection, not only with our explorations, but also with this theme in mind, that we spoke about last time, about

me feeling much more able these days. Feeling that I have reached a point in my life where I am beginning to have a sense of ease about my work and more confidence.

I then refer to some of the gestalt dream work about being projections of the dream and I ask Brent what he thought the sports game might represent.

Again, a brilliant question, it felt like I was at a professional match, rather than an amateur match. So, I suppose I was witnessing competence on the field. I don't know what team was playing, but the stadium was filled. Something exciting was going on but I didn't feel removed from it, you know, like an outsider. What was going on below was expertise and physical fitness, so maybe there is a theme there too. I was feeling impressed. This is a new thing, I'm not going to fall, and I am observing the movement down on the field, and the parallels to what we were talking about last time.

Again, Brent realised the significance of the new motif and how it is competent. He feels impressed with the players on the field who, of course, are projections of his own sense of competence. He is impressed with himself. He then goes on to tell me about another gravity dream. This time he is underwater, which is another new motif, and he laughs as he says:

It is almost David Attenborough-esque swimming among the sealions. I am laughing because it was so special, so playful. You know sometimes you'll see the underwater camera work, when they are in amongst the sealions, and it definitely felt like one of those, but again a feeling of competence, swimming amongst them and doing loop-the-loops and so actually quite different from the hovering above, because I was in the mix of things and I woke up and thought: 'Wow'.

These anecdotes suggest that Brent's motif, his sense making and his enthusiasm for the subject were all affected by our interviews. He was able to truly appreciate his own process of feeling satisfied, so much so that he was able to almost celebrate in his dream world how far he had come. We both laughed together at the lightness of this dream and I enjoyed the fact that he was in contact with the sealions and not watching from the outside. This felt like a metaphor for our work together. We were in the sea together as I joined in with his experience. We talked about what the water may mean, and he said:

I definitely do connect with the feeling of things being more fluid in my life and I can probably point to a few things in my life where there is a sense of flow, where there hasn't been for years. My daughter is off to university and she is doing really well and there was a certain degree of worry getting her through her adolescence and now she is a young adult. So now it's time for me and to pay attention to my self-care, so it's all connected, and this study has come along at a very opportune moment.

I tell Brent that it means a great deal to me that he wanted to report back his two latest dreams. I say that I can appreciate his sense of achievement at just getting a child through to university, happy and safe. I am also pleased that he is finally at a stage of life where he can enjoy himself.

When we talk about how Brent works with dreams in therapy, he tells me that in his training he was encouraged to stage the dream. He was told he might use objects to represent parts of the dream or if he was doing group work that people can represent aspects of the dream. He looked at the idea that each aspect of the dream can represent a part of the self.

Towards the end of the interview Brent asks me which books I recommend for working with dreams in psychotherapy. I realise that I haven't yet come across one that is really relational and contains decent anecdotes, but I suggest a few.

Brent fed back in his email that he had derived new hermeneutic meanings of his dreams' significance through the process of the interview. He made new connections through the interview process, in terms of what his psyche was indeed telling him. His motif changed throughout his life, from falling and failing, struggling to fly and progress, to hovering and eventually having fun in the water with sealions. He made new connections through the embodied dream metaphor.

In terms of the necessary dream – the changing motif and the developing self. it was quite apparent in the interview that Brent was going through different developmental issues at different times of his changing motif. His falling came when he was young and, for him, there was definitely an association between this and his terror of failing. As he got older, he gained a sense of knowing what he needed to be, a straight-A success, in order to survive his childhood. With one sibling having psychological issues and another playing up, Brent was learning that his road to being 'seen' was by being extraordinary. Early 'run and float' dreams give us an idea of a child who feels a real frustration at not making progress the way he felt he should. This really feels like some sort of internal conflict. As he steps into his adult years, his requirement for greater agency and his full awareness of the violence around him, is seen in his more powerful dream motif. When we meet for our interview during my PEP, he exhibits mastery over his motif (although I am not aware of this at the time) and he flies nostalgically home, describing vivid dreams of reconnecting with his identity, his home and his mother.

Towards the end of our time together the motifs change again demonstrating not just competency but a fixed gestalt: real satisfaction and play.

Brent told me in an email that he most connected with my theme of the therapy space; the retrieval, reduction, revival and reconnection with our dream self. He was able to recognise the benefits of our dreamwork together including the reconnection he had with himself, his processes, his journey and how this revived his interest in wanting to know more, reflected in his request for book recommendations.

It became apparent through the interview that Brent had not taken his dreams to therapy, telling me that perhaps this was down to the therapist, perhaps because he found them troubling. I found this really quite surprising given he told me that he not only did he have hundreds of gravity dreams, but he had held onto their memory for 50 years. When it came to be working with dreams in therapy, Brent had one reductive mode of working and that was through the use of psychodrama and parts of self.

THEMATIC ASPECTS	
The emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance through the interview through the embodied metaphor	Falling and fear of failure Personal agency Feeling grounded Satisfaction
The therapy space: reduction, retrieval, revival and Reconnection with our dream self	Reduction in terms of training Reduction in terms of therapy Reconnect with self Revival of interest
The Necessary Dream:	Processing his powerlessness
The changing motif and the journey of developing self	From fear of failing to Competence on the field

Figure 13: Overview of Brent's themes

10.2 Jo

Jo is in her late sixties. She is an Australian, Integrative Psychotherapist, working in Jersey. We meet face-to-face. Jo has completed a written piece for me. She contacted me after seeing my advert in the UKCP and recognised my name as a Jersey psychotherapist. Again, I didn't code her narrative for the sake of homogeneity, but I used the interview to direct the questions.

Jo described her history of gravity dreaming in her written piece. These began when she was a young child with dreams of laboured flapping motions, which she says were almost like that of a chicken. Her flapping got progressively more powerful as she got older. During our interview she jumps out of her seat and flaps her arms to show me how she did it. I am impacted by her passion and excitement.

I start the interview by asking Jo to tell me a little about herself, to see how she describes herself. This is something I abandon in later interviews as I find that people struggle to know how to answer this question. It is better perhaps to get a sense of who they are inductively. Jo tells me that she is an anxious person, she is a mother, she is loving and positive. I later find out that she is creative, writing poems and songs. She seems very self-deprecating, telling me that she self-sabotages and that she has struggled to find a place in the world. I get the sense of a really wounded healer, who appears to have come to psychotherapy late in life. She was previously a senior staff nurse in mental health.

Jo tells me about her strict and oppressed family culture, with her narcissistic, controlling and abusive father, who was in the army and her blackmailing, manipulating mother. She has two older sisters, one of whom was jealous of her and 'smothered me and tried to include me in all her manipulations' calling her by the name of a farmer's dog. She tells me that she never

thought of herself as anything other than the name her sister gave her and it was only years later that she realised that she had another, lovely name, which she began to wear in her 50s. I am struck by her inability to be authentic in her lifetime, only really feeling as if she was achieving this in her 60s. I asked her why she didn't feel that she could be authentic and she replied:

The first time I remember having to hide myself was when I was about four. I went out and climbed the caterpillar tree in the garden and I had such a sense of achievement. When my eldest sister came back from school, she said 'You've been climbing my caterpillar tree'. I asked her how she knew, and she said, 'A little birdie told me'. So not only did I have my sense of curiosity stifled, but I became paranoid that I was always being watched and judged.

I realise that Jo has had to metaphorically hide herself. She tells me about her early dreams of flying when she thinks she was nine or ten years old and how much effort was involved. She tells me she is not a good historian as she knows that she disassociated a lot as a child so she approximates the age she must have been during this dream series. Jo describes having to jump and flap and once she was airborne, she had to flap really hard in order to maintain her position. I realise again the power of these dreams from a physical perspective. This was also highlighted in my feasibility study. I am interested in her disassociation and I wonder whether this is also what she does in her dream world. Jo tells me that after a time she thinks her flapping muscles must have strengthened as in her later dreams she was airborne for longer. There is a definite motif, like with Brent, of a struggle and then mastery of her skill.

At this point I refer to a passage in her narration where she describes a dream she had when she was about 12 years, in which she lowered herself like a rocket into her place at school assembly. She describes only wearing her shorty pyjamas. I realise that in this dream she was watched and judged, but maybe for more positive reasons. I suggest that perhaps there was a sense of pride in the way she landed rocket like in assembly. She validates this by saying:

Yes, yes. They could admire my abilities, because when I was growing up, nothing I did was ever important, or right. I remember winning the school talent contest when I was 13 years old and no one in my family gave a shit. I was also the lead in my school play, and no one came, or applauded. I just had this sense of guilt any time I shined, I always felt guilty.

I feel desperately sorry for Jo, having my own 12-year-old who I realise really requires positive validation and to 'be seen' as she does her 'TikTok' dances round the house. I am aware that that the lack of validation must have been a real developmental deficit for her. She tells me that she thinks there is an element of shame in the dream, she references her shorty pyjamas and people being aware that she didn't have her normal pants on. Yet she tells me that it didn't really seem to matter because it was so amazing that she could fly that she didn't care what anyone thought. She remembers some faces looking up and exclaiming. She tells me they were in awe, wondering how she could fly. I mention that this really wasn't the sort of attention she was getting in her waking life and she replies;

No one gave a flying fuck about me. Nobody looked into my eyes and said, 'Who are you?', 'How are you?'

I ask Jo whether there was a sense when she was flying that she was something. Somebody.

She says:

Yes, I was of substance and it was irrelevant what everyone else thought. I didn't even consider it. I felt that I existed.

This is so powerful for me to hear. To know that there was a little invisible 12-year-old in her lived world, who somehow managed to exist, to be of substance in her nocturnal world. I realise Jo's profound developmental deficit, and at the same time I see her capacity to somehow address this. I am in awe. I think of Jung and how perhaps this is a compensatory function of her psyche. I feel the parallel process. I also find my inner child impacted. At 12 years old I also felt this sense of loneliness.

I ask Jo to tell me about her dream in which she is almost like superman, when she is an adult and I ask her what that felt like.

It felt really good. I don't know how to describe it, but I was flying in a vortex of space.

This is how far I have come from the days when I used to flap with my elbows and jump and get airborne. I had to keep flapping otherwise I wouldn't get airborne, so I taught myself to fly over many years and this was the culmination, me, in a vortex of time and space. Down below there are just eternal oceans of a greenish, greyish colour and this big vortex of space which is greenish grey. I am flying like superman, with my tummy parallel to the earth with my arms out. It is effortless flying, quite fast. I then became aware that I had to make a leap of faith, but I didn't know what that was, which is often the case with a leap of faith. I then realised I needed to flip upside down and fly with my belly to the sky. I then went into hyper drive.

Jo becomes very animated and excited as she talks, and I find myself smiling at her excitement.

I went whoosh. It was as if - not ceasing to exist exactly - but I was in another place.

When I woke up it felt so amazing, like a spiritual orgasm. I felt so tingly and so expansive and so alive, just happy and thriving.

This feels like such a physical dream, to awake feeling tingly and alive feels so powerful. I am not surprised it is so memorable. I am aware as Jo speaks how transcendent the experience sounds, as if some part of her needed this experience of joy and connection to something else. I tell her that she must have needed this experience at this time when her emotional life was so impoverished. She validates this and says:

Yes, I guess umm I've always been with narcissistic men. I was probably with my last husband. Yes, I did need it and I was a bit confused and disappointed because my feeling was that I must have had a real breakthrough and yet everything just went on the same and I stopped having flying dreams.

I ask Jo to tell me more about her feeling of expansiveness and I comment that it sounds as if she is in the universe. She tells me it is 'total awareness and total acceptance and total oneness with the universe'. I think 'Wow'. This feels like the tip of the iceberg, the final destination, the ultimate achievement. I tell her that it sounds transcendental, and I can't help but reflect on her desperate desire to be accepted, to belong. I realise that in the dream space she has found this. I notice Jo getting upset and I ask her what is happening. She tells me she can feel emotion in her heart chakra and points to her chest. I am struck by how significant the experience was, that this spiritual orgasm was healing in some way. I ask Jo whether, if the gravity dreams were a metaphor what they would mean to her. She tells me:

I have never been able to visualise myself thriving, it's a metaphor of me thriving. I am just not sure why they stopped.

In her dream space Jo thrived through the embodied metaphor. I ask her what was going on for her at the time of the dream and she tells me about her husband and the fact that she wasn't allowed to have needs, to be sick. This was exactly the same as her childhood, when she was objectified and unimportant. I mention the fact that her dream sounds as if she has connected to some kind of universal love and acceptance and she validates this by saying: 'Yes, yes. There was. Yes, and I'd like to give that to everybody, it's such a great experience'. Again, I am aware that even through the process of recalling her dream, she is reconnecting with the feelings that she experienced at the time. It is almost as if she is getting vicarious healing again. I am also aware that it is through the recalling and the interview that she is understanding the dream's significance. She realises just how much she needed this dream at the time. She then tells me that 'somehow or other I brought this about' and recognises the purpose of the dream: it is nourishment.

I asked Jo whether she felt the connection and acceptance came from within her, or whether it came from outside of her. She responds:

It's a good question. I think it came from the universe and I think that was me putting the toe in the water, and I like how you are describing it as a metaphor, it's a useful metaphor, even though it seems like nothing has happened, a lot has happened since then. I've stopped going out with narcissistic men, I don't go out with anyone anymore, but I'm open, you know. Yes, things are moving in the right direction, so I think that is the metaphor. I would love to do a painting of it actually.

This seems to be a very important part of the interview. Jo is realising that perhaps the dream did help her to feel some sense of power, she has moved on, she is not stuck in her victim position anymore. I realise that this is an important realisation in any therapy session, when a client can look back and see how far they have come, how well they have actually done. It feels as if she is able to feel some sense of satisfaction in where she is now and the metaphor of her 'thriving' has enabled this.

I ask Jo whether she has had any other recurrent dreams she and she tells me that she had a repetitive dream of killing someone and burying them underneath an old building. As she is talking about the spooky stairs in the building, I am aware of Jung's references to the house being like levels of our subconscious (Jung, 1948). She tells me that she was often confused as to whether the dreams were real. She tells me that in her waking world she would carry this sense that she had murdered someone, worrying that she would be exposed. She tells me that it felt almost psychotic to have these thoughts and that she thought it was related to her feelings of shame. I have to agree with this, although I am most interested in her previous comments of self-sabotage and how she has told me she cannot let herself shine for too long. I say that I am wondering whether she is burying a part of herself and she replies 'I do that all the time. Shooting myself in the foot. Disowning myself. Disavowing myself, yes'. She laughs as she says, 'Yes that makes sense'. I feel this is very powerful and Jo has definitely drawn a new connection out of this dream, it has gone from being about an attack on another, to an awareness of her attacks on herself.

We talk about her last big gravity dream, which she tells me she had when she was in her 40s. I ask her why she thinks that she remembers it so vividly. She tells me that it was because she felt so in the moment, and all her senses felt alive. She felt so awake, even though she was

asleep. I am aware now of something else: she is describing another level of alertness, as if this is a state that cannot be achieved in waking life.

It feels quite pertinent that the dreams have stopped, and I realise that perhaps I am looking at a woman who is still struggling to thrive, who still needs a little help to feel validated. She seems sad, she is missing this special aspect of her dream life, her connection to that different place, that sense of acceptance and I wonder why they have stopped. Then she tells me that becoming a mother helped her to move along a bit. That she was able to get a stronger sense of self and other. She also tells me how training as a psychotherapist later in life also helped her. However, she tells me that she still told herself that she was not lovable, not part of the group of trainees and I think back to her dream of burying the body. I wonder whether her dreams stopped as she started to help herself, or whether there really was nothing bigger or better than that particular brand of orgasm.

I ask Jo whether she has shared her dreams with anyone, and she tells me 'no'. I am not surprised. I don't imagine anyone in her childhood would have been interested. She also tells me that she hasn't had any clients bringing dreams to therapy. I am wondering whether it is something she invites. This is often a question I ask, if a client tells me they aren't sure what to talk about. I ask her how she works with dreams and she says:

I get a bit scared because we did a dream workshop in our training and I start worrying about my performance and whether I am going to get it wrong. I have done a thing where you step into a dream and you act it out and it's really good, but I feel a bit incompetent or wary of sort of treading on someone's dreams.

This anecdote seems to speak volumes. I wonder why I am finding that people don't feel confident working with dreams and whether it stems from a psychodynamic view that dreams should be interpreted that this in some way puts more pressure on us. I am also mindful of the fact that as an integrative psychotherapist she is describing a gestalt dream technique of going into the dream in the first-person, present-tense (Marmor et al, 2006). The most significant part of this anecdote to me however is the belief that she is treading on someone's dreams. I realise here that we regulate what we say in an interview and what we say in therapy and perhaps divulging our dream world is seen to be far more intimate than I had realised. This certainly appears to be the case for Jo. I wonder whether I have trodden on her dream, but she tells me that she has taken the idea of 'metaphors' from our interview and I think she has just been given a tool.

Jo made new hermeneutic meanings of her dreams' significance through the process of the interview through her embodied metaphor. She was able to understand more deeply why the dream was important to her and appreciate how she had grown alongside the changing motif, and how she was able to thrive, albeit possibly not to the level she wanted. The interview enabled a space for her to retrieve, revive and reconnect not only with her dreamscape, but herself. The dream's metaphor was what was most significant to Jo, and this I think will be taken into her practice going forward. Jo shared her lack of confidence working with dreams; hence she was working in a reductive manner. It was apparent through the dream series that she was able to achieve some healing of her developmental deficits including her need to be seen, to belong and to feel some form of universal love, all of which fits with the necessary dream – the changing motif and the developing self.

THEMATIC ASPECTS	
The emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning	Who am I? Do I exist?
Of the dream's significance through the embodied metaphor	Acceptance from the universe
	Thriving
	Self-sabotage
The therapy space: reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream self	Reduction in training and confidence
	Enjoying the metaphor
	Reconnected with dream experience
The Necessary Dream	From 'who am I?' to 'I'm ok'
The changing motif and the journey of developing self	From not existing to having substance
	Disavowing self to accepting self

Figure 14: Overview of Jo's themes

10.3 Louise

Louise and I have interviewed before and attunement is quick as we reconnect after two years. Louise is a lovely, soft-spoken, 55-year-old clinical psychologist, who has also trained as a psychodynamic psychotherapist. Louise is from a strict working class, coalmining family. She describes a history of mild neglect, with a lack of affection in her family. She tells me she lived in her own imaginary world, on one occasion being taken to the doctor because her mother was so concerned that she kept such close company with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. She tells me that her way of coping with her childhood was to escape into books and stories. She reminisces over a game in which she sat on a carpet with her friends, telling them if they believed hard enough, it would fly them away. Louise told me that she struggled to fit into the mining culture, being blamed and criticised for going to a grammar school and then on to university. There was no celebration of her achievements.

Louise tells me that her brother and sister misbehaved a lot, and that she learned to be a good girl and was well-behaved and rarely told off. I think of Brent, who also identified himself as the good child.

During our last interview Louise told me about a very transcendental dream that she had after her daughter had died in which they flew together. I had found this dream particularly moving as Louise felt that it had facilitated her grief. In her written piece she described five different motifs: swimming under water, leaving her body and zooming, 'managing the ascent' (as if the process required mastery and she had to practise how to go back into her body) and a dream in which she is on a trapeze, which she again masters, as well as flying with conscious intent to Scotland to visit her boyfriend. Louise describes motifs in her flying feels awkward and she is 'lurching' and she also describes frequent dreams of controlled 'zooming'.

I have become more conscious and able to take more control over the years. In the earlier dreams there was an obstacle, like an electricity pylon with wires that were in my way. I am quite scared of pylons. I would be bashing about not really sure where I was going or what I am doing.

Louise's experiences are very vivid and almost body-less and yet she still has vivid physical sensations. She describes feeling a different texture as she flew through the roof of her house, 'As if there was something that I was going through, but I don't feel in my body, I feel out of my body'. She also feels very much awake while being asleep, implying a lucid content to her dream.

We start talking about the dream in which she began to fly towards her boyfriend's home. She tells me that he was living in Scotland, working shifts and she didn't get to see much of him, so she made a conscious decision to travel to where he was. I refer back to her written piece in which she tells me of her fear at how long the journey might take.

Yes, I think that was the first time that I'd had that sort of realisation of 'Right, I'm here'. It felt very real and something I had not experienced before, so I had the sense of speed and travel, but it obviously was a journey and there were no landmarks really, so not like going in a car where you see road signs. I suddenly thought 'Where am I?' There were all these lights floating around me and they looked like miners' lamps. I suddenly thought maybe I should go home. I woke up in bed shortly after landing back.

I ask Louise about her relationship with her boyfriend at the time and she tells me that she was deeply unsure about the relationship, and says 'That's very interesting, given the dream. I really didn't know whether I wanted to be there with him or not actually'. I comment on the parallel

between the dream and her lived experience and Louise validates this by saying 'Yes, I can't remember the month of the dream, but I ended it in the January'. I check Louise's written piece and tell her it was the November when she had the dream 'That's very interesting then because actually the relationship just began in August, so clearly there was some uncertainty, there was uncertainty right from the start, yes'. I am aware that this is a new connection for Louise as to the significance of the dream, which has emerged through our discussion.

I ask Louise about a falling dream that she has mentioned having shortly after her relationship breakup. In her written piece Louise described a sense of isolation connected with the dream as she tries to send out a satellite signal and feels as if she is parachuting, then falling. She tells me that the dream doesn't feel friendly and that 'it feels like a kind of reach-out dream'. Louise wasn't affected by the relationship with her boyfriend ending, however her waking concern was that she was going to lose a group of friends that she had become close to. I ask Louise if falling would mean anything to her in the context of what was going on for her in her life and she replies 'yes, it brings up where will you land, will you land, will you land safely, softly, or will you carry on falling.' As we talk, I realise that the isolation that Louise is feeling in her waking life is replicated in this dreamscape, as she tries to reach out for some kind of connection, some sense of safety. She tells me that she is also associating the falling with a sense of not fitting in and how this echoes her childhood culture. The metaphor here being that she is trying to send out a satellite signal to reach out to friends that she was scared she would leave behind.

We then go on to talk about the fact that it would take her a little time to fit in. I ask Louise what her emotional experience is of the dream, and I am utterly awed by her response.

I love the flying dreams, they are exciting, but that doesn't capture it because that sounds like thrill-seeking. It is much better than that. It is much more rounded than that. It feels as if I am discovering something about who I am, so it's not just about me flying, it is about who I am. I can find something out there.

This feels so significant. This also fits with what the other gravity dreamers say, it is as if there is an attempt, or a real connection made with something existential, there is a question: who am I? and somehow, they understand something about themselves. This seems to be another purpose of the dream and another reason why it feels necessary.

I ask Louise what gravity dreaming means to her as a metaphor or a symbol, she tells me it is something about freedom. I think of her strict upbringing and need to be the good girl and I wonder whether being able to fly at night is quite a handy pursuit. She then says, 'They feel so real, I think I am more than this body'. I realise then that this doesn't sound like a defence mechanism, a dissociation, it sounds like a transcendental experience. She tells me that she feels as if she is somewhere else 'So when you are asking the question "What am I?" It's almost as if you are answering it on a different level, it's more than this body, so it's not on a physical level, it's probably on a spiritual or transcendental level'. I realise my thoughts are right, this is about a connection with yourself that you can't have when you are awake. Perhaps this is a state we achieve with certain types of breathwork, or meditation. This feels like a necessary dream. Somehow Louise is fitting in, she is belonging, she is part of something, she is greater and bigger than her body and she knows who she is.

We then start to explore the trapeze dream. Louise tells me how scared of heights she is and how she is scared in this dream.

So, there was a sense of being taken along by the trapeze. There was a sense of how much I was moving the trapeze, I was fearful of whether I could balance on it, could I feel OK on it. I was wondering what I was doing on the trapeze and whether I would slip and fall, but I became increasingly smooth and confident.

I ask Louise what would happen if she were to become the trapeze

Oh, that's a good question. I think the trapeze is a bit like the pylons that I've talked about. It's the self-limiting barriers, the bit that is holding me, it feels like it should be a point of safety, but it's actually not.

I then ask Louise what was happening in her lived world at the time she had the dream, and she tells me that there was an impending reorganisation at work at the time. She tells me that she wasn't worried about her job, but, again, she was worried about losing a good group of people that she was working with, which she said actually came to fruition as she was moved into another team. She says 'So maybe it was something about the safety net there. It was all fine'. I realise that Louise must have been aware of the fact that there was upheaval and her sense of safety in her job would have been a cause of concern. This trapeze dream feels like a perfect embodied metaphor for this: swinging to and fro, unsure whether she would slip or fall, but ultimately knowing she would be fine.

We begin to talk about Louise's underwater dream, in which she and her children were sea-creatures. The dream started as fun, jumping in and out of the water, and a tinge of sadness that not everyone had enough faith to be able to achieve what she and her children could, which was both flying and swimming underwater. She then tells me:

The dream became different and was more about being overwhelmed by the water on the surface and feeling scared. I associate this now with things going badly wrong in my life because my youngest daughter became very unwell. She is still recovering and then my eldest daughter suddenly, unexpectedly died, so the dream came just before this.

Louise tells me that things in her dream going wrong had something to do with the surface of the water. Underneath was absolutely fine. Then she and her children were on a boat and there was an enormous wave heading towards them. I am struck not only by the changing motifs of flying and swimming and then a wave, but her precognition at what was going to hit her. The metaphor of the dream was almost preparing her for something that hadn't even happened yet.

Again, like Jo, Louise expresses a sadness at not having have a dream like this for a while. I ask her whether she has any sense of why this could be, and she says:

I guess since that last dream, that my life has been in recovery from all the difficult times, very much focused on recovering from my daughter's death, supporting my youngest daughter, trying to function at work, so I feel like my life has been about survival, what do I do next, what do I need to be able to do to hold everyone together.

I mention that this feels grounded and practical. Louise validates this by saying:

Yes, I have had to be extremely grounded and very much focused on doing what's necessary, to get us through it. So maybe that is it, I've had to be grounded.

I ask Louise about another dream that she spoke about in her diary, in which she describes having a dream before her daughter's illness where she was out of her body and driving a car

with a broken steering wheel. She tells me she was lurching around and out of control, knowing that she needs to be somewhere, but unsure of where. She hears a voice telling her 'to follow her heart' and she understands where to go, so she zooms off to turquoise seas, knowing that she has work to do. When I ask Louise about what sense she has made of the dream, she tells me that it is about not over-thinking things. She tells me that she is someone who over-thinks. As we explore the dream further, I am aware that Louise makes new connections to the dream, saying 'It feels like it was a get out of your head... you don't have to have conscious knowledge of where you are going, you have unconscious knowledge and maybe that's better'.

I realise that this says something about letting go, relinquishing the ego, having cognitive knowledge and going with the flow, Louise agrees with me.

Yes. Yes. Letting go. Letting go of that over-thinking head. There's something odd about that state of mind that you're in when I'm in those dreams, it's nice to have that conscious awareness of 'Oh, I'm here again'. But equally that could dominate and spoil the experience because you're going to decide on the basis of your conscious life, well maybe that's not where you actually want to be, so there is something about balancing your state of mind between being aware but allowing yourself to make a decision in another way.

I realise that this is a new awareness for Louise, and she is referring to that reflective awareness in the dream space that has been named 'depersonalisation' in dreams. I ask Louise whether there were any parallels with her waking life at the time and she replies 'Well, I lost all control. At that point I lost all control in quite a dreadful way, so in contrast to the dream really because

the dream felt like a positive letting go of control.’ I ask Louise whether the dream impacted her day-to-day life at the time, and she says:

I think the only thing I would say is that the dreams bring positivity and a sense of hope. There is something about not being confined, that even if it’s just in your mind, you do not have to be completely enslaved to your outer circumstances, you know there is something about how you think and feel, so even if life might be pretty grim, in the practical everyday sense, there’s maybe somewhere where there is freedom from that.

This really feels like a necessary dream for Louise. Life is grim, her children have been very sick and somewhere in her dream space she can feel more hope, more freedom, more positive and she can exercise her control. I mention to Louise that her dream feels a bit like an escape from her lived world and she refers to the work of JRR Tolkien and says that he talks about distinguishing between the escape of the prisoner and the flight of the deserter. I wonder which Louise feels she is. She then tells me that dreams are not just about escape, they provide her with something positive. I am then thinking of the phrase ‘a state of grace’, which is a term Silvia uses to describe the dreams. Louise seems to use her dream space to get some needs met, such as feeling peace and positivity, connection to a different part of herself, perhaps a higher part of herself, that enables her to let go of current life concerns or understand who she is. She tells me that in her dream space she can draw on part of herself that she might not be able to draw on in her lived world.

We explore another dream in which Louise flies through a tunnel under a motorway and she describes a dream in which she makes a new connection to her ability to fly down and then fly up. She tells me that she feels this is something to do with a transitional space in her

dreamworld. She describes finding herself in a gloomy castle and I ask her whether she could become the castle. She realises as we talk that this was her grief at the time, after her daughter died. She tells me how it felt as if dementors had been in the house. As the dream progresses Louise meets her daughter, and they fly together. She described the dream as being the best dream she has ever had. It was full of joy and elation at reconnecting with her daughter, who looked so happy. She has held on to the embodied feeling of the dream, she remembers it so vividly. She tells me it is something about life and hope, recovery and restoration.

I ask Louise whether she thinks her dream experiences have impacted her practice and she feels that they have provided a greater sense of positivity. She tells me her training was in object relations, which she says, 'Can be a bit grim in all honesty'. She tells me that over the years she has become more interested in Jung. I ask her whether she has taken her gravity dreams to therapy and she says she can't remember. Louise tells me that 'There is something about acknowledging how much we don't know... there is something about not rushing to understand them too much... I think we don't understand enough, but for myself this is obviously about the experience and the mystery of them.'

I realise that this may be a reflection of Louise not understanding a great deal about dreams. She has experienced the most incredible series of dreams, yet there is something about them that is still a mystery. Louise tells me that her training was to accept and listen to the client's dreams, to think of it in terms of the self and the transference. She makes reference to dreams being brought into therapy when neither party knows where to go, when they are stuck. I feel sad hearing this. Why is it that we chose to work with dreams, at this point? Yes, you could say a dream comes into the room when the therapy is stuck, but my experience is that clients are usually invited to talk about their dreamworld, when there is nothing else to say. Also, if we

look at dreams purely from a transferential point of view, not only is this perspective totally hedonistic from the point of view of the therapist, if it is only considering the therapeutic relationship, but it is so reductive. Why would we assume that a dream is about the therapeutic relationship at all? Yes, it may well be, but my guess is that it is far more profound than that. Studies in fact show that we mostly dream about our waking concerns, so it is very likely we, the therapists, are not on the dreamers' radar.

In terms of how Louise's works with dreams as a practitioner, she feels that her reading of Jung has brought in something of 'Where are you in your journey?' to her practice. This is something that I agree with. I think our dreams reflect our developmental journey: our needs, desires and deficits. I realise there is something about how despite Louise's reductive training she possesses an openness to revive and reconnect with her dream experiences through our interview. Our time together enables Louise to make new hermeneutic understandings through the dream metaphors and further understand the value of her experiences on her developmental journey.

THEMATIC ASPECTS	
The emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance through the embodied metaphor	The self-limits Uncertainty in relationship Get out of your head Letting go
The therapy space: reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream self	Reductive training Revival and reconnection via interview Reduction in therapy
The Necessary Dream	Learning something about self
The changing motif and the journey of developing self	Recovery and restoration Processing life events Precognition Positivity

Figure 15: Overview of Louise's themes

10.4 Sally

Sally is a 40-year-old psychotherapist. After the interview she sends me a poem which she has written. Although the poem doesn't explicitly reference a gravity dream, it depicts a lonely, anguished character who appears to be without gravity, controlling her dreams as she weaves.

I am aware during the interview that this is a theme for Sally, who describes a lonely childhood, with her cousin moving in when she was seven years old. This cousin idolised her brother and took his attention away from her. She described missing her brother. When Sally was ten years old her mother had a breakdown from which she never recovered. I feel very impacted by her story and I can see that it is no coincidence that her poem and her piece of art (a twisted root) are so figural in our interview.

Sally was keen to get involved in my research, having a litany of gravity dream motifs, which began with horrible dreams of falling that she had had as a child. We have not interviewed before and, despite working closely geographically, this is the first time we have spoken properly. Sally describes herself as a mother, a wife, a sister, daughter, friend and a swimmer. I find out through our interview that she is also very creative and started her professional life as an artist, having studied fine art at school. We both appear to be shy initially, however I am aware that the interview is taking place in her therapy space, and she seems comfortable and engaged.

Sally provided me with a detailed written account of her latest flying dream, along with information on how she feels scared of heights and flying in her waking life. She also details a dream in which she is flying on a backless seat that has associated feelings of being out of

control and scared, yet also creates a sense of exhilaration on waking. As per the other participants, the written account was not coded but it was used to shape my questions.

Sally describes quite clearly remembering big dreams with certain dreams fitting with certain periods of her life, describing the world of dreams as being a 'Fascinating clue... A kind of mysterious clue as to what I am potentially up to, or not, and where I may be moving next'.

The first dream we talk about is a dream in which Sally knew she was dreaming. She was flapping her arms and gently rising, much like swimming underwater. She described the dream as being initially full of joy and wonder, however there seemed to be some 'pull' drawing her higher and higher. Her dream became more panicked as she sensed outer space 'up there' and she had a fear of going too far and being out of control. She fought to dive down and remembers waking feeling exhilarated. She tells me that the feeling lasted the whole morning. This touches my experiences as I remember feeling the essence of a dream long after I have woken.

I ask Sally to describe her dream a little more, but I notice that I am keen to explore 'the pull'. Sally hasn't kept a diary of what was happening for her, but we work back chronologically, and she realises that at the time of the dream she was preparing to submit some work for an artwork group. I ask Sally what her feelings were, and she said 'Good, mostly good, scared'. I ask her what the fear was, and she answers 'Well, exposure, confusion as to you know, who am I in the world, am I this or that, or all of it, yes, how will I be seen, will people like it?'

I realise that there is a parallel in being 'up there' and how this most likely fits with her fear of exposure and perhaps pushing her boundaries a little. I have always admired the bravery of artists, who really bare their souls through their work and how exposing this must be. There is

also something here relating to what my other participants have described, as if they are able to retrieve or find out something about themselves through the dream. I am also aware that Sally is describing 'a pull', a fear, and yet she ultimately wakes exhilarated, as if she knows deep down, she will be OK. She later tells me that the 'pull' seems to take over when she gets too high and 'There is a sense of letting go... kind of like what will be will be.' These new awarenesses emerge as we explore the dream and I feel that this must be a very valuable dream experience that enables Sally to move into exposure by letting go of her fears.

We then move on to a dream in which she describes flying above traffic, slightly too close for comfort, while balanced precariously on a backless stool. She describes the dream as stressful, yet there is, again, an element of exhilaration on waking. I begin by asking Sally what was going on for her at the time.

Well, this was March, the month that I was preparing for the show. I had the tree root to work with at this point, in one of my outhouses at home. We had moved to a new house a few weeks before. The traffic dream would have been the house move, boxes and all that. The house that we have moved to is a dream come true. It's beautiful. There is space. It's kind of like boxes and stress, but oh my, look where we are.

Sally later describes this dream as being about a lack of control. I can see the metaphor here of the fast-paced, precarious dream, combined with the sense of exhilaration on waking. We then begin to talk about another dream Sally had that again involved sitting on a stool and looking at land below. She describes looking at horses below, with a landscape of what feels like Ireland. It is 'wild, windy and fresh'. Then the seat changes direction and she is shooting sideways through busy market stalls and traffic 'I am hanging on for dear life. I feel in danger

and then suddenly the seat I am sitting on changes direction again.' Sally tells me that the dream is so vivid she can conjure up the images clearly even though it took place some time ago. She has a feeling that she was trying to find someone.

I ask Sally to tell me a little bit about the beginning of the dream when she is flying over a beautiful landscape and she replies 'I guess there is that sense of, well you get taken out of yourself. I would get taken out of myself in a wide-open space, so the focus is not internal, it becomes about the landscape'. I ask Sally whether she feels part of the landscape and she says, 'I kind of feel like I don't matter, but not in a negative way, but in a kind of taken out of myself - in a kind of wonder I think - and maybe whatever worries I have don't matter, I don't matter.' As I write this I am again struck by the power of these dreams. The beginning of this dream has a transcendental quality, as Sally flies along with a sense of wonder, her problems being of no consequence.

I then ask Sally about the stool and what, if anything, it signifies to her. She describes it as a button stool, unstable and not comfortable with nothing to hold on to. She says, 'I wonder if that letting go is that sense of "it'll be OK", when it happens possibly there is a sense of life and death because I know I am in danger and I know I could get hurt and I'm clinging on for dear life to that stool and I want to stay alive'. I realise the stool could be a metaphor for life and as we begin to chat further, my hunch is substantiated. As we talk about Sally's lived feelings of flying and rock jumping, and she has what I call an 'Aha'.

Aha, you know, this sort of awareness, as I have kids, that means I'm more aware of mortality. I suppose protecting them is everything and I suppose if I died then I can't

take care of them and that's what I want to do most, out of everything. I think as a mother that is probably the biggest fear.

Sally at this point begins to cry and I am aware of the out-of-control stool, the one thing in life that can't be controlled, and at the same time the 'pull' to let go. I ask Sally what she thinks she is trying to let go of and she says, 'It's control, like you've just got to go with the flow.' She is talking about her need to control her life. I ask Sally what relevance this dream metaphor has to her lived world and she again references having children 'You can't control what they are going to do... they just do what they do... you can't control what anyone's going to do'. I am also aware that, given Sally's history of abandonment (her brother abandoning her for her cousin and her mother leaving her due to mental illness) that feeling abandoned is likely to be an issue for her. I also consider the fact that Sally is scared of heights and flying in her lived-world and I feel that this is understandable, given she is fearful of leaving her children, and not being in control. I am impacted by Sally's fear of not being able to control life, having similar fears of flying and abandoning my children.

Sally tells me she has had other existential dreams. She describes a vivid dream of her mother after she died, describing that she woke up feeling that she had been with her mother. She also described having a mutual dream with her husband. This is not something I have coded but I am interested in the fact that my gravity dreamers experience other interesting dream phenomena. After our interview Sally writes an email to tell me that she remembered something happening at the time of her mum's death. She was walking in the woods with her children, when she completely missed her step, feeling pushed off the ledge she was on. Minutes later her brother phoned to say her mother had just died. She felt that she had lost

her 'grip' on the ground at the exact moment of her mother's death. She told me that it had been so significant she had told a friend who had affirmed her feeling of being 'uprooted'.

Of all the participants, Sally is the most enthusiastic about using dreamwork in her therapeutic practice, and I feel this has something to do with the artist in her. She tells me she will get her paints out and encourage her clients to paint their dreams and be curious about their dreamworlds. She appreciates the benefit of exploring her own dream world and this has motivated her to work with dreams. She tells me that there is something of her dream world not being 'pushed around or influenced' by others and that 'it helps me know what I know'. I really like this idea, it is as if we do know what we know, but we can't always access this while awake. As Sally said, 'Some people's voices are louder aren't they...? it feels quite muddly to know, I guess in the dream world there is no other voice, no other stories.' This is an Aha for me. I had not thought about the fact that in our dream world we are alone with no other influences telling us how to be or what to be. We are our alone with our authentic selves.

I am interested to learn that Sally hasn't taken her gravity dreams to therapy. She doesn't have an aversion to doing this, it has just never happened. She has also never had a client bring a gravity dream to therapy.

Sally makes many new connections and hermeneutic understandings during our interview. In the feedback form she says:

I enjoyed exploring my dreams further through the process of speaking out loud. It was emotional when I was making a link between the death of my mother and other existential phenomena happening at the time. It put the sequence of events into

more of a coherent order in my mind and unearthed or brought to the surface painful memories.

When she is asked about having a new awareness following the interview, she refers to her post-interview email in which she recalled losing her footing as her mum died.

These gravity dreams seemed to have changed through Sally’s self-development from falling and feeling lonely to flying with and without certain levels of control. They seemed to have a function to enable her to let go, but also to help her answer existential questions of ‘who am I?’ as well as to process life events, such as the strain and stress of moving to a new house. Sally highlighted the benefit of the interview as a place to retrieve and revive her dreamworld by saying in her post-interview questionnaire ‘The process has allowed me to make links to important life events and my dream life. It has made things clearer for me’. The interview also seems to have prompted her to take a renewed interest in her dreams as she writes ‘I am continually interested in my dream life and will attempt to make links with what’s happening in my waking life and any flying dreams’. Sally thanked me for the opportunity to explore her dreams and I realised that we don’t get the chance to reflect on such a vibrant, emotive and memorable aspect of our lives often enough.

THEMATIC ASPECTS	SALLY
The emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning	letting go
of the dream’s significance through the embodied metaphor	Control
	Exposure
	Who am I?
The therapy space: reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection	Making new connections
with our dream self	Reviving interest
	A place to explore
	Works only with art
The Necessary Dream	I know what I know

The changing motif and the journey of developing self	Finding the authentic voice
	Processing life events
	from falling and loneliness
	To flying and wonder

Figure 16: Overview of Sally's themes

10.5 Sarah

Sarah is a 59-year-old humanist integrative psychotherapist. She is married, without children. She is another creative participant, who loves to make jewellery and sing. In her written piece she says that she has had flying dreams since she was a child. An only child, Sarah attended a strict Catholic school, and her German parents argued a lot as she was growing up, existing in what she describes as a 'borderline-narcissistic relationship'. Both parents experienced traumatic events during the Second World War, and they struggled with their own emotional needs. The overall picture presented of Sarah's childhood is that of loneliness. She describes herself as an anxious child, lost among the egos and the bickering of her caretakers, but experiencing intermittent moments of warmth and love.

Sarah tells me that while her parents were arguing she would be in bed. She laughs as she tells me this because she realises that there is most likely a connection, or a disassociation, in her gravity dreams, an escape perhaps.

Yes, I would lie in bed and listen to the arguing. There has also been throughout my life, at school more, a sense of being different. I had a foreign name, and this was the 60s and there was always this sense of being a little bit 'other than' the group of children than I was with. Although the school did have a lot of Italians and mixed-race children, I still had a sense of difference.

I am struck by her sense of being different from her peers. Sarah also mentions in her interview and her written piece that her mother did not 'imagine' her. I ask her about this during the interview, and she responds:

It still happens to this day; my mum will talk to me as if I have not shared an experience with her. So, she will tell me something, and my husband notices this, as if we were not there, with her in an experience. It's really a very sort of splitting-off experience. We find ourselves saying 'You know, but we were with you'. She is in her 80s now, but she has always done it. She cannot imagine her child. She cannot imagine what it means to be me. She will speak through her own prism.

I contact my own feelings of not being imagined or seen at this point. I am aware of myself in this story, reflecting on my strict religious upbringing, and depressive parents, who are involved in their own stories. This is my transference child meeting that of Sarah's. She tells me in the interview, that despite being confident as an adult she struggles with 'real moments of wondering where I am' *and* explains that aspects of her childhood have impacted her, although she now sits comfortably with her history. I am aware that in not being 'imagined' we can sometimes question our existence and ask if they can't see us, are we really here at all? Who are we in relation to those who cannot acknowledge us?

Sarah tells me in her written piece that she had dreams that included being perched on her windowsill before taking-off from her bedroom window. She remembers the taking-off more than the actual flight. She writes about perching on the edge of the windowsill being precarious. It didn't feel exciting, more that she might not be able to fly and perhaps she really didn't want to. I am keen to discuss this with her in the interview, as it feels like quite a metaphor for what she must have felt at night as she was listening to her parents arguing and wanting to escape but also not wanting to leave the safety of her room. It feels like a conflict.

Sarah tells me during the interview that her experience of her school was 'pretty brutal' and that kids were hit with 'the stick' for minor misdemeanours. I don't want to minimise this experience as I write her story. In today's world this is not only abuse, but we now know it can invoke subsequent post-traumatic stress. However, she still tells me the education was great and that, overall, she has happy memories, and made good friendships.

Sarah's earliest memory of a gravity dream comes from her time at primary school. She was flying over the school playing field. I believe it is so significant that she can remember this dream as if it were yesterday, although it happened some 50 or more years ago.

I wanted to get away from the other children who felt menacing. I flapped my arms like wings, and I ran, flapped and took off and soared above the playing field and the other children were running to catch me. I escaped them very spectacularly! I felt elated, very special and victorious, but I was also scared that I couldn't keep it up.

I recall a similar dream that Jo described, which featured a similarly spectacular event in front of peers. I am also mindful that for someone who cannot be imagined, this must feel pretty potent. Sarah mentioned in her written piece that she felt her dream has something to do with individuality. She substantiates this in the interview by saying 'If I had written that again, I would have put individuation, because I think that is what it was about for me, having some way of being authentic... and to be able to just action something directly and take control and power in this sort of flapping, flying taking off, achieving something, you know, kind of escaping, being better and greater than the others I think.'

This feels very significant and is a perfect metaphor for her life in which she is desperate to be seen and special in her own way and which at the same time potentially wanted to escape. I

ask Sarah about the sense that she has made of the dream and what it might have facilitated for her and she tells me that there was an:

‘I’ll show you’ aspect to it... yes that’s one of the aspects, I think, that’s quite strong. It’s a bit like, you know, ‘I’ll show you something that you don’t know about me’ and I’m just beginning to reflect on that... I’m just thinking about this ‘imagine me’ business really because I think you know, children don’t imagine each other, they’re much more direct and immediate and all the rest of it, and I think there must have been a deep wish to show something and really be seen at it, whatever it is and I think the flying, I mean, my God, if a child takes off and runs along it has a kind of ‘Oh my God. Wow’ aspect to it for me. I think it really does deeply link with what my experience of what my parenting would have been. Yes.’

This is a new awareness for Sarah that has come through her exploration of the dream experience, what she gained from it and what it paralleled for her at the time of the dream. The dream here provides an embodied metaphor for her deepest developmental need, which is to be seen. The space provided in our interview helps Sarah make new awarenesses and consolidate what benefits the dream appeared to provide at the time.

Sarah tells me that she thinks she had quite a few of these dreams, but she can remember about five or six from her early childhood. She tells me what she felt during the dreams.

Flying felt really great, you know. It was as if I had flapped long enough, run long enough and oh my God, I have done it! I am up in the air. I don’t remember flying in my younger dreams, it was precarious, but the actual experience of losing gravity was good. If I

made the slightest arm movement in the wrong direction, I would probably plummet to the ground. I don't think I was very competent, put it that way.

This is another example of the start of a dream motif, that begins as something very precarious, just as Sarah's lived world is also precarious, with her parents arguing and not 'imagining her' and her school being strict. This also fits with the other participants' experiences. I tell Sarah that this sounds like flying is a skill and she validates this, saying 'Yes. Completely. Yes, that's a good observation, yes'.

Sarah has told me in her written piece that as she got older, she felt more substantial as she flew and was able to manoeuvre more easily, like a small plane. She tells me there were passengers sometimes, even though she wasn't in an actual plane. She was the thing that flew, she had responsibility for the passengers. As I read this, I wonder about her lived experience of responsibility. She writes 'I was aware that I mustn't crash. We might die if I hit a wire. The flying took great concentration and skill'.

I am keen to explore her lived experience at the time she had these dreams, and she tells me that she was working as a social worker 'at the sharp and pointy end of childcare'. She tells me that she later managed a mental health team, working in difficult and dangerous situations with people who were mentally unwell. I recognise her sense of responsibility not just for the children she is looking after, but her colleagues as well. She tells me that she was always having to manage her stress levels, as her job meant that she felt quite adrenalised. She recognises the impact this must have had on her and discusses her experience of the dream.

The dream was mostly pleasant, soaring over fields, having a nice time, but often obstacles would get in the way. There would be telegraph wires, poles and buildings,

chimneys and aerials all to negotiate, so whilst I enjoyed flying, I had to be watchful, I don't think I could ever just...

At this point Sarah, stops and I notice she has had a felt sense of something.

... that's interesting. I couldn't just relax and enjoy the experience.

I ask Sarah what she finds interesting.

Well, I am connecting this with the work, and my wider life. I have always had a sense of obligation to be somebody, and I know this comes from my upbringing where there were expectations upon me, so in those days, I couldn't be my authentic self. I was surrounded by lots of noise, marrying my first husband. It was in the 80s and we were a golden couple. What is interesting me is that I didn't feel as if I could ever relax into life, I couldn't honour what I really was and what I truly wanted out of life, in fact I don't think I was even in touch with what I really wanted out of life. So now we are talking about my dreams and I am thinking 'Why couldn't I just fall through the sky, like a big plane and enjoy it?' But there were always bloody aerials in the way, or the chimney pots. I had to be responsible, I have always had to be responsible for somebody, there was always somebody with me.

I am struck by this on many levels. The first is that the dream is the perfect metaphor for her lived experience, her dream experience being that she was incapable of relaxing and enjoying the flight. This night-time felt sense of obstacles was paralleled in her daytime world of responsibility. I am also impacted on a personal level as I realise the parallels to my dream world, which has always been about being responsible for animals in cages and having to

rescue them all. But I am also struck by the flight element. Part of her must have been searching for something different. I say this as I comment that part of her in her dreamscape was trying to soar. She validates this by saying;

For sure, yes, I have always wanted to soar [laughs]. Yes. Yes. And it's about freedom, I think. The more I am talking to you, the more I am thinking about freedom of expression, freedom of having agency, you know, some ability to just follow my path or go where the wind takes me.

I recognise this as what Todres (2007) calls a freedom-wound, a desire to be free, to search for something nourishing, something different. It implies by default there isn't this freedom in our lived world and, as I say something along these lines, Sarah validates this with 'I think yes. I think for sure'.

This demonstrates both the Necessary dream in terms of its attempt to show Sarah her unconscious desires to be free, and her current life obstacles, which are represented by her sense of either carrying people or not being able to enjoy life fully and be her authentic self. Later on, in the interview, Sarah connects with the obstacles again.

The body experience of gravity dreaming, speaking phenomenologically, is a powerful part of the dream. It's about having a relationship with your body and doing something that we're not built to do, we're not built to fly, but somehow, we can make it happen. I think as girls and woman there is also something about gender in terms of having body potency. I had a pregnancy and lost a baby and I wanted to mention it as I think part of these obstacles is not being able to create another life, there is something about life

and death. This is about being a woman and having strengths and weaknesses that comes powerfully for me personally into my adult dreams.

As Sarah talks, she experiences an emergence of new hermeneutic meanings, through the dream embodied dream metaphor. She is now connecting with her sense of powerlessness as a woman at being unable to create new life and reflecting on how the dream metaphor of obstacles paralleled this.

We begin to talk about Sarah's windowsill dream when she was a child. She tells me she would have been young as she remembers being able to sit on the windowsill. She understands the dream is about escape and trying to get away but not really knowing how to do it. She doesn't remember flying much beyond the windowsill. We talk about this juxtaposition; wanting to escape, but not feeling able to and consider whether this makes sense with her lived world at the time.

I think the pressure of being an only child was great, and an only child in what I now know to be a dysfunctional parental relationship. The pressures of succeeding and doing well and having a career was instilled in me very early on. There were huge pressures actually, balanced with some playfulness, thankfully. It feels that there was a very creative element to the flying dreams. It was something that I could make happen, that kind of fantasy thing that has always been part of my upbringing and family culture, through hearing stories about the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales, that was rich and very beautiful. But underneath the fairy tales was the backdrop of the darkness of wartime experiences, my father being a prisoner of war and my mother was in the Dresden bombings. I think the distress and harm and brokenness came into my dreams, which

were those two sides, the wow and the magic coupled with the dark and the bleak need to escape. I am just piecing this together a bit.

Again, this highlights further hermeneutic understandings that arise directly through the interview, the playing out of the two sides of Sarah's upbringing in her dream world; the fairy tales and the fun, alongside the dark and the difficult, and again an unconscious desire to rise above or escape it, alongside a need to be seen.

Sarah writes that in adulthood she has lost the arm-flapping, precarious mode of flight and now experiences flying in a more levitational way. She talks about a recurring dream in late adulthood in which she floats up and down up a staircase, knowing that there is an evil presence located somewhere on the stairs. The evil presence - a demon - appears and then she gets airier, like a ghost, raising herself off the stairs attempting to get bigger than the demon and envelope it. She feels the start of the fight against the demon's special powers and wakes.

Sarah tells me that she draws a connection between the full moon and these dreams, telling me that she always dreams very vividly when the moon is full. This is something I have heard before. My husband is a consultant cardiologist who has commented on heart attack and stroke cases rising during a full moon, so I don't doubt that our dreams can intensify as well. Post-interview, Sarah makes further sense of this dream.

I asked Sarah, as I have asked all of the participants, whether their dreams have impacted their practice in anyway. Sarah felt 'for sure' that her dream affected her work. She felt more inclined to talk to her clients about their dreams if they mentioned them, recognising the need to perhaps bring back and dwell with the dream. She tells me during the interview that she

loves how the dream 'feels in the body' and what the bodily experience of the dream is. This is something that Sarah has said she works with and I recognise that it was through her bodily experience of the obstacles that she made the most sense of her dream.

Sarah's training was in the Gestalt and object relations traditions, exploring parts of the projected self and body relational work. However, she hasn't taken her gravity dreams to therapy and she later tells me: 'I pounced on your little ad and I thought, oh my goodness, you know this is a chance to talk about it really, because I think they've always been quite precious to me. I think they've always been part of my experience of growing up and becoming who I am'. This for me is deeply significant. What is it about the current or past therapy space that doesn't invite the re-telling of a gravity dream, what is it about my open invitation to speak that limits the shame and provides the permission to explore something that Sarah has said is so precious to her? The interview space appears to provide something new that has never been experienced before by retrieving parts of our histories that have been buried and eliciting renewed the participants' interest in their dreamworld and that of their clients.

Towards the end of the interview, Sarah said 'Thank you. It's been really great to do this actually, it's been something that I've been looking forward to and I'm delighted that you are doing the work that you are doing, because I think it's a thinly explored area actually and it has such potency and such a place in people's lives I think, having a flying dream, you know people don't just have them'. This felt like the ultimate participant validation, not just of my chosen subject, but of Sarah's experience of our time together and my validation of her. It felt like real contact.

In my post-interview questionnaire, I asked Sarah how she found the experience of talking about her gravity dreams. She replied thus:

Hi Claire, I found it quite hard at first... from a 'standing start'...to get into the swing of talking, but I found it a very deep experience. Surprisingly so in fact and it stayed with me for a few days afterwards. I was impressed by your observations and questioning which was sensitive, appropriately thought provoking and insightful and thank you for this experience. Thinking about my childhood raised some feeling and memory which is familiar to me as these have been in my conscious awareness from time to time, for some time. I was surprised by the depth and breadth of the dream impact, the memory of the dreams, and I have given this some time in my personal development and conversations.

I think about my literature review and the data on working with dreams facilitating a deeper therapeutic relationship. Sarah and I have never met before yet in one hour she found the experience deep, and it stayed with her days after. When I ask about subsequent memories or thoughts that have come to her awareness following our interview Sarah tells me that she was thinking about the final, levitational dreams in which an entity is present and threatening. She tells me that she has wondered about the dream's meaning, particularly the familiarity of the theme 'I know what's going to happen' in these dreams, she can anticipate where the entity is and whether to engage with it. She feels this is a rich theme, stating 'Particularly in the last 20 years, in my second marriage with my husband and his gentle observations, the awareness that I can pull back, remove from the fight or struggle, I don't have to go there. There is nothing to conquer.' I am impressed here. Firstly, that the interview has stayed with her, but also that she is continuing to make more sense of her dream experience, using the idea of the embodied

dream metaphor. Whatever this evil presence is, this part of herself that sometimes looms large, she can in fact refuse to give it airtime, she can disengage. I would love to know more about what this represents for her.

Another question in my post-interview schedule, was 'Has there been any further understandings or meaning makings that have arisen as a consequence of the interview?' In response Sarah said:

I was struck, afterwards, by how the dream-flying style changed as the years passed. From the novice 'flappings' and shaky take-offs of the little girl to the anxious hesitations as a younger teenager to the adult 'responsibility feeling' of flight. Unsurprisingly, my relationship with my mother featured strongly when talking about it and her lack of real curiosity in me. How I longed to be 'seen' and how I wanted my own unique characteristics to be prized. This remains unchanged in my adult life, yet easier to manage. There is much here also about control, visibility and intimacy and what it means to me, the wish to escape perhaps too. I was also thinking about 'performance' and special-ness (the children saw me do something extraordinary!).

I realised as I read this that the interview space had really consolidated understandings that have really helped Sarah to make sense of her developmental journey alongside her dream world. These things will most likely stay with her as personal awarenesses in the same way that we develop new awarenesses in therapy. I started to see a pattern behind the reduction in the availability of space for this kind of therapy, whether because of the therapist, their tools, or the unwillingness of the client to disclose what is essentially a very private and personal experience. Sarah told me she was curious to explore more about dreaming in therapy and she

was looking forward to reading any papers I could send her, highlighting further a desire for continued exploration.

THEMATIC ASPECTS	SARAH
The emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance through the embodied metaphor	Not creating life Responsibility
	Who am I? Being seen
	Freedom
The therapy space: reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream self	Not taking dreams to therapy
	Reviving interest
	Reconnecting with past self
	A grateful space
The Necessary Dream	Look at me, special-ness
The changing motif and the journey of developing self	Processing life events/responsibility
	Obstacles, not able to enjoy life/body
	Individuation
	Freedom wound

Figure 17: Overview of Sarah's themes

10.6 Mathew

Mathew is a 40-year-old psychologist and trained psychodynamic therapist. He tells me he is a married gay man, who is currently in 'analysis' five times a week. I automatically say 'Wow' and Mathew laughs, saying it is good to have this fact normalized, admitting that five times a week for therapy is pretty tough, and he has been working towards a conclusion with his therapist. It is hard not to think about what must have bought Mathew to seek so much support, but I park my assumptions.

Mathew tells me that he was bought up in the north of England, his father being Welsh. He is the youngest of three brothers, both of whom are very masculine rugby players. He described his family upbringing as pretty brutal, but with aspects of loving warmth.

He is an amateur songwriter and a parent of a 16-year-old, whom he currently co-parents. He moved down to London, which is where he is as we interview, 'for love'. I am struck by his openness and get the immediate sense of a soft-spoken, gentle man. We chat over FaceTime as he sits outside, under a tree.

Mathew had a different gravity dream from my other participants. He has fallen, a lot. He tells me that after he contacted me for interview, he had his first ever flying dream. He wonders if this is significant. I think it may well be.

In describing his gravity dreams he says:

So, they go back really far. I know the bedroom I have had them in, so I guess that places me around seven. I had these dreams for quite a few years. I would have imagery before going to sleep, and then I would have incredibly vivid dreams of falling through

endless space, as if the universe was completely infinite. It was really quite disturbing... just falling and falling and feeling really insignificant with stars flying past. The dreams seemed to last forever. I also had a slightly different experience in which I would be on my bed, but I would become smaller and smaller, the bed becoming more and more vast. It was as if gravity was sucking me, pulling me underneath, like sand in an egg timer. It felt like a really hardcore, primal, elemental dream. This is why I was so interested in your project. The dreams were very anxiety-provoking, I felt so insignificant, so overwhelmed. I have also experienced this sensation when I am ill with a fever.

I feel saddened at the thought of a seven-year-old boy having these really existential experiences and feeling overwhelmed and insignificant. When I ask Mathew about what was happening in his life at the time of these dreams I am struck by the answer 'So when I was seven, actually the first thing that comes to mind, which interestingly, I haven't had that question asked in relation to that dream before, even though I have analysis five times a week [laughs], so that's really surprised me that my first thought is of my dad and his sister.' Mathew goes on to tell me that when he was six years old, his father found out that he had a sister who had been secretly adopted. He tells me that his dad worked away a lot in shipping, and that the introduction of the sister to the family dynamics was very unsettling. This was especially the case for his mum, as the sister wasn't interested in having a relationship with her, only with his father. His mum was an only child who was used to having Mathew's father to herself.

So, there was this very sort of exclusive relationship that happened between dad and his half-sister, who was adopted away, and it caused lots of tension in the house that

was really hard for me to understand at the time, so I think I've never related that to the dream before, but that was certainly going on then, sands were shifting.

I realise here that Mathew will have taken these dreams to therapy before and yet something as obvious as the lived experience of the dream has never been explored. He makes a new connection with the metaphor of shifting sands and the fact that his embodied experience of feeling small and powerless in this interview space. We talk about metaphor.

Yes, that makes sense, it does. I felt very insignificant, I felt completely incapable of addressing my mum's sadness and addressing my anger at her sadness. I guess it was quite a perverse experience, my mum being jealous of someone having a half-sister and I was quite angry with her on one level. As I have grown up, I have become more sympathetic to the fact that she was very lonely, but I felt so small at the time and so incapable of making a difference. I think this happened at a key time when there was lots of stuff going on in terms of a little boy having his omnipotence challenged.

I realise the powerlessness in the motif and Mathew acknowledges this. I ask him about the stars. I am struck by his comment about stars rushing by. I ask Mathew if the stars were projections of people or himself and whether that would mean anything, and he responds 'Maybe they are watching with indifference. Maybe that's it. If I was the stars, it would be indifference because they are having no impact at all.' I wonder whether the stars could also be the adults in his life. I ask him about his felt sense, what it felt like to be pulled through the bed, or to fall through space and he says 'It really did feel like when a plane drops through turbulence, that was the feeling during the dream. It was right in my gut, yes, right in my gut'.

Mathew tells me that as a child he had lots of abdominal surgeries, that he has always felt things in his gut. He tells me he struggled to feed and had food allergies and that he had a hernia operation at age eight. He tells me that he feels things belly first and this makes sense as he has described being someone who somatises his emotions. I ask him to explore the feeling of being 'pulled-down' and he tells me that it feels like the ground is swallowing him up. He tells me about his family home being a warm environment in the countryside, but there was also an element that 'was also grim, in many ways. So, I was brought up in a very rugged bugger type of family and I was the third little gay boy who really didn't want to get dirty, and I suppose that was very difficult and my parents had very strong views about that. I was late coming out, at 21.' It must have been a massive step to finally try and tell his parents about his sexuality.

Mathew then tells me that his parents thought there was something awfully wrong with him and they took him to the doctor 'It was really abhorrent actually and I wasn't able to speak to them for quite some time'. I think about the ground swallowing him up, the powerlessness and the indifference he must have felt. I wonder whether this really is the perfect metaphor for a boy who wants the ground to swallow him up, or who feels the ground is actually swallowing him up; a boy who is hiding himself, or fearful that he doesn't fit in. 'It was very difficult. I didn't know who I was. My dad was absent a lot and my mum was very lonely.' I realise Mathew thinks of his mother's loneliness and yet he doesn't acknowledge his own.

There was also a lot of shame around my Mum's first marriage, especially my oldest brother, from her first marriage. There was a real culture of don't talk about things, shame about keeping up with the Joneses, a nouveau-riche attitude. Also, my grandma moved in with us and she had Alzheimer's. She was very damaging to me to be honest,

because in her honesty, her dementia, she would call me names, like 'fat'. I also struggled with private school and I asked my dad if I could leave. So, I didn't know myself. I didn't know how to be different. My mum really struggled with my adolescence and the concept of separateness. She would insist on reading my diary. I think because I was the youngest, I was a bit of a confidante to my mother.

This paints a picture of a borderline process, a mother who doesn't seem to know her boundaries, who invades Mathew as she reads his diary, engulfs him as she confides in him and yet abandons him to her own misery and loneliness. He appears to be confluent in his mother's needs and I realise the metaphor of being swallowed by the shifting sands. I also think of his shadow-side and how he must be desperate to individuate. I can now understand why he still engages in therapy. I feel incredibly empathetic listening to his story. I can also see why he doesn't acknowledge his own loneliness; it feels very enmeshed with that of his mother. I understand why he didn't fit in, as a result of his sexuality, either with his family culture or in his school. I can see the power of the stars looking on with indifference and the felt sense of being 'pulled-down'.

I ask Mathew when the falling dreams stopped, and he tells me they ended when he was about 10. He tells me that he does still have them, but rarely. I ask him what happened when he was ten.

Interestingly, it was when I went to a school was happier in, when I was really struggling at this private school, and yes, I said I can't do it [laughs] and then it was probably the first time I felt really listened to and they took it seriously and I went to a different

school, so I think that's significant, in fact very significant and I've talked about that a lot in my therapy.

Again, this is a new awareness of the end or tailing-off of the falling dream motif. Mathew had a developmental need to be seen, acknowledged, listened to and this was demonstrated for the first time when his parents let him move school, at which point the dreams stop. This really resonates with Mathew as he describes the new awareness as 'significant'.

I then ask Mathew about his flying dream.

So, well I have only had this once and weirdly it followed an email to you, so I don't know whether it was my subconscious being very obliging. It was a dream very specific to what was going on. At the moment I am very keen to find an end date to my analysis and my therapist is very cautious about that, as anyone should be. I suppose I was feeling really stuck and I felt as if I was losing control. There was a dynamic that was going on, which we have since resolved and we now have an end date, which is really nice and now I can see her view more, now, but I felt out of control and I didn't have agency. So, I suppose that is related to the other dreams in a way. So in the dream I was walking along a street and I passed a homeless person who had a disfigured face and at the end of the street was my analyst and I was already walking towards them, but in the dream I lost control of my legs and I felt as if I was being drawn towards her as if she were governing that. It was like a spell in Harry Potter. It was troubling that I was walking towards her, yet I still lost my agency, so it was about losing control of my actions. I had the feeling in my gut that things weren't right, and the disfigured man was really quite troubling for me.

I am interested by the fact that he had a gravity dream after contacted me. I think about our waking experiences entering our dream world. I asked Mathew what sense he had made of the dream in therapy, and he told me that the homeless man represented his brother, and the projected anger he had on to him, and his sense of damage that he had caused because of his anger. He tells me his brother was menacing and vicious in the past, that he was homophobic, and the relationship was very painful. He told me that the flying felt as if he is on a path where he feels he does have some agency, but it is always centred around someone else's need. I feel quite uncomfortable with this. I can sense he is desperate to leave analysis and can't understand why he feels that he is hanging on at the request of his therapist. I wonder whether there is a parallel process here to the relationship with his mother. We talked about the fact that he is powerless, and he feels pulled towards her and he says 'I don't have power to stop. And I was already walking towards them anyway before I was lifted up'. I ask Mathew if the dream could have continued, and he had had power what would he have done?

That's a bloody great question. I would have made use of my legs and continued walking forwards, so I would have gone in the same direction, so I wouldn't have done anything different, other than keep walking, because I did need my therapist after seeing the disturbed man anyway. So, I would have walked [laughs], rather than being dragged.

I tell Mathew that I find this interesting, and he validates this. I realise that this is the metaphor of his dream, the reason why he didn't like the experience, he needed to make the decision himself as to how to proceed in therapy. He is not a child anymore. In this way the dream is necessary, or it serves a purpose. It invites him to look at his relationship with his therapist and

his feelings of powerlessness. It tells him of his resistance of being coerced into further therapy and provides content for he and his therapist to work with their relationship.

I then ask Mathew what 'falling' would mean to him if it were a metaphor, and he replies 'Just being dropped, not being in mind, feeling overwhelmed, or consumed. I think those words come to mind.' I think again of the bed consuming him. I think of his mother and her lack of boundaries and I see the parallels. He must have felt consumed and insignificant, dropped and not held in mind. This was why he fell. Mathew expands on this, saying 'Like not emotionally held, really being at the mercy of the elements, like being out of control and insignificant. Having no agency, yes, I guess that's what it is, having no agency'.

Mathew tells me of other dreams he has had which also feel existential in nature. He describes speaking ancient languages, he even woke up once speaking Welsh, which he said he was never taught. He said that he had to look up the next day what he had said, which translated as 'They will see well'. He tells me that his songs come to him in his dreams. He tells me that he dreams a lot about Wales, even though his father had no contact with the country. His dreams seem to provide incredible creativity and a sense of belonging to his ancestry, in this way providing another example of dreams being necessary in some way.

I ask Mathew how he works with dreams in his practice, He tells me that due to the nature of his work with dementia patients, he doesn't work a lot with dreams. He tells me later that he has in fact had no formal training on dreams. However, he tells me he would 'interpret' a dream using an analytic frame, which is essentially the transference therapy relationship. He tells me that a lot of his patients bring dreams of disorientation and vulnerability so 'maybe I just project on to them my stuff, but we would explore it together and I'd interpret'. He then

comments on the interview ‘It’s been really illuminating, and it’s just made me think I don’t adhere enough to dream material because there’s a lot of meaning in that I guess, but I’ve not really stuck with it and that’s interesting’. This highlights a deficit in his training, a reduction in his approach to working with dreams and an emergence of new hermeneutic understandings as well as a demonstration of the interview being a platform on which to launch a renewed interest and potentially change how he works with dreams in future.

THEMATIC ASPECTS	MATHEW
The emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance through the embodies metaphor	Powerlessness
	Insignificance
	Identity
	Being acknowledged
The therapy space: reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream self	Reductive training
	Works only with transference
	Reconnected with past self
	Renewed interest
The Necessary Dream	
The changing motif and the journey of developing self	A need to be seen, acknowledged
	Processing life events
	Informative of therapeutic journey

Figure 18: Overview of Mathew’s themes

10.7 Silvia

Silvia and I have interviewed before. She is a bisexual, Polish psychologist in her forties, who is also trained as a body psychotherapist. Sylvia has a childhood history of falling dreams, which changed to flying dreams in adulthood. Although Silvia tells me she had a stable upbringing, she says that her parents were affected by the Second World War in Poland and she believes this trauma was projected onto her. She tells me that in her childhood she had recurring nightmares of wars and remembers not getting the comfort she needed when she was upset. I ask Silvia whether she was a happy child, and she says 'Not particularly... I think I was actually quite a sad child because I remember at school a few times the teachers asking me what was going on, why are you so sad? And for me it was "No, I'm not". It was just a default mode.' I did not recognize it as some kind of persistent state which didn't have to be that way'. Sylvia later tells me that her school was a strict Catholic school. As we talk, I notice that Sylvia still seems sad, her voice is quiet, and her expressions are somewhat repressed.

Silvia hasn't written a narrative. I am aware that I have some information on her dreams from our previous interview, but I don't reference this, I just hold this in my awareness. It is easy to gain a rapport as Silvia starts to tell me about the first flying dream, she is aware of.

I think the first dream of flying was of me flying horizontally through quite a narrow brick tunnel at quite fast speed, and there was a thrill of the sensation of flying but also a fear that I will crash into the wall, but at the last moment there was an opening into an open space and the relief I felt when I was able to make it through the opening.

I ask Silvia what was happening at her life at the time, and she replies, 'All the dreams in which I was flying were happening during the time when I was at the end of my relationship with my

husband, and we were in the process of separating'. I ask Sylvia what the tunnel would mean to her if it had a meaning or a metaphor.

For me it was quite simple, though I am sure that there would be more meanings to the tunnel. For me going through the tunnel at high speed, I was experiencing both fear and the thrill, which was reflecting the dynamics between us and what was happening, the fear of leaving the security of the relationship, but in some ways, it was quite liberating going through the opening knowing that I would make it through that difficult place.

I am aware here that there is an embodied element to Sylvia's metaphor. She then tells me about waking up after some of her flying dreams.

There were a few occasions during that time [when she was ending her relationship] when I would wake up in the morning or in the middle of the night. They were very special experiences because it was almost like a state of grace. Of complete peacefulness, being in, not surrounded, but being inside of light, knowing that everything would be okay, that life was so much bigger. When I say bigger, I am thinking of the universe. When you go out into that sort of space, it was really a sense of being part of the universe. Not having boundaries, not feeling separate. Because in those states of grace I knew that I had a body, but it didn't matter, because the connection was so much beyond the physical.

This experience feels very transcendental and a necessary dream for Sylvia at the time. I suggest that it sounds like a very healing experience and Sylvia validates this, saying 'very much, yes'. Sylvia tells me that not only was she splitting from her husband, but she was coming to

terms with her bi-sexuality and the fact that she had fallen in love with a woman. I suggest that this must have been a massively significant time - not only was she going through the end of a major relationship, but she was also questioning her sexual identity. Silvia agrees with this, and I am struck again by the fact that this is a theme for all of my participants, they are all either losing their identity to the will of others, struggling to be seen as themselves, trying to be something that they felt that they should be, or trying to find their authentic self.

Sylvia then tells me about a dream she had around the time of her relationship split in which she was flying on a horizontal plane up high and at speed. She is particularly graphic in her knowledge about directions, which is a theme throughout our interview. She tells me she is flying west to east and then she turns and heads north. I remark that it sounds as if she is navigating and Sylvia validates this, saying:

I remember the speed and the thrill but there wasn't an element of fear, which was present in the other dream. There was uncertainty about whether it would be safe for me, I was literally turning 90 degrees.

I am struck at this point by the fact that this was happening at a time in her life where she was not only changing her partner, but she was adopting a new sexuality. I am also interested in her lack of fear.

My sense is that there was more certainty about the path that I had decided to take. Although, now as I'm talking to you it's suddenly occurred to me that it might have been about really enjoying the different sex life and not feeling fear any more about that.

I comment on how liberating that feels, to be able to change direction and she laughs and says 'I didn't crash. I moved forwards.' Sylvia tells me this dream happened after she had made the decision to leave her husband but before she had physically left. As we talk, I am aware that Sylvia is still in her relationship with her current partner. This is the perfect metaphor for her ability to escape her marriage and try something new. I am also aware that it is through the interview that she has a new awareness about what the dream meant and that this was facilitated through the metaphor but also through her emotional connection to the dream. It feels as if the dream was helping Sylvia to process what was going on for her in her lived world, but that there was an element of her unconscious telling her that she was safe and she didn't need to fear the turn, the change.

Sylvia tells me about a different gravity dream in which she is flying vertically. This particular dream is fascinating and highlights the power of the embodied dream. It also appears to be a dream series that consist of four gravity dreams.

It's very interesting talking to you about them, so there was flying up with fear that someone was trying to pull me back. I have had the vertical flying dreams three or four times, but the atmosphere in this dream was different. It was heavier, there was fear that someone was trying to pull me down.

I ask Sylvia what was going on for her in real life at the time.

It's so interesting talking to you about my dreams again because somehow I can see a relationship between that dream and the one I had a few years later about flying vertically and realising that someone was actually holding on to my feet and it felt as if they were pulling me down, and no matter how desperate that someone was to fly

with me, in order for me to be able to fly, to move forward, I would have to free myself of that person and that was what happened. Just by thinking to myself that I needed to be free, that I had to fly alone, the grip loosened, and I could move away. But then as I fly on, I realised there was a ceiling above me, and I couldn't escape out of that space and I was still being chased and I had to find somewhere to hide as high as possible. I knew in the dream it was my partner.

In this dream Sylvia is referring to her current partner. I am obviously fascinated to know what the ceiling represented, what it felt like. I say that the dreams to me feel quite claustrophobic. She is desperately trying to free herself of this physical burden and then just when she thinks she is free; she hits a ceiling. She agrees, saying 'it was very claustrophobic.'

I remember the dream was not long before we last spoke two years ago. I was going through a very difficult time with my partner, who had to have a liver transplant. It was a very difficult time, waiting for an organ and then waiting to see if she rejected it. I don't feel as if my nervous system has actually recovered. The uncertainty of whether she was going to survive, the hope that everything would be okay, but then the reality of people dying before they got organs. We got to the point where if a match didn't arrive in the next few days, she was going to be taken off the list because her body would have been too weak for surgery. It was very much on a knife-edge as to whether she was going to survive. I think being in hyper-arousal made it very difficult. After the operation it was all about passing milestones, the first twenty-four hours, then forty-eight hours. The tension remains for at least the first year. My partner found it really traumatic and developed psychosis. She was paranoid that the nurses were coming to kill her. She ended up in intensive care twice when things started to fail. At the same

time my father had a massive brain haemorrhage and stroke and was in a coma for two months, so there was the added fear that he wouldn't survive either.

I think of all the enormous demands on Sylvia and the fear and trauma that was going on in her life. I can see how some part of her must have wanted to leave it all behind and I consider what the reality of caring for her partner and her father must have entailed.

Well, my parents still live in Poland, so I was travelling back and forth and staying with my mum while my dad was in a coma, we believed that the more company he had, the less lonely he would feel. I spent the first few weeks thinking that he was there, that he was accessible and then I spent time thinking he was not there, so why was I bothering to be with him, and I began to feel real anger. I did provide a lot of emotional support for both my mum and sister and I think in some ways I coped better than they did. But my partner, I also had to stay with her in hospital too.

Sylvia starts to cry, and I really feel intense empathy for her, and I think of that ceiling, that immovable barrier. Sylvia starts to play with her mouth and begins to cry. I ask her what is happening for her, and she says 'There is the faintest sense of the understanding and yet I've been feeling that my tongue is going a bit numb and almost ridged, like I can't say it. There are strange sensations going on in my tongue now. But the understanding being of the ceiling that I can't escape from [sighs] two things, one from the circumstance and the other is my body at those times'.

Sylvia realises the significance of the ceiling, which is the circumstances that cannot be changed and the reality that her partner is on anti-rejection medication for the rest of her life and her life is still hanging by a thread. Her tongue remains so ridged that she struggles to speak, and I

am aware of how she must hold all of her feelings back, and that even now there is a sense that she can't escape and that her feelings can't escape her mouth. Sylvia later tells me that she trained as a body therapist after experiencing psychosomatic events and I am aware that this must be one way that her psyche communicates with her. I wonder what she means by escaping her body and imagine it is as if it will always tell her what she might not want to know. I later ask Sylvia if she can give me a sense of who she is, what she enjoys doing and she tells me the question makes her sad because over the last few years she has only been doing what is totally necessary. I get the sense of someone who is just trying to survive. I can see why she comes across as sad, she has been through a lot in the last few years. I can see more now why her tongue is quite literally tied; it is self-preservation.

I am interested to know how Sylvia works with dreams and whether she works with the body and she tells me that she would love to know more about how to work with dreams.

'I still find it difficult to engage with my dreams more, so when clients bring dreams, I feel actually a bit at a loss, especially knowing how rich a resource they are. Both a resource and a source'.

I ask Sylvia whether she has taken her dreams to therapy and she says 'Of course I did. But I didn't get very far with that in the sense of engaging more with them more with them, to understand more what was speaking through the dreams.' I ask Sylvia why she felt this had been the case, and whether this was due to the therapist or herself and she replies 'I think a big part the therapist, but there was a sense that they are just not very interested. For me dreams have often been like, wow, so much is happening, so much is talking, I need to and

really want to know what it is really saying. And because of my own experience I often think, you know, I would like to offer more to my clients when they bring dreams’

This perfectly demonstrates Sylvia’s experience of a reduction in her dream work, not only in her experience of therapy, but also her personal confidence in working with dreams. She hasn’t mentioned any formal dream training and my sense is that anything she might have had will have been limited. I am aware that Sylvia connected well with her understanding of her dreams when she considered the metaphor and her embodied response to the dream and that the interview provided a place for her to gather new awarenesses and rekindle her interest in working with dreams. This was evident in her asking me about resources she could use. Sylvia tells me that she would like to have a system showing how to work with dreams. I think about Clara Hill’s book *On Dreams in Psychotherapy* (Hill, 2013), which is probably the most thorough dreamwork guide I have read, and although I appreciate it is a heavy manual I don’t really know what else to recommend.

THEMATIC ASPECTS	SILVIA
The emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance through the embodied metaphor	A new sexual journey Tongue tied Ceiling and circumstances Connecting the dreams
The therapy space: reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream self	At a loss to work with dreams Limited success in therapy A request for a system for dreamwork
The Necessary Dream	The interview as a place for further insight A State of grace
The changing motif and the journey of developing self	Processing life events Healing An embodied awareness

Figure 19: Overview of Silvia’s themes

Chapter 11: Summation of findings



The nine initial thematic aspects were first clustered into five aspects, which I then consolidated further to establish three final essential thematic aspects. These themes included aspects of the existential identity crisis relating to the lived experience of the gravity dream and the dreams' perceived functions, as well as the essential themes found in the participants' experiences of taking dreams to therapy and personal practice. All of the themes were all inductive in nature in that I did not anticipate them, and they were generated from the data. I refer here back to van Manen and his suggestion that thematic aspects help us with the sense that we are able to make of something, the process of discovery, disclosure, a needfulness or desire to make sense (van Manen, 2016). This I believe I have achieved.

All the participants described vivid dream series that they had experienced over many years. The necessary dream: the changing motif and the developing self was an essential theme in that it related to the phenomenon of gravity dreaming alone. It was coded because the participants were able to identify how the dream had served them in some way. The dream motif appeared to have a different personal significance at different developmental stages of life. The most important aspect of the dream was in facilitating the participants in their

existential crisis, in their search for their sense of self and individuation. All the participants found an emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of their dreams' significance during the interview process. This theme, while not essential to the gravity dream experience, was something that transpired during every interview. I witnessed an 'Aha' with all of the participants. This new hermeneutic understanding was achieved through the participants' openness to exploration, a joint appreciation of wonder, an exploration of the embodied gravity metaphor alongside an investigation of the lived world. It was only when I came to anecdote my thematic analysis after the interviews that I realised the final theme - the therapy/interview space: reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream selves - was a by-product of the interview itself. One of the participants fed back that this, for them, was the most pertinent theme. There had been something in my invitation to attend an interview that provided a place for the participants to reconnect with this intangible phenomenon, something that they had either never shared or had only shared with limited success. I was also aware that it was through the interview that the participants became further engaged with working with dreams. They all described having had a fairly reductive dream training and some described lacking confidence in working with dreams at all. I realised that when I asked participants to tell me how their dream world had impacted their practice, I was expecting in some way to have enriched it. What was apparent was that they had an increase in curiosity and openness to working with dreams. However, I also saw limitations with how they worked, an insecurity borne out of a concern they might 'tread' on clients' dreams and I realised that the interview itself had provided tools that they would most likely take into their practice.

Chapter 12: Discussion



In my exploration of the gravity dream motif, I discovered that the participants' dream series changed alongside their developing selves. It appeared to assist with their feelings of existential isolation and enable them to process difficult life events. Two further themes appeared through the interview process. The first was an emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance, which came about through an awareness of the dream metaphor - the embodied felt sense in the dream and the exploration during the interview. The final theme - the therapy space: reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream self, while an inductive theme - was not related to the essential experience of the gravity dream experience but rather to the interview experience, highlighting the benefits to be gained from exploring this numinous dream series after the event. The distance in time allowed the participants to adopt a reflective stance, which appeared to enable them not only to reconnect with themselves developmentally, but also to recover their interest in working with dreams. It also became apparent that therapists had been trained and were working with dreams in a reductive manner.

12.1 Why the necessary dream, the changing motif and the developing self?

My literature review encompassed recent neuroscience research that demonstrates the role dreams play in assisting our emotional processing and memory consolidation. However, this study appeared to demonstrate the motif's, (dream series) role in assisting with the participants' existential concerns and struggles with how they were perceived by the world and in the eyes of others.

Why the 'necessary dream?'	Existential concerns
Silvia	She describes issues around identity at the times of her dreams, stepping into her bisexuality. She describes 'a state of grace' and healing taking place in the dream space allowing for the processing of life events. Feelings of oppression and responsibility .
Sarah	She describes a desperate need to be seen by her mother who cannot 'imagine her', attributing the dream to be about her individuation, alongside feelings of responsibility in life, and not being able to create life. Her dreams aid in processing life events.
Brent	Trying to be 'more', to make progress, to not fail, to be more powerful in order to be loved (responsibility). Shifts in his identity through the changing motif. A feeling of finally being competent.
Louise	Discovering her sense of self and identity , and transcendental in terms of having contact with deceased daughter and providing feelings of hope, positivity and freedom. Her dreams aid in processing life events.
Jo	Feeling seen and validated, existing in relation to something outside of herself, having a sense of identity a 'spiritual orgasm.' An oppressive family and army culture.
Sally	Who am I? A quest to individuate . The dream as a mysterious clue of what I know but don't know. The dream as a creative space. Loneliness as a child. Processing her lack of control in life events.

Mathew	The dream playing out feelings of being dropped, not 'held in mind'. Powerlessness . His inability to make an impact on his world/mum. Struggles with identity as a homosexual in an alpha male family culture.
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Figure 20: Why the necessary dream, the changing motif and the developing self?

I appreciate that this motif relies on the assumption that we do in fact have an unconscious. As a psychotherapist who spends my working day working with unconscious processes this is naturally a view I subscribe to.

As my interviews progressed it became apparent that the dreams were providing the seven participants with intensely positive emotional experiences that they experienced as reassuring in some way. They described how they were 'learning something about myself', 'feeling accepted', 'feeling more powerful', 'being seen', 'escaping' and 'being more than'. Mathew, the only participant who didn't benefit from his dreams, realised that they were a metaphor of his lived experience of being 'dumped' and not held in mind. The dream in itself felt necessary. Yet even for Mathew, it seemed that the dream was attempting to alert him to his internal world at the time: his not being held in mind and his lack of agency to change his situation. He seemed to be processing his lived experiences. The dream motif ceased as his lived experiences changed and he felt acknowledged for the first time. I believe that the dreams served a purpose for each individual and I suspected they fulfilled some compensatory function in the psyche (Jung, 1948). This study highlights the value the dream has for the individual as it develops. For all of the participants the motifs changed over time, Mathew, for example, stopped falling, while Brent became more assured as he settled into feeling 'competent on the field' of psychotherapy.

Each participant described experiencing some degree of existential loneliness in their lives when they had their dreams. Even Brent, who told me he had friends, spent his life trying to be good enough for his stepfather. He felt his dreams allowed him to reconnect with himself. The participants were all turned towards others, as, indeed, a lot of children are in their responsibility, in their oppression, in their need to be seen and loved.

Yalom describes an existential isolation as being an 'unbridgeable gulf between oneself and any other being' (Yalom, 1980: p.353). The participants appeared to have lost themselves or denied themselves to the needs of others. Yet all of them, with the exception of Mathew, gained something reparatory from the dream. Louise told me that she learned something about herself, that she was able to action something and feel more powerful. Brent and Jo expressed similar sentiments. Silvia felt a total 'state of grace' that she was able to feel secure in her changes in life. Louise spoke about 'recovery and restoration' through the dream space.

The dream appeared to assist with these internal struggles through a form of compensation. In the lived world the participants were falling 'prey to the world' and the wishes and wills of a stronger, more dominant 'other'. However, I believe that in their dream world, they were projecting themselves out in a bid for freedom, or self-search. Heidegger would say that in our entanglement with the needs and demands of others, in the being-with-one-another, we are lost, and we are not our authentic selves. This form of movement of the *dasein* (our being) is paralleled in the embodied dream metaphor. Heidegger calls it '*the plunge*', our being traveling out of itself in a bid to find its authentic self, creating a form of groundlessness, mirroring the nothingness of inauthentic everydayness, which I believe I witnessed in the endless falling and the fight for flight. Participants were sucked into the turbulence of their inauthenticity (Heidegger, 1953). The dream experience itself appeared to serve a purpose by addressing

these existential concerns, it was reparative for six of the participants. Even the participant for whom the dream was not reparative observed that it highlighted his existential concerns. Todres would call this experience a 'freedom-wound', an attempt to right an existential vulnerability, a 'soulful space between sky and earth that embraces ambiguity'. Perhaps rather than trying to deny this vulnerability, the psyche is inadvertently trying to address it? (Todres, 2007: p.111).

Mathew was metaphorically lost in space in his desire to soothe his mother and to be held in her mind. Silvia was sad and lacking in comfort and she also fell in her childhood dreams. Sally was lonely without her brother, Sarah's mother 'couldn't imagine her', and Jo told me 'no one gave a fuck' who she was. Although it is almost prerequisite for a psychotherapist to have psychological wounding, I was surprised that loneliness came up so often. During the interviews I could see how the developmental deficits being highlighted were somehow addressed through the dream experience, albeit briefly. The participants' psyches seemed to be acting out in some way in order to get their needs met in the dream world. In the case of Mathew, the dream was shouting over and over again 'This is how you feel!' It was the metaphor for how he felt. I thought of Jung and how he believed in the compensatory nature of the psyche and how the psyche tries to resolve by seeking assistance in the outside world. He saw dreaming as a natural regulatory process, directing individuals to understand their attitudes and actions. Jung also hypothesised that dreams may function as a self-representation of the psyche, in terms of the individuation process, when an individual is deviating from their true path (Hall, 1983). This tallies with what I saw in my results. I was also reminded of studies I have read on repetitive dream content seeking to address issues of social

bonding and attachment and this seems to resonate with my findings (McNamara et al., 2001; Mikulincera, Shaverb & Avihou-Kanzac, 2011).

As I was reading a blog from the New York Times (Marino, 2012), I saw a very pertinent quote by Søren Kierkegaard which really resonated with my work on this.

Deep within every human being there still lives the anxiety over the possibility of being alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked among the millions and millions in this enormous household. A person keeps this anxiety at a distance by looking at the many round and about who are related to him as kin and friends, but the anxiety is still there.

And then I thought: what about existential aloneness, not physical aloneness, what happens when there is no one around who relates to us, when we are invisible, where does the psyche go then? How do we comfort ourselves?

I thus realised the importance of existential loneliness and how this relates to our identity and is played out in the gravity dream. How can we know who we are when we are not known by others? Every single participant mentioned identity as a theme. It was as if in the search to find themselves they were metaphorically thrown into the dream space to answer the question 'Who am I?' Sarah spoke about individuation. Mathew discussed his inability to be authentic, life was just too hostile for him to declare his sexuality, he knew he couldn't be who he wanted to be. His fears were realised when at 21 he did share his deepest secret and he was shamed to his core. He was told there was something wrong with him. Jo didn't know who she was, she didn't even use her name, she was totally unacknowledged in her lived world and yet in her dreamscape she was superhuman. She went from not existing to having substance. Silvia was

able to know through the dream that she would be okay in her change of direction, her new sexual identity. Brent was able to reconnect with himself and Sally was able to use the space to 'know what she knew'. Somehow these dreamers were searching for their own authentic voices.

I could see through my results that the use of the dream metaphor confirmed what I had read about it being an expression of our identity 'to confirm and consolidate the identity of the individual who produced it' and how 'we exist because we have our own truth, our own unity, our own uniqueness. Our mental life constitutes our primary environment, metaphors being the expression of its contents that allow us to feel congruence between the external and the internal world' (Bolognesi & Bicisecchi, 2013: p.12). I realised how significant the theme of identity was and how this was played out in the dream metaphor of falling and flying.

There was also something about the necessary dream being about recovery and restoration for Louise, letting go for Sally, and acceptance and belonging for Jo. These dreams were also fundamentally necessary in that they helped all the participants deal with their life events. Perhaps they felt more powerful, perhaps the psyche, like in Mathew's case was just screaming over and over again at his developmental deficits, his falling and his being not held in mind. His subconscious knew what he needed and the fact that he is still falling may suggest he still has some way to go. His later flying, or dragging, dream seemed to serve a purpose in that it was alerting him to his resistance to therapy.

There was also something of a transcendental nature to the dreams. They were not every day experiences, and, in some way, they facilitated change. For Sylvia the state of grace implies a total acceptance or a euphoria, much like Jo, who also felt she had experienced a spiritual

orgasm. In many respects this fits with Jung's notion of a transcendent function as a model of personal and collective transformation that 'arises from the union of conscious and unconscious contents' (Jung, 2014: p.69). It also fits with Hamilton's notions that dreams initiate an awakening within us at moments of life crisis (Hamilton, 2014). It may well be that the dreams themselves were expressions of what Jung would call our 'shadow side'; aspects of the participants that remained buried or yet to be realised. They were aspects of self that were fighting to be seen and acknowledged.

Louise saw her dreams as being about recovery and restoration, as well as being precognitive and helping her to feel positivity. All of the participants' dream experiences fit with Todres's 'freedom wound', a soulful place or state of being human, a human kind of openness, a way of being (Todres, 2007). I believe the gravity dream may actually be that open space.

12.2 An emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance through the embodied metaphor

This was a totally unanticipated theme. I had not imagined that new insights would arise through our exploration, but now I write this I can see the parallel between the interview and a therapy session and understand the emergence of new awareness often arises through a period of immersion into an experience. I can also appreciate that the insight stage of working with dreams is based on psychodynamic dream theory, that it occurs at varying levels and at the deepest level we can understand how our dreams relate to parts of our self, our childhood conflicts and our existential or spiritual concerns (Hill, 2013). Since completing the interviews I have read studies demonstrating that new insights can be gleaned following dream work (Pesant and Zadra, 2004; Hill *et al.*, 2008; Edwards *et al.*, 2015).

When I look back on the participants' 'Ahas' - their new psychological insights - I can see that they were generated through an appreciation of the embodied dream metaphor, the 'felt sense' of their dreams alongside the dream imagery. In some situations, such as with Sylvia, the connection to her Aha was made through her embodied experience of recalling the dream and the metaphor of a ceiling. There was something about the insights that were generated in the interview that meant that the participants were able to look at things differently. This may be due to the fact that they were reflecting back on the problem or situation with an element of distance. I realised that new hermeneutic understandings or dream insights could facilitate a stepping-stone to further personal development. This concept that with insight comes change is not new, however I was aware of two important factors. The first was that the space that was created in the interview allowed for the insight to be generated through the dream immersion. However, there was also something about the combination of the distance in time from the event itself, and the embodied metaphor that brought things together fully. On reading a book called the *Eureka Factor* (Kounios & Beeman, 2015), I realised that my interviews had actually provided a shortcut to the participants' dream insights and there was something useful in actually being able to witness the point at which participants began making sense of their experiences and feed this back that created a complete gestalt. I witnessed their satisfaction at the new insights.

I realised that the embodied metaphors of flying and falling and what these meant to the participants were particularly strong. Flying seemed to be accompanied by positive and powerful associations, fitting with dictionary definitions. On an archetypal level this is seen in images of winged angels and superheroes. Falling, by contrast, came with metaphoric associations of falling from grace, falling from a standard and failing. The participants made

sense of their experiences through their emotional responses to the metaphor. As Lakoff suggests 'Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.' (1980: p.3). My study seemed to echo what I had read in the literature about metaphors being manifestations of the world of the dreamer that carry meaning and are structured in a way in which these meanings can be communicated to the internal parts of the individual (Bolognesi & Bicisecchi, 2013). It also suggested something that I have not read: that we feel the dream metaphor. The table below is a summary of what the participants discovered during the interview.

Why the emergence of new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance?	
Silvia	Silvia gained an appreciation that the ceiling was a metaphor for the embodied feeling of her immovable life circumstances and the suppression of her emotion. Realising that flying was a metaphor for her excitement at embarking on a new sexual journey. She became aware of her search for self during the interview.
Sarah	Sarah realised that the barriers in her dreams were a metaphor for her not creating life and her difficulty at being able to go with the flow and enjoy herself. She realised that the dream metaphor played out her need to be seen by others.
Brent	Brent made new connections between his childhood fear of falling and failing. He recognised the parallels with his personal agency and that the final motif represented his complete gestalt and feelings of competence as a therapist.
Louise	Louise realised that the pylons and the trapeze represented her limits, and that one dream was playing out the uncertainty she experienced in a relationship and her feeling of being lost. She also

	realised the dream's ability to help her get out of her head and let go.
Jo	Jo realised that she was searching for herself during the interview and that in some way there was a reparatory function to her dream, in that she was able to feel accepted by a greater totality. She also realised that her dream of burying a body was related to her self-sabotage and how she buries herself.
Sally	Sally realised that her dreams were playing out her feelings of lack of control and her fears of losing her children. She also made new connections about fears of exposure and her need to let go of her need to control aspects of life.
Mathew	Mathew realised that his falling dreams were related to his existential fears of not being seen or considered, of being dropped. He also realised the powerlessness in the motif and how this paralleled his lived world. He realised that the stars were watching on in ambivalence, which was his experience of childhood, and saw this as a metaphor for questions of identity such as 'where am I?' or 'who am I?'

Figure 21: Why the emergence of new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance?

Brent made new insights into falling and his fears of failing as a child. He also realised the power of being grounded not just in his dream world but as a metaphor for how he felt in his psychotherapy practice. He then related a dream of hovering with skill and watching a professional sports game to his own feelings of competence as a therapist. In a later dream he was able to associate his real feelings of fun and satisfaction while swimming with sealions with his enjoyment in life.

Jo also gained a lot of hermeneutic understanding through the embodied metaphor of flying and her feelings of thriving. I realised towards the end of the interview that this was something that she would take with her, not only as a therapy tool (she said she worked well with

metaphors) but also as a resource for reminding herself of her capability to do things other than self-sabotage. She appreciated the intense felt sense of connection to the universe and her self-acceptance as well as her journey from *not being* okay, to *being* okay. Through the dream metaphor of flying high above her school peers, she was able to recognise her need to be seen and realise that she had the ability to resolve her developmental needs.

Sarah was really able to contact her emotional sense of the obstacles she encountered in her flying dreams. For her they represented something to do with being unable to relax and enjoy the ride (life). The obstacles in her dream world represented obstacles in her lived world and her struggles with not being able to create life. She recognised her sense of 'passengers' in her flight and saw how this represented her constant sense of responsibility for others, which she felt physically in the dream space.

Sally recognized that her dreams of being carried on an 'out of control stool' through the sky replicated her lived experiences of feeling out of control. She was also able to connect with her felt sense during the dream of exposure and relate this to presenting her artwork to the wider community and her need to let go of her desire to control her life. Louise was able to identify with the metaphor of letting go, as well as realising the self-limits she imposed on herself. Mathew was able to appreciate that the dream metaphor represents his powerlessness and inability to make any impact on his mother, as well as struggles with his identity. Silvia was able to see her flying journey as a metaphor for her sexual journey and also appreciate her strong embodied feelings about not discussing how she really felt about her current life circumstances.

After reading an article on 'Heideggerian Pathways Through Trauma and Recovery' (Churchill, 2013), I realised that the dream metaphor fits with the idea of Heidegger's 'thrownness' and 'fallenness'. The dream motifs themselves changed over time, paralleling what was going on in the ontological experiences of the participants' lived worlds, in their personal development, and in their desire to project themselves forward and away from their emotional pain. The participants' existential, projected dream-selves, their detethering from physical dream reality was somehow enabling them to attend to their one-self. This, by default, appeared to enable healing in the 'with-world'. Their search for meanings, for belonging, for individuation, their desire to be seen was an unwitting attempt to recover or discover one's own being; one's life, one's existence and one's self. This was further paralleled during the interview process as the participants were not only able to appreciate and reflect back on their journeys but reach new hermeneutic meanings for themselves, through the exploration of the metaphor, the embodied experience, the felt sense and the re-immersion of the self into the dream scape. This study demonstrated that, through a targeted exploration of the dream metaphor and felt sense, new connections can be made even years after a dream took place.

12.3 The therapy/interview space: reduction, revival and reconnection with our dream self

Finlay (2016) describes the many ways in which research parallels the therapy process despite the fact that their goals are significantly different. In therapy we aim to increase awareness and strive for change through the relationship. Research is often a one-off encounter, the aim being to deepen and further our understanding of a phenomena. Although the goals are different, the processes are very similar, hence my linking of the therapeutic and interview spaces.

As I was conducting my thematic analysis, I realised there was a theme that manifested itself more in what wasn't said than what was said. Heidegger talks of our being in the world disappearing into the 'unsaid' of the world happening (Todres, 2007) and there was so much to be seen in the participants' lack of words. Although I did ask participants how they worked with dreams, I did not anticipate their response to be quite so underwhelming. Their experiences of taking dreams to personal therapy ranged from non-existent, to having 'limited success' to being reduced to only looking at the transferential relationship or being asked to draw a dream. This, apparently, was not at all helpful for Sarah, who had to do the drawing perfectly.

I thought back to my experience of training and how my work with dreams in my practice has largely evolved through my doctoral process and I realised that what I was witnessing was not only a deficit in personal training on how to work with dreams, but also the participants' reductive experiences of taking dreams to personal therapy. I witnessed how grateful they were for the opportunity to interview, describing the experience as 'a place to explore' in which they could 'make new connections.' It was a space for 'illumination' and 'a place for 'further insight.'

I did not anticipate how valuable the interview space would be in terms of providing permission to talk about a subject as intangible as gravity dreaming. I had read about participants gaining new insights through dream discussions (Blagrove et al., 2019), but I had not anticipated it would happen in my study. I realised also that I was drawing parallels between a phenomenological interview and that of the therapy room. I have summarized why this theme felt so pertinent to me below.

Why the therapy/interview space: reduction, revival and reconnection with our dream self	
Silvia	Not much success or confidence working with dreams. Wanted a system to know more. Please direct me. No model of working. Interest revived during interview.
Sarah	No real memories of taking dreams to therapy. A shame memory when asked to draw a dream. Wanted resources. Reductive models of working. Reconnecting with significance of dreams. Saw herself in this theme.
Brent	Not taken gravity dreams to therapy in case it was unsettling. Would like to know, more offer more. Lacked confidence. Reductive model of working. A renewed interest. Feedback that this theme was most pertinent for him.
Louise	Described 'grim' dream training. No sense of reaching understandings while working with dreams in history. Curious to know more. Had self-taught and self-read over the years.
Jo	Not wanting to tread on people's dreams. A lack of confidence on knowing what to do. A reductive way of working. Inspired to work with the metaphor in dreams.
Sally	No recollection of ever taking dreams to therapy. Gets clients to draw dreams. Enjoyed making new connections in the interview space and followed up on email.
Mathew	No formal training. Worked with transference. Some success working with dreams in therapy, but highlighted more success made in the interview space. Keen to learn and know more about working with dreams.

Figure 22: Why the therapy/interview space: reduction, revival and reconnection with our dream - self

Sylvia, Jo and Louise all described lacking confidence working with dreams. Brent, Silvia, Sarah and Mathew all described the limitations of their experiences of taking dreams to therapy.

Sylvia, Brent, Mathew and Louise all asked for tools to help them work with dreams more effectively. This fits with data I have read that suggests that only ten to fifteen percent of therapists work on dreams on a more than superficial level (Mahrer, 1990). Why? Is this because we are inadequately equipped?

Mathew, Brent, Sally and Sarah thanked me for the interview and the time providing space to reflect on past experiences and forge new understandings. I realised that there is something of an intimacy in describing our dreams. In essence we are laying ourselves bare, we are divulging our unconscious processes. We are sharing part of ourselves.

At the end of the interview the participants seemed to express a revival of interest in working with dreams and I believe they will take some of my questions into their dream practice in future. Their recalling of their dreams enabled them to reconnect with themselves and reflect on their developmental journey. There was something cathartic in this. It felt like the moment at the end of therapy, when we see how far we have come and what our milestones have been. It was intensely satisfying.

Two participants actively asked for more resources on working with dreams and Silvia explicitly suggested that she needed a system. There was a sense that they lacked information, and this may have been as a consequence of their modality of training. For instance, Mathew had no formal training on dreams, while Louise described her dream training as 'grim'. Four of the participants described similarities in their training. They all worked with parts of the self and Mathew worked with the transference relationship. Brent, the drama therapist described the protocols around acting out aspects of the dream, and Sally, the child therapist used play and

art when working with dreams. I believe that these are all dated and reductive ways of working with dreams and that training should pay greater attention to the role of dreams.

It is important to state that none of the participants were purely Jungian in training, which may have resulted in less of an emphasis on dreams. That said, today even a Jungian modality would still be seen as reductive when it comes to training therapists to work with dreams. I believe that, in light of more recent scientific dream studies into the benefits of working with dreams, there should be a call for a more integrative approach to addressing dreams in psychotherapy.

This study demonstrates that successful work with dreams can revive our interest in working with dreams and enable us to reconnect with aspects of ourselves that we may have forgotten. It also demonstrates that these seven participants had reductive elements to either their training, their confidence or their practice and I recommend that future training programs place greater emphasis on how to work with dreams, and their value for therapeutic practice.

12.4 Reflections on the themes

When I began this phenomenological exploration I had no idea how closely the subject area would actually fit with van Manen's four fundamental lifeworld themes: lived space, lived body, lived time and lived relations (van Manen, 2016). As I gathered the initial themes, I could see that these existential aspects were inherent in the 'necessary dream' theme. The lived space was present in the changing motif and the developing self, the transcendental experiences and the parallels and embodied metaphors to the participants' daily lives. The lived body was again present in the changes of the embodied motif, from falling to flying, as well as in the feelings of agency that the participants described. The lived time could be very much seen in the

dream's parallels to daily life and the metaphors by which the dreams demonstrated this. The 'lived relations' was seen in the themes of loneliness, disassociation and loss.

The necessary dream is an essential theme of the gravity dream experience, encapsulating a great deal of the lived experience. By contrast the other two themes were essential to the *recalling* of the gravity dream experience or the interview experience and not to the phenomenon of gravity dreaming itself. I realised that these detract from van Manen's desire to describe only the phenomenon alone and the decision to use them was a compromise that I made between adhering strictly to a methodology and fitting within the brief for a Doctorate by Professional Studies, which is primarily to doctor the field. When I sent in my previous learning agreement submissions, I received responses, such as 'what does this mean for therapy?' and it was only as I was reporting my themes that I realised quite what the study does have to say about therapy. I was aware that the other two themes highlighted areas in which the field of psychotherapy could grow.

In some areas it felt as if there was some overlap between the necessary dream and the new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance as themes. I realised again and again that the awarenesses were arrived at through the metaphor and this was highlighted through the changes in motif and the value it provided for the participant. However, these two themes were separate. The dreams' value to the lived experience was in fact very different from the new awarenesses that arose in the present as a consequence of the interview space. An example of this was Jo, who reported that she had the most amazing spiritual orgasm during her dream and had felt incredible feelings of belonging and acceptance in the dream space. However, it was only as she was re-immersed into her lived experiences at the time of the

dream that she realised just how impoverished her life had been when it came to feelings of acceptance and she saw what the dream had in actually really meant for her at the time.

I was also aware that I had asked the questions 'if your dream were a metaphor, what would it mean to you?' as a result of what I'd learned about how we dream in metaphor from my literature research. If I had not asked the question, I believe that people would not have made the same connections. For example, Mathew connected with the stars, who watched detached at his endless falling. The same can be said for questions around 'what does that feel like? In your body?' This was particularly notable in the case of Sylvia and the ceiling she described. It was only when she entered her body that she was able to connect to her tongue, to her inability to say how she really felt.

I am also aware of the fact that I interviewed a cohort of psychotherapists, all of whom believe in the value of dreams and the unconscious process, and that this study would look very different if I was interviewing a cohort who subscribed to Hobson's (1988) view that the function of dreams is simple mental processing.

The third theme, the therapy space; reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream-self felt intrinsically linked to the emergence of new hermeneutic meanings. In the interview space, a new awareness was forged that enabled the participant to see its value in their development.

As I engaged in my theme analysis, I realised that although all of the participants had experienced other existential dream phenomena, I did not know what this meant for the gravity dream phenomena itself. Did it say that the participants were more open or more spiritual? I could not get a consistent feeling about spirituality, and without doing a personality

test, I did not feel confident scoring their openness. Perhaps it says something about their natures that they were open enough to come forward to interview, intrigued enough to want to explore more, generous enough to give up their time and even quirky enough to be inclined to explore the intangible. However, none of these things had any relevance to the phenomena I was studying. If these participants were spiritual, did it mean that someone who wasn't spiritual couldn't have a gravity dream? My husband is an atheist, but he has had lots of gravity dreams. There is also the question of openness. Were people who were more open to experience, to things beyond their own physical existence, more likely to gravity dream? By saying this am I saying that only people who are open can gravity dream? I know people who are very open that don't gravity dream. I also did not feel that I could relate the phenomenon of gravity dreaming to the fact that participants had other existential experiences, so this theme became redundant. I realised that although there were commonalities between participants (for example, Sarah, Mathew, Sally and Jo were all artistic or creative, Mathew wrote poems, Sally was an artist, Sarah made jewellery, Jo composed poems and songs) could I really confidently say this was related to the motif alone? I decided that it was naïve of me to even ask the question. With a small cohort and without a comprehensive personality test, it was not possible to really ascribe my thoughts to a thematic aspect. It did not say anything about specific about the phenomenon. It only intimated something about the dreamers.

The theme 'culture' was first mentioned by Sarah, who described the possible cultural context of her gravity dreams in terms of storytelling and her positive identification or attachment to the concept of flying and witches. I recognised that perhaps we do attach to concepts of the witch and the flying superhero and that these attachments may form the basis of the metaphor

and whether it is seen as something positive or negative. The theme itself however, only felt pertinent to Sarah.

I was also aware that in my pilot study I had noticed a lucid element to the dreams. I spent some time trying to work out whether this was important to the gravity motif, recognising that some participants were more lucid than others. Louise, for example, seemed to knowingly control where she was going, as did Silvia. Brent also definitely experienced lucid moments in his dream space. I believe that being able to experience lucidity in dreams can be enormously beneficial and it has been shown to be helpful for nightmare cessation. However, I am not sure that that the theme of lucidity spoke only of this phenomenon. I came to the conclusion that it was not as pertinent as what appeared to be the transcendental experiences that fitted with six of the participants' testimonies and that seemed to imply the existence of a healing element in the motif. I did not code a transcendental theme in isolation as I was aware that Mathew only derived benefit from talking about his dreams in the interview and in his personal therapy and he was aware that the only purpose they really served was as a painful reminder of his existential isolation and loneliness.

Another theme that I discarded was loneliness, disassociation and loss. Disassociation was mentioned by Louise, Jo and Sylvia. It did fit alongside the theme of history of trauma and in some ways ultimately entered my essential theme. However, I did not reference the word specifically. I spent time thinking about disassociation and its possible links to our nocturnal world. I realised that, in many ways, disassociation is a necessary way of turning away from our emotional pain and that if this tool is also used at night, it still fits with the theme of the experience being in some way necessary. The theme of trauma also emerged with my critical friend and, although I think it is significant in terms of the experience of the gravity dream

motif, I think it fitted within the larger theme of the necessary dream and the journey of self-development.

I recognise that this theme can only be seen as valid alongside the assumption that dreams do in fact have a value. The literature research I have undertaken over the last five years has drawn me towards the conclusion that dreams have many purposes from processing simple lived experiences, emotional processing, to preparing ourselves for future experiences, reconnecting with ourselves, re-energising ourselves and to awakening ourselves. I appreciate that only a reader who believes this to be true will see the value in my work.

My final essential theme felt important in terms of doctoring the field: how it is possible to gain new hermeneutic understandings through gravity dream work, years after the dream itself, even as mature, experienced psychotherapists, who had undertaken extensive personal therapy. What is it about the distance between the dream and the telling of the dream - the re-immersion in the dream - that enables an element of reflexivity that can enhance the way we work with dreams in therapy? I realised that it was not just in the space, but the invitation of a space and how as therapists we are often averse to the exploration of things that aren't in the present tense or are not entirely tangible. I saw this in my difficulty to actually get agreement to study this subject. It was such an effort to get anyone apart from gravity dreamers to see its value.

I am also aware that when Allan Hobson reduced the dream experience to biochemistry and physiology in the 1950s, a whole era of thought on the significance of dreams seemed to abate. I believe that the emergence of new scientific data and the work of people like Bulkeley and Morley has meant that perhaps we are looking again into the benefits of our dream space.

In terms of the theme of the interview/therapy space being a place to retrieve, revive and reconnect with aspects of ourselves, this was demonstrated through the process of my interviews. I realise that while there are differences between a phenomenological interview and a therapy space, there are also many parallels and I was asking the same questions that I might ask a client when we explore a dream. Only two participants had intimated taking their dreams to therapy and had limited success. The interview offered an opportunity to reconnect with their past, but also to revive their interest in dream work.

The participants were all keen to see my results, to know more about how to work with dreams and for recommendations of books that could rejuvenate their therapeutic work with dreams. There was also something in what remained unsaid about how they worked with dreams. None of the participants really raved about their dream work. Louise described her training as ‘pretty grim’, while Mathew had no formal training. Two of the participants said they had no confidence working with dreams, despite recounting some incredible dreams of their own and gaining some new hermeneutic understandings. This then caused me to look at my own training, which had only lasted a day. My dream work as a therapist has been fascinating, but this was because I learned more about the practice through the process of my doctorate. I would not have known about embodied dream work or metaphor had I not begun this journey. This prompted me to realise just how reductive dream work is in certain schools of psychotherapy. Obviously, a Jungian analyst would work with the unconscious more than others and may well pay more attention to working with dreams. The different modalities of the participants will have meant that they all had different experiences of training with dreams, so I cannot say that the lack of confidence or experience working with dreams is down to a certain training within a certain modality. What I can say is that what I did an internet search

looking at continued professional development dream workshops for therapists online, I found very few courses in psychotherapy.

The interview provided a space that made attunement easy to achieve quickly. Studies have shown that sharing our dreams encourages empathy between the listener and the dreamer (Blagrove et al., 2019). Recounting our dreams to another person is unveiling part of our deepest hidden world. It invites intimacy and attunement. It invites interest and receptivity. It encourages creativity and the opportunity for further connections and reflections.

There was also something about this particular space; an invited dream space, in which participants could talk about their dreams in a way that they had not before. Why had they not done so before? Brent did not share his dreams because he feared they might upset the listener. However, I believe this reluctance to share runs a lot deeper than this. In the interviews I was providing a space to talk about an intangible subject. I was providing a space to talk about an undisclosed and hidden aspect of the participants' dream world. I don't believe this space often exists. When we go into therapy, we are encouraged to talk about events that are happening at the time, and we are pulled towards talking about the concrete, the things that we can see, the war wounds that we can understand and explain. Hill tells us that therapists often ignore existential issues due to their own fears of existential concerns. Perhaps if we attended to our own fears, we would be more prepared to meet those of others (Hill, 2013).

Existential questions cannot really be explained, and they are something we struggle to articulate or make sense of. I believe that is why we don't disclose dreams of an existential nature. We live in a world where people don't share their spiritual views for fear of persecution,

they don't share their political views for fear of offense and they certainly don't share their night-time gravity dream experiences, unless it is invited or, as Brent says, they are intrusive, and we feel they need to be explored.

Another redundant theme that was very obvious, was the dreams' enormous sense of emotional potency. This probably goes without saying as I believe we only remember the dreams with a high degree of emotional potency. However, I once again didn't feel this theme could be related to the phenomena alone. The participants described nightmares that they remembered, with Jo describing a recurrent dream in her childhood of killing and burying someone. This dream had nothing to do with gravity.

My critical friend saw the links between trauma and the gravity dreams the participants described. She saw the powerlessness, the not belonging, the identity struggles, the not being seen. I decided to house all of these elements under the necessary dream theme. It did feel that there was a purpose for the dreams. Jo was able to feel seen in her gravity dream and to feel special in a world where she was invisible. Brent could feel more powerful at a time when he was powerless or when he was processing his lived experiences of frustration at needing to be the straight-A guy. Yet it didn't feel right to link trauma directly with the gravity dream, as trauma can be linked with the wounded healer. All of the participants were therapists and were, by default, likely to have aspects of the wounded healer identity in their history.

An example of my coding something that I had not anticipated can be seen in the theme of identity. I had no sense that when I was gravity dreaming, I was trying to find myself in some existential way, that my oppression was affecting my self-expression, my existential freedom, my sense of identity. I thought of it merely as a freedom wound, trying to give me comfort in

some way, and this was what I had suggested in my PEP. The experiences of others consolidated my understanding of what had happened to me.

12.5 Limitations of the study

As I began my theme analysis, I was confronted by the fact that I did not have full data sets, and that as a result not all of the data was homogenous. I therefore decided to only code what was homogenous and used other pieces of data such as the participant narratives to provide context or examples.

The participant follow-up questionnaires were used to strengthen the final theme, relating to the therapy space. However, they provided no new data besides that which had emerged during the interview. The only benefit of the initial participant narrative was in grounding the context for the interview and providing focus for my questions. The fact that I had a semi-structured interview schedule meant that other than helping me to target my questions towards specific dream experiences, the initial narrative did not affect my results in any way. I had interviewed Brent, Silvia and Louise in my pilot study, so I already had some idea of their histories with gravity dreaming they each had a motif. However, my pilot study did not explore their lived experience at the time, so I knew nothing about them personally. As a result of these considerations, I did not generate any themes from the participant narratives. As van Manen's methodology is both descriptive and hermeneutic I do not believe that the gaps in data detract from the essential themes, and the use of things like Sally's poem, or Brent's and Louise's follow-up email, only serve to add context or enhance the power of the themes.

This study was not random. It did not seek to generalise the motif among a larger population. I did not set out with a hypothesis. I sought only to explore a motif as it occurred among gravity

dreamers who were also psychotherapists, and who also had a motif in their history. They each approached me through my advert, and they were motivated enough to explore this phenomenon with me. The limited number of participants meant that while I could explore their experiences in depth through interview and generate a qualitative study, I have not produced a replicable study into whether the gravity dream is *necessary* for every person who experiences it. Although my feeling would be that a numinous gravity dream would have purpose for anyone, this study did not seek to be generalisable across a large population. That being the case, I still believe that, by illuminating the lived experience of seven gravity dreaming therapists, it is phenomenologically informative.

By interviewing seven therapists I was able to get much richer and more reflective data exploring issues of identity and feelings of being missed or ignored. These were individuals who had done their own personal work. It is perfectly possible that these results may not be replicated with another cohort of therapists. It is also likely that if the study was written by another researcher, it might look different. The feedback from my critical friend highlighted a commonality in her themes and mine, and as Giorgi tells us, it is conceivable that another researcher could write a different structure or style, but experience has shown it is 'never *wholly* different: rather it is divergent because another investigator is looking at the same data slightly differently.' (as cited in Hycner, 1985: p.298). This is demonstrated in the Bible with the synoptic gospels. Mathew, Mark, Luke and John all telling differing stories of the same events. There are similar themes, but I do not feel that a different perspective makes them any less valuable. It is also possible that another interviewer would not have achieved the same results from the interviews, perhaps participants would not have made the same hermeneutic

understandings. This study was a co-creation, just like any therapeutic relationship, my own uniqueness was placed alongside that of seven other unique individuals.

The fact that I had already interviewed three participants meant that we already had a level of attunement. However, they had not seen my published pilot study and I only sent it to them after we interviewed a second time.

It should also be noted that it was assumed that, although it was understood that they were looking at their experiences from a retrospective viewpoint, there was accuracy in the participants' descriptions of their dreams. This is what we do as therapists daily. When a client talks about a significant experience, we do not minimise it just because it happened ten years ago. We know enough now about trauma and emotion staying locked in the body for lifetimes (Rothschild, 2017) to know that historical experience is still not only potent, it also impacts the here and now.

It should also be noted that there is always difficulty in verbalising essentially non-verbal experiences and that sometimes the expression of things like an 'Aha' awareness can be seen in far more than the statements. They can be seen in the pauses, the smiles and the eye rolls. These are intangible ways of drawing conclusions that only I myself could possibly pick up on as I was the only other person present in the room. It is also important to say that there may have been distortions, exaggerations, confabulations and psychological defensiveness in the participants' relation of their experiences. These are things that occur every day in the therapy room as we jump on 'the drama triangle' and seek attention (Berne, 1996). There is obviously something in the notion of a participant seeking attention, approval and understanding of their individual phenomenon. It is also possible that the participant may well have filled in the gaps of their memory, they may well have 'guessed' what happened. However, I believe that

confabulation may be another form of insight and data. It is still driven by unconscious processes. I also believe that the process of the in-depth reading, re-reading, listening etc. helped me to tune out from the background noise, engage in what was essentially happening in the interview and tune into the essential experience. The use of an independent researcher, and critical friend, also enabled greater objectivity.

I conducted my interviews over different internet interfaces. I was keen to use the preferred internet interface of the participants, rather than forcing my own choice on them. The most obvious reason for this was the fact that I wanted them to feel comfortable. I was aware of the various ethical issues with platforms such as Skype who own the recordings, so most of the interviews took place over FaceTime, with two being conducted face-to-face. I realise it might be argued that different interfaces offer differing levels of attunement and that physical interviews are more intimate. However, I totally disagree with this. There is a physical proximity in an internet call that you don't get face-to-face, for possible fear of sharing your coffee breath, say, or encroaching on someone's physical boundaries. I also realised that my online participants were safe, they were at home (although I saw Sally at her workplace, and Jo at my office). I could argue that I felt less safe in the later interviews but, having established the boundaries in terms of informed consent, expectations and options to withdraw, I like to think that everyone felt at ease.

12.6 Reflections on the process

I used participant validation as a way to improve the validity of my research and validate my themes. I was able to do this through the interviews, as well as by feeding the themes back to participants. I was aware throughout the process that even if the participant did resonate with something that I said, I still needed to be aware of the possibility that they were attempting to

please me or collude with me. I was careful to look at this in terms of the context of the interview, including the participants' eye contact and facial expressions, in order to check their responses were genuine and whether they would have said the same thing in isolation without my observations. Obviously there is no exact science and Ashworth (1993) warns against taking such participant validation too seriously, saying that the 'atmosphere of safety' that would enable a participant to lower their defences and act in open candour is unlikely to be achieved in the research environment. My interview style is one of openness, trust and relativity and I am aware that the fact that I had interviewed three of the participants before may have meant they were more relaxed than the other participants. It is quite likely that our initial encounter two years previously was enough to enable them to lower their defences and engage more easily in an I-thou dialogue (Buber, 1958).

I found listening to the voice memos in my car very useful for identifying themes. There was something about engaging in another task while having the interviews in the background that enabled me to immerse, or 'indwell' fully. Initially I found myself in a position of blind panic as I realised the enormity of what I was doing, and I found myself momentarily paralysed before something creative emerged. I realised at these points that I was going through a process of 'incubation' as described by Moustakas (1990). I was almost detached from the question, and I was unaware that things were percolating until a sense of 'illumination' arrived. As I wrote up my themes, I realised they were actually part of my tacit knowledge, that somewhere, somehow, I knew what I knew, but I didn't really know that I knew it, until I knew it.

In retrospect, I became aware that the linking of dreams to the participants' lived experience at the time they had them, draws on some of Maurice Friedman's work (Hycner, 1993), specifically his use of 'touchstones' as the central crystallized events that give a person's life

meaning. As a therapist, I will often look for touchstones, for events that have been pivotal in some way. As I looked at the parallels and metaphors between the dream and the lived experience, I was aware that the dreams were themselves touchstones, they represented significant life events and in the process of recalling the dream, the participants were creating new touchstones of meaning.

Hycner talks about the need in contemporary society to rediscover the 'holy'. By this he does not mean a spiritual belief, but an 'opening out to that which is beyond us' (Hycner, 1993: p.76). It felt as though the participants were opening out to something that was beyond them. However, there was also a sense of shame in their not discussing these intangible touchstones. They did not generally take their dreams to therapy. On the one occasion that one of them did, it was unsuccessful, or appeared to be limited. There are transpersonal and existential models of psychotherapy that could deal very well with these types of experiences in the therapeutic setting. However, this research calls for all models of psychotherapy to open up to what we cannot explain or see. Kelzer suggests that any individual or author who shares his own psychospiritual experiences opens himself up to criticism and potential vulnerability. Perhaps this is something that, like all stigmas, needs to be addressed and broken down (Kelzer, 2014).

Moustakas described six heuristic research phases (Moustakas, 1990). The first is the initial engagement with the subject, this was my immersion in the literature and the recording of my own personal reflections (a heuristic self-search) and experiences. The second phase involved full immersion in the subject. This was the point at which I was engulfed in a wave, or perhaps many waves of sheer panic. The data itself felt too big, the meanings too many and my six-week-long-headaches began. At the stage of incubation, I began to feel the data sinking further into my conscious and possibly my unconscious (hence my vivid dream world) and I had an

almost tangible feeling of something emerging. A sense of grasping or understanding from the inside, what this phenomenon truly meant. At this point the panic that I had been living with shifted and I began to feel the vaguest sensation of hope. I think this was the beginning of the fourth phase, of 'Illumination', where new understanding and revelations occur, when hidden meanings begin to reveal themselves in a 'how can you not have seen this before?' awareness. An example of this was the connection between what every participant described as a search for their authentic self or a crisis of identity and the gravity dreams. It was only as I began to look at this with an existential and philosophical lens that I was able to get a sense of the psyche's compensatory nature and the function that a projected dream self could serve. It was in this phase that I realised quite how many layers of thematic analysis there were. They stretched from the simple 'who am I?' theme to a far greater reaching explanation of how the psyche may try and heal, search, explore and make sense of our being.

I realised also that there was a hermeneutic cycle to my 'wonder' at the subject of gravity dreaming. This began with my openness to the subject and my curiosity about my own experience and developed into wonder as I finally understood what my subject meant to me. I had seen these different types of wonder described in Paula Seth's doctoral thesis on wonder. She described three interconnected overarching themes. The first being a state of openness. The second the embodied, deeply relational dimension of wonder. The third is a profoundly renewing experience (Seth, 2017). This was not only the case for me personally, I witnessed this in the 'Aha' with my participants.

In the process of *explication*, of trying to explain how I had arrived at my findings, I started to integrate the findings into a more theoretical framework, to make conscious and understandable something that has been lurking within my entire life. To finally be able to give

a voice to my experiences and unite them with the voices of others has been beyond validating. The final phase of *creative synthesis* has perhaps been the easier task.

I followed the Van Manen suggestions for doing my theme analysis, as can be seen in my results section. However, I got thrown off the scent when my critical friend discussed coding frequencies and coming up with certain measures to generate an interrater reliability. I began looking at this and then realised that it detracted from a van Manen methodology, which is opposed to the concept of computer-generated programs. The methodology 'contrasts with other qualitative methods and approaches that require repetition and may involve technicization, and comparison of outcomes, trends, and the indexing of data' (van Manen, 1990: p.29).

Sela-Smith (2002) warns that engaging in heuristic self-search may potentially cause a methodological ambivalence, cautioning that the inclusion of participants, being a distraction from the internal process, produces a dissociation that prevents one from entering the tacit dimension. I have to disagree with this. My initial self-reflections enabled me to be quite concrete about my biases, so that when it came to be entering the experiences of others, I could see new things. This is more indicative of a descriptive phenomenological methodology, whereby one aspires to 'bracket' assumptions, or at least name the biases that may affect the work. For me, this was a preparatory step that enabled me to set a scene on which to begin my engagement with the subject.

In many respects this could be described as a heuristic study in that I employed self-reflection throughout the study, not just as a means to bracket my assumptions. I grounded this project in my personal experience, which is where I both started and finished my study. It did not occur to me however to call this study heuristic as I felt it imperative to bracket my assumptions as a

gravity dreamer, not as a means to stand back from the phenomena, but as a means to see the 'other', rather like the way we would deal with the subject of grief. Sometimes, in seeing the processes of others we can connect with our own. The study was not about my personal growth; it was always about achieving greater understanding through the exploration of other gravity dreamers' experiences.

This leads to other questions, what if I had done a purely heuristic piece of research, would I have ever come to the same conclusions? I think not. It would have also not had shed light on a phenomenon that is shared by many and I think it might even have been seen as the ramblings of an eccentric existentialist! Throughout this doctorate, I have interviewed ten vivid gravity dreamers. Three dreamers from my initial cohort were not involved in this study, one was not a psychotherapist, one dropped out before the interview and one didn't reply to my email asking if they would do another interview. That said, the very fact that I can find ten gravity dreamers with relative ease told me that I was not alone in my desire to understand the experience.

12.7 Reflections on my ethical dilemmas

During the process of submitting my feasibility paper to the European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy, the paper was peer-reviewed. The experience was harrowing, but it was the most useful exercise that I have so far undertaken on my doctoral journey. I had spent a long time researching my questions and the methodology (which I had believed to be an existential phenomenological study), to find, according to Dr Linda Finlay, I had actually conducted a phenomenologically orientated thematic analysis. I was shocked, not least because it had been passed by my awarding body. It was only when I read an article in Wiley (Timulak & Elliott, 2019: p.10) that I realised this was quite a common mistake among novice

researchers. While I had set out to do one methodology, I hadn't quite achieved it. The article stated that 'there is a discrepancy between the reported use of a brand-name method and the actual used procedure, which may be idiosyncratic or even inspired by a method of a different name'. Every part of me prior to my publication believed that I had adhered to an existential methodology however, in hindsight and under scrutiny, I realised that I hadn't employed enough of the reflexive methods necessary to label it as such. I have subsequently written a reflexive piece on this experience which is to be published in the same journal.

I was also told that the number of themes I had attributed was too high and that I needed to reduce them drastically, as well as review how I had named them, as one critic said: 'they don't tell me about the phenomena'. This was another point of learning for me. I started to look again at phenomenological studies and saw that four themes were probably more standard and that these themes described a phenomenon, they weren't one-word themes like mine. I spoke to my academic advisor, who told me that this happens, and papers have to be rewritten, but that, really, the results were the same, which, indeed, they were. I went through the process of taking out the less-inductive codes and only published the codes that spoke about gravity dreaming. The process was invaluable, even if it did precipitate a crisis of faith. How did I manage to make this error? What did it say about me as a researcher? I realised that I was simply a novice researcher, who had to learn through her mistakes, just as we do in life. We learn when we take a bend too fast in the car, or we run with our hands loaded, or talk with our mouths full. Is it not the same when we embark on research? Halling talks about the importance of learning phenomenology through observation and practice and this has certainly been my experience (Halling, 2020).

What I did do, was return to the books on methodology. Where had I gone wrong? How could I do things differently this time? I had to re-write my paper under a different methodological title in order to get it published. I spent some time debating which version I should write up in this final study. The paper that passed the Metanoia and Middlesex test, or the peer-reviewed article? I decided that it was probably best to write up the latter version and acknowledge the journey I had been on. I have subsequently written a reflective paper on this experience for the same journal, which has been accepted for publication.

The other lesson I have learned is an ethical one. During the writing and re-writing of my paper for submission, the editor took one of the participants' names and attributed it to the wrong piece of text. Again, this was a critical learning point for me. As I was checking the final document for the 100th time I failed to notice that one of the names was wrongly aligned with the wrong text. I then had an email from one of my participants, who had read the published paper and was upset, having figured out the pseudonym I had given her, that one of the quotes attributed to her wasn't hers. I was absolutely mortified. I had obviously sent her the transcripts and had always aspired to be totally transparent and honest; this was quite simply a human error.

The most important thing that I took from this experience, other than making sure that I triple check an editor's changes, was just how powerfully people felt about their research. This participant felt let down by the error, she felt as if she had been wrongly portrayed. I sent her a copy of my PEP, so that she could understand that it was an error, however I was left with a feeling of guilt. I had let her down. She also intimated that she had felt that she could be identified by the paper. I had worked hard to anonymise the data extracts, attribute pseudonyms and eliminate identifiable features to ensure this was not the case. I then started

to think further along the lines of shame. This woman was anonymous to the world outside, but she could still see her feelings, expressions and statements made public. This particular participant was referring to gravity dreams being a 'private part' of herself. She had intimated that she had a history of abuse, had I then repeated her history, by not only publishing this private part of herself, but not doing it properly? Practice-based research has ethical guidelines that put the client's interests first (Bager-Charleson, 2012), the research relationship must be equal and not exploitative, and I had worked hard to ensure this was the case, only to get it wrong for one of my participants. It has meant that in this final study I have worked even harder at representing my participants fairly. With my anecdotes I have stayed very close to the factual truth. I have made sure that their names are changed and that they have had an opportunity to read the transcripts and report back on my themes. This feels very important. I have also made sure that the participants' identities were not shared with my critical friend and that she didn't have access to the recorded audio, just in case she was able to recognise a voice.

As a therapist I encourage my clients to see their humanity, to love it and accept it. 'You are human' I say, 'we make mistakes'. It is, however, hard when the shoe is on the other foot, when it is your mistake. I can only now reflect and say, 'Thank you', I have learned again from this lesson. I hope that I am no longer such a novice researcher, and it is my wish that I can avoid similar mistakes in future. Needless to say, this participant was not part of my second study. The fact that she had read my published paper could have skewed the interview.

In both my doctoral studies, I aspired to non-maleficence. I am committed to avoiding harm or distress to the participants and offer them both the right to withdraw from the study and the right to refuse to answer questions. I also provided them with ample opportunity to provide me with feedback and arranged further debriefs and interviews if they felt impacted by the

content. I was aware that I was dealing with participants who, as therapists, were also used to contracting and working within the ethical parameters of their governing bodies.

12.8 Reflections on thinking phenomenologically

Finlay tells us that the goal of a phenomenological study is to open ourselves up to be 'moved by other' (Finlay, 2008: p.3). This phenomenological journey enabled me to be moved by my participants and make sense of my own experiences, as I witnessed them make sense of theirs. The doctoral journey, which I have likened to a pilgrimage to a sacred place, has been fraught with challenges. Ultimately it has allowed me to experience various states of wonder, from my initial engagement of the subject to a greater, richer hermeneutic understanding that has answered my biggest question: why is gravity dreaming so important to me? As van Manen says, 'we don't always "know" what we know' (van Manen, 2016: p.47).

I realised that thinking phenomenologically is not just about following a methodology, nor is it really something that you could learn from a book, it is an attitude. My questions could be phenomenological in nature, but without the attunement, the space to allow for rich description, I would fail in my methodology once again. Without adequate reflexivity I would be repeating history. It was during this analysis that something began to happen. As I started to code, line by line, looking for the nuances and hidden meanings in each text, I found that it started a practice that became habitual. I would be scanning through any line of text, a newspaper for example, and finding myself going through the same process. I found that the mere act of engaging and looking at peoples lived experiences in this way, was changing how I was looking at the whole world. It was as if I was appreciating a subtlety to life that I had never seen before. It was as if I was viewing the whole world as a written text, looking for inductive codes in the dialogues I was having with my children or my friends. It was only after reading an

article on phenomenology that I realised I wasn't going mad. Students who study phenomenology, 'tend to look at their lived experiences with more attentiveness to the subtleness of lived meaning' (Adams & Van Manen, 2017: p.781).

I then noticed a change in my clinical practice as an Integrative Psychotherapist. My abilities to see between the lines of dialogue, to look for the unsaid and the inductive themes had been heightened. This new way of being was providing new depth to my work. I believe this is a real, tangible product of this doctoral process and it has provided me with new tools to use in my practice. I realised that my research's brief to work phenomenologically on dreams, without a need to interpret was something that I was integrating into my practice. This new attention to the unsaid as well as the said, my new reflexive skills and the information gained through the embodied metaphor were becoming tangible aspects of my intangible subject.

It is also important to acknowledge the intersubjective reflexivity I employed, facilitated a mutual relativity with my participants that enabled the essential aspects of the phenomena to reveal itself. These are aspects that I employ daily as a psychotherapist, that are rooted in my openness, wonder and curiosity to explore my clients lived experience. The use of validation and dialogue alongside my desire as a therapist to work with integrity are also aspects of my role as an Integrative therapist that I naturally pulled into the interview space. The parallels between living in phenomenology and living in an attuned relationship in the therapy room being much the same. It was only as I traversed the bends on the phenomenological pilgrimage, relaxing into this way of being, as the requirement to be the perfect researcher lifted, that I appreciated how much of myself as a relational therapist I was integrating into my research. It is also important to acknowledge, that like the therapy relationship, this was a co-creation. My participants met me at the contact boundary, because, like me they came with

an openness to explore their own wonder. While our agenda of self-exploration was distinct from therapy, the way in which we met each other, was in fact very much the same.

The period of immersion in my subject and my methodology caused me restless nights. I perceived small glimmers of something that felt big, but whose shape, size and appearance were beyond me. Eventually I finally sensed something tangible emerging from the data. I had moved from looking at the subject from the outside, to being well and truly on the inside of the data. I was very relieved to find Cornelius Verhoeven describe this experience perfectly as the 'state of suspension between the grasped and the un-grasped' (Haas, 1972). It was something that I could almost feel, yet it would still sometimes elude me. At times it felt like madness. I realised as I came into this state of illumination that I was experiencing a state of 'wonder' that I had seen described in the literature of Van Manen. It was then read that I read that phenomenology's core heuristic, the reduction, means to 'stand in 'wonder' before the world' (Adams & Van Manen, 2017). This was not something that I had fought to encourage, it was just something that happened as I reflected more and more on the question 'Why the motif? Why is it so powerful? Why is it so important to these participants? Why was it so important to me? What does it say about therapy?'

12.9 Reflection on the reductions

As I began this study, I worried about how I would be able to set my own gravity dreaming experiences aside from what I was witnessing in my interviews. I was aware that this was helped by my initial written piece as well as my line-by-line theme analysis and my journal writing. However, when it came to indwelling and writing anecdotes, it was very easy to separate myself from my participants and to see their experiences in their own right as belonging to them.

It was when I began re-writing the participant anecdotes that things became far more connected thematically and I experienced a full immersion into their narratives and experiences. Writing the experiences of others as if they were my own, in the present tense and using 'I' helped me enter something of a spiritual transformation. Husserl describes this as being necessary for *the transcendental phenomenological reduction*, saying it emerges at the point at which we 'stand above the world... at the gate of entrance to the realm, never before entered' (Husserl, 1980: p. 152-153). He likened the personal transformation needed in the reduction to a religious conversation. I realised as I danced between my personal experience of wonder at what I was witnessing and my personal felt sense, that some deep and profound part of me knew what I was seeing, but that before my study I didn't really have the words to describe it. Now, as I was immersed in the words of others, I felt that I could see the words that would have been my own. I felt such pride, such connection and such joy that I was finally making sense of something that was so important to me. It really did feel like an immersion into a new realm, but it was an immersion into the realms of others whose connections to my own world were in the process of unfolding. I felt very connected to the idea of my own 'thrownness': my lack of identity resulting from the suppression of my religious experiences and the needs of a bi-polar father and a depressive mother. This was my 'Aha'. I had finally made sense of why gravity dreaming was so important and why I needed to understand what this phenomenon had meant to me.

12.10 Reflections on the methodological juxtaposition

Throughout my pilot study I sought to breathe life into a subject that has, until now, only enjoyed a marginal position in psychotherapy research. My own experiences of gravity dreaming were paramount to my psychic survival as a child and it was profoundly moving to

discover that I have not been alone in my experiences. The juxtaposition came at the point that I was just about to begin my interviews. I was aware of a requirement to make an intangible, unquantifiable phenomena relevant to the field of psychotherapy. My research questions sought to tease out the participants' experiences both of the phenomenon and their lived worlds and to illuminate how these experiences may have shaped and impacted upon the therapy. However, I was aware that I was straddling a juxtaposition between adhering to my methodology and fulfilling the doctoral requirements of contributing to the field. There seemed to be a conflict between philosophy and practice. I read about varying modifications to phenomenology (not least by Amedo Giorgi himself, the creator of descriptive phenomenology) and I had seen the debates between phenomenologists who argue that many studies 'are not commensurate with the general scholarly accepted idea of phenomenology' (van Manen, 2017). In this, I would note the validity of the question posed by Halling 'who has the authority to define what constitutes phenomenology?' He says that 'as researchers we possess our own authority based on a richness of experience arising from our practice – our successes and our failures and the learning made possible'. He goes on to say that, unlike researchers, philosophers of phenomenology rarely have to 'contend with the realities, quandaries and problems that arise as one carries out an empirical phenomenological research project' (Halling, 2020: p.4). In serving two masters - phenomenology and my awarding bodies - I needed to find a way to honour both. This meant deciding to only have one thematic aspect that fitted with the essential phenomena of gravity dreaming. The other two themes, while inductive, were related to my participants' essential experience of dream practice and personal therapy, as well as their essential experience of the interview. Ultimately, I believe that phenomenology is not a practice, it is an attitude and that by employing self-reflection and reflexivity throughout this project, I believe I have achieved a phenomenological study.

12.11 Reflections on the participants

With five females and two males in the cohort, my study could well reflect what studies show of woman having greater dream recall (Schredl & Reinhard, 2008). Although it should be said that with such a small cohort it is certainly not possible to make this assertion definitively. It is also possible that this cohort reflects the perspective I encountered in the literature review that gravity dreams are about the individuals' renouncement of personal responsibility (Saul & Curtis, 1967), but it is my belief that this study has revealed the phenomenon to be about far more than that.

It should also be said that this was a cohort of emotionally literate therapists. The study's essential thematic aspects might look entirely different if it sampled a more randomised section of the public.

12.12 Reflections on culture

It is quite likely that the notions of flying and falling means different things in different cultures. However, I would say that there appeared to be consistency among my participants who associated falling with negative emotions and more potent, powerful ones with flying. That said, most of the participants described struggling to control their flight, or getting lost, or being aware of obstacles. I believe that there is something archetypal in the metaphor of flying and falling that carries across cultures, but work exploring this has not yet been done. My participants were German, Polish, Australian, American and British. There were no participants from African or Asian backgrounds, and it is entirely possible that the gravity dream motif could be situated culturally, and that feelings and associations of the metaphor could vary.

12.13 Reflections on future work

I think that a larger piece of work, involving a quantitative study exploring how therapists perceive the value of working with dreams, their training experience and how they feel about and work with dreams in practice would be very valuable. It would identify whether my findings reflect that of a larger population and may provide a more targeted approach to what is missing in psychotherapy training and practice.

Recent data showing that we dream in metaphor (Vedfelt, 2017) highlights an area for further research in clinical practice. I would be keen to look at changes in dream metaphor and therapy outcomes, the embodied dream metaphor and the connections between emotions and metaphor.

It would also be useful to explore the value of virtual reality (VR) in encouraging flying dreams. These dreams are associated with positive emotions and might perhaps be of benefit to individuals who are dealing with existential concerns. It may also be the case that engaging in the use of VR and the experience of unassisted flying may also be of some benefit to clients.

12.14 Do I agree with the literature?

When I read back through my literature review, I am struck now by how reductionist the theories of gravity dreams seem to me. Why does the function of dreaming have to be about survival, sociality, evolution, emotional processing, memory consolidation, or as possessing a transcendent function? Surely dreams can have a pluralistic function. Can they not assist all of these functions? This study suggests a role for the gravity dream in dealing with the participants' sense of self and identity. I thought back to Bulkeley's view of these gravity dreams as being about our existential awareness and I realised that this supposition does, in

some way, relate to the existential loneliness and search for self that I saw in the participants. That said, I disagree with Bulkeley's assertion that these dreams notify us of the limitations of our physical capabilities (2016). These dreams take us to a place where there are no physical limitations, I agree that the physical sensations appeared to be significant, although I do not believe the participants were being reminded of their mortality; they were being helped over an existential hurdle. The dreams were helping them answer fundamental existential questions such as 'Who am I? Am I alone? Am I loved?' I believe this experience actually fits far more with Jung's ideas of the compensatory function dreams have. Dreams assist the unconscious through the use of powerful embodied gravity metaphors. These experiences also fit with Jung's belief that individuation appears through the transcendent function. All these participants were struggling to individuate, and it was through their dream experience that this appears to have been facilitated. I was also aware of the power of the unconscious, shadow sides of the dreamer coming into their conscious during the interview. *This existential aspect of the gravity dream experience was a theme that showed itself with astonishing clarity and is certainly something that has also become integrated into my practice.*

Although there may well be an adaptive function to dreaming for survival, say, or for assisting us with social bonding; the dreams of my participants appeared to be far more important and useful, enabling them to process lived experiences or, on a more existential level, helping them to deal with their issues of identity or loneliness. The dreams felt necessary, like some method of psychic compensation: hence my need to code this theme. There was therefore no question on whether there was functionality; it was more of a question of what that functionality might be.

Jung described archetypal dreams as impersonal in nature, distinguished by symbolic images or motifs common to myths and religions all over the world. He believed these archetypes appear at times of emotional crisis, when one is experiencing a universal human problem (Sharp, 1998). I believe that gravity dreams could be archetypal dreams, without the symbolic imagery but with a personal symbolic metaphor. This would fit with Jung's belief that archetypal dreams come at a time of personal crisis. This was certainly the case for my participants. The metaphor of flying was one of escaping, progressing, moving on and beyond. The metaphor of falling was one of terror, failure and ceasing to exist. The metaphor was embodied, the participants had a felt sense of what it meant. However, I am unconvinced as to whether this is a universal metaphor. I believe we all have subjective pluralistic experience of gravity and metaphor. I personally think the theory of a universal archetype is also reductionist and rather abstract and generalisable. I believe symbol and metaphors are entirely subjective and the interpretation of dreams is best understood through personal embodied metaphor. The fact that modern science suggests we dream in metaphor provides the perfect explanation for this. 'The embodied metaphor' is not discussed in literature and its use in the therapy setting would reduce the complexity and codification of dream analysis into something that even novice therapists could use.

As a psychotherapist I believe that both the repeated dreaming of an unprocessed trauma and the dream material itself can provide an embodied metaphor that facilitates greater understanding and this study also sought to demonstrate that such metaphors also signify a symbiotic relationship with the lived world. The functionality of the dream is not just biochemical but transformative, enlightening, compensatory and psychospiritual. The function

of dreams can be multifaceted, so why do we feel the need to be so reductive in our need to explain the intangible?

I agree that when we finally make sense of what a dream metaphor is trying to tell us it can be astonishing (Bolton, 2014b). This I believe with my participants is because they felt the connection. I can also appreciate now that our ability to make metaphor may well be more active at night as the right hemisphere of our brain stays online, and that we feel things in our dreams more visibly and literally (Vedfelt, 2017). I can also see that, as per the conceptual metaphor theory, metaphors are far more than figures of speech: they are matters of thought. Metaphors are therefore pivotal in dream work (Lakoff, 1993).

In Jungian psychology these numinous experiences are categorised as a religious experience, as providing a solution, or as alleviating a spiritual dilemma. Jung defined religion as the 'careful and scrupulous observation of the numinosum' (Corbett, 2005: p.15). Corbett tells us that this experience is directly relevant to the developmental history of the experiencer, and this is evident in the changing motif of the gravity dream. He describes these numinous experiences as being 'both a healing symbol and also a personal bridge to the intrapsychic experience of the transpersonal realm'. He goes on to say that we exist in relation to something not of this realm and whether this is an experience that is generated from within our psyche or beyond it is not something we can answer (Corbett, 2005: p.7). Hamilton would call this a 'Psychospiritual Transformation Process' (PTP) (Hamilton, 2014: p.19), elucidating the ability to look back over a dream sequence in order to be able to see the PTP, or as he also calls it, an awakening. There was definitely something of the PTP in my study. As we looked back over numinous dream sequences through the interview collaboration the participants and I gained a sense of what the transformation had been. All my participants had issues with their identity, or being seen,

or being invisible in some way, and with the exception of Mathew, they had felt that, through their numinous experiences they were not alone. They did exist in relation to something outside of themselves as well as having contact with their transpersonal selves, which led to an experience of meaning. They felt as if they were part of a greater totality, which reduced their sense of alienation and aloneness.

I believe that regardless of a therapist's belief in the value or originality of the religious experience, it is paramount to consider the place of religious, numinous experience in the therapy room, otherwise we will not see the totality of a client's life. Doing so risks splitting the client's experience and forcing the spiritual experience over to a 'shadow side' that might be shamed or not recognised as significant to the individual. Corbett highlights the fact that it can be risky to talk about these kind of numinous events in therapy in case we are seen to be 'inflated, hysterical or frankly psychotic' (Corbett, 2005: p.15). I saw this in the reticence of my participants to talk about their experiences in therapy. I realise that this also relates back to me, as I have had negative results when taking existential experiences to therapy. My therapist reduced these experiences to biochemical explanations and, in doing so, succeed in truly squashing my 'wonder'.

In a letter written in 1945, after a heart attack and some personal visionary experiences, Jung wrote 'The main interest of my work is not concerned with the treatment of neurosis but rather with the approach to the numinous. But the fact is that the approach to the numinous is the real therapy and inasmuch as you attain to the numinous experiences you are released from the curse of pathology'(Corbett, 2005: p.13). Was Jung saying that in attending to the numinous he was not attending to the pathology of his patients or, more importantly, was he saying that in attending to the numinous experiences, he was treating his patients'

pathologies? I believe that through my interviews alone, by attending to my participants' numinous experiences, I was helping them to see their shadow sides and enabling them to make sense of that little part of themselves.

Freud believed that a dream could not be interpreted without a dreamer's association or symbolism, (Blechner, 2013) however I disagree with this. Sometimes a dream needs to be unpicked, with all its emotions and embodied sensations. These strong emotional experiences, along with information derived from the therapist about the client's current life concerns, their attachment style, their defence mechanisms, their aspirations, their personality, their emotional patterns, their opinions of their body and bodily functions and their past traumas provide a rich context in which the dream embeds itself. The therapeutic relationship thus offers a safe forum in which we can work collaboratively and creatively to achieve an insightful understanding of something that may be hidden.

My study also replicates what has been said in literature about Psychotherapists feeling unconfident about working with dreams and the value of working with dreams in terms of not just attunement, but new clinical insights and a better understanding of the clients internal dynamics (Pesant and Zadra, 2004).

12.15 A complete hermeneutic cycle: How does this research relate to me?

When I wrote the chapter about myself in the research, I had no idea about the nature of my own search for individuation and authenticity in my strict Catholic girl school and my excessively religious home. I did not see that I was struggling with my shadow side until I connected to the experiences of my participants. I realised that my gravity dreams were playing out my existential loneliness, my search for connection, in a world where I was not noticed or

seen. The parallel process for me was that I too reached new hermeneutic understanding of the significance of my dream experience.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, I experienced a new gravity motif. I fell. This was an incredibly scary dream, in which I literally felt my stomach drop. The sensation of falling was totally authentic. Feeling totally overwhelmed and terrified, I fell for what felt like a very long time from the top to the bottom of a Chinese hotel, at which point I was transported on a rollercoaster. I woke with a start as the rollercoaster stopped and I realised that this dream was a metaphor for exactly how I felt at the time: totally thrown, groundless and scared. Being a severe asthmatic and having had a pneumonia the previous year I had been sent a 'rescue pack' by my doctor. I was literally terrified about the virus and had lost my personal agency as restrictions were placed around me. I was also paralysed in my research as a result of my anxious lived experience, flicking from BBC News to Sky News in search for updates on the pandemic.

Two months later I spoke to my husband and told him that I could finally see the end of this doctorate. I had written my conclusion and I wasn't 'inside' the panic anymore. I took a little time to reflect on the process of my five-year journey with my husband, knowing that it wasn't over, but feeling a requirement to appreciate the effort I had put in. That night I dreamed that I was walking along a pavement and there were people walking behind me, watching. I remember consciously thinking 'I wonder if they can see that my feet aren't touching the ground? I wonder what they will think of me if I were to fly now?' I realised at that moment I really didn't care what people thought, but that maybe they would see how amazing it was to fly. Maybe they could see that I had not only mastered flight, but I could do somersaults. I summersaulted in the sky, my stomach doing flip-flops as I rose and sank in joyous fun. I woke

up the next morning feeling elated. I realised the parallels to my all-consuming research and concluded that I am content in my identity as a researcher. I am finally at the stage in life where I am happy to be seen. I can find total satisfaction, and, like Brent, I can have fun in this process. The changing motif seemed to demonstrate a shift in my developmental process, and this led to my final creative synthesis and an overwhelming felt sense of what these dreams have meant to me.

12.16 How does this doctor the field of psychotherapy?

Bulkeley tells us that one of the major obstacles to progress towards a consensus theory on the function of dreams is the failure to appreciate rare and impactful dreams (Bulkeley, 2016). Everyone has dreams that are random and perhaps meaningless. However, some dreams are numinous. Some dreams do stay with us for a lifetime and I totally agree with Bulkeley when she says that we will only really understand the true significance of dreams by paying attention to the big dreams. I believe that in therapy, gravity dreams are like gold dust and I believe invitations to discuss them in therapy would be rewarded.

This study intimates the relationship between a gravity dream motif and a sense of 'thrownness' in the participants' sense of self and identity. While this is only the finding of a single, small-scale phenomenological study, I can validate these findings through my own experiences of oppression and search for authenticity. While we may not seek out a gravity dream, I believe this data point provides therapists with valuable information if gravity dreams come up in therapy.

This study has also found that new hermeneutic awarenesses can be made through the dream metaphor and the embodied sense years after the occasion of the dream itself. I witnessed the

value the participants gained from retrieving further understanding on this small but significant part of themselves that they had wondered about. I witnessed the transformation of their wonder as they achieved new knowledge and self-discovery through the process of interview and their unconscious shadow sides became conscious. This is the value the study provides to the field of psychotherapy: alerting practitioners to the value of gravity dream exploration.

Sharp tells us our client's dreams often demonstrate the underlying factors that have brought them into analysis and highlights the psychological problems on which the therapist must work (Sharp, 1998). However, he stresses that it may not be until years later that, with the benefit of hindsight, the dream's symbolic content can be recognised. This is certainly the case in my study. Perhaps if these dreams had been explored soon after they had been lived, we would not have been able to reach the same hermeneutic awarenesses. By contrast, if I had explored these dreams within the context of a therapeutic relationship, I would have learned a great deal about these individuals' developmental and existential concerns had I paid attention to what was happening alongside the motif. The distance between the dream experience and the interview provides a reflective stance that was deepened through the use of the personal dream metaphor and its parallels to their lived experience. I believe we can learn a lot about our clients by paying attention to their dream sequences, even if they are historical.

This study showed that six out of my seven participants did benefit from exploring the flying motif. They described feeling seen, becoming part of a greater totality or learning something about themselves. Data suggests that what we experience during the day enters our nocturnal dream experiences, and this has the potential to be a tool for building resilience in clients, perhaps alongside meditation, visualisation or virtual reality (Montangero, Ivanyi & de Saint-Hilaire, 2003).

Among the seven therapists, the most common mode of working with dreams was by using Gestalt theory. I believe that Gestalt is, in light of recent scientific data, reductive and dated. This finding parallels my training experience, in which the 'parts of self' were the only memorable tools I was given to aid my work with dreams. There are many ways in which dreamwork can be enhanced and deepened, especially if we attend to the embodied, numinous dream motif. As this study found, a motif can change alongside the developing self, providing vital information as to our clients' internal world.

The fact that my participants either lacked confidence when working with dreams, had no formal training or worked reductively demonstrates a requirement to rejuvenate our training on the subject, especially given recent evidence on the value and function of dreams. It is also notable that when my participants had taken their dreams to therapy, they met with limited success. I believe this may suggest a need for a greater acceptance and exploration of existential dream phenomena in the therapy room. It may also be suggestive of a reticence among clients to broach these more intangible phenomena for fear of being stigmatised, and a fear among therapists to delve into the grey areas of personal experience.

Like my philosophical position, this study thus calls for a more pluralistic approach to dream work. *One that integrates the individual as a whole: their intangible, inexplicable lived experiences as well as their embodied responses to such numina, consolidating all the tools in the psychotherapy arsenal, across all modalities and sees the value of dreams pluralistically, not just in emotional or memory processing but as a meaningful, essential part of human experience. The value of exploring this private phenomenon not only encourages empathy and deepens the therapeutic relationship but has the potential for transformation, while highlighting developmental deficits that may enrich our work further.*

Chapter 13: Conclusion



This study emerged from my phenomenological experience of gravity dreaming and began with my own primal telling of my story. All of the participants were from varying therapeutic backgrounds and there was a cross-cultural spread of nationalities including Australian, American, Polish, German (heritage) and British. I used van Manen's phenomenology of practice to guide the study methodology.

I aspired to look for the primal, lived, pre-reflective, predicative meanings of the experience of gravity dream motif, as well as fulfil the requirements of a doctorate: to provide meaningful data with which to enrich the field of psychotherapy. This juxtaposition led to the formation of three essential thematic aspects. One which was attributed to an existential aspect of the gravity dream experience, and two themes which were related to the process of dream exploration during the interview as well as my participants' lived experience of working with and taking dreams to therapy.

The necessary dream, the changing motif and the search for self was a theme attributed as the dream motif changed alongside the participants' search for individuation and for self. Each participant described the dream series occurring at a point in their lives when they were

experiencing a sense of existential crisis. All seven participants were either losing themselves to others or through oppressive family cultures or were struggling to find their own authentic selves. The dream appeared to assist with these internal struggles, providing a form of compensation. When awake they were falling prey to their world and the wishes and wills of a stronger, more dominant 'other'. However, during their dreams, they were projecting themselves out in a bid for freedom, or self-search. This bid for authenticity, this 'thrownness' caused a metaphorical movement of their dream *dasein*. A symbolic plunge of self, an embodied dream metaphor for the groundlessness they were experiencing in their lived worlds. This was seen in the endless falling and the fight for flight. Participants were thrown and sucked into the turbulence of their inauthenticity. The dream experience itself appeared to serve a purpose by addressing these existential concerns and for six of the participants the experience was reparative. For the remaining participant, while not reparative, the dream did highlight his existential concerns. Perhaps this experience could be called a 'freedom-wound'; or 'compensation'. It appeared to be an attempt to right an existential vulnerability. Perhaps rather than trying to deny this vulnerability, the psyche was inadvertently trying to address it? Gone are the days when dreams were thought to be a random collection of images and mental processing. We now know that they can be a very valuable therapeutic tool and more attention needs to be paid across disciplines to the value of working with dreams.

The fact that a motif changed with the lived experiences and the personal development of the participants, highlights the benefit to therapy of actively seeking out (as opposed to just waiting for) a numinous motif.

During the interview all of the participants experienced an 'Aha' moment: an emergence of a new hermeneutic meaning of the dream's significance. This was facilitated through the use of

the personal dream metaphor and the embodied, felt sense of the dream. It was as if the participants' consciousness came into contact with their unconscious shadow side during the interview and the result was a profound new awareness. This theme was pivotal not as a thematic aspect of the gravity dream, but as a thematic aspect of the interview: demonstrating the value of doing dream work retrospectively and the fact that significant new understandings can be made. Participants were able to unite the dream metaphor with their felt sense of the dream and their lived world at the time of the dream and draw new hermeneutic understandings as to how and why the dream was so pivotal for them. They gained an understanding of why they had remembered these numinous experiences so vividly and for so long and why they were so precious.

My final theme was not anticipated. Although I witnessed a moment of illumination with all of the participants, it was only after the interviews, when I came to anecdote my thematic analysis, that I realised the final theme was a by-product of the interview: the therapy/interview space - reduction, retrieval, revival and reconnection with our dream selves. This was the theme that one of the participants described as being the most pertinent. There was something in my invitation to interview that provided a place for the participants to reconnect with this intangible phenomenon that they had either never shared or had only shared with limited success. I was also aware that it was through the interview that the participants became further engaged with working with dreams. They all described having had a fairly reductive training and some reported having a lack of confidence working with dreams at all. I realised the presumption I made when I asked the participants to tell me how their dream world had impacted their practice. I was in some way expecting it to have enriched their practice. Although there was an apparent increase in curiosity and an openness to work with

dreams, I also saw a reductive way in which they worked in practice, an insecurity to avoid 'treading' on clients' dreams. I realised that the interview itself had provided tools that they would most likely take into their practice.

This study thus demonstrates the benefit of exploring gravity dream motifs in psychotherapeutic practice, not only in terms of making new hermeneutic conclusions, but also in providing a permission-giving space in which to discuss personal intangible experiences that may have never been discussed before. This is a phenomenon that we struggle to articulate or make sense of. I believe this is why we don't often disclose these dreams.

We know that dream analysis is fundamentally a co-creation, and the fruit of a mutual reflection between both dreamer and analyst. There is little point in an analyst feeling that they may have some kind of personal understanding of a dream's meaning or significance if it doesn't resonate with the dreamer. As therapists we cannot possibly know the meaning of a dream, when it is not our own, but by paying attention to the embodied dream metaphor we may help insight progress. I am also curious about the fear of working with dreams some of the participants expressed, alongside the pressure that we feel as therapists to 'interpret' or help our clients make sense of their dreams. Perhaps this has something to do with a reticence to engage in dream work, yet the joint collaboration during my interviews set the ground for open and reflective exploration. There was something about my brief to just explore the phenomenon that meant I did not have any pressure on my outcome. I did not anticipate or hypothesise my findings. I did not need to interpret the dreams. I did not anticipate new hermeneutic understandings.

I believe this lack of agenda helps. Dream work should not involve staring from the 'top down' with a critical lens, which reduces dreaming to a mere cognitive exercise. It is not about

interpretation or intellectual muscle flexing. Dream work should focus on the embodied experience, the felt sense, on connecting with the metaphors, symbols and images presented. Awareness of the dream metaphor was pivotal for the participants' understanding of their dreams and this aspect of dreaming should be included in training programmes for therapists. I also believe that the works of Gendlin (2003) and the *felt sense* of a dream should be routinely included in dream training.

This research urges therapists not just to attend to the personal experiences of clients, but to provide an invitation to seek out their existential, transpersonal dream experiences too. It goes without saying that excessive work on archetypal dream images and transpersonal experiences can also be used defensively as a disavowal of other more practical lived experiences. However, when a numinous experience enters the room, the therapist should see it for what it truly is: a gift that must be acknowledged. In attending to the entirety of human experience, we are not splitting our client's sense of self into what can be easily understood and explained through the realms of concrete human experience versus the more intangible existential experiences, that can be significant in their own right. Perhaps it is time to look at the stigma that can be seen in the intangible, unexplained human experience. It matters not whether these experiences originate from outside of our psyche or from within it. Existential dream experiences occur within the realms of human experience, meaning their inclusion in the therapy room for open exploration, without judgement, is critical.

My study also highlights the benefit of time when it comes to exploring dream experiences that occurred years ago. The distance provided space for a reflective stance that enables the dreamer to look back objectively at their experience.

This study suggests that when a gravity dream enters the therapy room, clients may be dealing with issues of existential isolation or a fight for authenticity. We should always be curious about a dream motif: the recurring content is almost definitely trying to speak to its player and its audience. The repeating dream series is most likely mirroring the developing self and its internal struggles in symbolic form. These dreams can potentially offer clues to our clients' personal existential transformations and struggles over time. Obviously not all dream sequences will relate to a healing or trauma, they may be indicative of processing life events. However, it makes sense that reparation of the self does occur in our dream sleep, in the same dream state that facilitates our emotional processing and memory consolidation.

As an integrative psychotherapist I was not taught to look for recurring dream sequences, to be open to existential experience, or to process dream material using the embodied metaphor or the felt sense. These are tools that, until I conducted my research, I did not use. Nor are they tools that my participants described using. I believe that by providing an invitation to look at the intangible human experience, understanding it as having powerful and subjective meaning, we will enhance our practice and reduce stigmatisation of these universal human phenomena.

I believe that we need to take an integrated and pluralistic approach to dream work; one that embraces the totality of human dream experience as well adopting all of the dream tools described above. Using these phenomenological methods, alongside the traditional Gestalt and Jungian approaches, will provide another layer of exploration. Dream work involves a full immersion into the experience, like the phenomenological journey it can bring illumination and wonder. We can then return to our numinous experiences in therapy as a relational and

therapeutic tool. New awarenesses as to the personal significance of the dream can be made and any compensatory function can be installed as a healing function of the psyche.

I have called this study 'The Intangible'. My goal was to make the obscure and stigmatised less so and to give words to a phenomenon that has not been explored before. I believe that this study has achieved what it set out to do, it has taken an intangible phenomenon, and given it life. Perhaps this can encourage others to take up the mantle of 'The Intangible', so that my sense of illumination need not come to an end here.

This doctoral pilgrimage has not only enabled me to be moved by my participants, it has also supported me to make sense of my own experience of gravity dreaming: to know what I knew but was blind to. It has enabled me to connect to my childhood existential loneliness and fight into adulthood to find myself. It has enabled me to experience a complete hermeneutic cycle of wonder, concluding not only in a personal sense of renewal and profound understanding, but the feeling that I am now a far more phenomenological psychotherapist. I now sit alongside the said and the unsaid, the intake of breath and the protracted sigh. I have been trained to wonder about the things I may not have seen before.

Chapter 14: Products

My first two products were presentations of aspects of my PEP study at a European conference, which I wrote up as a paper for the European Journal of Qualitative Psychotherapy Research. I felt that it was necessary to write a reflective piece on my phenomenological journey and my ethical experiences in order to employ a deeper level of reflexivity. I have also submitted a paper calling for a more pluralistic approach to dream work, which has been sent to the International Journal of Psychotherapy. I also consider my becoming a phenomenologist a product in that it has deepened my client work.

My Feasibility Study

- Poster presented at the 8th Biennial European conference of Integrative Psychotherapy 'Curiosity, Authenticity, generosity', Bucharest 29-31st May (Appendix 9)
- Presentation at the 8th Biennial European conference of Integrative Psychotherapy 'Curiosity, Authenticity, Generosity', Bucharest 29-31st May (Appendix 10)
- Paper in the European Journal of Qualitative Psychotherapy Research: An Exploration of the Unassisted Gravity Dream 2019 (Appendix 1)

On Working with dreams

- Abstract of presentation to present at EAIP conference September 2020 (Appendix 11)
- Paper submitted to the International Journal of Integrative Psychotherapy 2020 'Into the Intangible: Working with Dreams in Psychotherapy', (Appendix 13).

On reflexivity

- Paper in the European Journal of Qualitative Psychotherapy Research 2021: The Novice Researcher and the Phenomenological Pilgrimage 2020 (Appendix 12)

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Appendix One

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An exploration of the unassisted gravity dream

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Abstract: Flying dreams are termed ‘gravity dreams,’ along with dreams that include falling, climbing, descending and floating through air, water and stairs. Enormous wave dreams are also considered to be gravity dreams. Phenomenological studies looking at flying dreams are scarce, and this area of dreaming remains largely unexplored, despite gravity dreams being listed as one of the most commonly reported dreams. This study uses phenomenologically orientated qualitative thematic analysis to explore the idiographic experience of the embodied self during an unassisted gravity dream. Six gravity dreamers were interviewed. Thematic analysis uncovered six major themes: ‘Boundaries;’ ‘Not of this world;’ ‘Being more than oneself;’ ‘Temporality’ (the sense of infinity or forever in the dream); ‘Locus of control’ and ‘Gravity Dreaming as a Process’ (in terms of learning to fly over time or a history of gravity dreaming). Four of the participant dreams described were lucid in nature. The discussion suggests that explorations of existential experiences enable us to push the boundaries of research, generating new ways to practice psychotherapy and greater understanding of how our experiences shape the formation of both therapist and therapy.

Keywords: Gravity dreams; qualitative thematic analysis; existential experience; psychotherapy

I fly in my dreams, I know it is my privilege, I do not recall a single situation when I was unable to fly. To execute every sort of curve and angle with a light impulse, a flying mathematics – that is so distinct that it has permanently suffused my basic sense of happiness. Friedrich Nietzsche

This research is grounded in my own subjective experience of gravity dreaming. Unassisted flying, a regular feature of my

nocturnal world, began at a time in my life when my life was bounded by numerous constraints: religious, physical and psychological.

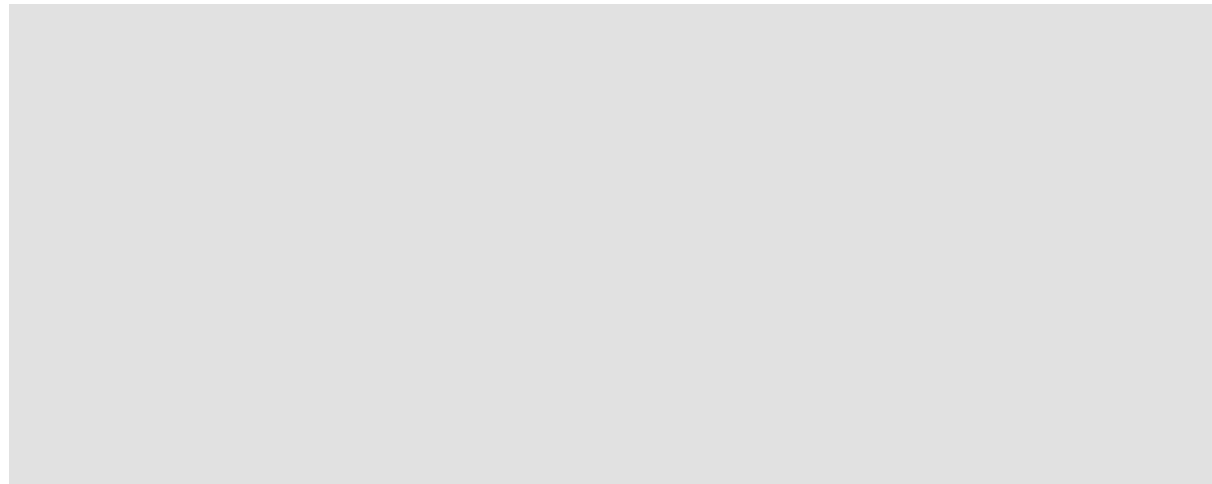
My interest in the research topic also stems from professional concerns. In my psychotherapy practice, gravity dreams have been reported as significant and memorable. This has fueled my desire to explore the experience of the gravity dream, in terms of the embodied self and the potential significance of such a dream to the dreamer.

As an integrative psychotherapist, I tend towards embracing a pluralist philosophical stance, one which disputes the possibility of any one single answer to the central questions of human existence. I reject the

notion of absolute or fundamental truths; I regard different sources of knowledge as having their own validity (McLeod, 2017). I perceive reality as mediated by individual experience and as socially and culturally situated. The data in this study derives from individual stories and from the subjective perceptions of my participants (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006).

Gravity Dreams

Flying dreams are termed 'gravity dreams.' This definition also embraces dreams that include falling, climbing, descending and floating through air, water, stairs and elevators (Maggiolini, Persico, & Crippa, 2007). Dreams involving enormous waves



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are also considered to fall in this category (Bulkeley, 2016). An unassisted gravity dream is one in which we fly or fall without assistance. Such dreams are often lucid; describing the relationship between flying and lucid dreams, Barrett (1991) notes that the lucidity usually precedes the flying, rather than being triggered by it.

Gravitational dreams, which have been recorded throughout history, seem to have a connection with the forces of physical reality. They appear to reflect an existential awareness of the dangers posed by these forces and the limitations of our existence. Such dreams have been described as emotional and very powerful, invoking in the dreamer an awareness of life and death and producing significant vertiginous bodily sensations that carry over into waking awareness (Bulkeley, 2016).

Flying and falling dreams are listed amongst the most common dreams in empirical studies. Maggiolini and colleagues report that these elements are present in 38.1% of recalled dreams (Maggiolini et al., 2007). The frequency of flying and falling dreams is estimated to fall somewhere between 65% and 80% of all examined dreams. Falling dreams have a higher incidence (73.8%) than dreams involving flying or soaring (48.3%) (Saul & Curtis, 1967).

Gravity dreaming is closely linked with lucid dreaming. Scientific studies have shown that during lucid dreaming our brains exhibit high frequency gamma waves, as seen in meditative and hypnotic states (Morley, 2016). This points to possibilities for psychological growth during such dream states. Gravity dreams have been described as 'numinous', archetypal and significant (Bulkeley, 2014). Jung suggested that lucid dreams "may prove to be the richest jewel in the treasure house of psychic experience" (Knudson, 2001, p.167).

Existentialists, while rejecting Jung's view of an unconscious, view dreams as constituting a microcosm of the dreamer's lived world (Deurzen, 2012). Dreams are also seen as significant by Dasein analysts, who contend that they reveal an individual's spectrum of world-openness (Cooper, 2003).

Regardless of whether dreams are a microcosm of our inner-world or a means by which we nocturnally demonstrate our world-openness, these tantalizing and mysterious aspects of our being merit greater attention. Dream work has been found to be a useful psychotherapeutic tool (Hill & Goates, 2004), with potentially beneficial effects. Research involving patients with post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia and nightmares suggests that working with lucid dreaming can help patients experience symptom relief (Zadra & Pihl, 1997). Research by Crook and Hill (2003) found that clients reacted positively when encouraged by their therapists to bring their dreams to therapy. Deeper exploration of these nocturnal experiences may well enrich therapeutic practice.

A look at the Literature

Theoretical Perspectives

While there has been little systematic research into the phenomenology of gravity dreams (Schredl, 2004, p.31), theories abound regarding dreams and their purposes.

In the field of neurobiology, activation-synthesis theory proposes that dreams are interpretations by our forebrains of random activity passing from our spinal cord to our cerebellum during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) Sleep (Hobson & McCarley, 1977). For Hobson (2005), many supposedly meaningful dreams are actually the simple reflection of sleep-related changes in the brain state. Alternatively, threat stimulation theory hypothesizes that, when dreaming, humans are playing out an evolutionary function geared to helping them deal with threats in waking life (Zadra, Desjardins, & Marcotte, 2006).

From a psychodynamic perspective, Freud proposed that dreams had both a surface, 'manifest' content and a hidden, 'latent' content. For him, dreams represented an attempt to disguise hidden desires (West, 2011). Some psychodynamic theories of dream analysis have been criticized for being interpretive and reductive (Condrau, 1993). An example is Freud's belief that falling dreams stem from our early childhood memories of being tossed around by an adult. In contrast, Gutheil (1951) associated falling in dreams with loss of temper and self-control: a 'falling down' in relation to prevailing moral standards.

For Jung, dreams had a greater significance than this: in some instances, they contained a pre-eminent wisdom which could guide human action. Dreams revealed unexplored aspects of ourselves, "the unvarnished, natural truth" that could help us challenge the limited views we have of ourselves. They offered a spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious (West, 2011, p.3).

The gestalt therapist Fritz Perls described the dream as an 'existential messenger'. He proposed that clients be encouraged to go back through their dream, creating a first-person narrative that would increase their sense of authorship of the experience. This in turn would facilitate a deeper understanding of the unconscious (Yalom, 1980). For Deurzen, taking an existential position, it matters little whether dreams are a product of relaxing brain cells or a directly meaningful expression of clients' current preoccupations. Rather, the dream is "a microcosm inhabited by the same intentions and worries as their actual world" (Deurzen, 2012, p.170).

From the phenomenological Dasein analytical perspective, dreams are not minor, truncated, spectral, reproductions of

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waking life but modes of experience that are autonomous and authentic in their own right (Stern, 1977). This is a position I have come to share through my work as a psychotherapist. In my experience, dreams appear to have some form of symbiotic relationship with the lived world and as such are human experiences worthy of exploration.

Research Perspectives

Regarding the taxonomy of dreams, Kuiken and Sikora (1993) propose four basic categories: mundane, anxiety, transcendent and existential. Transcendent dreams involve ineffable significance, visual-spatial shifts, magical success and transcendent awareness. Existential dreams can involve separation, sensory saturation, feeling shifts and self-perception in depth. Gravity dreams appear to span the existential and transcendent categories.

Gravity dreams have received some specific theoretical attention. Back in the 1940s, Irving Harris (1948) suggested a link between dreams of falling and certain personality traits, including: difficulty in expressing defiance, especially in the mother-child relationship; a tendency to naive, uninhibited expression of feeling; and a tendency to use defensiveness to protect self-esteem. He went on to argue that the mothers of patients with these traits had been insufficiently involved with them, resulting in a defensive introjection (Harris, 1960).

For Maggiolini, Persico, and Crippa (2007), falling dreams are generally connected with fear, while flying dreams are associated with happiness or surprise. Falling dreams have also been associated with higher neuroticism scores (Schredl, 2011). On the other hand, flying dreams have been linked with low neuroticism, openness to experience, boundary thinness, dream recall frequency and playing a musical instrument (Schredl, 2007). Other research has found a link between flying dreams and creativity (Brink, Solis-Brink, & Hunter, 1977).

The potential links between gravity dreams and emotionality suggest that gaining a better understanding of this phenomenon requires a psychotherapeutic approach. Just as Hobson (1988) hypothesized that the fundamental function of the flying dream is to reawaken our sense of self as an agent by integrating maps of self-representation, I too see a link between personality correlates and gravity dreaming. Since our histories shape who we are and who we become, the story of why and how we dream is likely to be complex and intricate.

Researchers have also explored lucidity in relation to gravity dreams. The Oxford dictionary defines lucid as 'sane, rational, clear minded or easily understood'. While Snyder (1988) detected an association between lucidity and flying dreams, Barrett (1991) found that individuals experiencing flying

dreams were significantly more likely than other dreamers to describe their dreams as lucid.

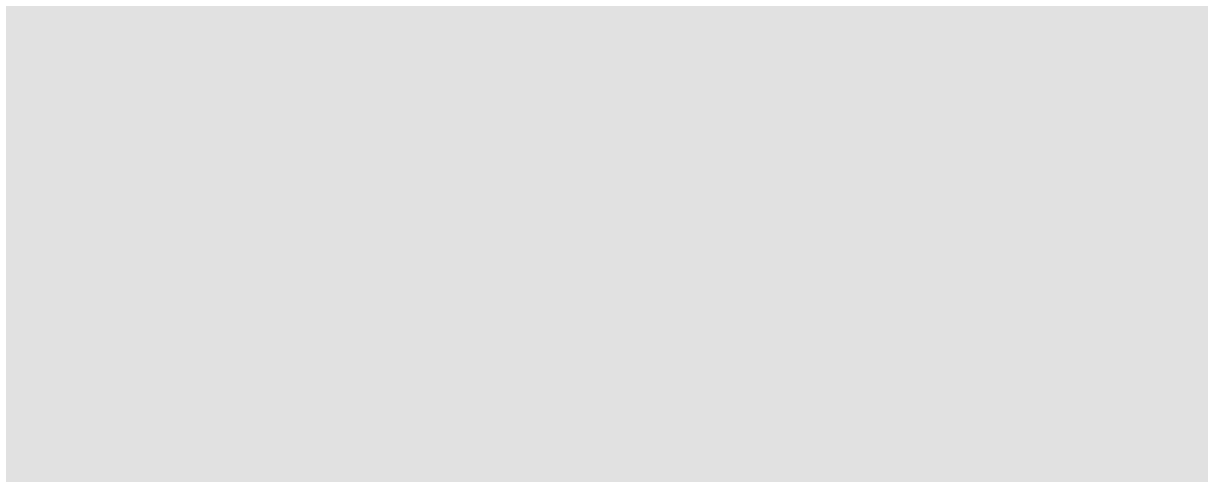
Gackenbach and Schillig (1983) regarded lucid dreamers as a subset of people whose vestibular system in the inner ear was subject to intense activation during sleep. However, later research by Leslie (1996) found that while activating the vestibular system in a sleep laboratory could stimulate lucid dreaming, subjects were able to have lucid dreams without such stimulation. Stumbys (2014) supports this when he describes spontaneous, passive, lucid dreams as well as active lucid dreams, suggesting we can actively encourage ourselves to become lucid dreamers.

Saul and Curtis (1967) provide a vignette of a woman with terrifying repetitive dreams of falling. In her therapy, this was found to be related to the pressures placed on her by her husband's alcoholism: "Whatever it was in Ann's makeup and whatever external circumstances made life too much for her, when her response became one of enraged giving in, giving up, letting go, she had severe anxiety dreams of falling" (Saul & Curtis, 1967, p.3).

While the available literature sheds some light on the prevalence, functions and possible benefits of gravity dreams, it reveals little about them in terms of an individual's embodied, lived experience. Although there has been some research into the ways in which personality correlates with gravity dreaming (Schredl, 2002, 2007; Schredl et al., 2017), little work has been done on the situatedness of the gravity dream in the life of the dreamer.

The exploration of dreams has lost favour among certain psychotherapy traditions, following reductionist models, which related dreaming to neurochemical changes in the brain. Shifts in cultural and spiritual traditions have also impacted our openness to existential dream phenomena. However, there has been a recent resurgence in the interest of dreams, following studies demonstrating their role in understanding our mental health (Robb, 2018). We know that patients with depression experience more nightmares (Hublin, Kaprio, & Partinen, 1999; Mume, 2009), and that patients with personality disorders have more negative dreams (Schredl, Paul, Reinhard, Ebner-Priemer, & Schmadhl, 2012). Research has also found that shifts in dream content can be indicators for psychological progression in therapy (Beauchemin, 1995).

Greene (2017) found that 10 out of 13 participants in her study had been unable to locate therapists who welcomed the inclusion of spiritual beliefs in therapy. These participants sensed discomfort in their therapists when they shared spiritual or religious experiences. This, I believe, is why it is paramount to include experiences such as gravity dreams and transcendental phenomena into our therapy room, without judgment, but with curiosity and interest.



Aim of Research

The primary aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of six gravity dreamers. The research used a phenomenologically orientated qualitative thematic analysis to explore the idiographic experience of the embodied self during an unassisted gravity dream.

Phenomenology seeks to capture and describe people's lived experiences, as conveyed through their personal narratives, with the aim of bringing to shed light on "that which has previously remained hidden" (Thayer, 2003, p.86). There are two dominant phenomenological traditions: the descriptive (Husserl, 1980) and the hermeneutic (Ricoeur, 2004; Smith et al, 2009). For hermeneutic phenomenologist van Manen (2015), phenomenology is interested in anything that presents itself to consciousness, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt. This paves the way for the exploration of human experience, which is subjective, intangible and existential.

As my literature search had pointed to the existential nature of gravity dreams, I decided to use four existential dimensions (physical, social, personal and temporal) to shape the interview schedule I would use with participants. Throughout the research I sought to engage reflexivity, whether in my role as witness or as the author of the study (Finlay & Evans, 2009). I kept a journal in which I noted down the details of my journey, assessed my relationship with each participant, and explored any pre-existing assumptions, specifically those which might stem from my own history as a dream flyer (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006).

Methodology

This study is phenomenologically orientated in that it seeks to grasp and describe aspects of participants' unique lived experience and it takes an existential orientation. This is potentially transformative for both researcher and participant, since it offers individuals an opportunity to be 'witnessed' and gives them both a voice and space to begin to make sense of their experience (Finlay, 2011).

In this study, I have sought to explore the gravity dream experience from an embodied perspective which draws on these four existential dimensions. At least four existential dimensions have been identified in relation to an individual's experience of the world. While Binswanger (1946) highlighted the physical, social and personal dimensions (*Unwelt, Mitwelt, Eigenwelt*), a fourth spiritual/temporal dimension (*Uberwelt*) was proposed by Buber (1923), Jaspers (1931) and Tillich (1952). For Merleau-Ponty, our bodily being is the place where ontology, epistemology and ethics meet; embodiment cannot

be considered separately from being and knowing (Todres, 2007). A phenomenologically orientated enquiry allowed me to explore not only the emotional experiences of my participants but also their embodied experiences. The study sought to explore individual, as opposed to collective, human experience, understanding this to be complex, contextual, emergent and transpersonal.

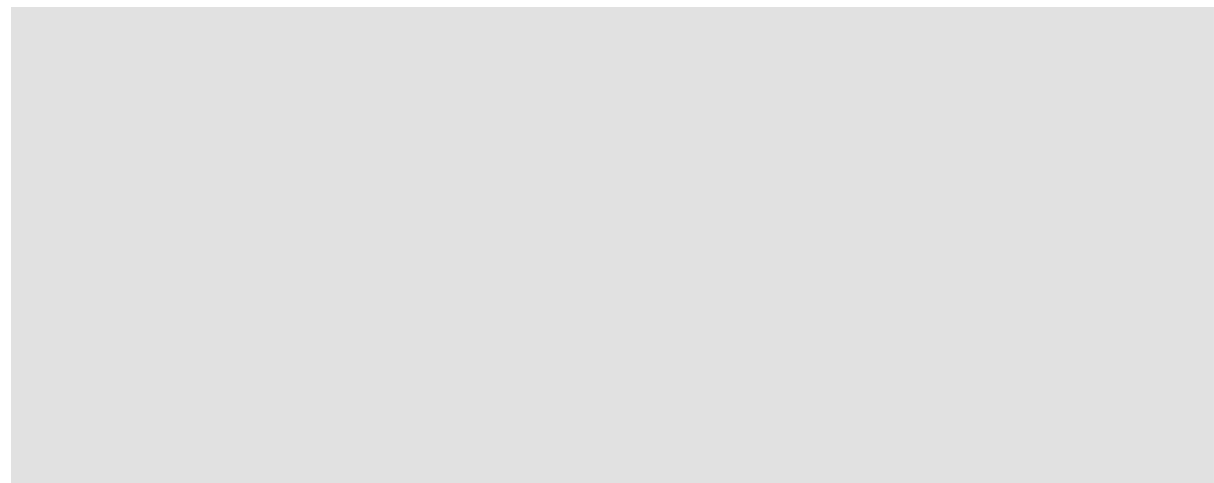
The specific methodology used for this research was phenomenologically orientated qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I did not intend this study to be one where I seek to explain or interpret a phenomenon in a positivist manner. The starting point was how gravity dreaming is to be understood as a subjective individual experience, not a concrete reality. I used thematic analysis to identify emergent existential themes without interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke, is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and can be seen as a methodology in its own right.

The use of thematic analysis to identify, analyse and report emergent themes was also influenced by my desire to unravel aspects of participants' surface reality via a semantic, inductive approach, rather than look for latent themes in the data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Some of the initial themes were linked to the questions in my interview schedule, and to that extent started off as 'top down' themes (Hayes, 1997), fed by the existential nature of the questions. However, the final five major themes, none of which bore much relation to interview questions, emerged on the basis of an inductive approach (Patton, 1990). None of these themes generated were driven by my theoretical interest in the subject area.

Participants

In terms of my selection criteria, participants could be of either sex and aged 18 years or above. They had to have experienced gravity dreaming within the last five years and have retained a vivid memory of such dreaming. They were also required to have no leaning towards loss of sense of reality. Given my awareness that a subject such as lucid dreaming could be open to fanciful, imaginative descriptions and conjectures, this was an important consideration for a study that sought to present a true reflection of the embodied experience of the gravity dreamer.

An advert was placed in the *Psychotherapist*, a magazine published by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) requesting the participation of gravity dreamers in a 40-minute interview. Eight people replied to the advert, of whom six followed through to interview. Initial information regarding participants' background, occupation and interest in



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the study was gained by phone or email, and on this basis, assessments were made about candidates' suitability for the study.

Recruiting through a psychotherapy magazine made for a relatively homogeneous sample. Four of the participants were female and two were male; all six were between 35 and 65 years of age. In terms of profession, the participants comprised: a consultant clinical psychologist and psychotherapist; two psychotherapists; two doctors of psychotherapy; and a company director who had experienced being in therapy. Despite this apparent homogeneity, it was understood that participants would vary in their philosophical orientations as well as their socio-cultural backgrounds, and that this would have an impact on the data.

Due to the geographical spread of the participants, the interviews were conducted online via a conferencing application. Audio and video recordings of interviews were made to facilitate my description of the

participants' experience and were saved anonymously on a password-protected computer. Participant names were changed to codes. The interviews were transcribed to text for analysis.

Data Gathering and Analysis

A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant, towards the goal of gathering rich, first-person accounts of gravity dreaming. Interviews were conducted via an online video conferencing application and were recorded using both an audio and video recording. The data was saved securely on a password-protected computer. The interviews were then transcribed.

Following the first interview, I added three more questions to the interview schedule to enable participants to focus more directly on their physical experiences (Gendlin, 2003). The schedule was adhered to as closely as possible to avoid my slipping into a therapeutic role.

Paralleling the work we do as psychotherapists daily, the focus during interviews was on participants' reconstructions of their experience. Questions were designed to explore participants' sense of embodiment and temporality/spatiality (Umwelt) and sense of 'selfhood' (Eigenwelt) during their dream and their degree of emotional connection to the dream. Questions also explored participants' 'sense-making' of the dream, and their sociality (Mitwelt) during the dream. Since existential, hermeneutic phenomenologists argue that all description is already interpretation, participants were encouraged to make sense of their dreams themselves (Young, 1993).

Repeated, systematic readings of the transcript were undertaken to explore recurrent existential themes, using an inductive, sematic, thematic analysis. The thematic analysis used was an essentialist method, one which was intended to report the experiences, meanings and reality of the participants in order to "unpick or unravel the surface of reality" (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p.81). Themes that captured a patterned response from the participants were coded. A process of coding and reviewing codes then ensued before the themes were named and defined. Initial themes were derived from the questions themselves, and this resulted in 15 themes (two more were subsequently added following a review of the data by a 'critical friend': see Table 1 in the appendix at the end of the paper).

Each data set was coded separately and comparisons were made across the data corpus (Saldana, 2016). The subsequent data sets then influenced the themes attributed and were recorded as initial themes and subthemes, which were put into a chart. This provided the basis for a process of data recycling towards achieving a final thematic map. Bar charts detailing the number of participant responses attributed to each main theme helped this process.

A 'critical friend'-- a respected and trustworthy colleague, who understood my philosophical perspective and could therefore shed light on my 'blind spots' (Bager-Charleson, 2014) -- was invited to read through the transcripts and make her own suggestions regarding emergent themes. This helped me 'bracket' some of my assumptions, and also allowed themes to emerge that were independent of my own gravity dreaming lens. Data extracts were taken for the results section.

While participants were invited to comment on the interview and the identified emergent themes, only one participant was interested in reading the interview. However, all participants were interested in seeing the final results.

Ethical Aspects

Participants received an Informed Consent document which required their signature. They were also given a Letter of Intention which: outlined the study; informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any point; told them of any potential risks; and gave them my personal details. The letter also explained in detail how the research would ensure confidentiality and data protection.

Practice-based research involves ethical guidelines which put the client's interests first (Bager-Charleson, 2012) and ensures that the research relationship is equal and not exploitative. In the case of my study, data was stored in a locked hard drive on my work computer. At every stage of the research I aspired to operate ethically within the guidelines of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the United

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Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy and Metanoia Institute (Middlesex University). Participants' names were coded and were not shared with my 'critical friend'. Extracts from texts used in the results section were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms.

Phenomenology advocates an attitude of loving acceptance of all aspects of a client's existence (Cooper, 1993), which I aspired to achieve. Throughout I strove for non-maleficence: the avoidance of harm to my participants or causing them distress. Along with their right of withdrawal, participants were also entitled to refuse to answer specific questions. In addition, they were offered debriefing interviews to ensure they had been adequately supported (in the event, none felt this was necessary). Copies of the transcripts were offered to participants, but only one took up the offer. They made no comment on the content but wanted to keep the transcript for their own personal development. One participant wanted to see the video and all participants were interested in my findings and any future work to do with gravity dreams.

Findings

Thematic analysis uncovered six major themes: 'Boundaries;' 'Not of this world;' 'Being more than oneself'; 'Temporality' (the sense of infinity or forever in the dream); 'Locus of control' and 'Gravity Dreaming as a Process' (in terms of learning to fly over time or a history of gravity dreaming).

Theme 1: Boundaries

The theme of boundaries was an unexpected theme, and one that came up at some point in every interview. Participants were asked whether they had a sense of their mortality during their dream. The response of one participant (Monika) was that the dream was more about: "Breaking free, breaking boundaries, going beyond, but I see those actually much more about life and affirming life and wanting more from life, rather than death".

Participants used terminology suggestive of breaking free of emotional or psychological constraints, such as "escaping" constraints and "dissipating" boundaries. Bridget spoke in the following terms:

I have been working in therapy and thinking about my wisdom and archetypal things, my sense of self and my creativity and freedom. I've seen it more as me seeking to be free and somehow without the kind of fettered everyday living and script and all of that kind of stuff and shame and everything, without that, this part of me is alive and powerful. (Bridget)

While Rebecca believed her dream was about breaking free of her unhappy relationship, Mark thought his was about breaking free of his work issues and making the decision to change his job.

Theme 2: Not of This World

This transcendent theme was coded thus because participants saw the dream content as coming from outside of themselves or from a higher part of their normal functioning. This fits with the spiritual dimension of an existential dream.

Participants believed their dream was either not a dream or made reference to a landscape that was not of this world. Describing a dream in which she was flying with her recently deceased daughter, Sarah spoke of her belief that her dream contained an After-Death-Communication with her daughter (Botkin & Hogan, 2014). It was moving and heartwarming to hear her describe her sense that the dream involved actual contact with her daughter. She believed they were meeting in a different realm, a place in between, where death was no longer an obstacle for contact.

When I later asked Sarah about the emotion connected to her dream, she replied thus:

That joy of connection and recognition and being with XXXX, and she was happy, which you can imagine was really important for me...I believe that I did have contact with XXXX, yes. (Sarah)

I was profoundly impacted by this interview. I recognized the comfort and solace this dream had given Sarah during her grief. Believing that her daughter was safe and happy had made a real difference to her ability to deal with her mourning.

When describing his gravity dream, Mark spoke of being “absolutely convinced within the dream that it is not a dream”. He believed a higher consciousness was assisting him through his work difficulties.

For Monika, gravity dreams were different from ordinary dreams:

I am aware of the fact, that this is not like you know just a regular story or something that I saw last night that trickles into my subconscious and brings something up. You know it’s separate; it belongs to itself. (Monika)

Bridget’s dreams were pivotal for her survival; she described them as a ‘private’ place where nobody could hurt her. They were again very much separate from her earthly experiences.

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Theme 3: Being More Than Oneself

One question asked of participants was whether they were themselves during their gravity dreams. All six affirmed that they were. However, I was surprised when I realised they were actually describing being ‘more than themselves.’ Monika put it thus:

I am me. I am absolutely me, but I am me without the weight of the world, I think I would probably say that I’m more spiritually or soulfully connected and I’m inhabiting that part of myself, that’s hampered in the everyday-ness of living. I’m much more uhh, I can feel my own wisdom, or that part of myself, that just knows that without any sense of doubt or without any of the drama of my internal inferiority, without any of that. I just am, it’s almost as if I am in touch with a part of myself that is really not so lively in everyday living. (Monika)

This was echoed by Bridget:

I don’t feel mortal. I don’t feel of this world. I feel like the essence of me is connected to the dream world in such a different way, there isn’t any sense of beginning or end of life or death. (Bridget)

Theme 4: Temporality

Participants described a sense of infinity, or 'forever-ness', about the dream experience. This demonstrated an existential 'temporality' to the dream content.

There's a forever quality about this. It is something that you've done before that you're doing now that you know you will do again in the future and it doesn't end. (Monika)

For me we know that the body will die, but I guess the dream, it had a real, almost like you could touch it, a real sense of being more than the body, so there is a sense of eternal in it. (Sarah)

Theme 5: Locus of Control

Participants felt that they were in control of their gravity and their dream, suggesting a strong internal locus of control (Woodward, 1982). All six participants mentioned having a sense of power during their dream: four used the term 'powerful' to describe how they felt, while two referred to 'empowerment'.

The 'locus of control' coding also fits with a lucid profile (Barrett, 1991); four of the six participants were aware that they were dreaming.

Theme 6: Gravity Dreaming as a Process

Five participants described learning to fly over time, and of experiencing flying dreams since childhood. Monika captured the experience in vivid terms:

I've gone all shivery now. I could feel like, oh, it's such an experience, because it's very vivid for me, so, I've been doing it since I was a very small child, so I had a real sense of the earth below me and so exhilarated and kind of powerful and I could see the trees...I know that I've done this before, and what are the steps and so then I realize, actually, I'll just begin floating, although in my recollection of trying to remember how I did it, I remember that at one point I thought I needed to run and jump, but now that is seem to have mastered it, or whatever it is, I don't need to do that... It does involve concentration; it's not involuntary stuff. (Monika)

Bridget and Sarah, too, had long histories of flying dreams:

I know that I was a child, a tiny child, flying, because of the whole experience and the flying experience as a grown up is very different because I remember, in the dream when I was a child, that I was in a watering can, a green watering can, and I was really low down to the earth, so I could see the detail of the soil as I flew. (Bridget)

I'm feeling emotional now because I've done it since I was very, very small and I feel like it is part of me and its part of the historic aspect of my life. (Sarah)

Mark contrasted the flying dreams of his childhood with his subsequent dream experiences:

Very early in my life I remember in my childhood I had a lot of flying dreams, which were very low level, just skimming along the ground, and I suppose those are the two contrasting types of gravity dreams I've had in my life, and there is some of the same feelings but not nearly the same kind of exhilaration, perhaps more of a frustration, but that was when I was a child really. (Mark)

Adam noted a locational shift in the progression of his flying dreams: "I am wondering if they started indoors and I got more powerful and started going outdoors".

Discussion

The use of existential dimensions in my interview questions proved both beneficial and challenging. While it was relatively easy to produce questions associated with existential themes, I was aware that this was presumptuous to the extent that it assumed that accounts of the gravity dreams were going to be existential. However, I take the view that lifeworld dimensions are fundamental to all experience, so it was a reasonable assumption to make. While some of the initial themes sprang directly from interview questions, five of the final six themes emerged inductively from the data.

As a gravity dreamer, I am aware that I had assumptions about the themes that might be generated. I acknowledge the active role of the researcher in identifying themes and reporting them (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). However, I was not anticipating the more inductive codes, even though they did fit with my experience.

In relation to the transcendent 'Not of This World' theme, Hamilton (2014) refers to dreams that come from a spiritual realm or a higher consciousness. For Spinelli (2005), these are not personal dreams, concerning un-reflected upon matter. Assagioli (1965, p.5) defines the higher consciousness as "the sphere of aesthetic experience, creative inspiration, and higher states of consciousness...denoting our higher potentialities which seek to express themselves, but which we often repel and repress." Perhaps this has relevance for gravity dreaming?

An interesting finding was that all six gravity dreamers chose to focus on flying dreams during interviews, despite mentioning that they had experienced other types of gravity dreams, including falling and tsunami ones. Why might flying dreams have featured so strongly? Could it be that a gravity flyer, rather than a gravity faller, is more likely to come forward to participate in research?

As a psychotherapist, I am interested in self-insight as an embodied form of understanding. Participants made sense of their experience and reached new understandings through the process of recalling their gravity dream. During the study, I witnessed four participants describe themselves as "more than" the ways they were during waking life. Todres (2007) uses the term 'freedom-wound', which he believes is a soulful space we can occupy where we are grounded in great freedom and great vulnerability. This I believe may be a theme in gravity dreams, although it is something I would like to study further.

The gravity dream motif was an interesting finding of this research, and merits further research. The theme 'gravity dreaming as a process' points to a learned skill that develops alongside our emotional and psychological world. There are

many psychological explanations for a dream series that involves developing a skill such as flying. Such an experience might be associated with a freedom-wound (Todres, 2007), a personality trait (Schredl, 2007), an avoidant attachment pattern (Bowlby, 2005) a creative adjustment (Evans & Gilbert, 2005), or some form of psychic compensation (Smith, 2015). Certainly, the notion of 'the wounded healer' is well known in psychotherapy (Sharp, 1998). Further research might shed more light on our clients' existential concerns and histories, enabling a deeper appreciation of why these dreams can be life-changing for certain individuals.

Some participants in this study referred to a sense of the "unreal" or "other-worldly". Lee (2017) views depersonalisation in dreams as a form of reflective awareness, related to past traumatic experiences, in which the dreamer's sense of self seems unreal. There is evidence to suggest that individuals experiencing depersonalisation during dreams develop fewer trauma-related symptoms subsequently (Shilony & Grossman, 1993). Bridget during her interview described thus:

The meaning I make now is that somehow that was, that's a place of safety for this part of me that, sadly my history and the people involved in my history would have, unfortunately, would not have cherished, would have been very destructive about it, so I feel I am very fortunate to have somehow found this place, to keep this part of me, but somehow this part of me cannot be kept, can't be squashed down in that way, because at night this part of me is exercising itself. (Bridget)

It would make sense that participants needed to feel control and power during their dreamscape if there were difficulties in their waking lives. Four participants recalled being aware that they were dreaming and feeling they were in control of their dream. However, while this supports previous the findings of previous research (Gackenbach & Schillig, 1983), it does not mean that this can be generalised across gravity dreams.

Through the process of recalling their dreams, participants were able to gain fresh insights into the significance of the experience, paralleling the work done in therapy. Participants had carried their dreams and remembered them vividly for many years. The fact that they are night-time experiences renders them no less significant than those encountered during the day.

Significantly, one proven intervention for the treatment of trauma is Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing therapy (EMDR), which replicates the eye movements found in REM sleep. It is during these REM cycles that we experience our dreams (Davidson & Parker, 2001). Perhaps we are generating our own EMDR as we dream? The gravity dreaming sequence may tell the story of our struggles and our healing.

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Robb (2018) found that clients who dreamed about traumatic events were more likely to heal from them.

That the dreams of the participants often seemed linked to their emotional survival and growth and development is profound. By exploring gravity dream motifs in our professional practice, we may not only aid the healing process but also help our clients gain fresh understandings, function at a higher level and become more aware of their own moods.

The clinical relevance for bringing dream work into psychotherapy is well documented. The exploration of existential phenomena takes the shame out of the intangible and pushes the boundaries of psychotherapeutic research, assisting the development of our discipline. Robb (2018, p.18) defines the challenge thus: "If we fail to take the simple step of remembering and understanding our dreams, we are throwing away a gift from our brains without even bothering to open it."

Closing Remarks

Throughout my research I have sought to breathe life into a subject which has thus far enjoyed only a marginal position in psychotherapy research. My own experiences of gravity dreaming were paramount to my psychic survival as a child and it has been profoundly moving to discover that I have not been alone in my experiences.

With five psychotherapists and a psychotherapy client in my research pool, I was aware of the likelihood of wounds in their history. However, my research did not attempt to place my dreamers in their specific context or provide a history of their lives. It did not explore their theoretical orientations, the changes in their motifs, or whether they had experienced other existential dream phenomena. It did not ask whether their dream experiences had influenced them as therapists or if they had shared their experiences with others. These are areas I hope to explore in future narratively orientated research.

Further phenomenological research is needed to deepen the descriptions of experience which have begun to emerge in my somewhat sketchy thematic analysis. While I believe I managed to capture something of the experience, a thorough going phenomenological analysis is needed to more fully explicate the existential dimensions and evoke the phenomenon.

All the participants were significantly impacted by their experiences of gravity dreams. They believed that in some way these dreams were assisting them through life events. I feel

enormous gratitude to them for so generously giving up their time freely to help me explore our shared passion. Their enthusiasm made me appreciate the potential benefits of gravity dreaming for the wider community. One participant (Sarah) summed it up thus:

[Gravity dreaming] is one of life's great profound experiences and if you haven't had it, wow, what a shame that is, and so I feel blessed, you know, you can't just order it up, either you get it or you don't...

Acknowledgements

Having done my integrative psychotherapy training with Ken Evans (and his wife Joanna Hewitt Evans) it feels fitting that I publish my first piece of original research in the journal that he founded. It was both Ken and Joanna who started me on this journey to be 'all that I can be', and at the tender age of forty- five years old, I feel that I really am at the beginning of that journey.

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About the Author

Claire Mitchell is an integrative psychotherapist in private practice in Jersey (British Isles) having done her post-graduate training with Ken Evans and Joanna Hewitt Evans. Her practice is humanistic and relationally centred. She employs EMDR in her work seeing some similarities with REM sleep patterns. Claire also has two degrees in psychology and business studies. She is currently in her fourth year of her Doctorate of Psychotherapy by Professional Studies (DPsych) programme at Metanoia, London. Her research interests include existential dream phenomena such as 'After Death Contacts' (dreams of the dead), precognitive dreams, and shared dreams. She regards her training in psychotherapy as a diving board into a myriad of fascinating areas that grab her attention.

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Appendix

Table 1: Emergent themes

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Appendix 2

Participant Narrative Piece

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. I would really like to understand your experience of gravity dreaming (flying dreams) from your unique perspective. Please can you write approximately 500 words about your experience of gravity dreams, in terms of how they may have changed over time, how you felt emotionally in your dreams, what you were experiencing in your body and what these dreams mean to you? What was happening in the outside world at these times? You can use imagery if you prefer.

Appendix 3

Semi- structured Interview Schedule

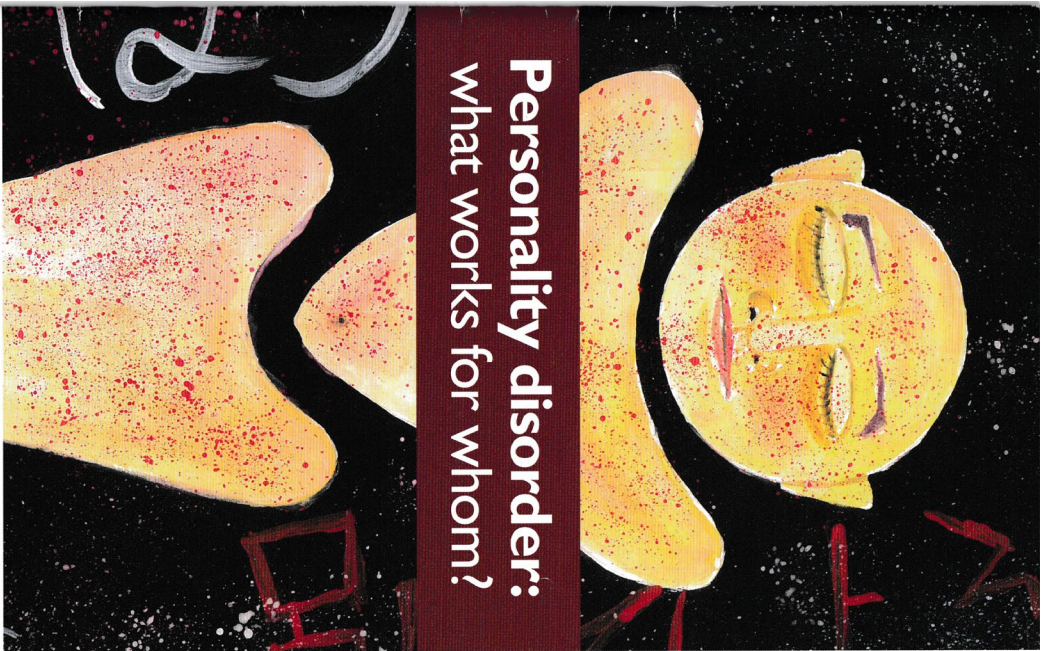
1. Thank you for sharing your experiences of gravity dreaming. I would like to begin by understanding a little bit more about you. Perhaps you can describe yourself?
2. Perhaps you can tell me a little bit about your experiences of gravity dreaming?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience of life at the time of your dreams?
4. What sense have you made of your gravity dreams and the changes in motif?
5. If your dream was a metaphor, what do you think it would be saying?
6. What were the associated feelings, awareness's, and sensations? How did you experience this in your body?
7. Have you shared your personal experiences with anybody?
8. Have you experienced any other existential dream phenomena (ADC's, tsunami dreams, falling dreams)? If so, can you tell me a little about them?
9. Do you feel that these dreams have impacted you in anyway?
10. What is your experience of working with dreams as a therapist?

Appendix 4

Post Interview Questionnaire

Thank you for giving up your time to be interviewed recently. I would be very grateful if you could spend a few more minutes to answer the following, brief questions?

1. How was your experience of talking about your gravity dreams?
2. Have you had any subsequent memories or thoughts that have come to your awareness following our interview?
3. Has there been any further understandings or meaning makings that have arisen as a consequence of the interview?
4. Is there anything that you are keen to explore further or understand about gravity dreams?
5. Is there anything further you would like to add for the purposes of this research?



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Do you fly or fall in your dreams?

I am a doctoral student at Merimna and am looking for individuals who have experienced flying dreams.

If you are interested in helping, I would really appreciate your time to hear about your experience.

Please contact me:
Claire Mitchell
mail@clairemitchell.com



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Appendix 6

Letter of Intention

My name is Claire Mitchell. I am an Integrative Psychotherapist in Jersey. I am also a student at Metanoia and Middlesex University on their DSPYCH program. The title of my research project is 'Into the Intangible: an exploration of Gravity Dream Motifs among Psychotherapists.'

My research interest is gravity dreams. You may have already been involved in my pilot study. You have been selected for this study because you are a gravity dreamer. This means that you may have had a series of gravity dreams when you were younger, or that you still have gravity dreams.

I will ask you questions about how you feel physically during these dreams (big, small, clumsy, ethereal, etc.), and what emotions you experience? I would also like to explore how this related to your life at the time of the dream? What was going on for you in your life at the time? How you describe yourself and a little bit about your training. I would also like to know what you have made of your dreams and how these dreams may have impacted you.

I will conduct the research interview using a video-conferencing application, so you do not have to travel anywhere. I would also like to ask you to write a short paragraph of your experience of these dreams over your lifetime. The interview itself shouldn't take more than an hour. You will be invited to a debriefing session a few days later, should you wish this opportunity. I will also send you a follow-up email to see whether you have had any further awareness's as a consequence of our interview.

I would like to personally like to thank you for helping me with, what I feel is a very fascinating and needed piece of research.

Claire Mitchell

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Appendix 7

Informed Consent

You are being invited to take part in a research study. 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. Ask us 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.

The research topic

I am wishing to explore your experience of gravity dreams and hoping to understand a little bit more about you. You have told me that you experience flying dreams and I am particularly interested in how you have experienced these dreams overtime.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you have approached me, following my advert, expressing an interest in my research topic. You are important because you can vividly remember a gravity dream or a series of gravity dreams. You may have already partaken in a study with me.

What is required of you?

I will ask you initially to write about 500 words, on your experience of gravity dreaming and what this has meant to you. I would then like to interview you, using video-conferencing for approximately 60 minutes. You will be asked to describe your experience of gravity dreaming. You may also be asked about aspects of your life at the time of the dream, along with some questions about your training, in terms of which school of Psychotherapy you come from etc.

If feel uncomfortable with any of the questions you may refuse to answer them. If you feel uncomfortable with the interview you may leave at any point. If you wish the information to be discarded and not used in my research, it will be discarded. All information you provide will remain confidential and will not be associated with your name. You we receive a copy of the written transcript for your comment. I value any feedback that you have. You will also have a copy of the audio recording for you to comment on.

After the interview I will send you an email asking you for any feedback you have, especially relating to any new awareness's you may have had during the interview.

You will be offered an opportunity for a debriefing session should you feel it necessary. If you have any further questions concerning this study please feel free to contact us through phone or email: mail@clairemitchell.com/ 07797723309. Please indicate with your signature on the space below that you understand your rights and agree to participate in this study. Your participation is solicited, yet strictly voluntary. All information will be kept confidential and your name will not be associated with any research findings.

Signature:

Appendix 8

Please see separate PDF attachments for the thematised transcripts.

An existential phenomenological exploration of the unassisted gravity dream



Claire Mitchell

What is a gravity dream?

- Flying dreams are termed 'gravity dreams,' along with dreams that include falling, climbing, descending and floating through air, water, stairs and elevators.
- An unassisted gravity dream is a dream in which we fly or fall without assistance.
- Gravity dreams have been linked to lucid dreams with dreamers often being aware that they are dreaming.



What do flying dreams mean?



- Maggiolini believed that flying dreams were globally associated with happiness or surprise and that fear was connected with falling dreams
- Flying dreams have been associated with low neuroticism, openness to experience, boundary thinness, dream recall frequency and playing an instrument
- Other studies however relate the incidence of flying dreams to creative persons.

'I fly in my dreams, I know it is my privilege, I do not recall a single situation when I was unable to fly. To execute every sort of curve and angle with a light impulse, a flying mathematics – that is so distinct a happiness that it has permanently suffused my basic sense of happiness.' Friedrich Nietzsche

Why was I interested?

- There are many studies that demonstrate that dream work has been found to be a useful psychotherapeutic tool to work
- Case studies have found that through working with lucid dreaming, patients with post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia and nightmares can see relief of their symptoms Crook and Hill believed that clients react positively to the therapists' encouragement of bringing dreams into therapy
- A dissertation by Greene showed that 10 out of 13 participants in her study could not find therapists who welcomed the inclusion of existential experiences to therapy and sensed discomfort in their therapists when they shared spiritual or religious experiences

What Did I do?

- I used existential phenomenology to explore the idiographic experience of the embodied self during an unassisted gravity dream. I interviewed 6 gravity dreamers; 5 Psychotherapists, (3 of which were at doctoral level), and one company director.
- I chose to use four existential dimensions (physical, social, personal and temporal) to shape my participant interview schedule in order to explore the existential, phenomenological experience of the gravity dreamers.

What Themes did I find?

- A physical sense of gravity
- Boundaries
- Transcendental
- Embodiment
- Sense of Self
- Sociality
- Locus of Control
- Sense making
- Gravity Dreaming as a process

The gravity dream Motif

- Could this be associated with a freedom-wound, a personality trait (Schredl, 2007), an avoidant attachment pattern, a creative adjustment, or some form of psychic compensation?
- Perhaps acknowledging our existential experiences as Psychotherapists can provide tools that can help develop the field of psychotherapy?



Appendix 11

Calling Numinous Dreamers

My name is Claire Mitchell. I have recently completed my doctorate on Existential Dream Phenomena at Metanoia and Middlesex University, London.

The reductive neuroscientific explanations on the function of REM dream sleep in the last twenty years led to a drop in the dream exploration in psychotherapy. More recently however, there been a resurgence in the interest of dreams, following studies demonstrating their role in understanding our mental health.

We now know that patients with depression experience more nightmares, patients with personality disorders more negative dreams and shifts in dream content can be indicators for psychological progression in therapy. It has been shown that when we share our dreams, we can enhance our relationships and alleviate our emotional stress.

More significantly, how we attach to our primary care givers may impact how we recall our dreams. Insecurely attached people are not only more likely to report a dream, but describe their dream frequency with more intense images, meaning that it is quite likely that we are conducting some serious attachment resolution in our nocturnal dreamscapes. We also now know that empathy between individuals can be enhanced in the sharing of a dream. So, are we maximising our opportunity to enhance relationships in the therapy room?

This workshop seeks to increase participants' awareness of what can be learned through the exploration of dreams and motivate attendees to look at new ways to work with dreams. I would like to explore some numinous dream experiences from the workshop participants, inviting people to not only go into the dream in the first person, but to work with the embodied metaphors and associations of the dream content and the lived – experience of life at the time of the dream. This will give participants new tools that can enhance their abilities to work with dreams during therapy.

Appendix 12

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An exploration of the unassisted gravity dream

Claire Mitchell

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Abstract: Flying dreams are termed 'gravity dreams,' along with dreams that include falling, climbing, descending and floating through air, water and stairs. Enormous wave dreams are also considered to be gravity dreams. Phenomenological studies looking at flying dreams are scarce, and this area of dreaming remains largely unexplored, despite gravity dreams being listed as one of the most commonly reported dreams. This study uses phenomenologically-orientated qualitative thematic analysis to explore the idiographic experience of the embodied self during an unassisted gravity dream. Six gravity dreamers were interviewed. Thematic analysis uncovered six major themes: 'Boundaries,' 'Not of this world,' 'Being more than oneself'; 'Temporality' (the sense of infinity or forever in the dream); 'Locus of control' and 'Gravity Dreaming as a Process' (in terms of learning to fly over time or a history of gravity dreaming). Four of the participant dreams described were lucid in nature. The discussion suggests that explorations of existential experiences enable us to push the boundaries of research, generating new ways to practice psychotherapy and greater understanding of how our experiences shape the formation of both therapist and therapy.

Keywords: Gravity dreams; qualitative thematic analysis; existential experience; psychotherapy

I fly in my dreams, I know it is my privilege, I do not recall a single situation when I was unable to fly. To execute every sort of curve and angle with a light impulse, a flying mathematics – that is so distinct that it has permanently suffused my basic sense of happiness. Friedrich Nietzsche

This research is grounded in my own subjective experience of gravity dreaming. Unassisted flying, a regular feature of my nocturnal world, began at a time in my life when my life was bounded by numerous constraints: religious, physical and psychological.

My interest in the research topic also stems from professional concerns. In my psychotherapy practice, gravity dreams have been reported as significant and memorable. This has fueled my desire to explore the experience of the gravity dream, in terms of the embodied self and the potential significance of such a dream to the dreamer.

As an integrative psychotherapist, I tend towards embracing a pluralist philosophical stance, one which disputes the possibility of any one single answer to the central questions of human existence. I reject the notion of absolute or fundamental truths; I regard different sources of knowledge as having their own validity (McLeod, 2017). I perceive reality as mediated by individual experience and as socially and culturally situated. The data in this study derives from individual stories and from the subjective perceptions of my participants (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006).

Gravity Dreams

Flying dreams are termed 'gravity dreams.' This definition also embraces dreams that include falling, climbing, descending and floating through air, water, stairs and elevators (Maggiolini, Persico, & Crippa, 2007). Dreams involving enormous waves Mitchell (2019) *European Journal Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, Volume 9, 60-71

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are also considered to fall in this category (Bulkeley, 2016). An unassisted gravity dream is one in which we fly or fall without assistance. Such dreams are often lucid; describing the relationship between flying and lucid dreams, Barrett (1991) notes that the lucidity usually precedes the flying, rather than being triggered by it.

Gravitational dreams, which have been recorded throughout history, seem to have a connection with the forces of physical reality. They appear to reflect an existential awareness of the dangers posed by these forces and the limitations of our existence. Such dreams have been described as emotional and very powerful, invoking in the dreamer an awareness of life and death and producing significant vertiginous bodily sensations that carry over into waking awareness (Bulkeley, 2016).

Flying and falling dreams are listed amongst the most common dreams in empirical studies. Maggiolini and colleagues report that these elements are present in 38.1% of recalled dreams (Maggiolini et al., 2007). The frequency of flying and falling dreams is estimated to fall somewhere between 65% and 80% of all examined dreams. Falling dreams have a higher incidence (73.8%) than dreams involving flying or soaring (48.3%) (Saul & Curtis, 1967).

Gravity dreaming is closely linked with lucid dreaming. Scientific studies have shown that during lucid dreaming our brains exhibit high frequency gamma waves, as seen in meditative and hypnotic states (Morley, 2016). This points to possibilities for psychological growth during such dream states. Gravity dreams have been described as 'numinous', archetypal and significant (Bulkeley, 2014). Jung suggested that lucid dreams "may prove to be the richest jewel in the treasure house of psychic experience" (Knudson, 2001, p.167).

Existentialists, while rejecting Jung's view of an unconscious, view dreams as constituting a microcosm of the dreamer's lived world (Deurzen, 2012). Dreams are also seen as significant by Dasein analysts, who contend that they reveal an individual's spectrum of world-openness (Cooper, 2003).

Regardless of whether dreams are a microcosm of our inner-world or a means by which we nocturnally demonstrate our world-openness, these tantalizing and mysterious aspects of our being merit greater attention. Dream work has been found to be a useful psychotherapeutic tool (Hill & Goates, 2004), with potentially beneficial effects. Research involving patients with post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia and nightmares suggests that working with lucid dreaming can help patients experience symptom relief (Zadra & Phihl, 1997). Research by Crook and Hill (2003) found that clients reacted positively when encouraged by their therapists to bring their dreams to therapy. Deeper exploration of these nocturnal experiences may well enrich therapeutic practice.

A look at the Literature

Theoretical Perspectives

While there has been little systematic research into the phenomenology of gravity dreams (Schredl, 2004, p.31), theories abound regarding dreams and their purposes.

In the field of neurobiology, activation-synthesis theory proposes that dreams are interpretations by our forebrains of random activity passing from our spinal cord to our cerebellum during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) Sleep (Hobson & McCarley, 1977). For Hobson (2005), many supposedly meaningful dreams are actually the simple reflection of sleep-related changes in the brain state. Alternatively, threat stimulation theory hypothesizes that, when dreaming, humans are playing out an evolutionary function geared to helping them deal with threats in waking life (Zadra, Desjardins, & Marcotte, 2006).

From a psychodynamic perspective, Freud proposed that dreams had both a surface, 'manifest' content and a hidden, 'latent' content. For him, dreams represented an attempt to disguise hidden desires (West, 2011). Some psychodynamic theories of dream analysis have been criticized for being interpretive and reductive (Condrau, 1993). An example is Freud's belief that falling dreams stem from our early childhood memories of being tossed around by an adult. In contrast, Gutheil (1951) associated falling in dreams with loss of temper and self-control: a 'falling down' in relation to prevailing moral standards.

For Jung, dreams had a greater significance than this: in some instances, they contained a pre-eminent wisdom which could guide human action. Dreams revealed unexplored aspects of ourselves, "the unvarnished, natural truth" that could help us challenge the limited views we have of ourselves. They offered a spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious (West, 2011, p.3). The gestalt therapist Fritz Perls described the dream as an 'existential messenger'. He proposed that clients be encouraged to go back through their dream, creating a first-person narrative that would increase their sense of authorship of the experience. This in turn would facilitate a deeper understanding of the unconscious (Yalom, 1980). For Deurzen, taking an existential position, it matters little whether dreams are a product of relaxing brain cells or a directly meaningful expression of clients' current preoccupations. Rather, the dream is "a microcosm inhabited by the same intentions and worries as their actual world" (Deurzen, 2012, p.170).

From the phenomenological Dasein analytical perspective, dreams are not minor, truncated, spectral, reproductions of Mitchell (2019) *European Journal Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, Volume 9, 60-71

waking life but modes of experience that are autonomous and authentic in their own right (Stern, 1977). This is a position I have come to share through my work as a psychotherapist. In my experience, dreams appear to have some form of symbiotic relationship with the lived world and as such are human experiences worthy of exploration.

Research Perspectives

Regarding the taxonomy of dreams, Kuiken and Sikora (1993) propose four basic categories: mundane, anxiety, transcendent and existential. Transcendent dreams involve ineffable significance, visual-spatial shifts, magical success and transcendent awareness. Existential dreams can involve separation, sensory saturation, feeling shifts and self-perception in depth. Gravity dreams appear to span the existential and transcendent categories.

Gravity dreams have received some specific theoretical attention. Back in the 1940s, Irving Harris (1948) suggested a link between dreams of falling and certain personality traits, including: difficulty in expressing defiance, especially in the mother-child relationship; a tendency to naive, uninhibited expression of feeling; and a tendency to use defensiveness to protect self-esteem. He went on to argue that the mothers of patients with these traits had been insufficiently involved with them, resulting in a defensive introjection (Harris, 1960).

For Maggiolini, Persico, and Crippa (2007), falling dreams are generally connected with fear, while flying dreams are associated with happiness or surprise. Falling dreams have also been associated with higher neuroticism scores (Schredl, 2011). On the other hand, flying dreams have been linked with low neuroticism, openness to experience, boundary thinness, dream recall frequency and playing a musical instrument (Schredl, 2007). Other research has found a link between flying dreams and creativity (Brink, Solis-Brink, & Hunter, 1977).

The potential links between gravity dreams and emotionality suggest that gaining a better understanding of this phenomenon requires a psychotherapeutic approach. Just as Hobson (1988) hypothesized that the fundamental function of the flying dream is to reawaken our sense of self as an agent by integrating maps of self-representation, I too see a link between personality correlates and gravity dreaming. Since our histories shape who we are and who we become, the story of why and how we dream is likely to be complex and intricate.

Researchers have also explored lucidity in relation to gravity dreams. The Oxford dictionary defines lucid as 'sane, rational, clear minded or easily understood'. While Snyder (1988) detected an association between lucidity and flying dreams, Barrett (1991) found that individuals experiencing flying dreams were significantly more likely than other dreamers to describe their dreams as lucid.

Gackenbach and Schillig (1983) regarded lucid dreamers as a subset of people whose vestibular system in the inner ear was subject to intense activation during sleep. However, later research by Leslie (1996) found that while activating the vestibular system in a sleep laboratory could stimulate lucid dreaming, subjects were able to have lucid dreams without such stimulation. Stumbys (2014) supports this when he describes spontaneous, passive, lucid dreams as well as active lucid dreams, suggesting we can actively encourage ourselves to become lucid dreamers. Saul and Curtis (1967) provide a vignette of a woman with terrifying repetitive dreams of falling. In her therapy, this was found to be related to the pressures placed on her by her husband's alcoholism: "Whatever it was in Ann's makeup and whatever external circumstances made life too much for her, when her response became one of enraged giving in, giving up, letting go, she had severe anxiety dreams of falling" (Saul & Curtis, 1967, p.3).

While the available literature sheds some light on the prevalence, functions and possible benefits of gravity dreams, it reveals little about them in terms of an individual's embodied, lived experience. Although there has been some research into the ways in which personality correlates with gravity dreaming (Schredl, 2002, 2007; Schredl et al., 2017), little work has been done on the situatedness of the gravity dream in the life of the dreamer.

The exploration of dreams has lost favour among certain psychotherapy traditions, following reductionist models, which related dreaming to neurochemical changes in the brain. Shifts in cultural and spiritual traditions have also impacted our openness to existential dream phenomena. However there has been a recent resurgence in the interest of dreams, following studies demonstrating their role in understanding our mental health (Robb, 2018). We know that patients with depression experience more nightmares (Hublin, Kaprio, & Partinen, 1999; Mume, 2009), and that patients with personality disorders have more negative dreams (Schredl, Paul, Reinhard, Ebner-Priemer, & Schmadhl, 2012). Research has also found that shifts in dream content can be indicators for psychological progression in therapy (Beauchemin, 1995).

Greene (2017) found that 10 out of 13 participants in her study had been unable to locate therapists who welcomed the inclusion of spiritual beliefs in therapy. These participants sensed discomfort in their therapists when they shared spiritual or religious experiences. This, I believe, is why it is paramount to include experiences such as gravity dreams and transcendental phenomena into our therapy room, without judgment, but with curiosity and interest. Mitchell (2019) *European Journal Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, Volume 9, 60-71

Aim of Research

The primary aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of six gravity dreamers. The research used a phenomenologically orientated qualitative thematic analysis to explore the idiographic experience of the embodied self during an unassisted gravity dream.

Phenomenology seeks to capture and describe people's lived experiences, as conveyed through their personal narratives, with the aim of bringing to shed light on "that which has previously remained hidden" (Thayer, 2003, p.86). There are two dominant phenomenological traditions: the descriptive (Husserl, 1980) and the hermeneutic (Ricoeur, 2004; Smith et al, 2009). For hermeneutic phenomenologist van Manen (2015), phenomenology is interested in anything that presents itself to consciousness, whether the object is real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt. This paves the way for the exploration of human experience, which is subjective, intangible and existential.

As my literature search had pointed to the existential nature of gravity dreams, I decided to use four existential dimensions (physical, social, personal and temporal) to shape the interview schedule I would use with participants. Throughout the research I sought to engage reflexivity, whether in my role as witness or as the author of the study (Finlay & Evans, 2009). I kept a journal in which I noted down the details of my journey, assessed my relationship with each participant, and explored any pre-existing assumptions, specifically those which might stem from my own history as a dream flyer (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006).

Methodology

This study is phenomenologically orientated in that it seeks to grasp and describe aspects of participants' unique lived experience and it takes an existential orientation. This is potentially transformative for both researcher and participant, since it offers individuals an opportunity to be 'witnessed' and gives them both a voice and space to begin to make sense of their experience (Finlay, 2011).

In this study, I have sought to explore the gravity dream experience from an embodied perspective which draws on these four existential dimensions. At least four existential dimensions have been identified in relation to an individual's experience of the world. While Binswanger (1946) highlighted the physical, social and personal dimensions (*Umwelt, Mitwelt, Eigenwelt*), a fourth spiritual/temporal dimension (*Uberwelt*) was proposed by Buber (1923), Jaspers (1931) and Tillich (1952). For Merleau-Ponty, our bodily being is the place where ontology, epistemology and ethics meet; embodiment cannot be considered separately from being and knowing (Todres, 2007). A phenomenologically orientated enquiry allowed me to explore not only the emotional experiences of my participants but also their embodied experiences. The study sought to explore individual, as opposed to collective, human experience, understanding this to be complex, contextual, emergent and transpersonal.

The specific methodology used for this research was phenomenologically orientated qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I did not intend this study to be one where I seek to explain or interpret a phenomenon in a positivist manner. The starting point was how gravity dreaming is to be understood as a subjective individual experience, not a concrete reality. I used thematic analysis to identify emergent existential themes without interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke, is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and can be seen as a methodology in its own right.

The use of thematic analysis to identify, analyse and report emergent themes was also influenced by my desire to unravel aspects of participants' surface reality via a semantic, inductive approach, rather than look for latent themes in the data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Some of the initial themes were linked to the questions in my interview schedule, and to that extent started off as 'top down' themes (Hayes, 1997), fed by the existential nature of the questions. However, the final five major themes, none of which bore much relation to interview questions, emerged on the basis of an inductive approach (Patton, 1990). None of these themes generated were driven by my theoretical interest in the subject area.

Participants

In terms of my selection criteria, participants could be of either sex and aged 18 years or above. They had to have experienced gravity dreaming within the last five years and have retained a vivid memory of such dreaming. They were also required to have no leaning towards loss of sense of reality. Given my awareness that a subject such as lucid dreaming could be open to fanciful, imaginative descriptions and conjectures, this was an important consideration for a study that sought to present a true reflection of the embodied experience of the gravity dreamer.

An advert was placed in the *Psychotherapist*, a magazine published by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) requesting the participation of gravity dreamers in a 40-minute interview. Eight people replied to the advert, of whom six followed through to interview. Initial information regarding participants' background, occupation and interest in Mitchell (2019) *European Journal Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, Volume 9, 60-71

the study was gained by phone or email, and on this basis, assessments were made about candidates' suitability for the study. Recruiting through a psychotherapy magazine made for a relatively homogeneous sample. Four of the participants were female and two were male; all six were between 35 and 65 years of age. In terms of profession, the participants comprised: a consultant clinical psychologist and psychotherapist; two psychotherapists; two doctors of psychotherapy; and a company director who had experienced being in therapy. Despite this apparent homogeneity, it was understood that participants would vary in their philosophical orientations as well as their socio-cultural backgrounds, and that this would have an impact on the data.

Due to the geographical spread of the participants, the interviews were conducted online via a conferencing application. Audio and video recordings of interviews were made to facilitate my description of the participants' experience and were saved anonymously on a password-protected computer. Participant names were changed to codes. The interviews were transcribed to text for analysis.

Data Gathering and Analysis

A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant, towards the goal of gathering rich, first-person accounts of gravity dreaming. Interviews were conducted via an online video conferencing application and were recorded using both an audio and video recording. The data was saved securely on a password-protected computer. The interviews were then transcribed.

Following the first interview, I added three more questions to the interview schedule to enable participants to focus more directly on their physical experiences (Gendlin, 2003). The schedule was adhered to as closely as possible to avoid my slipping into a therapeutic role.

Paralleling the work we do as psychotherapists daily, the focus during interviews was on participants' reconstructions of their experience. Questions were designed to explore participants' sense of embodiment and temporality/spatiality (Umwelt) and sense of 'selfhood' (Eigenwelt) during their dream and their degree of emotional connection to the dream. Questions also explored participants' 'sense-making' of the dream, and their sociality (Mitwelt) during the dream. Since existential, hermeneutic phenomenologists argue that all description is already interpretation, participants were encouraged to make sense of their dreams themselves (Young, 1993).

Repeated, systematic readings of the transcript were undertaken to explore recurrent existential themes, using an inductive, sematic, thematic analysis. The thematic analysis used was an essentialist method, one which was intended to report the experiences, meanings and reality of the participants in order to "unpick or unravel the surface of reality" (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p.81). Themes that captured a patterned response from the participants were coded. A process of coding and reviewing codes then ensued before the themes were named and defined. Initial themes were derived from the questions themselves, and this resulted in 15 themes (two more were subsequently added following a review of the data by a 'critical friend': see Table 1 in the appendix at the end of the paper).

Each data set was coded separately and comparisons were made across the data corpus (Saldana, 2016). The subsequent data sets then influenced the themes attributed and were recorded as initial themes and subthemes, which were put into a chart. This provided the basis for a process of data recycling towards achieving a final thematic map. Bar charts detailing the number of participant responses attributed to each main theme helped this process.

A 'critical friend'-- a respected and trustworthy colleague, who understood my philosophical perspective and could therefore shed light on my 'blind spots' (Bager-Charleson, 2014) -- was invited to read through the transcripts and make her own suggestions regarding emergent themes. This helped me 'bracket' some of my assumptions, and also allowed themes to emerge that were independent of my own gravity dreaming lens. Data extracts were taken for the results section.

While participants were invited to comment on the interview and the identified emergent themes, only one participant was interested in reading the interview. However, all participants were interested in seeing the final results.

Ethical Aspects

Participants received an Informed Consent document which required their signature. They were also given a Letter of Intention which: outlined the study; informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any point; told them of any potential risks; and gave them my personal details. The letter also explained in detail how the research would ensure confidentiality and data protection.

Practice-based research involves ethical guidelines which put the client's interests first (Bager-Charleson, 2012) and ensures that the research relationship is equal and not exploitative. In the case of my study, data was stored in a locked hard drive on my work computer. At every stage of the research I aspired to operate ethically within the guidelines of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the United Mitchell (2019) *European Journal Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, Volume 9, 60-71

Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy and Metanoia Institute (Middlesex University). Participants' names were coded and were not shared with my 'critical friend'. Extracts from texts used in the results section were anonymized through the use of pseudonyms.

Phenomenology advocates an attitude of loving acceptance of all aspects of a client's existence (Cooper, 1993), which I aspired to achieve. Throughout I strove for non-maleficence: the avoidance of harm to my participants or causing them distress. Along with their right of withdrawal, participants were also entitled to refuse to answer specific questions. In addition, they were offered debriefing interviews to ensure they had been adequately supported (in the event, none felt this was necessary). Copies of the transcripts were offered to participants, but only one took up the offer. They made no comment on the content but wanted to keep the transcript for their own personal development. One participant wanted to see the video and all participants were interested in my findings and any future work to do with gravity dreams.

Findings

Thematic analysis uncovered six major themes: 'Boundaries'; 'Not of this world'; 'Being more than oneself'; 'Temporality' (the sense of infinity or forever in the dream); 'Locus of control' and 'Gravity Dreaming as a Process' (in terms of learning to fly over time or a history of gravity dreaming).

Theme 1: Boundaries

The theme of boundaries was an unexpected theme, and one that came up at some point in every interview. Participants were asked whether they had a sense of their mortality during their dream. The response of one participant (Monika) was that the dream was more about: "Breaking free, breaking boundaries, going beyond, but I see those actually much more about life and affirming life and wanting more from life, rather than death".

Participants used terminology suggestive of breaking free of emotional or psychological constraints, such as "escaping" constraints and "dissipating" boundaries. Bridget spoke in the following terms:

I have been working in therapy and thinking about my wisdom and archetypal things, my sense of self and my creativity and freedom. I've seen it more as me seeking to be free and somehow without the kind of fettered everyday living and script and all of that kind of stuff and shame and everything, without that, this part of me is alive and powerful. (Bridget)

While Rebecca believed her dream was about breaking free of her unhappy relationship, Mark thought his was about breaking free of his work issues and making the decision to change his job.

Theme 2: Not of This World

This transcendent theme was coded thus because participants saw the dream content as coming from outside of themselves or from a higher part of their normal functioning. This fits with the spiritual dimension of an existential dream.

Participants believed their dream was either not a dream or made reference to a landscape that was not of this world. Describing a dream in which she was flying with her recently deceased daughter, Sarah spoke of her belief that her dream contained an After-Death-Communication with her daughter (Botkin & Hogan, 2014). It was moving and heartwarming to hear her describe her sense that the dream involved actual contact with her daughter. She believed they were meeting in a different realm, a place in between, where death was no longer an obstacle for contact.

When I later asked Sarah about the emotion connected to her dream, she replied thus:

That joy of connection and recognition and being with XXXX, and she was happy, which you can imagine was really important for me...I believe that I did have contact with XXXX, yes. (Sarah)

I was profoundly impacted by this interview. I recognized the comfort and solace this dream had given Sarah during her grief. Believing that her daughter was safe and happy had made a real difference to her ability to deal with her mourning.

When describing his gravity dream, Mark spoke of being "absolutely convinced within the dream that it is not a dream". He believed a higher consciousness was assisting him through his work difficulties.

For Monika, gravity dreams were different from ordinary dreams:

I am aware of the fact, that this is not like you know just a regular story or something that I saw last night that trickles into my subconscious and brings something up. You know it's separate; it belongs to itself. (Monika)

Bridget's dreams were pivotal for her survival; she described them as a 'private' place where nobody could hurt her. They were again very much separate from her earthly experiences. Mitchell (2019) *European Journal Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, Volume 9, 60-71

Theme 3: Being More Than Oneself

One question asked of participants was whether they were themselves during their gravity dreams. All six affirmed that they were. However I was surprised when I realised they were actually describing being 'more than themselves.'

Monika put it thus:

I am me. I am absolutely me, but I am me without the weight of the world, I think I would probably say that I'm more spiritually or soulfully connected and I'm inhabiting that part of myself, that's hampered in the everyday-ness of living. I'm much more uhh, I can feel my own wisdom, or that part of myself, that just knows that without any sense of doubt or without any of the drama of my internal inferiority, without any of that. I just am, it's almost as if I am in touch with a part of myself that is really not so lively in everyday living.

(Monika)

This was echoed by Bridget:

I don't feel mortal. I don't feel of this world. I feel like the essence of me is connected to the dream world in such a different way, there isn't any sense of beginning or end of life or death. (Bridget)

Theme 4: Temporality

Participants described a sense of infinity, or 'forever-ness', about the dream experience. This demonstrated an existential 'temporality' to the dream content.

There's a forever quality about this. It is something that you've done before that you're doing now that you know you will do again in the future and it doesn't end. (Monika)

For me we know that the body will die, but I guess the dream, it had a real, almost like you could touch it, a real sense of being more than the body, so there is a sense of eternal in it.

(Sarah)

Theme 5: Locus of Control

Participants felt that they were in control of their gravity and their dream, suggesting a strong internal locus of control (Woodward, 1982). All six participants mentioned having a sense of power during their dream: four used the term 'powerful' to describe how they felt, while two referred to 'empowerment'.

The 'locus of control' coding also fits with a lucid profile (Barrett, 1991); four of the six participants were aware that they were dreaming.

Theme 6: Gravity Dreaming as a Process

Five participants described learning to fly over time, and of experiencing flying dreams since childhood. Monika captured the experience in vivid terms:

I've gone all shivery now. I could feel like, oh, it's such an experience, because it's very vivid for me, so, I've been doing it since I was a very small child, so I had a real sense of the earth below me and so exhilarated and kind of powerful and I could see the trees...I know that I've done this before, and what are the steps and so then I realize, actually, I'll just begin floating, although in my recollection of trying to remember how I did it, I remember that at one point I thought I needed to run and jump, but now that is seem to have mastered it, or whatever it is, I don't need to do that... It

does involve concentration; it's not involuntary stuff.

(Monika)

Bridget and Sarah, too, had long histories of flying dreams: I know that I was a child, a tiny child, flying, because of the whole experience and the flying experience as a grown up is very different because I remember, in the dream when I was a child, that I was in a watering can, a green watering can, and I was really low down to the earth, so I could see the detail of the soil as I flew. (Bridget)

I'm feeling emotional now because I've done it since I was very, very small and I feel like it is part of me and its part of the historic aspect of my life. (Sarah)

Mark contrasted the flying dreams of his childhood with his subsequent dream experiences:

Very early in my life I remember in my childhood I had a lot of flying dreams, which were very low level, just skimming along the ground, and I suppose those are the two contrasting types of gravity dreams I've had in my life, and there is some of the same feelings but not nearly the same kind of exhilaration, perhaps more of a frustration, but that was when I was a child really. (Mark)

Adam noted a locational shift in the progression of his flying dreams: "I am wondering if they started indoors and I got more powerful and started going outdoors". Mitchell (2019)

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Discussion

The use of existential dimensions in my interview questions proved both beneficial and challenging. While it was relatively easy to produce questions associated with existential themes, I was aware that this was presumptuous to the extent that it assumed that accounts of the gravity dreams were going to be existential. However, I take the view that lifeworld dimensions are fundamental to all experience, so it was a reasonable assumption to make. While some of the initial themes sprang directly from interview questions, five of the final six themes emerged inductively from the data.

As a gravity dreamer, I am aware that I had assumptions about the themes that might be generated. I acknowledge the active role of the researcher in identifying themes and reporting them (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). However, I was not anticipating the more inductive codes, even though they did fit with my experience.

In relation to the transcendent 'Not of This World' theme, Hamilton (2014) refers to dreams that come from a spiritual realm or a higher consciousness. For Spinelli (2005), these are not personal dreams, concerning un-reflected upon matter. Assagioli (1965, p.5) defines the higher consciousness as "the sphere of aesthetic experience, creative inspiration, and higher states of consciousness...denoting our higher potentialities which seek to express themselves, but which we often repel and repress." Perhaps this has relevance for gravity dreaming?

An interesting finding was that all six gravity dreamers chose to focus on flying dreams during interviews, despite mentioning that they had experienced other types of gravity dreams, including falling and tsunami ones. Why might flying dreams have featured so strongly? Could it be that a gravity flyer, rather than a gravity faller, is more likely to come forward to participate in research?

As a psychotherapist, I am interested in self-insight as an embodied form of understanding. Participants made sense of their experience and reached new understandings through the process of recalling their gravity dream. During the study, I witnessed four participants describe themselves as "more than" the ways they were during waking life. Todres (2007) uses the term 'freedom-wound', which he believes is a soulful space we can occupy where we are grounded in great freedom and great vulnerability. This I believe may be a theme in gravity dreams, although it is something I would like to study further.

The gravity dream motif was an interesting finding of this research, and merits further research. The theme 'gravity dreaming as a process' points to a learned skill that develops alongside our emotional and psychological world. There are many psychological explanations for a dream series that involves developing a skill such as flying. Such an experience might be associated with a freedom-wound (Todres, 2007), a personality trait (Schredl, 2007), an avoidant attachment pattern (Bowlby, 2005) a creative adjustment (Evans & Gilbert, 2005), or some form of psychic compensation (Smith,

2015). Certainly the notion of 'the wounded healer' is well known in psychotherapy (Sharp, 1998). Further research might shed more light on our clients' existential concerns and histories, enabling a deeper appreciation of why these dreams can be life-changing for certain individuals. Some participants in this study referred to a sense of the "unreal" or "other-worldly". Lee (2017) views depersonalisation in dreams as a form of reflective awareness, related to past traumatic experiences, in which the dreamer's sense of self seems unreal. There is evidence to suggest that individuals experiencing depersonalisation during dreams develop fewer trauma-related symptoms subsequently (Shilony & Grossman, 1993). Bridget during her interview described thus:

The meaning I make now is that somehow that was, that's a place of safety for this part of me that, sadly my history and the people involved in my history would have, unfortunately, would not have cherished, would have been very destructive about it, so I feel I am very fortunate to have somehow found this place, to keep this part of me, but somehow this part of me cannot be kept, can't be squashed down in that way, because at night this part of me is exercising itself. (Bridget) It would make sense that participants needed to feel control and power during their dreamscape if there were difficulties in their waking lives. Four participants recalled being aware that they were dreaming and feeling they were in control of their dream. However, while this supports previous the findings of previous research (Gackenbach & Schillig, 1983), it does not mean that this can be generalised across gravity dreams.

Through the process of recalling their dreams, participants were able to gain fresh insights into the significance of the experience, paralleling the work done in therapy. Participants had carried their dreams and remembered them vividly for many years. The fact that they are night-time experiences renders them no less significant than those encountered during the day.

Significantly, one proven intervention for the treatment of trauma is Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing therapy (EMDR), which replicates the eye movements found in REM sleep. It is during these REM cycles that we experience our dreams (Davidson & Parker, 2001). Perhaps we are generating our own EMDR as we dream? The gravity dreaming sequence may tell the story of our struggles and our healing. Mitchell (2019) *European Journal Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, Volume 9, 60-71

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Robb (2018) found that clients who dreamed about traumatic events were more likely to heal from them.

That the dreams of the participants often seemed linked to their emotional survival and growth and development is profound. By exploring gravity dream motifs in our professional practice, we may not only aid the healing process but also help our clients gain fresh understandings, function at a higher level and become more aware of their own moods.

The clinical relevance for bringing dream work into psychotherapy is well documented. The exploration of existential phenomena takes the shame out of the intangible and pushes the boundaries of psychotherapeutic research, assisting the development of our discipline. Robb (2018, p.18) defines the challenge thus: "If we fail to take the simple step of remembering and understanding our dreams, we are throwing away a gift from our brains without even bothering to open it."

Closing Remarks

Throughout my research I have sought to breathe life into a subject which has thus far enjoyed only a marginal position in psychotherapy research. My own experiences of gravity dreaming were paramount to my psychic survival as a child and it has been profoundly moving to discover that I have not been alone in my experiences.

With five psychotherapists and a psychotherapy client in my research pool, I was aware of the likelihood of wounds in their history. However, my research did not attempt to place my dreamers in their specific context or provide a history of their lives. It did not explore their theoretical orientations, the changes in their motifs, or whether they had experienced other existential dream phenomena. It did not ask whether their dream experiences had influenced them as therapists or if they had shared their experiences with others. These are areas I hope to explore in future narratively orientated research.

Further phenomenological research is needed to deepen the descriptions of experience which have begun to emerge in my somewhat sketchy thematic analysis. While I believe I managed to capture something of the experience, a thorough going phenomenological analysis is needed to more fully explicate the existential dimensions and evoke the phenomenon.

All the participants were significantly impacted by their experiences of gravity dreams. They believed that in some way these dreams were assisting them through life events. I

feel enormous gratitude to them for so generously giving up their time freely to help me explore our shared passion. Their enthusiasm made me appreciate the potential benefits of gravity dreaming for the wider community. One participant (Sarah) summed it up thus:

[Gravity dreaming] is one of life's great profound experiences and if you haven't had it, wow, what a shame that is, and so I feel blessed, you know, you can't just order it up, either you get it or you don't...

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Having done my integrative psychotherapy training with Ken Evans (and his wife Joanna Hewitt Evans) it feels fitting that I publish my first piece of original research in the journal that he founded. It was both Ken and Joanna who started me on this journey to be 'all that I can be', and at the tender age of forty-five years old, I feel that I really am at the beginning of that journey.

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About the Author

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Appendix 13

Into the Intangible: Opening the gift of a numinous dream sequence

Abstract

During my doctoral research, in one of my studies, I conducted a phenomenological exploration of a numinous gravity dream sequence, among seven psychotherapists. I looked at the changes in the motif alongside the lived experiences of the developing self. There was one theme that appeared as a bi-product of my interviews and that was the reductive experiences that my participants had faced in taking their dreams to therapy as well as reductive ways in which the participants themselves worked with dreams. During the process of recalling a historic dream series, using the embodied dream metaphor: the 'felt sense' of the dream, my participants were able to make new hermeneutic connections as to their dream's significance. The distance in time creating a reflective space in which participants were able to reconnect with aspects of their development and life experiences at the time of the dream. The interview process renewing or consolidating their interest in working with dreams in practice.

Introduction

Although I looked at gravity (falling, flying, tsunami) dreams during my research, I realised that some of my findings could apply to any numinous dream, or dream series. My cohort in my latest study was of mixed modalities and consisted of; a drama Therapist, Child/Art therapist, Psychologist/Body Psychotherapist, Human/Integrative Psychotherapist, Psychodynamic Psychologist, Psychodynamic Psychotherapist and an Integrative Psychotherapists. They all described incredibly vivid dreams that they had carried with them for many years. I was very surprised considering their dream experiences that they described reductive ways of working with dreams as well as having reductive experiences

when working with dreams in personal therapy. Five of my participants used the Gestalt concept that each part of the dream is a projected aspect of the personality. (Mackewn, 2014). One participant, a Psychologist used the Transferential relationship (Freud, 1900b), the drama therapist used Gestalt theory to act out the dreams and the child/art therapists encouraged her clients to draw their dreams. One participant described her training as 'grim', one participant said she didn't like to 'tread on people's dreams' and one participant said she didn't like to work with dreams as she had no confidence. Obviously, this will not be representative of the whole Psychotherapeutic world, however it started me thinking about my training, which was similar; a workshop using the Gestalt approach and I realised that many therapists are still relying on methodologies that dated back to the early and mid 1900's.

Two participants in my study actively asked for more resources in which to work with dreams, one participant suggesting that she need a system. There was a sense that there was information lacking and this may have been as a consequence of their modality of training. It is important to state that none of them were purely Jungian in training, therefore the emphasis on dreams may not have been in their training in a way that it would have been for a purely Jungian modality. However, even a Jungian modality would still be seen as reductive now when it comes to training therapists to work with dreams. I realised that there should be, in light of more recent scientific dream studies on the benefits of working with dreams a call for a more an integrative and pluralist approach to addressing dreams in Psychotherapy.

Despite the lack of purely Jungian Psychotherapists in my cohort, these findings were however replicated quantitatively in a questionnaire that was sent to 500 members of the Florida Psychological Association, in order to assess how their members worked with dreams. They received a 46% response rate and Freudian and gestalt practices were reported to be the most commonly used, with most practitioners saying that they gained experience on working with dreams through their self-study rather than their training (Keller *et al.*, 1995). This study is however dated, and I would very much like to repeat this again to see whether it has changed.

A more recent study looking at the use of dreams in private practice of 228 therapists, found that 17% of therapists used dreams occasionally, 57% moderately, 17% frequently and 9% almost always. Psychoanalysts were more likely to work with dreams, perceiving it as beneficial in therapy, basing their dreamwork around Freudian positions, with humanist and cognitive behavioural therapists using a more Jungian approach. There was also a significant relationship between therapists being more likely to work with dreams if they had taken them to therapy (Schredl *et al.*, 2000). Other research indicates that most psychologists who use dream work in their practices consider it to contribute therapy in a significant way, especially if the initiative has come from the client (Lempen and Midgley, 2006). Psychotherapists mostly report using more exploration-orientated strategies than problem-solving ones (Hill *et al.*, 2008).

I realised that while science has moved forward with their understanding of the function of dreaming, psychotherapy practice perhaps hasn't, and I started to wonder why. Although many therapists do engage in reading around the subject and enhance their dreamwork in practice and although my study population was limited, it did intimate an arid landscape, with many potential tools for really enhancing dreamwork being unexplored. It is for this reason I decided that I should share some of my findings for the wider psychotherapeutic community. I will begin this paper by giving an overview of some of the dreaming theories.

Dreaming theories and current data

Dreaming is a ubiquitous activity, a major, recurring, non-pathological, modality of consciousness, a universal feature of human experience that has fascinated many throughout history. Dreams have been described through numerous texts from the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Iliad and the Bible, believing to contain messages for the recipients (Brook, 2009). Dreams are depicted in pieces of art and described in poetry and great works of literature. Transcriptions of significant dreams date back to biblical times

when it was thought by the early Judaeo-Christians that God communicated through them. Until about the nineteenth century dreams were considered in the context of spirituality rather than science, with some scholars arguing that religions has its origins in dreams and our attempts to understand them (Robb, 2018).

Evidence supports the importance of sleep and dreaming for emotional functioning in waking life (Malinowski and Horton, 2015) Many contemporary dream theorists suggest that dreaming is functionally significant, serving a biologically important function, especially in emotion adaptation (Scott, 1994; Hartmann 1998; Levin and Nielsen, 2007). There are also numerous studies more recently that indicate that some dreaming does include rational thinking and reflective awareness and our dream content changes and responds in content according to the trauma we experience (Bulkeley and Kahan, 2008). Dreams involving analytical and executive processes being termed as ‘higher-order’ (Wolman and Kozmová, 2007), with some studies showing that sleep deprivation is linked to chronic anxiety (Baglioni *et al.*, 2010). Cartwright proposed that if we experience negative waking life experiences, which we then dream about, we are more likely to cope with the experiences better, the emotions being regulated (Nielsen, 2011).

Theories about the function of dreaming are great, and to a certain extent they have altered with technological advances and the discovery of REM sleep. There is now considerable evidence that it is during our Rapid Eye movement (REM) sleep that we benefit from emotional processing and memory consolidation and this is interrupted in the traumatized brain (Diekelmann, Wilhelm and Born, 2009). This has led to theories about the requirement for REM sleep in emotional regulation and the processing of life events that occur within our dream sleep. The function being, to process the negative emotions attached to them, and process the memories (Walker, 2009). The association of REM sleep and dreaming, have led to studies looking at the traumatized brain along with the emergence of EMDR

(Eye Movement Desensitisation Therapy), an eye movement which replicates the bi-lateral eye movements found during REM sleep (Davidson and Parker, 2001).

Dreams in Psychodynamic practice during the beginning of the 19th century were considered of great significance with Freud proposing that dreams have both a surface, 'manifest' and a hidden 'latent' content, that they attempted to disguise hidden wishes (West, 2011). He believed dreams were largely responsible for protecting sleep through the distortion of the unconscious meaning of the dream. This is a view that has been criticised following contemporary conceptualisations of dreams based on empirical research (Roesler,2018) and has been described as interpretive and reductive (Condrau, 1993a).

Jung took the function of dreams further in his belief that some held a pre-eminent wisdom, which could guide us. He felt that dreams were unveiled unexplored aspects of ourselves, 'the unvarnished, natural truth' that could help us challenge the limited views that we have of ourselves. He described them as a 'spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious' (Jung, 1933:31). He also spoke of a divine presence in dreams, believing that in our dream sleep were are immune to psychic noise, dreams being a multifaceted phenomenon reflecting both individual and universal influences (Hill, 2013).

The Gestalt therapist Perls termed dreams 'existential messengers', believing that by taking the client back through the dream in the first person, it increased the individuals' authorship of their dream facilitating a deeper understanding of the unconscious (Yalom, 1980). Other theories on the function of dreams are that they facilitate social bonding (McNamara, 1996), they have an evolutionary function and help to prepare us for potential threats (Zadra, Desjardins and Marcotte, 2006), that they enable

emotional processing, (Levin, 1990; Hartmann, 2011), they are required for memory consolidation (Montangero, Ivanyi and De Saint-Hilaire, 2003a), that they reflect our waking concerns (Hall, C.S & Nordby, 1972), waking thoughts (Strauch, I., Meier, 1996), or waking life experiences (Schredl and Hofmann, 2003).

The cognitive - experiential model of dream work 2004 is however the most well-researched and empirically supported model of dream work currently in use (Pesant and Zadra, 2004). This model conceptualises dreams as the result of an autonomous process by which our sleeping mind tries to incorporate waking events with cognitive schema from our past history. These dreams reflect the concerns of waking life. Hill believes that the use of dream work in therapy may bring challenging topics into the room that may otherwise lay dormant (Hill *et al.*, 2013).

I believe it was following the 'Scientific Activation-Synthesis Theory' of dreams in 1997 that interest in working with dreams in Psychotherapy started to dwindle. This theory stated that dreams are interpretations by our forebrains of random activity from our spinal cord to our cerebellum during Rapid Eye Movement (REM) Sleep (Hobson & McCarley, 1977). Hobson stated that many dreams which are thought to be meaningful are actually the simple reflection of sleep-related changes in the brain state (2005).

I believe also that shifts in cultural and spiritual traditions have also impacted our openness to explore more existential, numinous dream phenomena. However I am optimistic of a resurgence in the interest in the use of dreams following studies demonstrating their role in understanding our mental health (Robb, 2018). Studies show that patients with depression experience more nightmares (Hublin C, Kaprio J, Partinen M, 1999; Mume, 2009), patients with personality disorders more negative dreams (Schredl M, Paul F, Reinhard I, Ebner-Priemer UW, Schmadhl C, 2012) and shifts in dream content can be indicators for psychological progression in therapy (Beauchemin KM, 1995). It has been shown that

dreams and dreamwork hold tremendous therapeutic potential (Schredl and Wittmann, 2005). Walker describes dreaming as an overnight therapy, taking the sting from painful, traumatic events that have occurred during the day (Walker, 2018). Dream recall can aid raising awareness of life concerns, our sense of identity and the meaning of the dream. Our emotional brain during sleep is more active than during our waking life (Gottesman, 2007) . It is believed that by paying attention to our dream content could well act as a reminder or reference to what we may well want to ignore in our daily life (Blagrove *et al.*, 2019).

It has also been shown that it is during the process of sharing our dreams we can enhance our relationships and alleviate our emotional stress (Schredl and Schawinski, 2010). More significantly how we attach to our primary care givers, may impact how we recall our dreams. McNamara (McNamara, Andersen, *et al.*, 2001) demonstrated that insecurely attached participants were not only more likely to report a dream, but describe dream frequency with more intense images, concluding that It is quite likely that we are conducting some serious attachment resolution in our nocturnal dreamscapes, as dream content may well reflect bonding themes (McNamara, 1996). Blagrove's incredibly important study on trait empathy demonstrated that through the process of sharing our dreams with others we can increase our empathy to others. This high-lights how important the therapy setting is, not only for bonding in the i-thou sense (Evans, K and Gilbert, 2005), but for opportunities for understanding disavowed content. Perhaps if we were to adopt a more pluralistic philosophy (McLeod, 2017) on dreams, would assume many reasons in which dreams are important for our functioning and the therapeutic relationship;, perhaps they can be existential messengers, as well as enabling our social bonding and our empathy, perhaps they can preparing us for live events, enable processing our lived experiences and our memory consolidation and serve as a healing function?

Metaphors and Dreams

While I was doing my literature review for my thesis, I realised that there is not enough emphasis placed on metaphor and the embodied dream in psychotherapy and in psychotherapeutic research. There is also very little data on the relationship between metaphor and emotions and this is something that I only appreciated the significance of as I was doing my interviews and reading around the subject. All my participants made new hermeneutic understandings through the embodied dream metaphor and this should be something that is included in training programs for therapists. The works of Gendlin (Gendlin, 2003) and the *felt sense* should also be included in our dream practice and should also be routinely included in dream training.

I realised as I started to read around the concept of metaphors in dreams that as human beings, we are natural metaphor makers, using metaphors many times a day without even realising it. Metaphors expressing abstractions, memories, thoughts, ideas and feelings. The psychiatrist Modell said that metaphors enable us to grasp feelings, which is a vital element of reflexive practice. We don't always understand our metaphors initially, but when we do they can be astonishing (Bolton, 2014a). It is through metaphor that we make emotional connections, and these are especially prominent in dreaming. Our symbolic and metaphoric thinking is generally attributed to the right hemisphere of our brain, which is more active in dreaming than in waking life (Vedfelt, 2017).

Dream symbols can be found in common metaphors that we find in everyday life, according to Vedfelt these bring abstract concepts to life and put contexts within our own practical intelligence and lived experience. However in the dreaming world they appear much more visibly and literally to the dreamer (Vedfelt, 2017).

Hartman argues that metaphors used in dreams are particularly emotionally powerful. In a sense they are talking to us, 'the metaphor is a way of simplifying or explaining a complicated idea, or emotion'(Hartmann, 2011:55). He uses the metaphor of a tidal wave to demonstrate feelings of being vulnerable, scared and swept away, saying that the picture-metaphor in the dream simplifies by putting the feeling-state or idea directly into an image. The picture itself may not be a perfect translation but it provides an approximation.

The most well-known theory of metaphors is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which suggests that metaphors are actually matters of thought, rather than figments of speech and that they characterise our thinking, contributing to the structure of our knowledge, being deeply imbedded in our personal, interpersonal and cultural dynamics (Bolognesi and Biscicchi, 2013). Casonato has analysed the use of metaphors that emerge during psychotherapy, demonstrating that it is possible to track the process of cognitive transformation during clinical discourse depending on how they change over the therapeutic journey (Casonato, 2003).

Eynon suggests that metaphors that appear in dreams reveal crucial information for the therapist, (Eynon, 2002) and this is endorsed by Lakoff, who believes that the function of metaphor is to map the dream onto the meaning of the dreaming, providing relevant knowledge of the dreamer's life, along with an opportunity for both dreamer and therapist to come to a concrete realisation as to its significance (Lakoff, 1993). Bolognesi and Biscicchi believe that the emotions that enter our mental life through our bodies get shaped in the form of primary metaphors, which are believed to be derived from recurring correlations between particular types of perceptual experiences that allow these emotions to be transferred into mental objects. They believe that metaphors that present in dreams are structures that can be interpreted (Bolognesi and Biscicchi, 2013).(Schredl *et al.*, 2000)

There are also differences in personal associations with certain symbols or metaphors, a dove for one person may be a symbol of peace, for another it may be an annoyance. This will be imbedded in a cultural context. Ullman tells us that the dream metaphor is entirely personal, only the dreamer knowing what the message it signifies means. In the dream world we are totally immersed in experience and the metaphor, but later in life, when we contemplate our dreams, they interact with our imagination which becomes creative, and then allows for experiential dreamwork and interpretation. The metaphor is not simply the bottomless ground, the empty core, the final destination of language. By way of metaphor, language can take us beyond the content of the metaphor towards the region where language speaks through silence. This is the speaking of thinking, of poetizing' (Van Manen, 1944:48). The metaphor can help the poet to transcend their limit, to give a richness to that which they are describing that words alone cannot portray.

The use of metaphor in dreams is hypothesised as being for assimilation of waking life experiences (Malinowski and Horton, 2015), insight, in terms of enabling is to know something about ourselves that we do not know (Ellis, 2013) and hyper associativity (the intense connectivity between loosely associated memories), an imaginative activity that is hyper connective, fluid and flexible that help the integration of newly learned memory representations into pre-existing or new schema (Stickgold and Walker, 2013).

Ullman provided many examples in which dreams appear to be metaphorically picturing an important problem or concern and describes one dream that a patient had of his wife's temper, being depicted through a metaphor of a hurricane. He believed the metaphor providing a picture of the emotion felt and not simply a figure of speech but also a way of learning (Hartmann, 2011). He went on to develop the Experiential dream group, or 'The Ullman Process;' which relies upon the associations and projections of group members, onto the dream content provided by the dreamer. They enter the dream space of the dreamer, with their own eyes as if it were their own experience. The emphasis is not just being on cognitive interpretations but as an experiential exercise (Ullman, 1990)

All my participants connected to their dreams through the metaphor. One participant, Mathew had terrifying, recurrent dreams of falling endlessly through space. He told me also of dreams where he was consumed first by the bed and then he fell on and on, the stars watching in apathy. As a homosexual man, he described an existential loneliness in his family culture of rugby and keeping up with the Jones's, recounting being bullied by his brothers and having a confluent relationship with his sad mother, who felt he was unable to have any impact upon. He told me his parents took him to the doctors when he came out, believing there to be something wrong with him. I asked Mathew if 'falling' where a metaphor, what would it mean to him; *'just being dropped, not being in mind, feeling overwhelmed, or consumed. I think those words come to mind.'* I see the relationship of Mathew's description of the bed consuming him. And the descriptions of his mother and her lack of boundaries and I see the parallels. He must have felt consumed and insignificant, dropped and not held in mind. This was why he fell. Mathew expands on this; *'Like not emotionally held, really being at the mercy of the elements, like being out of control and insignificant. Having no agency, yes, I guess that's what it is, having no agency.'*

Another participant, Louise, described a dream on which she is on a trapeze. She told me how scared of heights she is and how scared she is in this dream;

So, there was a sense of being taken along by the trapeze. There was a sense of how much I was moving the trapeze, I was fearful of whether I could balance on it, could I feel Ok on it. I was wondering what I was doing on the trapeze and whether I would slip and fall, but I became increasingly smooth and confident.

I asked Louise what would happen if she were to become the trapeze; *'Oh that's a good question. I think the trapeze is a bit like the pylons that I've talked about. It's the self-limiting barriers, the bit that is holding me, it feels like it should be a point of safety, but it's actually not.'*

I then ask Louise what was happening at the time of the dream in her lived world and she told me that there was an impending reorganisation at work at the time. She told me that she wasn't worried about her job, but she was worried about losing a good group of people that she was working with, which she said actually came to fruition as she was moved into another team. She says, *'so maybe it was something about the safety net there. It was all fine'*. I realise that Louise must have been aware of the fact that there was upheaval and her sense of safety in her job, would have been a cause of concern. This trapeze dream feels like a perfect metaphor for this; swinging to and fro, not sure whether she would slip or fall, but ultimately knowing she would be fine.

Another participant Brent described childhood dreams of falling. During one interview he divulges a little of his childhood, growing up in a violent area in North America, his younger brother, who is very naughty and his sister who he described as having a 'litany of problems'. He tells me that he had very high expectations of himself, that he learned to work hard for his high-achieving stepfather, that doing well is how he got attention. He begins to tell me about his early memories of gravity dreaming, and how they included dreams of falling in his childhood, which he found consistently upsetting, the sensation of falling he said felt as if it were *'impossibly long'*.

I asked Brent what is felt like for him to fall and he tells me that it was terrifying. I ask Brent if falling were a metaphor for him at the time, whether it would have meant anything to him in his teenage years, when he remembered having them.

'terrifying to fall, ahh, yes, ok. Terrifying to fail, very closely related word' and he laughs,

'Yes, terrifying to fall, to fail, to be embarrassed, to lose face, to all of that stuff, yes reputation management as a teenager.'

It is through the use of the metaphor, that Brent becomes aware of the meaning of the dreams and has what I would call an AHAH moment. He connects with his 'felt sense' of falling. He connects the falling

to his real fear of failing, of losing face. Brent also links the feeling of failure to the float-running dreams, where he was younger. In these dreams he describes losing gravity for some time before touching the earth again. He tells me there were two aspects to the experience;

On one hand it felt wonderful, because I had this special ability, but it was also frustrating. I would try very hard to make progress, but I couldn't actually move forward. This I think is what I found especially disconcerting. I would know that it wasn't a dream, it was real, and I could not make progress. I have had hundreds of these dreams in my childhood.

I ask Brent whether he feels this has any significance with his life at the time, whether not progressing meant anything to him as a child. Brent tells me about his high internal value system, his need to do well and how although he did very well, there was a fear of not progressing as he would wish to.

Brent also described his mode of flying as a 'superpower' which we explored in our interview. He told me that he has never been obsessed by superheroes, but says;

Could I have been a rescuer? Could I have intervened? Well I think having superpowers in my childhood would have come in useful a few times growing up in a violent city. I suffered from violent crimes at quite a few times. Everyone in my family suffered from violence in the community, some of them really extreme and serious violence. So, I suppose there might have been part of me that, well I know there was a part of me that would have liked to be more powerful or been able to get revenge against the perpetrators.

Brent made connections through the dream metaphor. He later told me about a dream in which he was hovering over a professional sports game, enjoying the competence on the field. This came at a time in his life where he was feeling incredibly satisfied with his work as a therapist, the dream paralleling with metaphor his own feelings of competence.

Jung talked about archetypal dreams. He described these as being impersonal in nature, distinguished by symbolic images or motifs common to myths and religions all over the world (Jung, 1948). I believe having conducted my doctoral research on gravity dreams, that Gravity could be archetypal dreams, without the symbolic imagery but with the symbolic, personal metaphor. This would fit with Jung's belief that archetypal dreams came at a time where there was some form of crisis, as this is what I saw in my cohort (Sharp, 1998). The metaphor for flying in my later study being about dreams of escaping, progressing, moving on and beyond, and the metaphor to fall was one of terror, failure and ceasing to exist. However, I am unconvinced as to whether this is a universal metaphor. I believe we all have subjective experiences of gravity and it makes sense that as a metaphor it may mean something entirely different to the client who is scared of heights verses the avid skydiver. I personally think the theory of a universal archetype is also reductionist and rather abstract, symbols and metaphors are entirely subjective. I believe the interpretation of dreams is much better understood through personal metaphor. The fact that modern science tells us we dream in metaphor provides the perfect explanation for this.

The embodied dream

It was Gendlin (Gendlin, 2003) who founded the idea of 'focusing' on emotions in our body to help us to connect with what our body was trying to tell us. This I believe is the key to a good dream session. One of my participants, described a dream where she is flying vertically, and she hit a ceiling. Sylvia told me that her partner was in hospital at the time following a transplant and her father was in a coma in Poland. She spent a lot of time looking after them both.

I was travelling back and forth and staying with my mum while my dad was in a coma, we believed that the more company he had, the less lonely he would feel. I spent the first few weeks thinking that he was there, that he was accessible and then I spent time thinking he was not there, so why was I bothering to be with him, and I began to feel real anger. I did provide a lot of emotional support for both my mum

and sister and I think in some ways I coped better than they did. But my partner, I also had to stay with her in hospital too.

Sylvia started to cry, and I felt intense empathy for her and what this must have been like for her and I think of the ceiling she has described, that immovable barrier. Sylvia started to play with her mouth and began to cry. I asked her what was happening for her in her body, *'There is the faintest sense of the understanding and yet I've been feeling that my tongue is going a bit numb and almost ridged, like I can't say it. There are strange sensations going on in my tongue now. But the understanding being of the ceiling that I can't escape from (sighs) two things, one from the circumstance and the other is my body at those times'*.

Sylvia realises the significance of the ceiling, the circumstances that cannot be changed, the reality that her partner's life is still hanging by a thread and her father is very ill. Her tongue remained so ridged that she struggled to speak, and I was aware of how she must hold all of her feelings back, that even during the interview there was a sense that she couldn't escape and that her feelings wouldn't escape her mouth. Sylvia later told me that she trained as a body therapist after experiencing psychosomatic events and I realised that this must be one way that her psyche communicates with her. I wondered what she meant by 'escaping her body', it was as if it communicated to her that which she disavows.

Another participant described coming across obstacles and pylons as she flew. I was keen to explore her lived experience at the time of these dreams and she told me that at the time she was working as a social worker, *'at the sharp and pointy end of childcare'*. She told me that she later managed a mental health team, working in difficult and dangerous situations, with people who were mentally unwell. I recognised her sense of responsibility not just for the children she was looking after, but her colleagues as well. She told me that she was always having to manage her stress levels, as her job meant that she felt quite adrenalized. She recognised the impact this must have had on her, and talked about the experience of her dream;

The dream was mostly pleasant, soaring over fields, having a nice time, but often obstacles would get in the way. There would be telegraph wires, poles and buildings, chimneys and aerials all to negotiate, so whilst I enjoyed flying, I had to be watchful, I don't think I could ever just.... At this point Sarah, stops and I notice she has had a felt sense of something..

...that's interesting. I couldn't just relax and enjoy the experience. I asked Sarah what she finds interesting;

Well, I am connecting this with the work, and my wider life. I have always had a sense of obligation to be somebody and I know this comes from my upbringing where there were expectations upon me, so in those days, I couldn't be my authentic self. I was surrounded by lots of noise, marrying my first husband, it was in the 80's and we were a golden couple. What is interesting me is that I didn't feel as if I could ever relax into life, I couldn't honour what I really and truly wanted out of life, in fact I don't think I was even in touch with what I really wanted out of life. So now we are talking about my dreams and I am thinking, why couldn't I just fall through the sky, like a big plane and enjoy it, but there were always bloody aerials in the way, or the chimney pots. I had to be responsible, I have always had to be responsible for somebody, there was always somebody with me.

A place for new hermeneutic understandings

My study found that participants could reach new hermeneutic meaning of their dream's significance, years after the actual dream. I realise that the insight stage of working with dreams is based on psychodynamic dream theory and that it occurs at varying different levels and at the deepest level we can understand how our dreams relate to parts of our self, childhood conflicts and existential, or spiritual concerns (Hill, 2013). I have read a studies latterly which demonstrate new insights made following dream work (Edwards *et al.*, 2015; M. *et al.*, 2018). However, when I look back on my participants 'A-HAH's', or new psychological insights, I could see that they were generated through an

appreciation of the dream metaphor, and also the 'felt sense' of the dream. In some situations, such as with the participant I mentioned previously with her tongue, the connection to her A-HAH was made through her embodied experience of recalling the dream, as well as the metaphor of a ceiling. There was something about the insight that was generated through the interview that meant that they were able to look at things differently. This may be due to the fact that they were reflecting back, with an element of distance in time to the problem or situation at the time, providing a reflective distance, away from the emotional intensity of their situations at the time.

Sharp (Sharp, 1998) talks about our client's dreams, as often demonstrating the underlying factors that have brought the client to therapy into analysis and highlighting the psychological problems, with which to work on. However, he stresses that it may not be until years later, with the benefit of hindsight that the dreams symbolic content can be recognised. This is certainly the case for my study. It appears that in the case of my study, it is only years later, with the benefit of distance that my participants were able to work towards an understanding of the dream's motifs.

I realised that the new hermeneutic understanding or dream insight could facilitate a stepping-stone for further personal development. This as a concept is not new, the idea that with insight comes change, however I was aware that there were two important factors. The first was the space that was created in the interview. I offered when I recruited my participants a space for them to talk about their fantastical, existential dream phenomena's. This in itself was permission giving in a way that perhaps not every therapy session is. There is a great deal of shame in recalling these more private, intangible areas of our human experience. As therapists we may not all feel confident to just attend to the personal experiences of clients, but to seek out these existential, transpersonal dream experiences too. It goes without saying that excessive work on archetypal dream images and transpersonal experiences can also be used defensively as a disavowal of other more practical lived experiences. However, when

a numinous experience enters the room, the therapist should see it for what it truly is, a gift that must be attended to. We live in a world where people don't share their spiritual views for fear of persecution, they don't share their political views for fear of offense and they certainly don't share their night-time existential dream experiences, unless it is invited.

On reading a book called the 'Eureka Factor' (Kounios, J. Beeman, 2015), I realised that my interviews had actually provided a shortcut to their dream insight through the use of the metaphor and the embodied sense and I was able to witness the point at which the participants were making sense of their experiences. As Lakoff and Johnson suggest; "Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor." (1980: 3). My study seemed to echo what I had read in the literature about metaphors being manifestations of the world of dreamer, that carry meaning and are structured in a way in which these meanings can be communicated to internal parts of the individual (Bolognesi and Bicisecchi, 2013).

One participant, Brent made new insights into falling and his fears of failing as a child. He also realised the power in being grounded not just in his dream world but as a metaphor for how he felt in his psychotherapy practice. He then related a dream of hovering with skill and watching a professional sports game to his own feelings of competence as a therapist. In a later dream he was able to associate his real feelings of fun and satisfaction while swimming with sealions to be related to his enjoyment in life. Another participant, Jo, gained hermeneutic understanding through the metaphor of flying and her feelings of thriving. I realised towards the end of our interview that this was something that she would take with her, not only as a therapy tool, as she said she worked well with metaphors, but also as a resource reminding herself of her capability to do something other than self-sabotage. She appreciated the intense felt sense of connection to the universe and her self-acceptance, her journey from *not* being

Okay, to *being* okay. Through the dream metaphor of flying high above her school peers, she was able to recognise her need to be seen and realise her own ability to resolve those developmental needs.

Another participant, Sally, recognized her dreams of being carried on an 'out of control stool' through the sky to replicate lived experiences of feeling out of control. She was also able to connect with her felt sense during the dream of exposure and related this to presenting her artwork to the wider community and her need to let go of her desire to control her life. Another participant, Louise was able to identify with the metaphor of letting go, as well as realising the self-limits she imposed on herself. The invitation to interview appeared to offer a space that allowed for these new insights to be generated through the dream immersion. There was something of the combination of the distance in time from the dream event itself, the embodied feeling of the dream and the dream metaphor that brought things together fully.

After reading an article on 'Heideggerian pathways Through Trauma and Recovery (Churchill, 2013), I realised that the dream metaphor of gravity fitted with the idea of Heidegger's 'thrownness' and 'fallenness'. The dream motifs themselves changed over time, paralleling what was going on in the ontological experiences of the participants in their lived world and their personal development, and the desire to project themselves forward and away from their emotional pain. The participants existential, projected dream-selves, their detethering from a physical dream reality was somehow enabling them to attend to their one-self. This by default appeared to enable healing in the 'with-world'. Their search for meanings, for belonging, for individuation, to be seen was an unwitting attempt to recover or discover one's own being; one's life, one's existence and one's self. This was further paralleled during the interview process as the participants were able to not only appreciate and reflect back on their journeys but reach new hermeneutic meanings for themselves, through the exploration of the metaphor, the embodied experience, the felt sense and the re-immersion of the self into dream scape.

My study highlighted a reductive experience of taking dreams to therapy, but also a reductive way of working with dreams in therapy. My participants experiences of taking dreams to personal therapy ranged from non-existent, to 'limited success' to being reduced to only looking at the transferential relationship, or being asked to draw a dream, which apparently was not at all helpful for one participant who felt they had to do it perfectly. I did not anticipate how valuable the interview space would be in terms of providing permission to talk about a subject as intangible as gravity dreaming. I believe that any offer from a therapist to their client to work on dream material without judgment, but with curiosity, would be an invitation that is most likely to be well received. There is something of an intimacy in describing our dreams. We are in essence laying ourselves bare, we are divulging our unconscious processes. We are sharing part of ourselves. The offer of such an intimate dream reflection, not only allows for trust to build, it facilitates an empathetic relationship and well as providing a space to reflect on past experiences, where there is an emotional distance, allowing an opportunity to forge new understandings.

At the end of my research interviews, I witnessed a revival of interest in working with dreams with my participants. The recalling of their dreams enabled them to reconnect with themselves and reflect on their developmental journey. There was something of a catharsis in this. It felt like the end of therapy, when we see how far we have come and what our milestones have been. It was intensely satisfying.

Conclusion

Bulkeley tells us that one of the major obstacles to progress with a consensus theory on the function of dreams is the failure to appreciate the rare and impactful dreams (Bulkeley, 2016). Everyone has dreams that are random and perhaps meaningless, we wake up knowing that we dreamt of Aunt Mable because she texted the night before. However, some dreams are numinous, some dreams do stay with us for a lifetime and I totally agree with Bulkeley when she says that we will only really understand the

true significance of dreams, by paying attention to the big dreams. I believe that these in therapy are gold dust and I am sure Jung would agree with this.

We know that dream analysis is fundamentally a co-creation, and the fruit of a mutual reflection, between both dreamer and analyst, that there is little point in an analyst feeling that they may have some kind of personal understanding of a dream's meaning or significance, if it doesn't resonate with the dreamer. I agree with this. As therapists we cannot possibly know the meaning of a dream, when it is not our own, but there are things we can do that can help the client along. For example, asking the obvious questions, such as 'how did you feel in the dream,' 'what did you feel in your body?' 'If this dream was a metaphor what would it be saying to you?' 'What was going on for you when you had that dream?'

I also cannot help wondering about my participants who didn't feel confident working with dreams and I am wondering about the pressure that we feel as therapists to 'interpret' or help our clients make sense of their dreams and whether this has something to do with a reticence among some therapists to engage in dream work. Perhaps if we didn't feel a necessity to come up with some form of understanding of what our clients' dreams mean, and there is no pressure about the session outcome, we might be more inclined to work with dreams, seeing the time as a providing a reflective space, enabling trust in the relationship, demonstrating empathy and interest in our clients' unconscious processes. Perhaps this should be the goal, rather than an attempt to shed light on our unconscious processes.

I believe that dream work should not involve staring at it from the 'above down', with a critical lens, which reduces it to a mere cognitive exercise. It is not about interpretation or intellectual muscle

flexing. Dream work should focus on the embodied experience, the felt sense, connecting with the metaphors, with the symbols and the images presented. It is about providing an invitation, looking for the parallels of the embodied dream, to the lived experience and understanding it to only have subjective meaning. These are not things that we see discussed in gestalt, psychodynamic or even existential literature. I believe that we need an integrated approach to dream work. Gone are the days when dreams were thought to be a random collection of images and mental processing. We now know that they can be a very valuable therapy tool and more attention needs to be paid to how therapists should work with dreams during training. Dream work involves a full immersion into the experience, like the phenomenological journey, it can bring illumination and with it may come the recognition of a healing of self and a healing space. We can then return to our numinous experiences; they can be consolidated and installed into the psyche as a healing function.

As Robb's says, 'if we fail to take the simple step of remembering and understanding our dreams, we are throwing away a gift from our brains without even bothering to open it' (2018:8). I witnessed how grateful my participants were for the opportunity to talk about their numinous, dream series, describing the interview experience as 'a place to explore,' being able to 'make new connections', a space for 'illumination' and 'a place for further insight.' My desire to write this paper is to provide an invitation, a gauntlet to continue to open those intangible gifts. For those of you who open them daily, perhaps this paper can further encourage you, or provide a few further tools for those, who like some of my participants, need a little encouragement.

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Appendix 14

Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholder	Risk/Benefit Ratio	Management of risk to acceptable level
Participant	<p>Participants' may feel emotionally vulnerable after their interview and aspects of their history will be exposed. Participants will only be recruited if they have no psychiatric history. They will have an opportunity to debrief with me if necessary.</p> <p>Exploration of the participant's dreams may allow for enlightenment and understanding of the dream studied as well as allowing an opportunity for an aspect of the participant's history to be processed.</p> <p>Participant anonymity will be preserved, and codes attributed to the text of the final project.</p>	<p>Participants' will be briefed as to the content of the research and the expectations, after they have been recruited to the study. This will be done after an informal telephone interview. Care will be taken to make sure that the participants are not known to me. They will sign an informed consent form and will be given a letter of Intention outlining the study.</p> <p>The participants will be informed of their anonymity, as names and identifiable details are changed. They will be notified about the audio recording of the interview, as well the transcription of the interview. They will be given copies of the transcripts and the final themes and will be encouraged to feedback whether they see themselves in the themes.</p> <p>The participants will be told that they do not need to answer all the questions and the interview can be terminated at any point. They will be invited back for a debrief session should they require. When they receive the transcripts, they will have an have an opportunity to comment on the content up until the final the final thematic analysis is completed.</p>
Dream subjects	Participants may bring details of other people into the interview	Keeping the audio data coded and anonymous will help minimise bringing 3 rd party data into the public arena.

		Audio data will be destroyed after transcription. Identifying names or places in the original transcripts will be altered to reduce identification.
Participants close friends and relatives	It is possible that is a participant is affected by the interview this may have a subsequent impact on their close friends or relatives.	Care will be taken to ensure that participants have adequate time after the interview to debrief. This is paralleling the work we do a Psychotherapists to ensure the safety of our clients and those in their immediate surroundings.
Metanoia/Middlesex University	Risk to reputation of Metanoia research body if study not conducted appropriately.	As a student of Metanoia and Middlesex I am bound by my code of conduct and ethical responsibilities as a Psychotherapist to ensure that I represent myself and the data to the best of my ability.
Critical Friend	There is a risk that my critical friend could be impacted by the data/interviews and need further support.	I will offer a debrief with my critical friend and an opportunity to talk through the subject after the themes have been coded. She will have an opportunity to see the final themes and document
UKCP Magazine	There are no perceived risks to the magazine as it is a magazine designed for therapists. The magazine will not have access to the identity of anyone interested in the study. There are also no perceived benefits to the magazine; it is only a vehicle in which to find participants.	The magazine does not need to know anything regarding the study; it will be placed as an advert.
Myself as the researcher	Interviews with gravity dreamers may stir up a psychological response in me.	I will use my academic advisor, supervisor and my colleagues in Cohort 18 for support. I will continue with my research

	The research process itself may cause stress due to its intensive nature.	journal as an aid to processing my emotionality and aiding reflexivity.
Academic Advisor	The research topic and process may stir up emotions or frustrations in my academic advisor. It is also labour intense to read a thesis.	I aspire to maintain open communication and honesty with my academic advisor throughout this process. I am aware of the fact that it is a paid role and one that my academic advisor has willingly agreed to.
Academic Consultant	The content of the research as well as the time demands of following a piece of research may well affect my academic consultant	My intention of open and honest communication, as well as time limited requests, should mean that I am only asking for reasonable levels of support, which is something that is both paid for an agreed contractually between us.
Signatories	The signatories are vouching for my credibility as a researcher and their reputation is at stake if the research is not carried out with integrity.	I will conduct this research according to the ethical boundaries of Metanoia/Middlesex and my profession. Signatories will be allowed access to the work as it is undertaken and will be able to make comment of the final project.
My family	This research will take me away from my family, in terms of my available time, possible levels of stress, irritation, lack of sleep and mood disruptions.	Hopefully this will be offset by my desire of self-actualisation, the support I gain from my friends, family and colleagues and my reflexivity and personal awarenesses of the need for healthy balance in life.