How do existential counselling psychologists and psychotherapists feel they construct a sense of being attuned to their clients? A grounded theory study.

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Statement of Authorship

This dissertation is written by Jaqueline Dias and has ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University for the Degree of Doctor of Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy. The author reports no conflicts of interest and is alone responsible for the content and writing of the dissertation.

Abstract

Existential counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists feel that particular moments in psychotherapy can give rise to feelings within them, which they feel can tell them something about the experience of the inner world of the other. This study explores this non-verbal and embodied aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship using the construct of 'being attuned' to clients. Currently, there is a lack of research exploring this topic from existential practitioners' perspective. A constructivist grounded theory approach was used where eight existential practitioners were interviewed.

The concepts being dependent on the inner self, communicating non-verbally, being internally preoccupied, meeting as equals, bringing into view, being supervised and being relational-specific are illuminated as a result of this study. The two key processes found were being empathic and attuned and being within and between. The findings highlight the importance of existential practitioners' use of their self when sensing, understanding and being with their clients on a non-verbal and embodied level. This study suggests that implementing a relational based understanding of existential practitioners' use of their self on a non-verbal and embodied level will increase their understanding of their role in the psychotherapeutic encounter and potentially improve their clinical practice.

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This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my father, Leif Barlund, who sadly passed away before he was able to see this thesis completed.

Keywords: Attunement, non-verbal, embodiment, presence, openness, self-awareness and constructivist grounded theory.

Definition of terms

In this research, I have chosen to use the words *'attunement'* or *'being attuned'* to point towards a set of experiences within an area that I want to explore. I choose to identify this area of experiences as '*how one makes sense of feeling that they are resonating with the inner world of the other*'.

The term '*existential counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists'* is taken to encompass all counselling psychologists and psychotherapists with a professional training in existential psychotherapy. The term also includes counselling psychologists and psychotherapists with a professional training in another psychotherapeutic approach together with a training in existential psychotherapy.

'Embodiment' refers to the assumption that "thoughts, feelings and behaviours are grounded in bodily interaction with the environment" (Meier, Schnall, Schwarz & Bargh, 2012, P.1). Thus one does not only 'have' a body, but 'is' his or her body for themselves and for the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

The word '*phenomenon'* refers to a set of experiences that appears to and is constructed by the individual's mind.

The word '*intersubjectivity'* means the sharing of an experience between two individuals.

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter provides the foundation for this research thesis on how existential practitioners feel they come to construct an experience of 'being attuned' to their clients. I provide an introduction to the research topic, the rationale for the study, and a brief review of how the word 'attunement' is used in this research and how it is used in the literature. I then outline the research purpose, the research question and the objectives. Finally, this is followed by the researcher's positionality and a summary of the potential contributions of this research to counselling psychology and an outline of the structure of the thesis.

This research identifies and explores how existential practitioners feel they construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients. The words 'attunement' or 'being attuned' point towards an area of experiences that I am interested in exploring. I identified this area of experiences as 'how one makes sense of feeling that they are resonating with the inner world of the other'. The reasons for this will be discussed in the subsequent section.

I believe that there are particular 'moments', which might occur when two human beings meet and begin to interact with each other. If these moments do occur, they can give rise to feelings within me, which I feel can 'tell me' something about the inner world of the other.

In these moments it is easier for me to be with the other without figuring them out or fixing them. It is 'being' rather than 'doing' and it is a part of the non-verbal and embodied aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship. It is what I have come to recognise as an essential part of existential psychotherapeutic practice. I have come to call these moments or set of experiences 'attunement'. In the rest of the thesis, the

phenomenon explored in this study will be called ‘attunement’ or ‘being attuned’ where applicable.

In existential philosophy and psychotherapy, existential thinkers such as Martin Buber, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty have written extensively about how they feel a particular ‘moment’ between two human beings can give rise to feelings within us of a ‘shared experience’ of the other’s inner world.

Martin Buber (1958) postulates that there is a ‘genuine dialogue’, no matter whether it is spoken or unspoken, where we are open and present to the other with the intention to establish an authentic shared relation with the other (Buber, 1958). According to Buber (1958) the ‘I’ came into existence through experience and relation, and the ‘I’ cannot develop without being in relation to the other.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) employs the term ‘being-for-others’ to describe the interpersonal dimension of being (Sartre, 1943). ‘Being-for-others’ is one’s being as it exists in the consciousness of the other (Sartre, 1943). We constantly experience how we see ourselves through the gaze of the other, even in the physical absence of the other. Sartre (1943), similarly to Buber (1958), takes the view that the other is needed for us to require a sense of ourselves. Therefore, our sense of the other is seen as prior to our sense of self.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) wrote: “it is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive ‘things’ ” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.216). We exist in the world as embodied subjects constantly in interaction with other embodied subjects, and it is through our bodies and in interaction with others that we come to perceive and understand the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Buber (1958), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre’s (1943) thoughts on the ‘shared experience’ of the other will be discussed in more detail in the literature review.

The rationale for the research

Existential philosophy and psychotherapy place an emphasis on our relationship with the other, in particular, on the 'shared experience' of the inner world of the other (Buber, 1958; Sartre, 1943; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Our understanding of the social world around us and of other individuals is dependent on recognising what is on the other's minds. Dant (2014) argues that we need to be able to understand someone else's mind for a social interaction to take place. This is particularly evident in people with autism who struggle to understand the other's mind and therefore find social interactions difficult (Dant, 2014). And yet our understanding of such a phenomenon in a psychotherapeutic context is currently limited.

Research suggests that the very quality of the psychotherapeutic relationship is dependent on how counselling psychologists and psychotherapists interact with their clients (Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Lambert & Barley, 2001; Cooper, 2004). According to Birdwhistell (1952), a substantial part of an interaction is carried out on a non-verbal level (Birdwhistell, 1952 as cited in Seikkula et al., 2015). Foley and Gentile (2010) argued that being aware of these unspoken subtleties could provide practitioners with valuable information that clients might be unable to put into words. After a focus on language in the construction of reality, researchers and practitioners have come to be more aware of the embodied quality of a social interaction (Seikkula et al., 2015).

If the psychotherapeutic relationship depends on how counselling psychologists and psychotherapists interact with their clients (Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Lambert & Barley, 2001; Cooper, 2004) where a substantial part might be carried out on a non-verbal level (Birdwhistell, 1952 as cited in Seikkula et al., 2015), it becomes pertinent to explore how existential practitioners conceptualise their use of

self in relational to their clients on a non-verbal level to better understand how it might impact their psychotherapeutic relationship.

Thus in this study, I am interested in identifying and exploring a non-verbal and embodied aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship: how existential practitioners feel they construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients, and what 'being attuned' to their clients might mean for them and the psychotherapeutic relationship. Consequently, the rationale for researching how existential counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists feel they construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients is to give existential practitioners a voice since these sets of experiences from their perspective is insufficiently understood. Currently, to my knowledge, there exists no research exploring this topic from the participants' perspective. Focusing solely on the participants' perspective might contribute to new knowledge that can give insights into how this phenomenon might affect existential practitioners and their relationships with their clients.

I choose to focus on existentially trained practitioners because my training and clinical practice are strongly influenced by existential philosophy. As discussed in the previous section, existential philosophy and clinical practice place an emphasis on our relationship with the other and the shared experience of the other's mind (Buber, 1958; Sartre, 1943; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Existential practitioners might therefore, be more inclined to practice on a non-verbal and embodied level with a focus on their sense of self in relation to their experience of the client's inner world. This aspect of the psychotherapeutic encounter is of great interest to me, and the existential literature inspired me to research this specific topic. I am interested in identifying and exploring on a non-verbal and embodied level how existential practitioners might construct the

phenomenon under study. Thus my intention with this research project is to deepen our understanding of this particular phenomenon and thus broaden the existential profession and its clinical practice.

Research grounded in existential practitioners' perspectives of the phenomenon under study will allow the development of a theory of their experiences, which might give us a better understanding of their processes and actions in relation to their clients. In response to this need, this research attempts to add to the body of work by presenting a theory of existential practitioners' account of a particular set of experiences within the non-verbal and embodied aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship.

The word attunement

In this section, I describe how I came to call a set of experiences 'attunement' and how the word is used and understood in the literature. Throughout the research process, I wanted to find a word that came directly from participants' account of their experiences to describe the phenomenon under study. However, it quickly became apparent that such as word would be very difficult to find because of the complexity of the phenomenon under study. Thus finding a word to describe this area of experiences became secondary.

I predefined these set of experiences within the area of attunement as 'how one makes sense of feeling that they are resonating with the inner world of the other'. I identified and described this phenomenon in a broad way to ensure that the participants and I were referring to the same social interaction during the interview process. I use the word 'resonating' as a part of identifying phenomenon, which in its natural form means, "when an object's natural vibration frequency responds to an

external stimulus of the same frequency" (Duarte, 2010, p.15). In this research, to resonate with someone was left up the participants to identify and explain what it might mean to them.

The majority of participants preferred to call their experiences 'attunement' or 'being attuned'. One participant however preferred to call his set of experiences 'harmony'. I feel the word attunement describes the set of experiences that I want to explore very well. The word can be used both as a noun 'attunement' and as a verb 'being attuned', which I think makes the use of the word easier to describe and understand participants' account of their experiences. I, therefore, use the words 'attunement' or 'being attuned' to point towards a set of experiences that I am interested in exploring.

In the literature, the word attunement is used to describe different theoretical frameworks and theorists use the word attunement in different ways (Finlay, 2015). Thus it is necessary to identify the phenomenon this study intends to explore to ensure that the participants and I are referring to the same social interaction during the interviewing process. However, I identified and described this phenomenon in a broad way to ensure that the information can emerge from the participants' understanding and experiences of the phenomenon under study. I will now briefly review how the word attunement is used and understood in the literature.

In existential psychotherapy, Heidegger (1996) uses the word attunement ('Stimmung') to describe the centrality of moods as a condition of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Heidegger's (1996) concept of Dasein refers to what it is like to be human, how it is like 'being here'. At the most basic level of being-in-the-world, Heidegger (1996) argues that Dasein is always confronted by a mood and that the mood comes neither from the outside nor the inside but arises from being-in-the-world (Heidegger,

1996). One might turn away from a mood but will only be met by another mood because it is a part of the human facticity[1].

Dasein has "an openness to the world that is constituted by the attunement of a mood or a state of mind" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 26). For example, being joyful might 'attune' one to risible dimensions of things. If an incident occurs where one is in an angry mood one might feel irritation, however, if one is feeling joyful that same incident might show up as amusing.

Heidegger's (1996) attunement of a mood or state of mind do not describe, this study's set of experiences that I call attunement because his definition is about 'how we find ourselves in the world'. He uses the word attunement as a part of describing our subjectivity and its influence in the world, whereas the idea of attunement to me is a more relational experience.

In psychoanalysis, however, Stern (1985) uses the word attunement to point towards a set of experiences between the mother and her infant (Haft & Slade, 1989). Stern (1985) defines his notion of the word attunement, as to how the caregiver is able to 'read' the feeling state of the infant. The caregiver acts out a range of behaviours that relate to the feeling state of the infant, the infant interprets the caregiver's behaviour as relevant to his own internal experience (Stern, 1985).

Fonagy and colleagues (2002) use the word attunement in a similar way as Stern (1985). Fonagy and colleagues (2002) describe the word attunement as 'an attuned' parent that has the 'ability to reflect' on the infant's experience and re-present it to the infant in a language of actions that is comprehensible to the infant.

Since Stern's (1985) use of the word attunement, other definitions of the word have emerged with different meanings. For example, Feldman & Greenbaum (1997)

[1] Heidegger's (1996) facticity means that we are thrown into the world. The thrownness of Dasein is disclosed in moods.

use the word ‘maternal affect attunement’ to describe the experience as maternal positive affect with a focus on maternal synchrony. Legerstee, Markova and Fisher (2007) use the word ‘maternal attunement’ to describe their set of experiences as maintaining attention and having a warm sensitivity.

In an adult psychotherapeutic context, McCluskey (2005) use the word ‘attunement’ to point towards a set of experiences he defines as “a way of communicating to the other that one has recognised the affect they are experiencing. Attunement conveys to the other that one has a feeling sense inside of what it feels like to be them right now” (McCluskey, 2005, p. 92). Similarly, Erskine (1998) refers to the word attunement as being a process that involves empathy where the psychotherapist is able to ‘sense the internal state’ of the client and respond appropriately to the client (Erskine, 1998).

Laub (2008) uses the word attunement to describe a set of experiences as ‘being in sync’, where attunement can direct the psychotherapist’s attention to matters that have emotional significance to the client. To Siegel (2007) the word ‘attunement’ means “how one person focuses attention on the internal world of another” (Siegel, 2007, p. 7) and that enables two people to 'feel felt' by each other (Siegel, 2007).

Siegel’s (2007) idea of attunement comes closest to how the participants and I have come to understand the area of experiences under study. Throughout this research, I will use the word attunement to refer to this area of experiences where applicable. The subsequent section presents the purpose of the research and the research question and objectives.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to elicit new and robust findings and develop an explanatory and coherent theory of how existential counselling psychologists

and/or psychotherapists come to construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients.

Research question and objectives

The research question of this study is as follows: how do existential counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists feel they construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients? The aim of this study was to explore this set of experiences from the perspective of the participants in order to elicit new and robust findings in the area.

This research is informed by the constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 1990, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2006, 2014) to achieve the following objectives:

1. identify and explore what 'being attuned' might mean to existential practitioners and the psychotherapeutic relationship, from the existential practitioners' perspective.
2. develop a theory to describe and explain how participants feel they construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients, from the participants' perceptive.

The researcher's positionality

My interest in researching this topic grew during my years as an existential counselling psychologist and psychotherapist trainee. It was my encounter with existential philosophy and literature that inspired me and made me decide to research this topic. I have always been interested in the non-verbal and embodied aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship. As such, I approached this research already holding an opinion about this particular phenomenon. It is therefore important for me to be mindful and reflexive about it throughout the research process, which I aim to convey in this thesis.

In my clinical work, I experienced a unique 'reciprocal meeting' with the other that gave 'rise to feelings' within me, where I experienced 'resonating' or 'sharing' the other's inner world. I realised that these 'moments', which I during this research have come to term 'being attuned', seemed to have a significant affect on the psychotherapeutic relationship between my client and I. I experienced that 'being attuned' to the client seemed to facilitate a greater trust, understanding and closeness between us.

I recognise that there exists a tension between the belief of having a 'shared experience' of the other's inner world and knowing that I can never directly access the other's mind. If I have an actual experience of the other, which is more than mere analogical inference, it does not imply that I can experience the other in the same way as he/she does, nor that the other's consciousness is accessible to me in the same way as my own. Thus I believe we can never directly access the other's mind. The only mind we have experiential access to is our own.

The contribution to counselling psychology and psychotherapy and substantial and original contribution to new knowledge

This research seeks to add to the body of existing knowledge and develop a much-needed theory that is grounded in existential practitioners' experiences of the phenomenon under study. The benefit of such a theory to the field of counselling psychology and psychotherapy might be a greater understanding of the non-verbal and embodied aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship between practitioners and their clients. In turn, this might lead to improving the very quality of the psychotherapeutic relationship, which can result in improved clinical practice with clients. In the subsequent section, a comprehensive list of how this research might

contribute to knowledge is stated.

This research will try to make several substantive and original contributions to knowledge as follows:

- understand the psychotherapeutic relationship between existential practitioners and their clients on a non-verbal and embodied level.
- develop a substantive theory that is grounded in participants' experiences where no such theory to my knowledge presently exists.
- provide a unique, in-depth insight, understanding, and explanation of the actions and processes by which participants' feel they come to construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients.
- finally, the findings of this research will try to enrich and broaden both the counselling psychology and the psychotherapy profession and clinical practice.

Structure of the thesis

This research has been organised into seven chapters. The remaining chapters have been organised as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature in order to set the stage for the research. It presents a justification for a literature review in constructivist grounded theory prior to the study. The chapter then outlines the literature review on the shared experience of the other and addresses this under-researched area. The chapter concludes by arguing that there is a paucity of research that explores how participants feel they come to construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients, from the existential practitioners' perspective.

Chapter 3 presents a rationale for an interpretive constructivist research paradigm. It then considers the most appropriate research methodology to address the research question and the objectives. It is argued that an exploratory, qualitative methodology is best suited for this research because it will provide an in-depth insight into how the participants feel they come to construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients. The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism provides the theoretical frame underpinning this research. The constructivist grounded theory is identified as an appropriate methodological framework to adopt in the current research (Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2014). The chapter then moves on to evaluate and examine the rigour of the research. Finally, it discusses the limitations of the research and the ethical consideration and confidentiality.

Chapter 4 outlines the methods applied to this research and the application of constructivist grounded theory. It describes the tenets of constructivist grounded theory and the data analysis procedure together with my reflexivity.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the analysis on how existential practitioners come to construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients. The research findings are presented under the following headings: attunement – an embodied constructed experience of contrasts, the experience of the other, the context, and the processes. Finally, the substantive theory of how existential practitioners construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients is presented.

Chapter 6 focuses on a discussion of the research findings and highlights how the research question and the objectives were answered. It then demonstrates how this research met the criteria of credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness to evaluate this constructivist grounded theory research.

Chapter 7 presents concluding thoughts and the implications of this research for the field of counselling psychology, existential psychotherapy, and the psychotherapy profession and clinical practice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the foundation for this research thesis. I introduced the research topic, the rationale for the study and a brief review of how the word attunement is used in this research. This research explores how existential practitioners feel they construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients. The words 'attunement' or 'being attuned' point towards an area of experiences that I was interested in exploring. I identified this phenomenon as 'how one makes sense of feeling that they are resonating with the inner world of the other'. Throughout this research, I will use the word attunement tor being attuned o refer to this area of experiences where applicable. I outlined the purpose of this research, the research question and the objectives.

This chapter identified the importance of providing a much-needed theory of attunement that is grounded in the participants' experience of attunement. Finally, this was followed by a summary of the potential contributions of this research to counselling psychology and psychotherapy. In the next chapter, I will provide the context for the research, and review how the literature explore the idea od a shared experience of the other.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

The previous chapter provided a foundation for the research of the topic under study. In this chapter, I will give a justification for why it is necessary to conduct a literature review for this study. I then move on to present the process of the literature review. Finally, in the literature review, I illustrate the need for further research on the area of attunement, research that is firmly grounded in how existential practitioners feel they construct a sense of being attuned to their clients.

The literature review on grounded theory

Classical grounded theorists argue that to be true to the research, theory development, and the effective use of the literature; a literature review should not occur at the beginning of the research, as it will influence the researcher and thus the developing theory (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2006) have come to reject the Classical grounded theorists' original pronouncement, and now recognise that the lack of familiarity with the literature is untenable.

Charmaz (2006) acknowledges delaying the literature review because "it encourages you to articulate your own ideas" (2006, p.165). Although that is fine in principle, Charmaz (2014) argues that in practice this could result in rehashing old empirical issues. A researcher typically holds extensive knowledge in his or her field of study before deciding on a research topic (Charmaz, 2014). Thus the researcher does not enter the research field as a *tabula rasa*[2].

Charmaz (2014) recognises that a student is often required to conduct a literature review prior to the study due to University requirements. The student needs

[2] Tabula rasa Latin [clean slate] - an absence of preconceived ideas.

to demonstrate a grasp of relevant work and identify the most significant ideas and findings (Charmaz, 2014). Conducting a literature review *pre-entry* to the field allows the student to be familiar with existing theories and research findings in the field in order to address an under-researched area in the literature and make sure that the research is unique (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014).

Charmaz (2014) postulates that a grounded theorist recognises the advantages of using pre-existing theories and findings in the substantive field and takes a critical and reflective stance towards it. It is important to "…remain alert as to whether, when, and to what extent earlier ideas and findings enter your research and, if so, subject them to rigorous scrutiny" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 307) "…without letting it stifle your creativity or strangle your theory" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 308).

I took Charmaz's (2014) lead, and carefully reviewed the literature by taking a critical and reflective stance towards it. I ensured this by questioning the reviewed literature and had my supervisors reviewing my material and providing me with constructive feedback.

The rationale for a literature review

I conducted a literature review *pre-entry* to the field as a requirement of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Middlesex University for a research proposal and a pilot study. The review addressed an under-researched area, and it ensured that this research was unique.

I conducted a series of literature searches and reviewed the literature at various times *pre-*, *intra-*, and *post-entry* to the field. The rationale behind this was based upon several reasons. Firstly, the literature review *pre-entry* to the field made it apparent that there was a paucity of a substantive theory explaining the non-verbal and embodied set of experiences this study intended to explore.

Secondly, the current literature on the area of attunement was dominated by quantitative studies and therefore did not accord this set of experiences the depth of investigation it seemed to require. A qualitatively based research could address this issue by providing an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study.

Thirdly, without a robust review of the literature, this research thesis might have provided yet another study that was not grounded in participants' non-verbal and embodied set of experiences. It was for these reasons that a *pre-entry* literature review was presented as part of this grounded theory research.

The review of the literature *intra-* and *post-entry* to the field allowed me to examine explicit and compelling connections between my grounded theory and earlier studies (Charmaz, 2014). The timing of these reviews was of importance and they were carried out only after the grounded theory of this study was partially or fully generated.

A literature review process

The aim of the literature review was to identify, critically appraise, and synthesise relevant studies in regards to this research conducted within the field of counselling psychology and psychotherapy. The literature available in the area of attunement highlighted a fragmented field of study that lacked an integrative overarching explanatory theory.

The *pre-entry* literature search conducted 2013 provided an understanding of the issues surrounding the different concepts on the area of 'how one makes sense of feeling that they are resonating with the inner world of the other' which I termed 'attunement' or 'being attuned'. I identified the research aim, which was to identify and explore how existential practitioners felt they constructed a sense of 'resonating' or 'being attuned' to their clients using the constructivist grounded theory approach.

An *intra-entry* literature review was undertaken in October 2015 using a variety of databases and keywords. At this time, the term 'attunement' was the participants' and my preferred term encompassing the research area. Searching covered a period from January 1950 to October 2015 excluding seminal textbooks. A thorough search of the literature was also undertaken using Google scholar. The website search was cross-referenced with relevant bibliographies to ensure completeness.

A final literature search was undertaken in April 2018 and I reviewed the most recent research related to the research topic that had been published since the previous literature review that was undertaken in October 2015. Searching covered a period from October 2015 to April 2018 excluding seminal textbooks.

The method used in identifying literature for this review included several searches where works relevant to the broad research topic were sourced and references cited in these works accessed. Primary source materials were accessed through major electronic databases such as EBSCO Psychology Behavioural Science Collection, BPS Journals, Science Direct, Academia, and Willey Journals. There was a major focus on literature on the area of intersubjectivity within counselling psychology and psychotherapy. However, the importance of other disciplines such as neuroscience was recognised as essential to informing this work. Keywords used in the searches included attunement, affect attunement, non-verbal communication, emotional connection, empathy, advanced empathy, presence, openness, intersubjectivity, embodiment, mirror neurons, countertransference, relational depth in combination with additional terms including counselling psychology, psychotherapy, existentialism, psychodynamic, person-centred therapy, psychoanalysis, attachment theory, neuroscience, developmental psychology.

The literature review

In this section, I review the literature in regards to the research topic and illustrate the need for further research in this particular area; research that is firmly grounded in how existential practitioners feel they come to construct a sense of being attuned to their clients. The purpose of this literature review is to provide the reader with a context for the research project and to identify an under-researched area.

To provide a focused, in-depth and informative analysis of the existing knowledge on the area of attunement, I have selected the literature most relevant to the current research. I have included literature that explores a set of experiences that come the closest to the phenomenon this study intends to explore. However, I opted to exclude concepts such as 'compassion' or 'sympathy'.

In the literature, the word 'compassion' is frequently referred to as an altruistic virtue, emotions or behaviours where the individual has the desire to alleviate the suffering of others (Blum, 1980). 'Sympathy' is an expression of sorrow or pity for an individual's distress (Clark, 2010). These two concepts do not reflect the set of experiences that this research intends to explore.

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the complex and varied range of notions regarding the practitioners' experience of the other as being shared on a nonverbal and embodied level. This chapter describes the various philosophical and research efforts intended to record, measure and explore this particular phenomenon. The intention of this chapter is to reflect the complexity and controversy surrounding this important, yet a highly debated psychotherapeutic phenomenon.

Introduction to the literature on the shared experience of the other

A central concern in studies on consciousness is the problem of the other's mind, which asks how we can justify our belief that the other has a mind much like

our own and how we can predict the other's state of mind, as our experience of the other shows that we often can (Hyslop, 2005).

Our own mind is the very core of our being; it is a private and intimate part of our inner sense of self. And yet our understanding of the social world around us and of other individuals depend on understanding what is on the other's mind. Dant (2014) postulated that we need to be able to understand someone else's mind for a social interaction to take place. According to Hyslop (2005) however, we can never directly access the other's mind. As such there exist two major opposing positions on the shared experience of the other's mind. One position insists on our capacity to 'directly experience' the other's mind; whereas the other position claims that there is an asymmetry between our experience of ourself and our experience of the other.

Research suggests that the very quality of the psychotherapeutic relationship is dependent on how counselling psychologists and psychotherapists interact with their clients (Horvath & Symonds, 1991; Lambert & Barley, 2001; Cooper, 2004). Whilst previous research tended to focus on the experience of the client (Van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005) the arrival of studies into intersubjectivity[3] has prompt a shift towards the psychotherapist (Jaenicke, 2007). However, according to Cooper (2004), for the past few decades research into the psychotherapeutic relationship has advanced slowly. There is, therefore, a need for research to explore the psychotherapeutic relationship from counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' perspective to gain a deeper understanding of its impact on the practitioners' sense of self and the impact the other might have on them.

[3] Intersubjectivity - the sharing of experience between two individuals.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore all the views within philosophy and psychology on the shared experience of the other's mind. This chapter explores the most relevant theories and research to this study that are found in the literature.

Existential perspectives

Existential philosophical ideas have had great consequences for how the relationship between the self and the other is understood. The phenomenologist Edmund Husserl situated his theory of intersubjectivity in his concept of empathy (Thompson, 2005). Husserl argued that there are three different modes of relating to an object: signitive, pictorial and perceptual. In the signitive act an object is talked about but never seen, in the pictorial act the object is seen as a representation, a detailed drawing. The perceptual act is the only actual perception in which the object is directly perceived. The perceptual act presents the object in its bodily presence, which Husserl termed in 'propria persona' (Zahavi, 2011, p. 227).

According to Husserl when the other speaks it credits us with the percepts of the other's inner experiences, we 'see' the other's pain. When we perceive the other to voice certain inner experiences, we are able to empathise with the other because we have had these inner experiences ourselves (Zahavi, 2011). We only have an outer not an inner perception of the other's experiences. Although the body of the other is given to us in propria persona, the inner experience of the other can never be directly accessed. Instead, the inner experience of the other is 'appresented' through 'apperceptions' (Zahavi, 2011, p. 227). Thus Husserl thought that our perception of the other, the body and bodily expressions, allows us to empathically co-perceive the other's inner experience but we can never really know the other's inner experience (Zahavi, 2011).

Husserl's student Edith Stein (1989) set about expanding Husserl's notion of empathy. Stein (1989) argued that empathy is an intentional state in which the other's mental states are 'given' to us. In an empathic experience, we are presented with, not mere bodies in motions, but with persons who display different emotional states such as anger, joy, or sadness. The other is, therefore, 'given' as 'embodied with lived experiences', as an 'I'. We see the other as a person not as another physical object in the world. So we do not infer that the other exists but rather we know the other exists on the basis that the other is being 'given' to us. Similar to Husserl, Stein (1989) asserted that our awareness of the other's pain derives from our empathic recognition of the same kind of pain experienced within ourselves. Individuals incapable of empathy or have a limited capacity for it cannot be empathic towards the other because they are not in touch with their own emotions such as their pain (Thompson, 2005).

Husserl and Stein believed that there was an asymmetry between our experience of ourselves and our experience of the other and they were challenged by this idea as they were faced with another problem namely solipsism[4].

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) challenges Husserl's assumption that we are independent and autonomous beings and the self is all that can be known to exist, proposing instead, that we are fundamentally and inextricably intertwined with the other. According to Merleau-Ponty, to perceive a human body in action is to perceive, directly, a person (Dant, 2014). Merleau-Ponty (1962) wrote: "it is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive 'things' " (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.216).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) considered subjectivity to arise from the space in-

[4] Solipsism – the view or theory that the self is all that can be known to exist.

between the different bodies of experience. He saw our embodied consciousness as the in-between; it is neither in us nor out in the world of objects (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The space in-between suggests that meaning arises from the intertwining of the different bodies, rather than one particular subject (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) argued that we gradually discover ourselves through the other. He suggested that our primordial experiences develop out of our interaction with the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). We exist in the world as embodied subjects constantly in interaction with other embodied subjects, we are intertwined with one another and it is through our bodies and in interaction with others that we come to perceive and understand the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Thus we are embodied subjectivities. This challenges the notion that we are independent and separate beings, as laid out by Husserl and Stein. Our subjectivity is not isolated within itself, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes, but rather exists within our relation to the world.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) also disagreed with Husserl and Stein's notion of individuals being seen as separate beings that are isolated from the world. He argued that human beings are social beings embedded in a social context (Sartre, 1943). Sartre (1943) took the view that the other is needed for us to acquire a sense of ourselves as individuals.

In order to understand Sartre's (1943) interpersonal dimension of being, an introduction to his two concepts of the in-itself and the for-itself needs to be reviewed. According to Sartre (1943), the in-itself refers to objects in the external world and the beings that are unaware of themselves and lack the ability to change for example a tree. The for-itself is the opposite of the in-itself; being for-itself is conscious of its own consciousness but lacking in any definite nature, for example, human beings.

In addition to the primary ontological dimensions of being the in-itself and the for-itself, Sartre employs the term being-for-others to describe the interpersonal dimension of being (Sartre, 1943). Being-for-others is one's being as it exists in the consciousness of the other (Sartre, 1943). We constantly experience how we see ourselves through the gaze of the other, even in the physical absence of the other. However, we cannot access or control the subjectivity of the other; the other constitutes us in a particular way based on how our being in the world is manifested in the other's subjectivity. According to Sartre (1943), it is vital to distinguish between the other, which we perceive, and the other that perceives us. Our encounter with the other is an encounter in which the other perceives and objectifies us.

We exist in the world as conscious beings together with other conscious beings and like Merleau-Ponty (1962), Sartre (1943) believed that we are embodied consciousnesses. Sartre (1943) asserted that it is through the gaze of the other that we become aware of our bodies as we experience it, as an entirely subjective entity, and has in effect an objective side to it situated in a world that is not purely ours.

The gaze of the other consequently makes us become aware of ourselves as an object and allows us to become self-reflective (Sartre, 1943). In the gaze of the other, our consciousness moves away from being pre-reflective and views itself as an object fixed in space and time (Sartre, 1943). Sartre (1943) argued that this is the very point when the other becomes a mediator between our 'I' and 'me'. The other's gaze allows us to achieve a sense of objectivity regarding ourselves. Thus for Sartre (1943), the self can only be conceived in relation to the other; prior to the existence of the other, the self is meaningless.

Martin Buber (1958) described his concept of intersubjectivity as individuals

being two-folded in their attitude towards the world. He argued that there are two types of intersubjectivity: actually being with the other (I-thou), and appearing to the other (I-it), where the latter is more concerned about what the other might think of oneself. Buber (1958) stressed that the I-it relationship is, in fact, a relationship with ourself engaged in a monologue, whereas the I-thou uses our whole being. Buber (1958) described the I-thou relationship as a 'genuine dialogue', no matter whether it is spoken or unspoken, where we are open and present to the other with the intention to establish an authentic shared relation with the other.

Similar to Sartre (1943), Buber (1958) also asserted that the 'I' came to existence through experience and relation, and the 'I' cannot develop without being in relation to the other. In this way, our self-existence is seen as being of a dialogical nature essentially made up of our encounter with the other (Buber, 1958).

Interestingly, in Buber's (1965) later writings, however, he seemed to take a more asymmetric position on intersubjectivity. Buber (1965) argued that the 'imagining the real' is what we engage in when we imagine the other as a unique being from the other's perspective as him/herself. He used the term 'imagining the real' to describe what it takes to fully put oneself "into the life of the other" (Buber, 1965, p. 81). Buber (1965) postulated that this imagining is as close as we can get to the other's sense of being in the world. Thus this view of intersubjectivity contradicts Buber's (1965) previous idea of the I-Thou relationship as being a shared experience between the self and the other.

Thompson (2005) asserts that these philosophical ideas presented above have a direct consequence for how we determine the relationship between the self and the other. This is particularly applicable to existential practitioners' psychotherapeutic work and holds important implications for how practitioners are to be understood in

the psychotherapeutic relationship. Regardless of what existential philosophical position we choose to take, we need to ask important questions concerning the nature of the interaction between the practitioners and their client and what impact both might have on one another.

The existential literature has followed a philosophical method of introspection, reflection and thought to explore a shared experience of the other and it, therefore, cannot offer us experimentally based evidence for its philosophical ideas (Dant, 2014). This is in radical contrast to the methods used by cognitive psychologists who have devised social behavioural experiments to test their hypotheses (Dant, 2014) and consequently can provide us with evidence-based findings of a shared experience of the other.

Cognitive behavioural perspectives

Discussions and theories of intersubjectivity are prominent in contemporary psychology. The major theories of intersubjectivity are the theory-theory and the simulation theory. These two psychological theories hold an asymmetric view of a shared experience of the other. This stands in stark contrast to Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre's (1943) positions on intersubjectivity, which take a view of a direct experience of the other.

The theory-theory asserts that an individual holds an everyday understanding of human psychology or folk psychology to make inferences about another's inner state such as their beliefs, emotions and desires (Ratcliffe, 2006). The information about the other is used to understand and predict the other's intentions and behaviours (Ratcliffe, 2006). Folk psychology rests upon knowledge of a theory, which individuals unconsciously use throughout their day (Gopnik, 2012). One example of

such folk psychology theory is ‘a person that breaks a limb will feel pain’. Folk psychology theories are therefore seen to have causal and explanatory laws (Gopnik, 2012).

The theory-theory is closely related to the theory of mind (ToM). ToM is a child’s ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others and to understand that others have beliefs, intentions, and desires that differ from one’s own (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). Children and adults with autism struggle to attribute mental states to other and understand other’s beliefs, attitudes and emotions (Dant, 2014).

The simulation theory, on the other hand, refutes that our understanding of the other comes from a folk psychological theory. Instead, the simulation theory, similar to Buber’s (1965) idea of imagining real, postulates that individuals use their own mental apparatus to understand the other’s mind by ‘putting him/herself into’ the other’s shoes and imaginatively occupy the other’s point of view (Gallese & Goldman, 1998). The simulation theory suggests that individuals try to simulate the other’s thought processes and arrive at a decision, which is then attributed to the other (Gallese & Goldman, 1998).

An important question that needs to be raised is whether these ‘pretend states’ are sufficiently similar to what the other is experiencing? Goldman (1995) argued that these pretend states are similar to the other’s experience and give an example of research exploring ‘pretence-generated motor instructions’. It is common knowledge amongst sports psychologists that athletes can enhance their performance by mere mental rehearsal (Goldman, 2006). Yue and Cole (1992) compared participants that actually trained with participants who generated appropriate motor imagery. They found that training led to an increase of 30% in maximal force while motor imagery

led to 22%. Although not as much as real training, the finding of this study demonstrated that motor imagery has a great impact on strength. Goldman (2006) concluded that pretence could produce close facsimiles of natural-generated states.

Pretence-generated motor instructions do demonstrate the ability of our minds to affect our bodies and how mind and body are intimately interlinked. However, pretence-generated motor instructions cannot imply *knowing* that our pretend states are similar to that of the other.

The theory of emotional contagion challenges the theory-theory and the simulation theory and instead states that we are able to experience the other's inner state by mimicking the other's expression. Emotional contagion is the idea that describes an individual's tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize postures, vocalisations, and movements with those of another (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1993). Rapson (1993) argued that individuals are able to feel themselves into the other by tracking the expressive behaviour and emotions of the other. In this way, people are able to gain information about the other's emotional state (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1993). Thus the notion of emotional contagion is perceived as automatically mimicking the other's expression and thereby 'catching' the other's emotional state.

If we had to mimic the other's facial expression to access the other's inner experiences, how might that look like within a psychotherapeutic context? Gallese, Eagle and Migone (2005) argued that an illustration of emotional contagion as a 'shared experience' of the other's mind would be that if the client cries then the psychotherapist would mimic that and cry too. In a psychotherapeutic context, such a response might not be very helpful for the client. It raises questions for practitioners around how and when it is appropriate to disclose emotions and where to set the boundaries between the practitioners and their client.

Person-centred perspectives

The cognitive behavioural perspectives of the mind seem to reduce the mind to the physical organ of the brain (Dant, 2014) whereas the person-centred perspectives take the whole person into account (Rogers, 1980). Person-centred therapy is most prominently portrayed in the work by Carl Rogers. This therapeutic approach focuses on the client as a whole and the presence of the psychotherapist as a person in the therapeutic relationship (Rogers, 1980). Central to person-centred therapy is the application of three essential conditions required for therapeutic change, which are unconditional positive regards, congruence, and empathic understanding (Rogers, 2007).

Carl Rogers' (1980) theory of empathy is partly based on the phenomenological philosophy in which an individual's actions are determined by how the individual perceives the world. Advance empathy differs from a basic empathic response in that it is not simply a reflection of what the client has just expressed. Instead, advance empathy reflects what is outside the client's awareness (Hough, 2006). It is about picking up what the client might be hinting at or stating in a confused way but it is not an interpretation as practice by psychoanalytical psychotherapists (Hough, 2006).

Rogers (1980) defined advanced empathy as one aspect of relational depth and described advanced empathy as "entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever, that he or she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making

judgments, sensing meanings of which he or she is scarcely aware" (Rogers, 1980, p.142).

Hough (2014) expanded Rogers' (1980) notion of advanced empathy and argued that it is "a deeper, more intuitive awareness of another person's experience" (Hough, 2014, p.147). In the psychotherapeutic encounter, advanced empathy is effective in understanding the client's unexpressed difficulties (Hough, 2014). Thus advanced empathy means to share the clients' experience with the clients that will assist them to move on by seeing their issues more clearly (Hough, 2014).

Similarly to Rogers' (1980) notion of advance empathy, Heinz Kohut (1959) described empathy from a psychoanalytical perspective as "the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of the other" (Kohut, 1959, p. 82). According to Kohut (1959) though, it is only through introspection into the psychotherapist's own experience, that the psychotherapist can understand what it is like for the other. Thus Kohut (1980) believed empathy to be a form of understanding and that the process could be both accurate and inaccurate as a direct consequence of the psychotherapist's engagement in introspection.

Rogers' (1980) view of advanced empathy advocates for practitioners to connect with their clients on a profoundly deep, embodied and intuitive level where they carefully move to sense the clients' unspoken difficulties or concerns. This is significant because the idea of advance empathy suggests that there is a much deeper level of connecting to the client within the psychotherapeutic relationship. It is important for practitioners to gain a deeper understanding of this level of relating because it might assist them in understanding their clients better and consequently improve their clinical practice.

Rogers' (1980) position on intersubjectivity stands in stark contrast to the psychological theories, which take an asymmetric view of the experience of the other. Instead, Rogers' (1980) notion of advanced empathy is closely related to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) idea of a shared experience of the other as both views express a direct experience of the other. However, where Merleau-Ponty (1962) provides a philosophical viewpoint of intersubjectivity, Rogers' (1980) intersubjectivity brings his idea of empathy into a psychotherapeutic context and explores the relationship between the psychotherapist and the client with an emphasis on the psychotherapists' role in the psychotherapeutic encounter.

Additionally, advance empathy, in contrast to the existential philosophy on intersubjectivity, suggests a more 'active' attempt by the psychotherapist to step out of the self to experience the other's inner state. Rogers' (1980) concept of advance empathy is therefore conceptualised slightly different from existential philosophy and it is more action-oriented. This suggests that the psychotherapists can actively construct this deeper connection with their client. It implies further that there might be certain conditions in which psychotherapists can construct such a profound and deep connection with their clients. Advance empathy gives us an insight into this deeper way of connecting to the client but falls short in explaining how psychotherapists can achieve such a connection with their clients.

Psychoanalytical perspectives

In psychoanalysis, George Atwood and Robert Stolorow were the first to introduce the idea of intersubjectivity, which was developed in response to the classical psychoanalytical view of the isolated mind (Orange, Atwood & Stolorow, 1997). The classical psychoanalytical theorists believed that the mind was isolated

and the analyst was seen as a neutral and detached observer in the psychotherapeutic encounter (Orange, Atwood & Stolorow, 1997). The development of an intersubjective view introduced a relational based understanding of the psychotherapeutic encounter to the psychoanalytical theory. This intersubjective understanding has also influenced how child development is viewed and how it affects individuals' adult life (Orange, Atwood & Stolorow, 1997).

Daniel Stern (1985) situated his theory of intersubjectivity in his concept of affect attunement and described it to be the caregiver's sharing of the inner state of the infant. He defined attunement as how caregivers are able to 'read' the feeling state of the infant. The caregiver acts out a variety of behaviours that relate to the feeling state of the infant and the infant interprets the caregiver's behaviour as relevant to his own internal experience (Stern, 1985).

Stern (1985) identified several specific qualities of affect attunement. He found that some form of 'matching' was going on where the parent was able to 'read' the feeling state of the infant from the infant's overt behaviour. This 'matching' was often cross-modal, that is, the mother matched her infant by using another channel or modality that differed from the infant's overt behaviour (Stern, 1985).

Stern (1985) distinguished between 'modal qualities', which were specific forms of the behaviours, which included postural, facial, gestural and vocal, and 'amodal qualities', which were intensity, time and shape. He argued that in order for a 'matching' in affect attunement to occur between different modalities the two expressions needed to share a 'common currency' that permitted them to be transferable from one to the other (Stern, 1985).

Stern (1985) identified the 'common currency' as amodal qualities, which were intensity, time and shape. Intensity was an amodal quality that was one of the

most frequently matched qualities. The matching occurred most often between the intensity of an infant's body movement and the intensity of the mother's vocal expression. Time was the temporal quality of the behaviour and that was the second most commonly matched quality in performing affect attunement. Stern (1985) described shape as "the transfer of the shape of a static object from the tactile mode to the visual mode" (Stern, 1985, p. 153). An example would be an infant, facing his mother, shakes his rattle up and down and the mother begins to nod her head up and down too, matching her son's arm motions (Stern, 1985).

Stern (1985) makes the case that amodal perception plays a central role in affect attunement because the infant and the caregiver can perceive and engage in the amodal qualities of intensity, time and shape. As such affect attunement is more than a reciprocated response from the caregiver. For example, if the caregiver observes the infant crying, she or he does not also cry, which would reflect 'emotional contagion' rather than affect attunement (Gallese, Eagle & Migone, 2005). Affect attunement, then, is the performance of behaviours that express the quality of feelings of a 'shared affect state' without imitating the exact behavioural expression of that inner state (Stern, 1985).

The amodal qualities of intensity and time relate to another key aspect of affect attunement, which Stern (1985) termed 'vitality affects'. The vitality affects are the affects of attunement and are present continuously in the background of any behaviour and are described as the dynamic, kinetic qualities of feelings (Ammaniti & Ferrari, 2013). Stern (1985) described the vitality affects as an infant's vital feelings that are connected to the infant's somatic states. Thus the vitality affects are subtle moment-to-moment micro affects that qualitatively shift in energy, rhythm, feeling and arousal (Stern, 1985).

The caregiver is able to sense the vitality affects by the subtle and fluctuating details of body postures, contour and speed of movements, changes in muscle tone, and the intensity, time and shape of vocalisations (Stern, 2004). Stern (2010) explained that the infant's 'vital feelings' occur within the infant's psychobiological rhythms of the body and arise from the relationship with the caregiver. So when the caregiver's caring intervention leads to the infant's needs being satisfied, the infant experiences a feeling of vitality (Ammaniti & Ferrari, 2013). According to Ammaniti and Ferrari (2013), the experience of feeling vitality "confirms a personal integration of self" (Ammaniti & Ferrari, 2013, p. 368).

Stern's (2010) concept of the vitality affects has been critiqued by Koppe and colleagues (2008) because the concept has gone through extensive changes throughout the years, and these different versions of the concept make it difficult to fully understand it. The vitality affects are defined in relation to many different developmental areas such as neuropsychological, physical, interactional and the consciousness. The concept is "extended to so many areas that it tends towards disintegration" (Koppe et al., 2008, p. 169)[5].

Stern (1985) argued that affect attunement was significant because it contributes to the very quality of the relationship between mothers and their infants (Stern, 1985). The quality of early social interactions is essential for the infants' social and cognitive development (Ammaniti & Ferrari, 2013). In the absence of affect attunement, for example, infants are unable to learn how to self-regulate their emotions such as seen in the case of clinically depressed mothers who are disengaged

[5] For a more detailed discussion on the topic see: Koppe, S., Harder, S., Vaever, E. (2008). Vitality affects. International forum of psychoanalysis. 17:169-179.

in their interactions with their infants (Ammaniti & Ferrari, 2013). Stern (2002) postulated that in experiencing affect attunement an infant was able to learn that experiences and emotions could be shared with another individual and as such the experiences were therefore not merely restricted to the infant (Stern, 2002).

Stern (1985) also argued that affect attunement plays an important part in an infants development of affectivity and in their sense of self. Mothers who were sensitive to their infant's affective and attentive rhythms were able to adjust to their infant's behaviours and bring the infant to a more organised state (Stern, 1985). However, if mothers failed to provide optimal levels of stimulation and modulation as the infants' arousal level heightened, the infants showed more gaze aversion and disruptive synchronicity in the interaction with their mothers (Stern, 1985). The caregivers' ability to understand infants' internal state is, therefore, the vehicle whereby the caregivers' attachment organisation becomes highly relevant to the infants' sense of self and the infants' relationships to others (Fonagy et al., 2002).

Stern (1985) studied affect attunement primarily by observing mothers interact with their babies. In one such study, Stern (1985) video recorded ten mother-infant dyads and in those recordings noted 151 affect displays. He rated each affect display as comments, imitations or affect attunement. The mothers were shown the video recordings with an emphasis on the displayed affects and asked why they had responded in that particular way to their infants. Their responses indicated that they were largely unaware of why they responded to their infants in the way they did (Stern, 1985). Stern (1985) believed the reason for that was because affect attunement occurred rapidly and largely out of our awareness. The mothers described their interaction and response towards their infants as 'to be with', 'to join in', and 'to share' (Stern, 1985, p. 148).

Stern (1985) conducted another study in which the mother was told to misattune to her infant by under-responding to the infant's behaviour. The mother was instructed to do exactly the same as previously, and approached her playing animated infant from behind, except that now the mother was to misattune to her infant by being less excited than what the infant appeared to be. When the mother jiggled her infant's leg more slowly and less intense, the infant stopped playing and turned around to look at the mother (Stern, 1985).

Stern (1985) concluded that infants only reacted strongly when misattunement occurred, and often responded as if nothing had happened when the mothers correctly attuned to their infants. Although misattunement might be perceived as being 'disruptive' to the infant there are times when the mother has to modify her intensity of affect attunement and 'misattune' to her infant. One example of misattunement is when the infant displays distress and the mother both validates the infant's expression but also attempts to calm the infant down (Osofsky & Eberhart-Wright, 1998).

Stern's (1985) mother-infant research is of an observational nature. Although observational research is good for when observing actual situations, the researcher can only observe the behaviours of the participant and then provide an interpretation of what that behaviour might mean (Porta, 2008). In mother-infant research where the infant is non-verbal, observational research might be a good method to use to understand the behavioural exchange between a mother and her infant but that is the only information an observational inquiry can provide us with. Thus observational research can therefore not reveal anything about what a particular action might mean to the participant.

Stern's (1985) notion of affect attunement is closely related to Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Rogers' (1980) positions on intersubjectivity where a shared experience is

seen as a direct experience of the other's inner world. Yet there is an important difference between Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Rogers' (1980) theoretical constructs and Stern's (1985) notion on intersubjectivity; Stern's (1985) ideas are based exclusively on mother and infant research and not adult research. This is significant because it raises questions around whether Stern's (1985) theoretical construct is applicable to adults in a psychotherapeutic context. Despite this crucial issue, Stern's (1985) theoretical construct has been the starting point for scholars when exploring this topic within an adult psychotherapeutic setting. The subsequent section explores the area of attunement within an adult psychotherapeutic setting.

Richard Erskine (1998) described attunement as a process of unity of interpersonal contact. He described attunement as a two-part process that begins with empathy where the psychotherapist is sensitive to and able to identify with the client's sensations, needs or feelings. The final part of the process involves the communication of that sensitivity to the client (Erskine, 1998).

Erskine defined attunement as "…a kinesthetic and emotional sensing of others, knowing their rhythm, affect and experience by metaphorically being in their skin, and going beyond empathy to create a two-person experience of unbroken feeling connectedness by providing a reciprocal affect and resonating response" (Erskine, 1998, p. 236). According to Erskine (1998) attunement is facilitated by the psychotherapists' ability de-centre from their experiences and the capacity to notice and anticipate their behaviours on the client.

In contrast to Erskine (1998), Daniel Siegel (2007) described attunement as how one person focuses attention on the internal world of another and this focus on the mind enables two people to 'feel felt' by each other (Siegel, 2007, p. 7). Siegel (2007) argued that when caregiver and child are attuned, the child is able to 'feel felt'

by the caregiver and experience a sense of stability in the present moment. When attuned, the caregiver is able to 'see' the child's internal world with clarity and the caregiver comes to resonate with the child's inner state (Siegel 2007).

According to Siegel (2007), there are two ways to attune to the mind of the other. When one engages with the other there is a mutual focus of awareness on the elements of the other's mind, which becomes 'the shared centre hub' of one's mind (Siegel, 2007, p. 290). Once 'joining' evolves, both individuals begin to resonate with each other's states where both 'feel felt' by each other. Siegel (2007) termed this experience; the Internal State of the Other (ISO) in which each individual senses their embodiment of one's mind clearly in the expressions of the other. Another way in which to attune to the mind of the other is by a narrative of the other. When meeting the other, one takes in the experiences of the other, which creates a story in our mind about the other (Siegel, 2007). Siegel (2007) argued that we have a "Narrative Of The Other inside us" (NOTO) (Siegel, 2007, p. 290). Siegel (2007) concluded that the psychotherapist has the capacity to embed the client in him/herself in the present within ISOs and across time with NOTOs, thus the client comes to 'feel felt' and attuned to the psychotherapist (Siegel, 2007, p. 290).

Similar to the existential perspectives, Erskine (1998) and Siegel (2007) based their theoretical notions on introspection, reflection and thought and therefore cannot produce any empirical evidence for their ideas on intersubjectivity. However, Seikkula and colleagues (2015) researched attunement from a quantitative perspective and their findings are therefore based on a systematic empirical investigation.

Seikkula and colleagues (2015) explored, in a case study, how two psychotherapists and a couple attuned themselves to each other with their entire bodies. In all sessions, the psychotherapists and the couple were video recorded, and

in two of the sessions, autonomic nervous system (ANS) measurements were included. The ANS measuring equipment covered skin conductance, respiration and heart rate of all four participants.

In this study, attunement was measured based on the ANS outcome and whether the psychotherapists and their clients were physically synchronised with each other. Each participant was thereafter interviewed and asked about four video extracts where the ANS outcome demonstrated a high synchronicity (Seikkula & colleagues, 2015). Seikkula and colleagues (2015) found that mutual attunement involved the ANS synchronised with participants' movements and facial expression. The researchers concluded that synchrony can often be dyadic or triadic and it changes from moment to moment (Seikkula & colleagues, 2015).

Although Seikkula and colleagues (2015) can provide empirical evidence for their research findings their research is not entirely convincing in terms of how they researched attunement. The researchers assume that the experience of attunement manifests itself as two individuals physically being synchronised with each other and that this can be measured through the ANS. There are difficulties with such an assumption because Seikkula and colleagues (2015) cannot verify if, in the moment of being highly synchronised, participants felt attuned to each other as this was only asked after the experience of attunement had taken place.

In contrast to Stern's (1985) theoretical construct, which describes affect attunement as a form of matching between two different modalities, Seikkula and colleagues (2015) described their findings as a form of matching between the same modality such as through movements or facial expressions. In the light of Seikkula and colleagues' (2015) study, this shows that matching behaviours are different between the mother and child compared to those of adults in a psychotherapeutic

context. Seikkula and colleagues' (2015) findings imply that Stern's (1980) theoretical construct might not be applicable to adults in a psychotherapeutic context. Thus there is a need for the development of a theory that qualitatively explores adults' subjective experience of intersubjectivity in a psychotherapeutic context that currently is absent from the literature.

Sigmund Freud was the first who introduced the idea of transference and countertransference. In a psychotherapeutic context, transference refers to redirection of the patient's feelings for a significant other to the psychotherapist (Rycroft, 1995). This definition covers two components of transference: that it is a projection of an early developmental relationship and that this relationship is being repeated with the psychoanalyst standing in for a figure from the patient's past (Rycroft, 1995).

Countertransference, on the other hand, is a redirection of the psychotherapist's feelings towards a patient (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1998). The concept of countertransference is more relevant to this literature review than transference because it examines the psychotherapist's subjective experience towards the client. This review will, therefore, focus on the notion of countertransference.

In the early days of psychoanalysis, Freud discounted the analyst's ideas, beliefs and feelings towards a patient as having little or no relevance to the psychotherapeutic encounter (Rycroft, 1995). However, Kohut (1959) recognised the importance of the analyst in the psychotherapeutic encounter and developed intersubjective theories such as empathy that placed the analyst at the heart of the encounter. Thus, modern psychoanalysis sees the psychotherapeutic encounter as an intersubjective interaction between the analyst and the patient.

There is a growing consensus around the importance to have a distinction between personal countertransference, which has to do with the psychotherapists, and

diagnostic countertransference, which indicates something about the client (Casement, 1990). This distinction is significant because psychotherapists must distinguish between what their own reactions to the client are telling them about the client's psychology and if their reactions to the client are merely an expression of their own psychology. Countertransference can, therefore, be a useful therapeutic tool to uncover the meaning behind the interpersonal encounter as long as practitioners are aware of what they bring into the encounter (Casement, 1990).

The idea of countertransference stands in stark contrast to Stern's (1980) affect attunement in that it is not about a form of matching between different modalities but about the psychotherapist's own experience and reactions to the client. Gomez (2003) argued that the psychotherapist's interpretations can only arrive through attunement to the patient and the patient's associations, and these interpretations can only be confirmed when they 'click' in the patient's own cognitive and emotional recognition. The psychotherapist, therefore, needs to verbally check if their interpretations resonate with the client, and that is not a part of Stern's (1980) construct, which is only based on a non-verbal exchange between the mother and the child. How attunement in this context is related to the process of countertransference, Gomez (2003) fails to describe further.

Neuroscientific research

There have been interesting developments in regards to neuroscience. For years, researchers in the field of neuroscience have tried to understand how we come to form an understanding of the other's inner world and how our brains are shaped by our interpersonal experiences. In this section, the results of such an inquiry will be explored.

Gallese (2006a) suggested that not only do we think about the content of someone else's mind as an abstract representation but we are also able to 'directly sense' the performed actions by others, and the emotions and sensations others experience. According to Gallese (2006), we can 'directly sense' the other through the application of what neuroscientists have termed the 'mirror neurons system'.

Mirror neurons are a specialised class of neurons that fire both when an individual act and when the individual observes the same act performed by the other (Iacoboni et al., 2005). The neurons 'mirror' the behaviour of the other, as though the observer was acting. Thus the mirror neurons translate motor actions that the individual observes in others into internal representations in the observer's brain, facilitating understanding of the other individual's actions (Iacoboni et al., 2005). These neurons are found in the premotor cortex and inferior parietal cortex (Reiss, 2011). The mirror neuron system mediates between the personal experiential knowledge about the body and simultaneously the implicit certainties held about others (Gallese, 2001; 2003, 2005a,b). Thus Gallese (2006) asserted that there is an experiential dimension to interpersonal relationships.

Gallese, Eagle and Migone (2005) argued that what makes intentional attunement as they termed it possible, and what constitutes the biological basis for intentional attunement is the existence of a mirror neural system, more specifically the mirror neurons. Gallese (2005b) described intentional attunement as a process where the intentional behaviour of the other produces a specific phenomenal state within us. According to Gallese (2005b), this phenomenal state "generates a peculiar quality of familiarity with other individuals, produced by the collapse of the other's intentions into the observer's ones" (Gallese, 2005b, p. 43.) According to Gallese (2006),

several empirical studies have found the mirror neural effect in emotional understanding and sensations of the other, which are presented below.

In a functional magnetic imaging (fMRI) study the neural mechanism to understand the emotions of others were examined. Wicker and colleagues (2003) had participants inhaling odorants, which produced a strong feeling of disgust. The participants then observed a video clip showing emotional facial expressions of disgust. Wicker and colleagues (2003) found that observing such faces with feelings of disgust activated the same sites in the anterior insula and the anterior cingulate cortex in participants as when they inhaled the odorants. Wicker and colleagues (2003) argued that these findings suggest, at least for disgust, that an individual's experience of a given emotion is underpinned by the activity of a shared neural substrate.

Gallese, Eagle and Migone (2005) suggested further that "this double pattern of activation of the same somatosensory-related brain regions suggests that our capacity to experience and directly understand the tactile experience of others could be mediated by embodied simulation, that is, by the externally triggered activation of some of the same neural networks underpinning our own tactile sensations" (Gallese, Eagle & Migone, 2005, p. 141). If the anterior insula is damaged it impairs both the capacity to experience disgust and recognise it in others (Gallese, 2005b).

In a research looking at couples, the female partners received a neutral signal that indicated that their partners were receiving painful electric shocks to their hands (Singer et al., 2004). By merely observing their partners receiving electrical shocks to their hands resulted in the activation of a well-defined pain matrix in the female partners' brains. According to Singer and colleagues (2004), this research suggests

that when people say, ‘I feel your pain,’ it is not just a figure of speech. Thus we do not just ‘see’ an action, an emotion or a sensation we ‘feel’ it (Singer et al., 2004). According to Keysers and colleagues (2004), these findings suggest that: “the experience of being touched on one’s body activates the same neural networks activated by observing the body of someone else being touched” (Keysers et al., 2004, p. 10).

Gallese (2006) argued that the above studies demonstrate how we come to form an understanding of the other’s inner world. The underlying mechanism for intentional attunement is an embodied simulation of the mirror neuron system. Although many scientists have expressed excitement about the discovery of the mirror neuron system, there are those who have expressed doubts about the existence of such a system.

According to Dinstein and colleagues (2008) the current neurophysiological experiments, which demonstrate the existence of a mirror neuron system, are exclusively based on research conducted on monkeys. During the past ten years, several studies have used different techniques in an attempt to identify a human mirror neuron system (Dinstein et al., 2008). A key issue with these studies is that they are unable to measure exclusively mirror neuron activity. For instance, the results of the studies measuring passive movement observation experiments, like the studies presented above by Wicker and colleagues (2003) and Singer and colleagues (2004), reveal many cortical areas that exhibit larger fMRI responses during observation including areas that are not believed to include the activity of mirror neurons such as the primary visual cortex (Dinstein et al., 2008). Dinstein and colleagues (2008) argued that this demonstrates that there are many other neurons, in addition to the

mirror neurons, in various cortical areas that increase their response during the experimental task. How then can we know if the fMRI response exhibited by a specific brain area is generated by the activity of the mirror neurons or the activity of any of the other cortical areas (Dinstein et al., 2008)? A critical issue with the studies presented above is that they have simply disregarded the activity in all other cortical areas except for the ventral premotor and the anterior intraparietal sulcus, because these two areas are assumed to be homologous to the areas of a monkey, the F5 and the PF/IPL, and are therefore expected to contain mirror neurons (Dinstein et al., 2008).

Despite this critic and the uncertainty surrounding the mirror neuron system researchers such as Siegel (2007) argues that Gallese's (2006) notion of the mirror neuron system is the neurological underpinning for attunement. According to Siegel (2007), the idea of embodied simulation of the mirror neuron system can be seen in how "our neural processes integrate what we perceive with our body's priming for action and emotion" (Siegel, 2007, p. 290). Consequently, the difficulty to truly know how to measure the mirror neuron system in humans has left us with an ambiguity surrounding the mirror neuron system. It, therefore, makes it difficult to draw any conclusions around whether the mirror neurons are directly and exclusively responsible for, on a neurological level, a shared experience of the other.

The counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' self

According to Beutler and colleagues (2004), most psychotherapy research over the last two decades has been based on the medical model, which is concerned with the measurement of empirically verifiable or objectively observable phenomena. Psychotherapy research has, therefore, primarily been focused on the effectiveness

and the practical application of treatment models (Beutler et al., 2004). As such research evidence has been gathered without the inclusion of the psychotherapists' subjectivity, which might result in the self being overlooked (Blair, 2010). Thus research exploring counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' self qualitatively is relatively sparse and most of the studies have been carried out on the area of social work (Blair, 2010). Nonetheless, one such study can be found in a psychotherapeutic context, which is presented in the subsequent section.

Omylinska-Thurston and James (2011) explored the therapist's use of self from a person-centred perspective. The aim of the study was to understand the processes within congruence and how the therapists' inner experiences could give insight into the client's inner world. This was defined as 'the therapist processing and communicating her inner experience of the client in a genuine and authentic way' (Klein et al., 2002, p. 195). Seven person-centred therapists were asked about how they processed and used a strong feeling, thought or sensation that they experienced with their clients. Using grounded theory the researcher described four processes involved in congruence: receiving, processing, expressing and confirming. Omylinska-Thurston and James (2011) argued that to be able to 'use the self' in the therapeutic relationship the therapist need to be present and 'tuned-in' internally to create conditions for receiving and processing thoughts and feelings from the client. The therapist must then decide how to appropriately use and express their internal experiences in response to the client. Any self-disclosure can be assessed for its effectiveness by paying close attention to the changes that occur in the client. This required the therapists to have a high level of self-awareness in order to not misuse power in the therapeutic relationship (Omylinska-Thurston & James, 2011).

This study by Omylinska-Thurston and James (2011) is significant because it contributes to our understanding of the process of the self in relation to the other within a psychotherapeutic context and specifically within the process of disclosure. Although the Omylinska-Thurston and James (2011) only interviewed psychotherapists, it is one of the few articles published in a Counselling psychology journal, which qualitatively explores an aspect of the therapist's self in relation to the psychotherapeutic process.

Inevitably, several crucial questions are left unanswered by Omylinska-Thurston and James' (2011) study. Their study falls short as to describe how the process of 'tuning in' might look like and its potential underlying processes. Furthermore, Omylinska-Thurston and James' (2011) study does not explain what conditions the therapist need to create to 'receive' the client's feeling state. The study does, however, unlike the theory on emotional contagion, explore the issues around disclosure and the importance for therapists to be mindful of when to disclose by considering the appropriate time and the client's vulnerability (Omylinska-Thurston & James, 2011). Thus Omylinska-Thurston and James' (2011) gives us a broader understanding of the processes involved in congruence but we are left with questions around how these processes might look like and the necessary conditions for them to take place. Answering such questions would assist practitioners in understanding how their sense of self is involved with the other and what underlying processes and conditions are necessary for such an experience to occur.

The rationale for the current study

The philosophical, theoretical and empirical literature on the shared experience of the other is wide and ranging, yet sparse. Although the majority of psychologists, psychotherapists and researchers agree that the practitioner is a central

tenant in the psychotherapeutic encounter (Dant, 2014), there is little specifically focused research exploring the practitioners' experience of this phenomenon. The philosophical literature on the shared experience of the other does provide an understanding of the phenomenon, however, lacks any experimentally based evidence to support its philosophical ideas (Dant, 2014).

The theoretical literature on intersubjectivity, in particular, cognitive behavioural theories of intersubjectivity, reduces the mind to the physical organ of the brain (Dant, 2014) and neglects to take into account the individual as a whole. While Stern's (1980) theoretical construct does include the individual as a whole, the theory itself is based on observational research exploring mother and infant interactions. Seikkula and colleagues' (2015) quantitative findings imply that Stern's (1980) theoretical construct might not be applicable to adults in a psychotherapeutic context. Thus there is a need for the development of a theory that qualitatively explores adults' subjective experience of intersubjectivity in a psychotherapeutic context that currently is absent from the literature.

A few qualitatively based studies have attempted to explore a shared experience of the other but have fallen short in explaining how practitioners' self is involved with the other and how they can cultivate such an experience with their client. This has left us with questions, which if answered could assist practitioners in understanding how their sense of self is involved with the other and what underlying processes and conditions are necessary for such an intersubjective experience to occur.

The present study aims to expand the current understanding of a shared experience of the other. It is hoped that the use of a qualitative method will give a better understanding of the participants' experience and perspectives on how their

sense of self is involved with the other and how they come to construct a shared experience with the other. The findings of this study may encourage the individual practitioner to cultivate a particular awareness as to how they may personally influence and impact their psychotherapeutic relationship.

Conclusion

This literature review provided the reader with a context for the research project and addressed an under-researched area. I reviewed different philosophical, theoretical and empirical ideas around having a shared experience of the other's mind, which demonstrated the debate around directly knowing the other's mind.

Currently, there exists no research that is firmly grounded in how existential practitioners feel they come to construct a sense of being attuned to their clients, from the existential practitioners' perspective. Without exploring their perspectives, we can never come to fully know how and what these sets of experiences might mean to the existential practitioners and their relationships with their clients. The aim of this study is, therefore, to explore existential practitioners own perspectives of the phenomenon under study. The next chapter outlines the philosophical and methodological framework of this study.

Chapter 3 Philosophical and Methodological framework

In the literature review, it was argued that there is a need for research that is grounded in the participants' perspective of the phenomenon under study. In this current chapter, I will provide a rationale for the philosophical and methodological stance adopted in this research. I will present various philosophical frameworks that will be discussed and compared, together with a clearly outlined theoretical paradigm. A justification is given for the choice of methodology and the constructivist grounded theory used in this research. Finally, the procedures taken to ensure that the research findings are trustworthy are set out. This is followed by a discussion about the limitations of the research and ethical consideration.

Theoretical paradigms

A theoretical paradigm influences how knowledge is studied and interpreted and provides an overarching philosophical or ideological stance that guides the design and application of the research (Creswell, 2007). These philosophical or ideological assumptions regarding the nature of reality are termed 'ontology' and how knowledge is obtained is referred to as 'epistemology', which underpins the theoretical paradigm. The choice of a theoretical paradigm outlines the intent, motivation and expectations of the research and provides a basis for the subsequent choices regarding the methodology and the methods (Creswell, 2007).

In order to maintain research rigour, the links between ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods need to be carefully observed (Charmaz, 2014). In this research, consideration was given to ensure and demonstrate research rigour in terms of congruence between the research question, ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods of data collection.

Philosophical assumptions

The ontological and epistemological assumptions underpin the theoretical paradigm. Ontological assumptions refer to the nature of reality (Creswell, 2007). I hold a relativist ontological perspective, which contends that there is no external truth but rather different interpretations of 'reality' (Burr, 2003). These interpretations are individual and may change over time and according to context (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Relativists have received criticism for not taking a stance and for not making any clear judgements (Hepburn, 2000). A radical relativist would say that all ideas and knowledge are equally valid (Hepburn, 2000). I argue that the existence of many views does not indicate that all views are equally credible. In doing so, I take a less radical stance towards relativism. Such a relativist outlook suggests that the researcher systematically *questions the possibility* of an objective reality (Hepburn, 2000). Thus relativism is a "more or less extensively theorized questioning – analysis, problematizing, critique – of the key elements of traditional objectivist thought" (Herrnstein Smith, 1988, p. 151).

I see relativism as being on a continuum that allows for flexibility rather than being a fixed position where the researcher refuses to take a stance. The focus on a relativist's *doubt*, by questioning objective reality, suggests that the researcher accepts the possibility that a *value judgement* is being made. The researcher makes a value judgement rather than asserting that all knowledge is equally valid (Hepburn, 2000). I make judgements based on my personal value system, which in turn is influenced by the social value system I am situated in. I recognise that this research is therefore influenced by my personal value system.

Whilst ontological assumptions refer to the conceptions of reality, epistemological assumptions refer to the nature of knowing and the relationship between the knower and the known. A subjectivist epistemology contends that knowledge about the world is generated subjectively (Creswell, 2007). I hold a subjectivist epistemology, which recognises the intersubjective relationship between the researcher and the participants and the co-creation of meaning (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997). Thus the ontological relativist and epistemological subjectivist positions recognise that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is transparent and that the research data is co-constructed (Charmaz, 2000).

Research paradigms

There is a lot of debate and conflicting terminology in relation to ontology, epistemology, methodologies and research paradigms. Evidence of this can be found in the literature with considerable overlapping of these areas and conflicting advice (Creswell, 2007). Consequently, this makes it both challenging and at times frustrating to navigate through a myriad of philosophical views. The following sections outline four research paradigms and their philosophical assumptions.

Positivism paradigm

Positivism stems from a tradition of thought that assumes that reality is constant. Positivists hold the belief that universal laws and scientific methods can explain, predict and determine the truth (Creswell, 2007). Thus there is an objective way of conducting research and knowing the truth. Positivists are realists, as opposed to relativists, and central to positivist assumption is empiricism, which states that the truth can only be observed by human beings (Bryman, 2001). This research paradigm prevails in quantitative research where there is an emphasis on cause and effect, structured interviews, systematic reviews and the collection of empirical data

(Creswell, 2007). Subsequently, post-positivism was evolved as a response to positivism in regards to its philosophical limitations concerning reality and how knowledge is produced.

Post-positivism paradigm

Post-positivists take a critical realist stance on the nature of reality and truth. They hold the belief that there might be some external truth but that a social phenomenon is less likely to produce an absolute truth and definite knowledge (Creswell, 2007). Post-positivists accept that some phenomena cannot be studied empirically, but they assert that psychological measurements can be developed in measuring these phenomena objectively (Parahoo, 2006). Thus rather than attempting to prove an absolute truth, post-positivists examine correlations between variables, and by manipulating these variables the researcher can increase the probability of truth.

Social Constructionism paradigm

Positivists contend that there is an external truth whilst post-positivists are less fixed in their realist stance towards what can be known but generally concur with an objective reality. Social constructionists, on the other hand, without making an ontological claim (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) take an anti-realist stance, in that they deny that knowledge is a direct perception of reality (Burr, 2003).

Social constructionism has its origins in sociology and is viewed as postmodernism (Burr, 2003). Its key focus is on language and discourse (Cromby, 1999). Social constructionists view knowledge as created not discovered, and argue that reality is socially and culturally constructed (Burr, 2003).

Social constructionists have been criticised for their emphasis on language and culture as meditators of meaning and consequently neglecting subjectivity and human

agency (Burr, 2003). They are interested in explicating the process by which individuals come to describe and explain the world in which they live in. Language structures experience and makes thought possible by constructing concepts (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

Interpretive constructivist paradigm

Interpretive constructivists and social constructionists share the same views in that meaning is created and negotiated by human actors, and the same objective of understanding lived experience. While social constructionists place the emphasis on language and culture as meditators of meaning, interpretive constructivists are more focused on subjective meaning and interpretations. The interpretive and constructivist paradigms, which are often combined (Creswell, 2007), both hold a relativist ontology with a subjectivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The interpretivist researcher accepts multiple meanings and ways of knowing, and understands that objectivity can never be captured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The interpretive paradigm focuses on recognising the meaning of action and human experiences (Fossey al., 2002).

The constructivist researcher believes that meaning is created through an interaction of the interpreter and the interpreted (Crotty, 1998). In terms of human experience, interpretive constructivists argue that there is no objective reality but rather multiple perspectives and subjective meanings towards objects (Creswell, 2007).

The interpretive constructivist researcher tends to rely upon the "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p.8). Moreover, the researcher recognises what impact his or her personal background and experiences can have on the research (Creswell, 2003). The meaning is an interpretation by the researcher and

the participant and the data and the developing theory is co-constructed (Creswell, 2007).

The rationale for an interpretive constructivist research paradigm

This section provides a rationale for my choice of an interpretive constructivist paradigm. My ontological relativism and epistemological subjectivism position influenced this study's theoretical paradigm. I hold a relativist ontological perspective, which contends that there is no external truth but rather multiple realities (Burr, 2003). My subjectivist epistemological stance contends that knowledge about the world is generated subjectively (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997).

The positivist and the post-positivist theoretical paradigms were therefore deemed not to be appropriate for this research because both theoretical paradigms do not fit my ontological and epistemological stance.

The social constructionist paradigm was also deemed to be inappropriate for this research. Firstly, social constructionists do not make an ontological claim (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) and therefore hold no view about the nature of reality, which I do. Secondly, the social constructionist paradigm focuses strongly on language and culture as meditators of meaning and neglects subjectivity and human agency (Burr, 2003). I hold a subjectivist epistemological view and neglecting subjectivity and human agency go against my epistemological stance (Burr, 2003).

An interpretive constructivist research paradigm was applied to this research (See Figure 1: Research paradigm outline, p. 68). The interpretive constructivist paradigm takes a relativist ontological stance together with a subjectivist epistemological view (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Thus the interpretivist researcher accepts multiple meanings and ways of knowing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and contrary to social constructionists is more focused on subjective meaning (Charmaz,

2014). An interpretive constructivist paradigm was therefore deemed appropriate for this research because it fits well with my view of reality, how knowledge is studied and the research question.

The constructivist paradigm and attunement

This section briefly discusses the constructivist paradigm in relation to attunement. The word 'attunement' will refer to the set of experiences this research is exploring, except when the word is in reference to the literature. The interpretive and constructive paradigms are often combined (Creswell, 2007), however, in this section I solely discuss the constructivist paradigm.

The constructivist framework, much like the social constructionism paradigm (Burr, 2003), has received considerable critique by emphasising on the centrality of language in the constructivist work (McNamee, 2010) and ignoring the embodiment of subjectivity (Cromby, 2004). Cromby (2004) contends that the body tends to be omitted by constructionists and that constructionists' subordinate embodied subjectivity to language and discourse (Cromby, 2004).

In the first instance, this might be problematic as the idea of attunement in most of the literature is perceived to 'give rise' to 'feelings' within an individual of an 'embodied interpersonal' experience with the other, and attunement is seen to reflect the non-verbal aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship (Erskine, 1998; Siegel, 2007; Laub, 2008). However, in this research, the term 'language' and its practices have come to include much more than the spoken or written words or text. Language practices refer to all embodied activities that an individual performs (McNamee, 2010). "When people engage with one another, *the said*, *the unsaid* and the *imagined* have meaning and it is the meaning made in relation with others that generates the

sense of the real for participants" (McNamee, 2010, p. 359). Thus this research encompassed all embodied activities of an individual.

Symbolic interactionism

The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism provided the theoretical frame underpinning this research. In this section, the word 'attunement' refers exclusively to the set of experience this research explored. Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that unifies theory and method (Charmaz, 2014). According to Waskul and Vannini (2016), symbolic interactionism consists of several conceptual frameworks that are loosely bound by pragmatism. Symbolic interactionists can borrow freely from these conceptual frameworks to create interesting analytical insights (Waskul & Vannini, 2016).

Symbolic interactionism was founded by George Herbert Mead (1934) and further developed by Herbert Blumer (1969). William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Charles Horton Cooley are among others who have influenced the theoretical development of symbolic interactionism (Waskul & Vannini, 2016). Symbolic interactionism rests on three basic principles, which state that individuals respond to their environment based on the meaning they ascribe to it, meaning is derived from social interactions, and individuals interpret meaning (Blumer, 1969). In other words, society is socially constructed through human interpretation (Waskul & Vannini, 2016). Social interactions are seen as 'symbolic' and are dependent on both the 'spoken' and the 'unspoken' language and meanings (Blumer, 1969).

Mead (1934) viewed the self as emerging out of relationships of bodies interacting with each other, and the self was therefore seen as embodied (Waskul & Vannini, 2016). George Simmel (1921) believed that the interaction between two human beings was based on reciprocity and he described it as: "by the glance which

reveals the other, one discloses himself. By the same act in which the observer seeks to know the observed, he surrenders himself to be understood by the observer. The eye cannot take unless at the same time it gives. The eye of a person discloses his own soul when he seeks to uncover that of another" (Simmel, 1921, p. 358 as cited in Waskul & Vannini, 2016, p. 4).

Simmel's (1921) idea is associated with Charles Horton Cooley (1983), a pioneer of symbolic interactionism and his notion of the 'looking-glass self' (Waskul & Vannini, 2016). Cooley's (1983) theory of the 'looking-glass self' states that an individual's sense of self is reflected and formed by the imaginary perspective of the other. There is no sense of an 'I' without a correlative sense of the other and the sense of self is therefore seen as being reflective (Cooley, 1983).

Charmaz (2014) suggests that a theoretical perspective should only be selected upon the completion of the study's theory. I followed Charmaz's (2014) lead and carefully considered a theoretical perspective only after the completion of the research theory. I found symbolic interactionism to provide an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. A variety of approaches within symbolic interactionism have influenced this study's theoretical perspective. I have borrowed key ideas from Blumer (1969), Mead (1934) and Cooley (1983) to fashion a complete understanding of this study's theoretical perspective.

Symbolic interactionism focuses on how meaning is derived from social interactions, and how individuals interpret meanings and respond to their environment based on those meanings (Blumer, 1969). In this study, existential practitioners derived meaning from their experience of attunement out of their perceived social interaction, where they interpreted what the experience meant to them, and then actively engaged in the experience based on the meaning assigned to it.

Mead contended (1934) that the self emerges out of relationships of bodies interacting with each other, and the interaction between two human beings is based on reciprocity (Simmel, 1921) and the 'unspoken' language and meanings (Blumer, 1969). In this study, existential practitioners described their experience of attunement to be a non-verbal and embodied experience. Similar to Simmel's notion (1921), existential practitioners expressed that being attuned was a reciprocal interaction, where not only did being attuned revealed the other but it also disclosed oneself. This idea will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Central to symbolic interactionism is the concept of self (Mead, 1934). In this study and in line with Cooley's notion about the self (1983), the role of the self played an integral part in the process of attunement, which is discussed in more detail in the process of 'being within and between' in chapter 5 and 6. The participants constructed attunement based on the imaginary perspective of the other. Attunement is therefore reflective because it is dependent on the imaginary perspective of the other.

Symbolic interactionism and pragmatism influenced Charmaz's theoretical underpinnings of the constructivist grounded theory. Both pragmatists and constructivists believe there are no external truth but rather multiple realities (Charmaz, 2006) and both state that human beings are active and creative agents (Waskul & Vannini, 2016). In this study, attunement was described as being a subjective experience where existential practitioners actively felt like they constructed attunement with their clients.

Symbolic interactionism has received criticism for being limited to micro-level aspects of social life and unable to deal with macro-level processes such as institutions or social structures (Charmaz, 2014). This research was concerned with micro-level processes of how existential practitioners constructed, defined and came

to understand their experience of attunement. However, existential counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists can be found in a variety of institutions and social structures such as health care systems, for example, the National Health Service (NHS) and educational institutions.

Symbolic interactionism, contrary to the constructivist grounded theory which is focused more on social interactions, actions and processes, gives this study the aspect of meaning which is essential to this research. Symbolic interactionism creates interesting analytical insights and in particular illuminates the role of the self, which reflects the findings of this study. Furthermore, it brings together the findings of this research with other theoretical constructs within psychology. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Figure 1: Interpretive constructivist paradigm outline

What is the nature of reality	**Ontology** *The study of reality* Relativist/Relativism
How do we know what counts as knowledge?	**Epistemology** *The study of knowledge* Subjectivism
What prior knowledge informs our study of the world?	**Theoretical perspective** *The philosophical stance informing the methodology* Symbolic interactionism
How should we study the world so we can understand reality?	**Methodology** *How knowledge can be accessed* Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006)
How can evidence be collected and analysed about reality?	**Methods** *How evidence is collected* Interviews, constant comparative analysis, coding and categorising data, theoretical memos

(Adapted from Crotty, 1998)

Consideration of a possible quantitative methodology

This section discusses the methodological framework applied in this research. Qualitative research is primarily exploratory research in which the researcher is interested in gaining an understanding of underlying opinions, reasons, experiences, and motivations (Creswell, 2007). Quantitative research, on the other hand, generates

quantifiable data that can be transformed into statistics. The researcher is interested in quantifying attitudes, behaviours, and other defined variables (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

A quantitative-based research cannot adequately answer the research question. In to access how participants' *feel* they construct a sense of being attuned to their clients, I need to ask directly about their subjective experiences of the phenomenon. A qualitative based research was deemed to be appropriate for this study because it is able to address the research question by directly asking participants through interviews about their experiences.

Consideration of qualitative methodologies

Alternative qualitative research approaches were considered, and phenomenology is arguably the closest to interpretive constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2007). The central focus of phenomenology is to explore an individual's meaning of a lived experience (Creswell, 2007). The intention of phenomenological inquiry is to access the 'meaning' of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994) or the 'essence' of the lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). There are two predominant strands of phenomenology; hermeneutic and transcendental. Hermeneutics takes an interpretivist approach to research (Van Manen, 1990) whereas the transcendental favours a descriptive approach to the phenomenon with a 'bracketing' of the researcher's presumptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Hermeneutic phenomenology was particularly relevant to this research since it is located within the constructivist paradigm and takes into account the researcher's perspective (Van Manen, 1990). However, hermeneutic phenomenology does not offer an explanation to the underlying processes and actions of this study's set of

experiences. Moreover, the hermeneutic phenomenology primary aim is to understand individuals' meaning of a lived experience, and therefore not to generate a theory to describe and explain how the phenomenon under study might be constructed. I was interested in developing a theory that could identify and explain the process by which existential practitioners felt they came to construct a sense of being attuned to their clients. Thus hermeneutic phenomenology was deemed not to be an appropriate methodological inquiry for this research.

Transcendental phenomenology favours a descriptive approach to data and excludes the researcher's perspective by the process of 'bracketing' (Moustakas, 1994). I hold the belief that the data is co-constructed and thus I recognise my involvement in the data analysis procedures (Creswell, 2007). Transcendental phenomenology did not fit my worldview and was therefore not considered an appropriate strategy of inquiry for this research. Subsequently, grounded theory was the methodology adopted because it takes into account my worldview, it is able to answer the research question and its primary aim is to generate an explanatory theory. In the subsequent section, this approach will be reviewed in more detail.

Consideration of different versions of grounded theories

Grounded theory is a systematic methodology with the aim to construct a theory through data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and in this study termed the 'Classical' grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, Glaser and Strauss disagreed on how to apply the grounded theory methods, and Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) went on to modify the approach. The main changes Strauss and Corbin (1990) incorporated to their 'Straussian' grounded theory were to the coding structure by adding more procedures on how to code the data. As an alternative to the 'Classical'

and ‘Straussian’ grounded theories, Charmaz went on to develop the ‘Constructivist’ grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; 2006; 2014).

Although there are other grounded theory approaches, I have only considered these three approaches because they are the main grounded theory approaches used in academic research (Charmaz, 2014). In the subsequent section, I describe each approach in more detail and provide a rationale for my choice of a constructivist grounded theory approach.

Classical grounded theorists assert that qualitative research is an objective social science. Glaser (1978) argues that the researcher should not enter the field with ‘a preconceived notion’ about the phenomenon under investigation. Thus the researcher acts like a ‘neutral observer’ where the research is seen as an external reality, which is there to be ‘discovered’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The Classical grounded theory comprises two types of coding; substantive and theoretical coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Substantive coding involves open coding where the researcher looks for the emergence of core categories and related concepts. The researcher then engages in selective coding to reach theoretical saturation of those core categories and related concepts. The final stage is theoretical coding where the researcher conceptualises how the substantive codes might relate to each other and integrate them into the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The Classical grounded theory approach was not considered for this research for the following reasons. Firstly, the Classical grounded theory’s philosophical underpinning, a positivist view, is not in line with my philosophical stance, which is a relativist view. Secondly, I believe that the researcher cannot enter the field without

having a preconceived notion about the subject. I hold a subjectivist epistemology, and as a researcher, I would not be able to adopt a 'neutral stance'. I believe the data is co-constructed, and thus I recognise my involvement in the data analysis procedures.

The Straussian grounded theory, compared to the Classical grounded theory, takes a more linear approach to the research methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The Straussian grounded theory sets out a well-defined coding paradigm termed 'axial coding', which systematically looks for causal conditions, the phenomena, intervening conditions, strategies and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The Straussian grounded theorists do not explicitly hold an epistemological position, and it has therefore been subject to debate and interpretation (Charmaz, 2000).

I elected not to adopt the Straussian grounded theory firstly because its epistemology is not clearly identified (Charmaz, 2000) which for me makes the philosophical underpinning of the approach unclear. Secondly, I think that the Straussian grounded theory approach to data analysis and coding process is too rigid and constrained. For example, applying a systematic coding paradigm as axial coding provides a framework for researchers but this might arguably limit the researchers' vision (Charmaz, 2014).

Charmaz (2014) contends that the researcher could develop subcategories and demonstrate the links between them without applying an analytical frame such as seen in the Straussian's axial coding. Charmaz (2014) proclaims that her approach differs from axial coding in that her analytical strategies are emergent. In this research, I followed Charmaz's (2014) lead and I applied simple and flexible guidelines. I felt that I could tolerate the ambiguity of flexible guidelines and I therefore did not need

to apply axial coding in my analysis. Thus I chose to adopt the constructivist grounded theory approach.

Constructivist grounded theory

Charmaz (2000) asserts that the constructivist grounded theory "assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognises the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward an interpretive understanding of subjects meanings" (Charmaz, 2000, p.510). Thus Charmaz stresses that the constructivist grounded theorist and their participants co-construct a shared reality through an interactive process.

Epistemologically, constructivism states that reality is a subjective construct as the individual assigns meaning to the world around her (Appleton & King 2002). It was my intention to use Charmaz's (2000) constructivist grounded theory and "form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory that emphasises its emergent, constructivist elements" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510).

I have elected to adopt the constructivist grounded theory approach for the following reasons. Firstly, the constructivist grounded theory was in line with my philosophical stance; the construction of multiple realities. Secondly, constructivist grounded theory adopts a flexible approach to data analysis and coding. Thirdly, constructivist grounded theory stress that existential practitioners are to be seen as unique beings, and the focus should be on the world as experienced by the participants. Finally, the constructivist grounded theory approach acknowledges that the researcher plays a central role in the analysis process and emergent theory (Charmaz, 2000).

Evaluation of grounded theory research

There has been a considerable debate in qualitative research concerning the most appropriate criteria to adopt when evaluating research studies (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed a framework for assessing qualitative research recommending four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Although these criteria are still referred to in many qualitative research studies, it has been disputed that qualitative research should be assessed against criteria more consistent with its specific philosophical stance (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Guba and Lincoln's (1998) framework for assessing qualitative research corresponds to the criteria employed by the positivist framework and are therefore not consistent with my philosophical stance. The methodological framework of this research was the constructivist grounded theory. I therefore chose to follow the criteria recommended by Charmaz (2006), which are *credibility*, *originality*, *resonance* and *usefulness* to evaluate this constructivist grounded theory research. In this section, Charmaz's (2006) criteria will be stated. How this research has met these criteria will be demonstrated and set out in detail in Chapter 6.

Charmaz (2006) describes the *credibility* of a research as the "trustworthiness" of the entire research process. Credibility is concerned with whether the data, the analysis and the findings of the research are plausible. In order to ensure credibility, Charmaz (2014) suggests several criteria to be taken into account, which are the following:

- Does the research present intimate familiarity with research topic?
- Are the range, number and depth of the data gathered sufficient?
- Were categories and observations systematically compared?

- Do the categories cover a range of empirical settings/observations?
- Does the data gathered link rationally to the data analysis and subsequent arguments, which emerge?
- Has sufficient evidence been provided in the study to enable a detached reader to concur with the findings of the study?

Originality is measured in terms of whether the research presents "a new conceptual rendering of the data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182). Charmaz poses four criteria in order to ensure originality and these are:

- Do the categories present 'fresh insights'?
- Does the research present "a new conceptual rendering of the data?" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 337)
- Is there a social and theoretical relevance to this research?
- To what extent does this research theory "challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts and practices?" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 337).

Resonance refers to the assessment of the depth and breadth of the data. It explores whether the categories are saturated and therefore represent: "the fullness of the studied experience" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182).

- To what extent do the categories present "the fullness of the studied experience?"(Charmaz, 2014, p.337).
- Has any meaning been taken for granted?
- To what extent have links been made between: "larger collectivities or institutions and individual lives, when the data so indicate?" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 338).

- "Does your grounded theory make sense to your participants or people who share their circumstances? Does your analysis offer them deeper insights about their lives and worlds?" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 183)

According to Charmaz (2006), the *usefulness* of the research is measured in terms of its contribution and relevance to existing knowledge in the substantive area of research. Charmaz sets out four questions to take into account when evaluating the usefulness of a research, and these are the following:

- To what extent can this analysis be applied to counselling psychologist and psychotherapists' "everyday world" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 338)
- Do the theoretical categories capture the generic processes? And have these generic processes been analysed for tacit implications?
- Can the analysis spark further research in other substantive areas?
- Does the analysis identify the need for additional research in another substantive area (s)?

Rigour

Charmaz (2006) recommends employing Glaser's criteria (1978) to check the rigour of the resulting theory, which are defined as follows:

- "Fit; the categories of the theory fit or match the data
- Work; the theory explicates, predicates and interprets what is going on in a substantive area
- Relevance; the theory is relevant to the substantive area
- Modifiability; though basic social processes remain in general, their variation and relevance are ever changing in our world" (Glaser, 1978, p. 5).

Throughout the work and in the analysis of the data, these criteria were adopted because of their usefulness in assessing the emerging theory.

Ethical consideration, risk assessment and procedure

Ethical permission was obtained from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and Middlesex University research ethical board. I ensured that every measure was taken to maintain the dignity and welfare of all the participants in this research. In terms of risk assessment, this research posed minimum risk to its participants. Nevertheless, a potential risk is always present in any research study.

The interview questions might cause emotional distress where for example participants might 'open up' and perhaps 'say more' than they intended to say or, when reflecting later, might be unhappy about something they said. Furthermore, in regards to this research topic area, possible emotional distress could also occur where participants might start questioning their own practice. I addressed these issues in the debrief process where time was allocated for participants to raise any concerns or emotional distress that the research interview might have caused them.

Another issue during the interview might be the potential disclosure of sensitive client information. I addressed this where necessary by reminding participants about client confidentiality, and when transcribing by leaving out any information about participants' practice location. After the interview, I sent the participants the transcript so they could read through it, and have the chance to remove or amend it. Further, by giving the participants this opportunity, to read through the transcript, I hoped that the risk of withdrawal from the research study, which they still had the right to do at any given point, could be kept to a minimum.

The ethical procedure was conducted as follows: the participants were provided with an information sheet, which informed them about the research, the purpose of the study, the benefits, the risks and the informed consent procedure. Informed consent is a procedure in which the researcher ensures that the participants understand the purpose and requirements of the research and agrees to take part willingly without coercion (British Psychological Society, 2005). I sought informed consent where the risks, the benefits and the withdrawal procedure were explicitly stated.

After the interview, participants were debriefed where feedback was provided, and the participants had a chance to raise any concerns or questions about the interview or the research. In the debrief form, phone numbers and contact details to UK Council for Psychotherapists and the British Psychology Society were stated, in case the participants felt any distress and needed to get in touch with a psychotherapist or a supervisor.

Confidentiality and intellectual property

Throughout the research conscious efforts were taken to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. All information provided by the participants was solely used for this research and was securely stored to ensure privacy for all participants involved. Throughout the course of the research, only an assigned number could identify each participant. Thus the consent forms with the participants' signatures were stored separately from the anonymous information provided by the participants in the research.

The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and were thereafter transcribed and transferred to a password-protected laptop, deleting the recorded files

from the digital recorder. All the data was stripped of any identifying material and pseudonyms and stored on a password-protected laptop, and I acted as custodian of the stored data.

The participants that chose to be interviewed via Skype were identified through their online presence, email addresses and Skype usernames. The Skype sessions were held at a private location where the only individuals present were the participant and myself. To ensure this, I discussed it via email or phone before the interview. Moreover, any other issues such as potential technical problems or anything else related to the Skype interview and the research was discussed prior to the interview via initial email contact. I ensured that the online Skype interview did not leave permanent records of any communications such as written communication. Once all the interviews had been conducted the participants' Skype information and account were deactivated and completely removed from my Skype account.

No individual data was made public as part of the final research thesis. Furthermore, the data was stored up to six months after the research study had been fully completed. The data was thereafter destroyed. All procedures used in this research adhered to the current data collection and handling policy of the Middlesex University and New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling under the Data Privacy Act.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of this research are congruent with the objectives of this research. I have provided a rationale for adopting constructivist grounded theory methodology, and this methodology has guided the specific objectives of the current research.

Firstly, the constructivist grounded theory methodology was particularly relevant for this research because it provided an explicit constructivist stance, in contrast to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) approach, which is open to interpretation.

Secondly, constructivist grounded theory adopts a flexible approach to data analysis and coding. Finally, the constructivist grounded theory methodology takes into account the importance of the role of the researcher in the developing theory. The focus of this constructivist grounded theory was the social processes, the actions, and the interactions of participants' set of experiences of the phenomenon under study. The ethical consideration was outlined. The subsequent chapter outlines the methods used based on the purpose of the research.

Chapter 4 Methods

In the previous chapter, I presented the philosophical underpinnings and discussed the methodological framework for this research. In this chapter, I present an overview of the methods employed in accordance with the constructivist grounded theory approach. I explain why I think the research question lent itself to the constructivist grounded theory method. The research design, the study population and the data collection procedure are then presented. Finally, the process of data analysis is described and outlined.

The research question and objectives

The research question of this study is as follows: how do existential counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists feel they construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients? The aim of this study was to explore this set of experiences from the perspective of the participants in order to elicit new and robust findings in the area.

This research is informed by the constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 1990, 1991, 1995, 2000, 2006, 2014) to achieve the following objectives:

1. identify and explore what 'being attuned' might mean to the existential practitioners and the psychotherapeutic relationship, from their perceptive.
2. develop a theory to describe and explain how participants feel they construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients, from the existential practitioners' perspective.

Constructivist grounded theory

The constructivist grounded theory was postulated by Charmaz (2000) as an alternative to the 'Classical' grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the 'Straussian' grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Charmaz (2014) claims that a constructivist approach sees the data and analysis as created from shared experiences with participants. Constructivists study 'how' participants construct actions and meanings in certain situations (Charmaz, 2014). The theory depends on the researcher's perspective, and the resulting theory is therefore seen as an interpretation (Charmaz, 2014).

The constructivist grounded theory is an emergent technique, which method can be adopted flexibly (Charmaz, 2014). In order to facilitate the emergence of data, Charmaz (2006) argues that the methods should be seen as flexible rather than prescriptive. Charmaz (2000) sets out the following strategies for constructivist grounded theory methods: a) simultaneous collection and analysis of data; b) data coding processes; c) comparative methods; d) memo writing aimed at the construction of conceptual analyses; e) sampling to refine the researcher's emerging theoretical ideas and; f) integration of the theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2000, p. 511).

The constructivist grounded theory is a particularly appropriate method to adopt in this research because of its focus on social processes and actions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The constructivist grounded theory fits the nature of the research question: how do existential counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists feel they construct a sense of being attuned to their clients?

In the literature review, the idea of attunement is suggested to be 'action-oriented' because attunement is 'actively constructed' by the individuals (Erskine,

1998; Siegel, 2007). The research question is therefore oriented towards action because it explores how participants come to 'construct' their sense of being attuned to their clients.

The literature suggests that being attuned is a social process because attunement is perceived to 'give rise' to 'feelings' within an individual of an embodied interpersonal experience with the other (Erskine, 1998; Siegel, 2007; Laub, 2008). The research question is therefore open to social processes as it explores how existential counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists feel they construct a sense of being attuned to their clients. The constructivist grounded theory approach presented particular utility to this research through the clarification of concepts relevant to the phenomenon under study.

Tenets of Grounded Theory

The basis of the grounded theory is to generate theory grounded in systematically derived data using a constant comparative method. Constant comparison is a central feature of the grounded theory procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section of this chapter.

The key aspects of grounded theory methods are *theoretical sampling, saturation, and theoretical sensitivity*, and in the subsequent section, I describe these key aspects in more detail.

Theoretical sampling and saturation

Theoretical sampling means collecting data that refines and elaborates the categories in the emerging theory. It gives the work analytical depth and precision (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) argues that conducting theoretical sampling advances the development of the analysis and it keeps the researcher from getting

stuck in unfocused data collection. The researcher seeks to address gaps found in the data, and this can be achieved by seeking information from other participants (Charmaz, 2006).

For example, early on in the data analysis, I identified a category that was related to how participants perceived the clients' reaction to attunement. In the analysis of the first interview, the participant referred to attunement as being perceived to be an experience of contrasts for the clients because the clients could at times feel overwhelmed or overexposed by the experience. I reflected on what this aspect of the clients' experience meant for the participants and their psychotherapeutic relationship. Theoretical memos assisted me in exploring and refining this notion and theoretical sampling required me to check this idea against empirical realities. In my subsequent interviews, I asked the participants directly about this potential aspect of how they perceived their clients' experience and its impact on the psychotherapeutic relationship.

In keeping with theoretical sampling in constructivist grounded theory, "the number of participants is determined by the needs of the emerging theory whereby data is collected and analysed and subsequent collection is guided by emerging directions in that analysis" (Punch, 2005, p.158). Theoretical sampling continues until 'theoretical saturation' is reached and when the complete range of constructs that make up the theory is fully represented by the data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) and new data reveals no additional insights (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Punch, 2005).

I was forced to slightly deviate from theoretical sampling where I was required to set a prelimit at between 8-12 participants. This set number of between 8-12 participants intended to allow room for some flexibility if needed. The reason for

setting a prelimit was the following: this research was submitted to the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and Middlesex University Psychology Department in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a degree of Doctor of counselling psychology and psychotherapy. A doctoral research has a set maximum of twelve participants and a word limit of no more than 60.000 words for a doctorate research thesis. Nevertheless, I made sure to collect rich and in-depth data on the topic, and I ensured that the collected data sufficiently answered the research question.

Theoretical saturation relies upon the process of constant comparison and it is a consequence of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical saturation is where the researcher analyses the data until no new data appear and all the concepts are well developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2014). In other words, theoretical saturation is the point at which no issues arise regarding a category, no new categories are identified, and no new insights are obtained (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

When considering assessing whether the categories have reached saturation, Charmaz (2014) recommends asking the following questions:

- Which comparison is made between and within categories?
- What sense can be made between these comparisons?
- Where do they lead?
- How do the comparisons illuminate the theoretical categories?
- In what other direction, if any, might these categories take?
- What new conceptual relationships, if any, might be found?

(Charmaz, 2014, p.214)

I reached theoretical saturation through the coding process, constant comparison procedure, and I followed Charmaz's (2014) recommendation for assessing saturation within categories. I sought to identify categories within a set of data, find the relationship between these categories and describe these relationships. I engaged in a constant comparison procedure, by comparing newly gathered data with previously collected data and coding to illuminate new insights into the analysis and coding process.

During the coding process, I recorded my ideas and any questions about the data in my memo writings. In this research, theoretical saturation was considered to have been reached when I could not raise any more issues regarding categories, no new categories could be identified, and no new insights could be obtained.

Theoretical sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is a concept that involves the researcher's level of insight into the research area, and the ability to reconstruct meaning from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In constructivist grounded theory methods, the researcher adopts a reflexive approach by considering her contribution to the developing theory (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher plays a key role in the coding process by interpreting, analysing and identifying relevant data. The constructivist grounded theory approach acknowledges that the researcher co-constructs the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz (2014) recommends keeping a 'theoretical methodological journal' as a reflective tool to record the researcher's abstract thinking about the data. A theoretical methodological journal will assist the researcher in engaging in reflexivity and avoid any preconceived assumptions about the data. A constructivist grounded

theorist uses theoretical memo writings for analytical purposes. The style of writing is informal and for personal use rather than public consumption (Charmaz, 2014).

I achieved theoretical sensitivity by keeping a methodological journal as a reflective tool to record my abstract thinking about the data in terms of coding, interview questions and analysis. The theory was therefore co-constructed with the participants as I pose the interview questions, explored specific topic areas and finally interpreted the data.

Participant sampling

This section provides information about the participant sample. The participant sample for this research was based on a 'purposefully selected sample' method. The goal of purposive sampling is to focus on a particular group of potential participants that will best assist in answering the research question. In this study, my group of interest was existential practitioners.

In this research, eight existentially trained counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists were interviewed, four were female and four were male. This equal ratio of females and males was unintentional. However, the outcome of this was an equal representation between the genders and therefore no gender bias. The participants came from a wide age range between the early thirties and late seventies, where four were counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists and four were psychotherapists.

The counselling psychologists' and/or psychotherapists' level of training ranged from newly qualified counselling psychologist and /or psychotherapist to over thirty years of experience as a counselling psychologist and/or psychotherapist. They all had some form of training in existential philosophy and psychotherapy. Six of them had an additional training in psychodynamic psychotherapy, four of them had

training in cognitive behavioural therapy, three of them had training in person-centred psychotherapy, two of them had training in transpersonal psychotherapy, and one of them had training in Gestalt psychotherapy. Below is a table that illustrates the key demographical information about the participants.

Figure 2: Demographic table

Participants	Age	Gender	Years of practice	Interview method	Additional approaches
P1	50-60	Female	15 years	Face-to-face	Transpersonal/ Psychodynamic /CBT
P2	65-75	Male	Over 30 years	Face-to-face	Psychodynamic /person-centred/ Transpersonal
P3	35-45	Male	Newly qualified	Skype	Psychodynamic /Person-centred
P4	30-40	Female	Newly qualified	Skype	CBT/Psychodynamic
P5	60-70	Male	Newly qualified	Skype	CBT
P6	35-45	Male	1 year	Skype	Gestalt /Person-centred
P7	50-60	Female	3 years	Skype	Psychodynamic
P8	45-55	Female	10 years	Face-to-face	Psychodynamic /CBT

Additionally to the eight participants included in this research, I interviewed one more participant that unfortunately decided to withdraw from the study after reviewing the transcript. The main reasons for the withdrawal were: firstly the participant did not feel that the transcript depicted how she perceived herself to communicate in real life. Secondly, she did not feel 'tuned in', as she expressed it, to my questions during the interview, which became apparent to her once reviewing the transcript. In accordance with the participants wishes the participant was therefore not

included in this research. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The interviews were held at a preferred location of the participants such as at their office or via the online videoconference Skype. The decision to conduct interviews via Skype was based on the convenient way it offered to meet participants since they might not be based in London. Hence, Skype is an inexpensive, flexible, user-friendly tool to use for research interviews. Five interviews were conducted via Skype, and the other three were conducted face to face.

This research includes a number of inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Figure 3: Participant inclusion and exclusion criteria, p. 91). The first inclusion criterion was that existential trained counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists with or without a professional training in another psychotherapeutic approach were included in the research. The reason for this was because one of the aims of this research was to generate a theory with the purpose of enriching and broaden the field of existential counselling psychology and psychotherapeutic practice.

The second inclusion criterion was that the participants needed to have a professional accreditation with either or both the British Psychology Society (BPS) and the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) to participate in this research. This was to ensure that a minimum level of experience, training, competence and proficiency was met. Individuals with an accreditation with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) were excluded due to various levels of training.

The third inclusion criterion was to include both male and female existential counselling psychologists and/or existential psychotherapists in this research, as no research has been found to indicate a gender difference in the experience of

attunement. Furthermore, this research aimed at a widespread demographic profile (i.e. age and gender) to be able to include a broad range of existential practitioners.

The fourth inclusion criterion was that the participants must have had a set of experiences in the area of attunement in a therapeutic setting at some point during their careers and practice. This would mean that attunement would be a self-reported experience because it would be the existential practitioners' experience of attunement regardless of whether or not their clients would agree with it.

Participant recruitment

A pragmatic approach to participant recruitment was taken as I sought participants coming from a counselling psychology and psychotherapy profession with an existential training background. I recruited participants through institutes such as Metanoia, Regent's College and New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and on relevant websites and online forums.

Participants were recruited through 'word of mouth', approached directly via email, social networks such as Facebook, Society of existential psychotherapy, and via New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling email. In order to generate interest and to reach as many existential practitioners as possible, flyers that briefly describe the research were posted on relevant online settings such as the BPS Facebook page.

Figure 3: Participant inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria:

- Existentially trained counselling psychologists and/or existential psychotherapists with or without a professional training in another psychotherapeutic approach
- UKCP and/or BPS accredited
- Both male and female qualified existential counselling psychologists and/or existential psychotherapists or counselling psychologists with existential psychotherapeutic training
- A widespread demographic profile
- Experience in the area of attunement in a psychotherapeutic setting with their clients

Exclusion criteria:

- BACP accredited psychotherapists

Data collection procedures

In this research, the primary source of data collection was through the use of a semi-structured, intensive, in-depth interview. The semi-structured interview has specific topic areas that need to be covered during the course of the interview. These topic areas were the following:

- Self-experience
- Experience of not being attuned to the client
- Perception of the client
- The therapeutic relationship
- Empathy in relation to attunement

The order of the questions and the exact wording of the questions were left to the discretion of the researcher (Bryman, 2001; Hessler, 1992). For me, this enabled a flexibility to respond immediately to issues raised by the participants, ask probing questions and to allow participants to discuss and expand on the experiences or issues considered to be important to them (Charmaz, 2014). However, I remained focused on collecting data to ensure that the research questions could be answered and to ensure cross-case comparability (Bryman, 2001).

Interview process

In line with Charmaz's (2014) recommended interview procedure, this research employed an intensive interviewing technique. Intensive qualitative interviewing and grounded theory methods are both "open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 85). I therefore, adopted an intensive interviewing technique because it facilitated open-ended, in-depth exploration of the construct under study. Examples of research questions that are used in this research can be found in the subsequent section under *Example of research questions* on p. 96.

In terms of the transcribing process, scholars from diverse disciplines have begun to recognise the centrality of transcription in qualitative research (Poland, 2002). Interviews can be transcribed at different levels and it is important for the researcher to make a decision about how much detail to record. A transcription can strongly affect the way the participant is understood, the information that has been shared, and the conclusions drawn (Poland, 2002).

Transcription practices can be seen as a continuum with two dominant modes: 'naturalism', in which every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible, and

'denaturalism', in which idiosyncratic elements of speech where for example non-verbal communication, stutters, and involuntary vocalisations are excluded (Schegloff, 1997).

In this research I transcribed all the interviews, and I took a 'denaturalistic approach', where non-verbal communication such as laughter, stutters, body language, and involuntary vocalisations was disregarded. I found that non-verbal elements of the interviews such as expression of ideas or thoughts through movement of the body were impossible to capture using an audio tape recorder.

A pilot interview was conducted to get a sense of how the participant responded to the questions, how clear the questions were to the respondent and how long the interview might take. The first interview was used to gain a formative understanding of the participant's perspective to the general research questions outlined above, which was used as a guideline. Subsequent interviews were driven by the need of the emerging theory whereby data was collected and analysed according to emerging directions in that analysis (Punch, 2005).

Example of interview questions

In this research a wide range of questions were asked. Below is a selection of a few questions asked in the interviews:

- Can you think of an experience with your client when you felt attuned? How was that experience like for you?
- Once attuned, how was your experience of your client like?
- Do you experience periods of not being attuned? What are these periods of not being attuned like for you?
- Can you think of an experience of when you felt empathic towards your client? How was that like for you? Is that experience similar or different from the experience you describe as attunement?

- How did your experience of attunement with your client, if any, affect your relationship?
- What would you call this phenomenon? How come you call this experience attunement?

Below are frequently asked questions:

- How was that like for you?
- Could you say a bit more about that?
- Is there anything else you think I should know about to understand attunement better?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Reflexivity

This section provides information about my reflexive writing. A constructivist researcher acknowledges openly her role in the research (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher, therefore, includes her voice in the study rather than writing in a removed third-person-voice (Baily & Jackson, 2003). Including the researcher's voice in the research study implies that the researcher's history will need to be transparent within the reflective memos.

The inclusion of the researcher's history will create a point of integration of herself in relation to her theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Reflective memo writing makes, therefore, the researcher's influence clear in the reconstruction of the theory. In the subsequent section, I have included my reflective writings to further illuminate the research process.

The researcher's positionality

In this section, I briefly set out my personal biography and reflect upon how that might have influenced this research. The word 'attunement' will refer to the set of

experiences I explore in this research except when referenced in regards to the literature then the word might point towards a different experience. It was my experiences of attunement as an existential counselling psychologist and psychotherapist trainee that made me decide to research this topic. As such, I approached this research already holding an opinion about attunement. This research was informed by my experiences as a former client and existential counselling psychologist and psychotherapist trainee. My experiences of attunement as a client in personal therapy gave me a multifaceted perspective on the topic.

As a client, I came to experience particular 'moments' that gave rise to a unique feeling within me. I later came to call these moments 'attunement'. I was seeing a psychotherapist in my early twenties, and did not know a lot about psychotherapy except that I wanted to get my troubles 'fixed' and 'out of the way'. I can vividly remember this profound moment I felt I 'shared' with my psychotherapist where I felt completely understood, seen, accepted, loved and felt by her. I did not quite understand what was happening at the time, other than that it felt lovely and it encouraged me to be more authentic and open to her.

My experiences of attunement as an existential counselling psychologist and psychotherapist trainee has not had such a profound impact on me as my experiences as a client; because the experience of attunement as a client changed my way of relating to myself and to others. Nevertheless, I remember those moments with great clarity and a sense of profound gratitude. One of those moments that come to mind was with a client I worked with for over a year. The client was talking and avoiding eye contact and only occasionally glanced at me. I felt open and very present at that moment. I suddenly experienced a range of emotions and that the pace of the session

seemed to slow down. I recall that I said something to the client in response to what I was experiencing in the room. The client looked up and burst into tears, and told me in surprise that it felt like I had 'felt' him.

During the course of this research, I found that words similar to these were echoed by the participants participating in this study: how they talked about it and how they perceived their clients' felt experience of attunement. However, I acknowledge that no two individuals will have the same experience, which is the case for the existential practitioners in this study and their clients. It became apparent from talking to the participants that every relationship is unique, and thus how the experiences of attunement might be constructed in these relationships was equally unique. For example, participants described experiencing attunement much more intensely with some clients than with others. Throughout the research, remaining transparent and conscious of these perspectives was important.

I came across the term 'attunement' whilst I was undertaking a psychoanalytical module at the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling. The word 'attunement' was used to describe a set of experiences from a psychoanalytical developmental perspective, exploring the interaction between the mother and her infant. The lecturer presented a short video clip of a mother and her infant 'being attuned' to each other. The mother was 'communicating' with her preverbal infant by 'matching' the infant's internal state. The mother had been instructed to break contact with her infant at some point during their interaction by 'misattune' to her infant. At one such moment of 'misattunement' the infant reacted distressed. The video clip had a profound impact on me and it left me feeling distraught.

I have come to understand what I call 'attunement' as a relational and socially

constructed process between the participants and their clients. That subjective understanding of attunement comes from my experiences as both a client and as a counselling psychologist and psychotherapist trainee. In my clinical work, I experience attunement as a unique 'reciprocal meeting' with the other that gives rise to feelings within me, where I experience 'resonating' and 'sharing the other's inner world'. These 'momentary meetings', which I have come to term 'being attuned', seemed to have a significant affect on the psychotherapeutic relationship between my clients and myself. I experienced that 'being attuned' to the client seemed to facilitate a greater trust, understanding and closeness between us.

My experience of attunement has inevitably had an impact on this research. The way I have constructed the research questions has influenced the direction of this research. The content of each research question is around what I am interested to explore and understand in the area of attunement. In terms of attunement, this means that there might have been other avenues to explore that I did not. However, the questions were constructed as open-ended to allow participants to discuss and expand on their experiences or issues considered to be important to them. For example, one participant brought up a spiritual aspect of attunement that I had not considered which opened up and broaden my views on the experience of attunement.

In the summer of 2013, I attended a two-day conference with Confer where the word 'attunement' was used to explore a set of experiences in an adult psychotherapeutic setting. I was interested in their concept of 'attunement' and I wanted to understand the experience better. The conference's keynote speaker was Dr Dan Siegel a clinical professor of psychiatry at UCL. At the conference, it quickly became apparent that the speakers were not able to present any research grounded in how 'attunement' might be constructed in a psychotherapeutic adult setting. Dr Daniel

Siegel pointed out that such research simply did not exist at the moment.

Instead, they talked about mother-infant research and linked that to neuroscience and how 'attunement' might be 'worked' within an adult psychotherapeutic context. The idea that the mothers and their infants construct attunement in a similar way to how adults in psychotherapeutic context construct attunement was made without any reservation. Although I found the conference insightful it made me question this notion that mothers and infants compared to adults construct attunement in a similar way. The paucity of research in this area gave me the idea and the foundation for my research.

During the course of conducting this research, I was seeing clients, and for the first time, I had to consider the questions of the idea attunement from a personal perspective. I began to consider 'how do I 'attune' to my clients?' and 'how important, if at all, is attunement for the therapeutic relationship?' The methodological implications of this were, that I was not only interviewing participants as a researcher, I was interviewing them with an increasingly personal experience of attunement as a counselling psychologist and psychotherapist trainee. Due to my interest in the topic, I was able to recognise that these set of experiences were not a straightforward or easy process to put into words. I was able to empathise with those participants that at times struggled to describe how they felt a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients. Thus I believe my personal experience of attunement led me to possibly build a better rapport with participants than would otherwise have been the case.

My personal experience of attunement was relatively limited compared to the majority of the participants. As a former client, researcher and counselling

psychologists and psychotherapist trainee in her thirties, I used my personal experience of attunement as important insights that I occasionally could draw upon as discussed in the previous section. At the same time, I made sure to remain open to participants' account of their experiences of attunement.

Data Analysis

This section presents the research methods applied in the analysis of the data. The data analysis follows a systematic procedure regarding abstraction and comparison outlined in the constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 1990, 1991, 1995, 2000).

A constructivist theorist uses an iterative pathway and moves from data collection to the emergent theory and back again until theoretical saturation is reached (Charmaz, 2014). The analysis of the data and the conceptual theorising occur simultaneously and early on in the research process (Charmaz, 2006).

The following section outlines the analytical processes (Charmaz, 2006, p. 234), which were employed in this research:

- Identify the research questions and research problem
- Data collection and initial coding
- Initial memos and diagrams that assisted in raising codes to potential categories
- Further data collection and focused coding
- Advances of memos and diagrams that refined conceptual categories – adopting certain categories as theoretical concepts
- Integrating memos and diagramming concepts
- Writing draft

In this research, the source of data used was interviews with existential practitioners, their experience and understanding of attunement together with my theoretical memo writings and diagrams. The subsequent section outlines the coding process employed in this study.

Coding and categorising data

In line with Charmaz's (2006) method, the coding process was undertaken using two phases; initial and focused coding. 'Initial coding' involves "naming each word, line or segment of data, followed by a 'focused selective coding' that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesise, integrate and organise a large amount of data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). I will now give detailed accounts of both initial and focused codings.

Initial coding

The initial coding requires a close reading of the data and the goal is to remain open to possible theoretical directions that can be discerned in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding sorts the data into categories, which allows the researcher to see the emergent process, and helps the researcher to keep the analysis grounded in the data (Charmaz, 1995; 2000). However, Charmaz (2006) points out that the coding represents the researcher's view because it is the researcher that chooses the words that constitute the codes (Charmaz, 2006).

The initial codes are provisional because the aim is to be open to other analytical possibilities and create codes that best fit the data (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2006) recommends line-by-line open coding to start the chain of theory development whereby actions or procedures are interpreted into initial codes.

Charmaz (2014) refers to participants' special terms as 'in vivo codes'. In vivo codes are a useful analytical point of departure that helps to preserve participants' views and actions in the codes themselves. In a robust grounded theory, these codes need to be integrated into the grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) states four kinds of useful in vivo codes:

- terms that everyone 'knows' that flag condensed but significant meanings
- a participant's innovated term that captures meaning or experience
- insider shorthand terms reflecting a particular group's perspective
- statements that crystallise participants' actions or concerns

(Charmaz, 2014, p. 134).

In constructivist grounded theory methods, 'gerunds' are used and are words ending in *ing* (Charmaz, 2006). Adopting gerunds fosters theoretical sensitivity because it prompts the researcher to think about and analyse actions (Charmaz, 2014). Gerunds are codes to reflect the process rather than the topic (Charmaz, 2006).

Focused coding

The next phase of the coding process is focused coding (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (1995) explains coding as "the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain the data" (Charmaz, 1995, p.37). Focused coding brings the researcher further into the comparative process. It is about paying attention to what the initial codes say, and the comparisons that have been made with and between them (Charmaz, 2014).

Focus coding helps the researcher to assess the initial codes by comparing them and distinguishes those codes that have greater analytical power into major

categories (Charmaz, 2014). Categories illuminate ideas or processes in the data and aim to make sense of what participants have said (Charmaz, 2006). In this research, focused coding was used to explain and synthesise larger segments of data. Charmaz (2014) proposed the following list to assist in defining which codes serve best as focused codes:

- What do you find when you compare your initial codes with the data?
- In which ways might your initial codes reveal patterns?
- Which of these codes best account for the data?
- Have you raised these codes to focused codes?
- What do your comparisons between codes indicate?

- Do your focused codes reveal gaps in the data?

(Charmaz, 2014, p. 141).

Conceptualisation

According to Charmaz (2006), to achieve 'theorising' the researcher needs to move beyond the coding stage of analysis in order to raise categories to concepts. It is only "the most significant categories that become concepts of the theory" (Charmaz 2006, p.186). The major categories that were identified to carry "substantial analytical weight" (Charmaz 2006, p.139) and render the data most effectively were raised to theoretical concepts. I developed theoretical concepts through the process of constant comparison, memos and diagrams.

In this study, concept development led to theoretical development. The theoretical concepts that were developed in this research were 'being dependent on the inner self', 'being internally preoccupied', 'communicating non-verbally' and

these concepts were found to represent participants' experience of attunement. The concepts of 'meeting as equals', 'bringing into view' represented the existential practitioners' experience of the other. 'Being supervised' and 'being relational-specific' represented the context and ' being empathic and attuned' and 'being within and between' represented the processes existential practitioners were engaged in.

Diagramming

Diagramming can provide a visual presentation of the major categories and their relationships (Charmaz, 2014). It can help the researcher to see the "…relative power, scope, and the directions of the categories as well as the connections among them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 218). Diagrams can be useful throughout the analytical process (Charmaz, 2014).

I used diagrams throughout my analytical process to illustrate aspects of the emerging theory. In applying diagrams, I wanted to provide the reader with a clear visual presentation of elevated concepts and their relationships. Several diagrams that illustrate the elevated concepts and their relationships can be found in Chapter 5.

Constant comparative analysis

A distinct feature in constructivist grounded theory is the constant comparative analysis where the phenomenon identified by the participant is coded and then compared throughout the data collection of the research (Charmaz, 2014). Constant comparison occurs at each level of the analytical work where the researcher searches for similarities and differences in the data (Charmaz, 2014). This research evoked the constructivist approach to constant comparison via initial and focused coding.

The data analysis procedure

This section presents how I analysed the data using the constructivist grounded theory methods. I interviewed eight participants and I transcribed each interview. In line with Charmaz's (2006) method, the coding process was undertaken using two phases; initial and focused coding.

In initial coding, I carefully viewed the transcripts line-by-line and labelled codes by noting when participants had raised key terms such as 'meeting as equals'. I found 'in vivo codes' and 'gerunds' to be useful analytic methods that helped me to preserve the participants' views and actions in the codes themselves. One example of this form of coding, that is both gerund and in-vivo coding is provided. When I asked one participant how he experienced attunement, he said that it was like 'sharing the same experience' with the client (participant 2). 'Sharing the same experience' was an initial code that was used to indicate existential practitioners' experience with the other.

I then moved on to the focused coding phase, where I carefully viewed what the initial codes said and compared those codes both within the transcript and between the transcripts. When undertaking focused coding, I moved across interviews and compared participants' experiences, actions, social interactions and their interpretations of attunement. So for example, in relation to the code 'occurring naturally', I examined the data to see how each participants talked about their experience of attunement as occurring naturally for them and compared what each had said about their experience, which assisted in refining the code of 'occurring naturally'. I went on to develop the focused code 'occurring naturally' to a category.

A central feature of the constructive grounded theory is constant comparison which means that sampling, data gathering, and analysis concurs simultaneously. I

engaged in constant comparison by comparing newly gathered data with previously collected data and coding to illuminate new insights into the analysis and coding process. For example, I used constant comparison methods to search for similarities and differences in the data to assess and raise those codes that had greater analytical power into major categories and concepts.

Theoretical saturation relies upon the process of constant comparison and it is a consequence of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical saturation' is reached when the complete range of constructs that make up the theory is fully represented by the data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) and new data reveals no additional insights (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Punch, 2005). I reached theoretical saturation by asking the subsequent participant any questions I might have about a construct. For example, one participant talked about her experience of attunement as being an experience of contrasts. I used my memo writings to reflect upon, record ideas and ask questions about the construct. I then asked the subsequent participant directly about it and this process continued until I felt the construct was fully represented in the theory and no new data revealed any additional insights.

I developed theoretical concepts through the process of constant comparison, memos and diagrams. The focused codes that had greater analytical power were raised to theoretical concepts. For example, the theoretical concept of 'being dependent on the inner self' became a major category, elevated to a concept that encompassed a number of other categories closely related to the participants' 'being dependent on the inner self'. I found using diagrams to be useful throughout the analytical process. It helped me to see the relationships between categories and elevated concepts and to clearly illustrate aspects of the emerging theory.

Theoretical memos

Charmaz (2000) sees memo writing as occurring throughout the analytic process whereby memos elaborate the processes, the assumptions, and the actions that are included in the codes. The writing of memos plays an essential part in the development of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Memos can be used to compile questions, to note reflections and to explore different ideas (Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz (2000), it is important to write in such a way that the focus is on participants' experiences. Charmaz (2014) achieves this by continuously including participants' voices through the process of memo writing.

In this research, the theoretical memos were used to record my thoughts on key issues, which emerged during the course of the interviews. In those cases for example where participants referred to attunement as a perceived experience of contrasts for their clients, this was noted for additional exploration. The process of writing memos was ongoing and it was an essential part of the development of the data analysis collection and procedure. Feedback was sought throughout the analytic process from my supervisors to ensure that the analysis conducted by me was grounded in the data.

Example of theoretical memo writings

The participants' referred to the clients' experience of attunement with them as an experience of contrasts. On one hand, existential practitioners perceived their clients to feel accepted, seen and heard which was shown by clients being physically relaxed in their bodies. The clients also reflected afterwards on their experience of attunement by saying for example that they 'felt seen' by the practitioner (participant 1).

On the other hand, existential practitioners perceived their clients to feel

overwhelmed or overexposed by the experience of attunement. It can be that the clients are not ready to explore what the participants have picked up during a session such as their emotional pain or parts of themselves they yet have to come to acknowledge. The existential practitioners noticed that their clients were feeling overwhelmed or overexposed when they avoided the subject or simply missed sessions and stop attending sessions.

So how do we know when a client is ready to engage in the experience of attunement? After months of collecting data and emerging myself in the data analysis, I found that the answer to that question was not as simple as I thought. Every client and every relationship is unique so it is impossible to know beforehand how a client might react to 'sharing an experience of attunement' for the first time. However, being aware of the clients' possible contrasting experience enable existential practitioners to understand the process and perhaps 'slow down' the psychotherapeutic exploration if they perceive their clients to feel overwhelmed or overexposed by the experience. One facilitating factor that enabled participants to become aware of the process of attunement was the support they received from their supervisors. Supervision helped existential practitioners to become self-aware and understand their inner processes in relation to the clients better.

A negative case

In grounded theory, a negative case is when participants' experiences or views differ from the main body (Charmaz, 2006). According to Charmaz (2006), negative cases may contradict or complement the grounded theory. In this research, the negative case arose from the data and rather than discounting this finding, the negative case was analysed to "give strength and rigour to the development of the emerging theory" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 198). An example of the negative case that

arose from the data and was included in the theory is presented in the subsequent section.

One participant described his experience of attunement to be on a spiritual level when working with clients' dreams. He described his experience of attunement as a spiritual experience where two people enter the subtle level of consciousness. He experienced a spiritual connection with the client that was more than an emotional connection. He described that being on the subtle level of consciousness is not about finding a truth but to discover what impact the experience they are sharing is having on them.

Although this particular participant described experiencing attunement on a spiritual level, his account of attunement shares a lot of the characteristics described by the other participants in this study. For example, he described his experience of attunement as being open, being present and being vulnerable with his clients. He described his experience of attunement as being an experience of 'sharing' between two human beings, communicated non-verbally and occurring naturally. He also talked about clients experiencing contrasting feelings and not being ready to attune.

The spiritual aspect of attunement strengthens the theory because it broadens our understanding and adds another dimension to the experience of attunement. The spiritual dimension in relation to the set of experiences this study explored will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 and 6.

Theorising

According to Charmaz (2014), theorising means, "stopping, pondering and thinking afresh" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 244). In order to achieve theorising, the researcher needs to move beyond the coding phases of analysis to raise main categories to concepts (Charmaz, 2006). Theorising fosters seeing possibilities, asking

questions and establishing connections (Charmaz, 2014). Theorising consists of actions involved in constructing the accounts in a theory (Charmaz, 2006).

I used memos and diagrams to move beyond the coding phase and raise main categories to concepts where diagrams were particularly helpful to me (Charmaz, 2014). I think diagrams gave me a clearer visual presentation of the raised categories and their relationships to each other.

Defining a theory

The main purpose of the grounded theory approach is to produce a substantive theory that describes the phenomenon of interest (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher's perspective is integral to the process of data collection and influences the emergent theory (Charmaz, 2000).

A theory tries to answer questions or offers accounts of what happened (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2006) asserts that constructivist grounded theory approach aims to develop an interpretive theory which seeks to understand rather than explain a phenomenon. It is vital though that a grounded theory moves beyond description and offers a conceptual abstract explanation of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014).

A theory is distinct from a description. Description means words of the individual that invoke mental pictures of experiences, events, and objects whereas a theory is explanatory and abstract (Charmaz, 2006). Thus I explained, not merely described what was happening in the social setting.

This research provides a conceptual abstract explanation of the experience of attunement. It gives an interpretive theory, which means that theoretical

understanding was gained through my interpretations of attunement (Charmaz, 2014). The aim of an interpretive theory is "to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 231). An interpretive theory aims to:

- conceptualise the studied phenomenon to understand it in abstract terms.
- articulate theoretical claims pertaining to scope, depth, power and relevance given in analysis.
- acknowledge subjectivity in theorising and hence recognise the role of experience, standpoints and interactions, including one's own.
- offer an imaginative theoretical interpretation that makes sense of the studied phenomenon.

Thus theorising from an interpretive perspective is an emergent process where I interpreted the participants' meanings and actions and they interpreted mine (Charmaz, 2014).

Defining a process

In this research, a process is defined as consisting of "unfolding of temporal sequences in which single events become linked as part of a larger whole. Thus temporal sequences are linked in a process and lead to change" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 344). A key strategy in constructing theory is to have a focus on actions and processes (Charmaz, 2004). Gerunds prompt me to think about actions, and adopting gerunds fostered theoretical sensitivity because these words pushed me into thinking about processes.

Charmaz (2006) points out that it might not be possible to identify one single social process that unifies everything that has been learned. Instead, the researcher

might discover several basic social processes in a setting (Charmaz, 2006). In this research, two processes were identified that captured what I had learned from participants' perceived experience of attunement.

The social processes that were identified that best captured what existential practitioners described were 'being empathic and attuned' and 'being within and between'. The processes of 'being empathic and attuned' and 'being within and between' will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the methods have been discussed and outlined in accordance with the constructivist grounded theory. The research methods in this study were appropriate for the research aim. The research design, theoretical sampling, participant sampling, data collection, and analysis have been presented. The constructivist grounded theory provided the framework applied to guide the analysis process. The subsequent chapter presents the findings of this research.

Chapter 5 Findings

In the previous chapter, the methods were outlined and discussed for this research. In this chapter, I present the findings of the analysis and the theoretical conceptualisation of how participants construct a sense of being attuned to their clients. The findings will be presented with excerpts from the interviews and my interpretations. In the final section of this chapter, I present the substantive theory of this research.

The findings of this research are clearly grounded in the data as the experience of attunement is described through the participants' own words (Charmaz, 2014). The findings from the analysis and conceptualisations of the data are presented in four parts.

The categories and the concepts identified in this research relate to the processes and are outlined in the following model below (see Figure 4: The representation of attunement and its processes, p.114). The presentation of a model intends to assist the reader to see how all the pieces fit together to create a sense of the whole. The elevated concepts presented in this study were all part of the framework for theorising and involved in constructing the accounts of the substantive theory. The chapter and the model follow the same outline and both are described in more detail in the subsequent section.

The first part: 'attunement - an embodied constructed experience of contrasts' presents how participants construct a sense of being attuned to their clients, encompassed within the major categories, which were elevated to concepts (Charmaz, 2006). The concepts of 'being dependent on the inner self', 'communicating non-verbally' and 'being internally preoccupied' were developed from the analytical process.

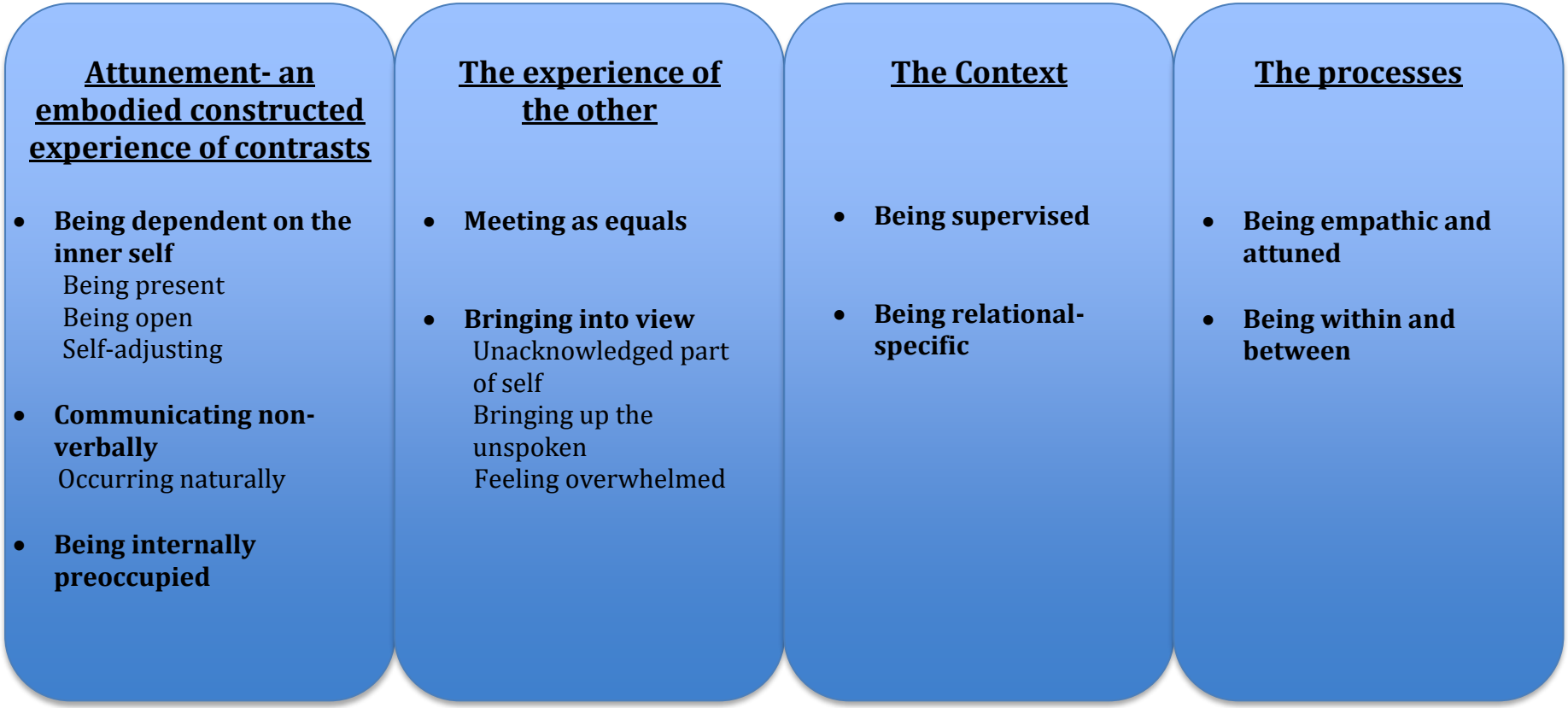
The second part: ‘the experience of the other’ describes participants’ set of experiences of attunement in relation to their clients. The concepts of ‘meeting as equals’, and ‘bringing into view’ were identified.

The third part: ‘the context’ presents participants’ circumstances that form their experience of attunement. The concepts of ‘being supervised’ and ‘being relational-specific’ were developed from the analytical process.

The fourth part: ‘the processes’ presents the processes of this research. The two processes identified in this study were ‘being empathic and attuned’ and ‘being within and between’. These were the processes the participants were engaged in as they experienced being attuned to their clients.

In the final section of this chapter, the theory of how existential practitioners come to construct a sense of attunement with their clients is introduced. The theory is based on analysis and interpretations of participants’ account of how they constructed attunement, what that experience meant to them and the psychotherapeutic relationship.

Figure 4: The representation of attunement and its processes



Attunement - an embodied constructed experience of contrasts

This section presents my account of participants constructed meanings and actions of their experience of attunement. The participants in this study talked to me about their experience of attunement, how that experience was like for them, and how they made sense of it.

The participants were fully and actively engaged in their experience of attunement – emotionally, physically, psychosocially and spiritually. Attunement was therefore understood to be an embodied constructed experience for the participants, which is illustrated by the categories and the concepts in the subsequent section. Embodiment in this work recognises that "thoughts, feelings and behaviours are grounded in bodily interaction with the environment" (Meier, Schnall, Schwarz & Bargh, 2012, p.1). This means that the participants' embodied constructed experience of attunement – the emotional, the physical, the psychosocial and the spiritual were interactive and interlinked.

The existential practitioners' experience of attunement was also one of contrasts. Their experiences of attunement ranged from feelings of warmth and love to feelings of discomfort and pain. The contrasting feelings are illustrated in the following quotes:

> *It is a very nice experience, it is kind of a warm experience where you feel you are really sharing something with the client, and it is quite delightful (participant 2).*

> *It is a lovely feeling in my chest and is quite warm and tingly but it is so nice that it feels sometimes uncomfortable because it is a bit intense (participant 5).*

When I am with him and he is talking about howling in pain, and he means literately and physically howling in pain, I feel some of that (participant 7).

It was a terrifying experience for her, so the contrast between that level of harmony that I felt, and I was not being disturbed, her material did not disturb me. I was just really with her as she described it, utterly accepting. It was still a level of harmony that I experienced. I felt a lot of love, a lot of love for her (participant 9).

The contrasting feelings of warmth and love to feelings of discomfort and pain reflect the complexity of existential practitioners' experience of attunement. These contrasting feelings were found to be evident within the same participant as well as between participants.

I reflected on what impact these contrasting experiences might have on the participants' experience of attunement. I found that although the participants at times experienced discomfort and pain when being attuned, those contrasting experiences presented by their clients did not completely become their own experiences. Thus their clients' contrasting experiences did not overwhelm existential practitioners because they were firmly grounded within themselves by maintaining a sense of awareness of their experiences with their clients.

Being dependent on the inner self

'Being dependent on the inner self' describes how the participants' experience is dependent on their inner state of being, and their individual responsibility towards their inner state of being. 'Being' describes how participants experience attunement. The 'inner self' in this study describes the participants' mental and emotional state of being. 'Being dependent on the inner self' also describes an aspect of how participants come to construct a sense of 'becoming attuned' to their clients.

‘Being dependent on the inner self’ became a major category, elevated to a concept that encompasses a number of other categories closely related to the participants’ ‘being dependent on the inner self’. Thus the related categories became subcategories of ‘being dependent on the inner self’ and these are: ‘being present’, ‘being open’ and ‘self-adjusting’.

All participants in this research expressed at some level that the experience of attunement in a session was dependent on their inner state of being. Being mindful of their inner state of being enabled them to feel a sense of becoming attuned to their clients. The following quotes reflect the concept of ‘being dependent on the inner self’:

> *Sometimes it [attunement] requires more effort depending on how I feel on that day other times it feels very effortless and it is like it just flows (participant 6).*

> *I would ground myself; I would be still within myself and be present a bit like ‘tuning up’ my own instrument (participant 9).*

‘Being dependent on the inner self’ also reflected existential practitioners’ responsibility towards their inner state of being as the following excerpts illustrate:

> *I think attunement starts with me, not with the client. I need to be aware of my own agenda with what is happening in myself (participant 6).*

> *I tried to let go of the thoughts that were entering my mind (participant 8).*

Being present

‘Being present’ represents participants’ experience of being aware of themselves, the other and their environment. ‘Being present’ was identified as a sub

category of ‘being dependent on the inner self’, and ‘being present’ itself was seen to give rise to participants’ ‘being dependent on the inner self. ‘Being present’ is reflected in the following quote:

> *Be there with my own presence with my own existence and with my own being (participant 2).*

One participant described how she experienced ‘being present’ both within herself and towards her client as the following excerpt illustrates:

> *I was just really with her, very present within myself and very present to her (participant 9).*

Another aspect of ‘being present’ is in relation to how participants experienced having an awareness of their surroundings during a session. Several participants expressed that being aware of their surroundings gave them an impression that time itself was slowing down. One participant described this in the following passage:

> *When we are in that state [being attuned] it feels more intense […] the temperature in the room is different the pressure in the room is different (participant 7).*
>
> *In what way is it different? (Jaqueline)*
>
> *It is almost like the time seems to slow down a little (participant 7).*

The sub category of ‘being present’ therefore represented participants’ awareness of themselves, the other and their environment. Being self-aware was a key element of ‘being present’. Several participants described that at times they felt that

being very present in a session resulted in them feeling exhausted, which is reflected in the following quotes from the interviews:

> *You need to be very present and I find that at times it can feel a bit exhausting (participant 6).*

> *It is like the whole energy in your body has been sucked out, and you need space to actually regenerate (participant 10).*

Being open

'Being open' was a sub category to 'being dependent on the inner self' and refers to participants' willingness to open the self to the other, and thereby allowing the self to be vulnerable in the presence of the other. The concept of 'being open' also describes participants' curiosity towards the other. The following quotes illustrate the concept of 'being open':

> *With a client, I feel I have to somewhat be prepared to let go of my guard and be vulnerable momentarily (participant 8).*

> *It [attunement] requires me to have a general openness, which can feel vulnerable for me (participant 6).*

One participant described her curiosity towards her client as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *I had a really strong feeling that I needed to find a way to see more of the client (participant 2).*

One participant expressed that ‘being open’ and therefore being vulnerable in the presence of the other could at times result in feelings of anxiety, which is reflected in the following quote:

> *I may feel anxious or I may feel like fearful of being honest with a client, I have to sometimes make myself open up despite those feelings (participant 10).*

Several participants experienced ‘being open’ as a moment when the boundaries became blurred between themselves and their clients as the following excerpts illustrate:

> *The boundary between the client and the therapist disappears (participant 2).*

> *There is not a self or another anymore (participant 5).*

> *I think we are standing close enough that some of that natural isolation from others is breaking down and it becomes a special moment (participant 7).*

This aspect of ‘being open’, when participants experience that the boundaries between themselves and their clients became blurred, allowed them to experience a sharing of their clients’ inner world. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *There is an opening of the therapist and the client and this opening allow us to share the same mental area or the same space (participant 2).*

Self-adjusting

‘Self-adjusting’ was identified as a sub category to ‘being dependent on the inner self’ and describes how participants feel they need to adjust their inner state of

being to their clients in the moment. The following quote illustrates a part of the concept of 'self-adjusting', which is always present in the experience of attunement:

> *An adjusting so when [a client] comes to see me, I sit there, and [I say] okay it is a different energetic field coming into the room, there is two of us now, it is not just me so I am feeling into myself. What is happening with the other person, and how that is impacting me? So then I am adjusting to what is happening between us (participant 9).*

The participants describe another aspect of 'self-adjusting' as being a conflict between the senses because what the client brought up was not what the practitioners were sensing was going on with the client. This part of 'self-adjusting' is relational specific, which means that it is dependent on the client and the relationship. This aspect of 'self-adjusting' might therefore not always be present when existential practitioners construct a sense of being attuned to their clients, which is reflected in the following excerpt:

> *It is a sort of adjustment that happens, almost like I can physically feel my body wanting to adjust but I do not physically do it […] it is almost like I'm tuning. What I am seeing is not what is going on, so it is almost like I have to tune like you tune a radio to get the right wavelength, so my different senses are in conflict with each other (participant 1).*

Another aspect of participants' experience of 'self-adjusting' was expressed as being able to do less in a session. Thus participants needed to adjust their inner state of being into 'doing less' and 'being more' in a session. One participant described this in the following quote:

I think experience and the confidence to do less are definitely part of it [being attuned] (participant 5)

Confidence to do less? (Jaqueline)

Yes, because it is quite hard to 'not do' in therapy, to 'be' it is quite difficult. It is quite hard to just be (participant 5).

Communicating non-verbally

The concept of 'communicating non-verbally' became an elevated concept with the related sub category of 'occurring naturally'. The concept of 'communicating non-verbally' describes how participants perceive attunement as a non-verbal experience and express attunement non-verbally with their clients. 'Communicating non-verbally' demonstrates participants' embodied experience of attunement. The following quotes illustrate the concept of 'communicating non-verbally':

We both sank into something and it was so comfortable being with each other and we were not really talking very much but we both knew sitting face to face we both knew that we were there (Participant 5).

Opening into the spiritual level, the subtle level (participant 2).

She knew and I knew she knew that I was with her even though we didn't say anything I felt she knew that she wasn't alone in that moment (participant 9).

The participants described their experience of attunement with their clients as expressed non-verbally between them as illustrated in the following excerpts:

I get it and she knows I get it and we do not need words for that (participant 7).

The thing that struck me so strongly was how much silence it was between us; it was the most silent process in therapy I have ever experienced (participant 9).

The silence, it is not a silence filled with anxiety it is the silence of 'I feel good now', 'I feel understood', 'I feel like you get me' [perception of client] (participant 10).

The participants described how they perceived their clients as becoming relaxed when they experienced being attuned to their clients, which is illustrated in the following quotes:

At that moment he changed as he relaxed into being with me (participant 8).

A client that is very upset or anxious may sort of just 'huh' relax in their body (participant 1).

Well in this particular experience I am describing [being attuned] there is not much verbal content or words involved and it is much more a felt connection and it has nothing to do with words or thinking, it is more a feeling and it is a mutual thing because he sinks into that as well and has the same sort of relaxed connection (participant 5).

Although the experience of attunement was a non-verbal experience, several participants said that at times their clients would verbally express how their experience of attunement had been for them. The subsequent excerpt reflects the clients' reaction following their experience of attunement:

I feel seen for the first time (participant 1).

Oh, you noticed that (participant 6).

Oh, it felt like you know exactly how I am feeling (participant 10).

Another aspect of 'communicating non-verbally' is that participants expressed how they sought to connect with their clients on a non-verbal level and experienced a felt connection. One participant described his experience of attunement as a dynamic yet complex dance where he sought to connect with his client on a non-verbal level, which is reflected in the following quote:

> *It is a very dynamic dance that goes on I think between myself and my clients and who starts it and how it evolves is actually quite complex but I think for my part there is always an aspect of wanting to connect at an emotional and an embodied level in order to really attune to that client and step into their world, to their emotional world momentarily (participant 8).*

Occurring naturally

'Occurring naturally' describes how participants experience attunement as happening naturally, and 'occurring naturally' is a sub category of 'communicating non-verbally'. 'Occurring naturally' might at first glance seem to contradict the concept of 'being dependent on the inner self' because the experience of attunement is dependent on participants' inner state of being. Thus there is a paradox in which participants feel they come to construct attunement with a sense of intention towards the client but the process occurs naturally. The participants describe the concept of 'occurring naturally' in relation to 'being dependent on the inner self' in the following excerpts:

It happens naturally but I think that there is some intentionality there as well so I don't think it would happen unless I am present with my clients and prepared to tune into my clients (participant 8).

It happens naturally but you have to let it happen (participant 5).

One participant described how attunement might happen naturally, which is closely related to the sub category 'self-adjusting'. The participant needed to adjust to the other by making space within herself for the other. This is illustrated in the following quote:

Giving the client space and not filling the space with your own whatever it is but really make room for the client (participant 6).

Being internally preoccupied

The concept of 'being internally preoccupied' reflects participants' experience of not being attuned to their clients. 'Being internally preoccupied' describes how the participants experience internal factors that prevent them from becoming attuned. 'Internally preoccupied' in this study describes how participants pay attention to their thoughts and therefore having difficulties engaging with the other.

The concept of 'being internally preoccupied' is a direct opposite to the sub category 'being present'. When participants were internally preoccupied they were not being present with their clients. 'Being internally preoccupied' is in a sense to be present within oneself. However, 'being internally preoccupied' is about being focused on one's thoughts, and the focus on thoughts prevents an individual from being present in the moment. The following quotes reflect the concept of 'being internally preoccupied':

I can find myself thinking about an activity I am doing later that day (participant 7).

It could be that a client talks about something and it is too close to home, it reminds me of an experience that I share and that I feel I need to disconnect from (participant 6).

The participants expressed several other factors that prevented them from becoming attuned to their clients such as personal issues or feeling fatigued.

The existential practitioners described another aspect of 'being internally preoccupied' such as by noticing that they were attuned to their clients resulted in them feeling that they came out of their experience. The participants described attunement as a felt experience and therefore recognising that they were attuned to their clients brought them out of that experience and into a state of mind that involved cognitive processing. Cognitive processing is about being engaged in the process of thinking, which prevents an individual from being present in the moment. The following quote illustrates this aspect of 'being internally preoccupied':

Attunement comes quite unexpectedly and everything goes quite quiet and it is a felt connection and it is recognised by both, and then I think we recognise the connection by recognising it we make ourselves come out of it, that is when you spot something and the fact that you spotted it means you lost it (participant 5).

The experience of the other

This section presents participants' experience and perception of their clients. The participants perceived their clients to experience attunement as a non-verbal and embodied experience. Thus the participants perceived their clients to be actively and fully involved with them in the experience of attunement- emotionally, physically, psychosocially and spiritually, which is illustrated by the categories and the concepts in the subsequent section.

The experience of the other was also described as one of contrasts. The participants described their experience of attunement with their clients as an experience of contrasts where their clients felt accepted and heard or overwhelmed and overexposed. The participants' perception of their clients' experience of attunement as an experience of contrasts will be illustrated with excerpts under the subcategories of 'bringing up the unspoken' and 'feeling overwhelmed'.

The participants' experience of the other is encompassed within the major categories, which were elevated to the concepts of 'meeting as equals' and 'bringing into view'. The subsequent section presents the elevated concept of 'meeting as equals'.

Meeting as equals

The concept of 'meeting as equals' reflects existential practitioners' experience of meeting the other as an equal human being, from the participants' perspective. The concept of 'meeting as equals' is illustrated in the following quotes:

> *For this brief moment we are just two people and it feels very equal and very connected (participant 6).*

It is a feeling that we are both human beings that are sharing the experience (participant 2).

One participant described the experience of attunement with her client as a moment in which she felt there was a mutual openness between them, which is reflected in the following excerpt:

They [clients] do not need to hide but I also feel that I do not need to hide behind the therapy mask […] in this moment it feels like just two people and it feels very real (participant 6).

Several participants found that they experienced 'meeting as equals' to result in a moment of shared intimacy with the other. One participant found the experience of attunement to be difficult because of that shared intimacy with the other as illustrated in the following quote:

I feel a reason why attunement is so difficult, and as I said it can be because of me as a therapist and my own issues, but very often it is because it is such an intimate relationship…(participant 6).

'Meeting as equals' also resulted in existential practitioners feeling that they shared an understanding with their clients, which is reflected in the following excerpt:

It is like we have reached that moment [of being attuned] and we both know that we are sharing this moment…(participant 10).

Bringing into view

'Bringing into view' became a major category, elevated to a concept that encompassed a number of other categories closely related to the concept of 'bringing

into view'. Thus the related categories became subcategories of 'bringing into view' and these were: 'unacknowledged part of self', 'bringing up the unspoken' and 'feeling overwhelmed'.

'Bringing into view' describes how participants let their clients become aware of parts of themselves they have not yet come to acknowledge. The sub category 'unacknowledged part of self' describes clients' part of themselves that they have not yet come to acknowledge and will be described in more detail in the subsequent section. 'Bringing into view' was clearly an important yet complex concept of participants' experience and understanding of attunement.

The existential practitioners expressed that one aspect of 'bringing into view' occurred as a result of being attuned to their clients. The participants described a second aspect of 'bringing into view' as how the concept 'bringing into view' could facilitate the experience of attunement and therefore enable participants to become attuned to their clients. The following excerpts reflect the concept of 'bringing into view' and these two aspects of this idea:

> *Where for me it helped the therapy was that I could hold that part of the client and listen with that ear having this information to what they were bringing and saying, and I suppose I would respond to certain things with questions related more to this hidden side of them, which would slowly begin to bring that into the work (participant 1).*

The first excerpt above reflects one participant's experience of 'bringing into view'. Being attuned to her client allowed her to both identify and connect to the client's 'unacknowledged part of self' and slowly bring that knowledge into the psychotherapeutic work. 'Bringing into view' was therefore perceived to occur as a result of participants' sense of being attuned to their clients.

…but actually what they [clients] are doing is talking about something that has a huge emotional content and I think that there are moments that I can pinpoint where either there is some emotion attached to it but they moved passed it or there should be emotions attached to it and they seem to gloss over it. But bringing them back to that and naming it […] even if there is just a moment of recognition, often there is a sense of a felt connection and attunement…(participant 8).

In the second excerpt above, one participant describes 'bringing into view' as how his clients avoided talking about emotional content. The participant brought those emotions 'into view' and when clients were able to stay with those emotions the experience of attunement occurred. Thus 'bringing into view' facilitated the experience of attunement with the client.

Another participant described her experience of 'bringing into view' as reflected in the following excerpt:

I may say something that actually leads to this experience [attunement]... but it is not really the verbal thing that I am saying that leads to this experience. I think it is the sharing of that experience and being open in the moment with the client (participant 10)

Unacknowledged part of self

The concept of 'unacknowledged part of self' reflects participants' perception and understanding of their clients' parts of themselves they have not yet come to acknowledge. The concept of 'unacknowledged part of self' is a sub category of 'bringing into view. The 'unacknowledged part of self' was seen to give rise to participants 'bringing into view'. The following quote reflects the concept of 'unacknowledged part of self':

> *To see beyond it [client's façade] and be connected to the part that the client so desperately tries to cover up, so desperately tries to abort to still be connected to that (participant 6).*

The participants perceive the concept of 'unacknowledged part of self' to reflect a part of the client that the client is trying to cover up, which according to the participants are the client's painful emotions. The 'unacknowledged part of self' also describes a part of the clients that they might not always be aware of such as their potentials in life. One participant described her experience of the client's unacknowledged potentials, which is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *I also think, if you are able to tune into people, that you are able to enable them because you get a really good sense, I certainly do, I get a really good sense of what they are capable of and often up to that point they haven't really shown that in their lives. So I really get a sense of their purpose in a way what they are able to achieve (participant 1).*

The same participant described what a client's 'unacknowledged potentials' might be as illustrated in the following quote:

It is seeing, it is seeing how magnificent that person is, and it is tuning into that part of them, it is definitely tuning into their core being for me. It's who they really are, it is for me always about bringing in that part, their journey is giving birth to that part of them (participant 1).

In the following section, I present my memo writings where I describe how I came to choose the term for this sub category "unacknowledged part of self'. In constructivist grounded theory, gerund or in vivo codes are the recommended methods to use when labelling categories. However, in this case, I chose to deviate from that and my reasons are expressed in the memo below.

Memo

I really struggle to find a 'term' to describe this sub category. The participants referred to their experience of their clients as a 'hidden part' of the client. The word 'to hide' describes keeping something out of sight. In line with the constructivist approach, I could describe their experience of their clients as 'hiding part of self' or 'being hidden'. However, the data seems to suggest that the clients were not always aware of this part of themselves. If you are not aware of something how can you then hide it? One participant described several of his clients as being unaware of their emotions or potentials (participant 8). I think 'unacknowledged part of self' subsumes more of the nuances contained in the data and it describes clients' hidden part of self as well as the unawareness of their part of self. The unacknowledged part of the clients is present, and they are either hiding it, avoiding it or have not yet encountered it and they are therefore unaware of it.

Bringing up the unspoken

'Bringing up the unspoken' was identified as participants' experience of their clients disclosing something for the first time or talking about something of great importance. 'Bringing up the unspoken' is a sub category of 'bringing into view'.

Similarly to 'bringing into view' participants expressed that 'bringing up the unspoken' could either occur as a result of being attuned or 'bringing up the unspoken' could enable the participants to become attuned to their clients. The following passage reflects the latter aspect of 'bringing up the unspoken':

> *It is something they have not said before and so it is something that they have not said for a reason because of the possible reaction of other people so then to say it and for it to be accepted and held. I think there attunement happens (participant 5).*
>
> *So it is almost like they are showing a part of themselves for the first time and you are accepting that part? (Jaqueline).*
>
> *Yes (participant 5).*
>
> *What goes on for you when that happens? (Jaqueline).*
>
> *I am very aware that they have said something and said something that they see as very disturbing and have not really said to anyone before because of the nature of it. And I am aware of that and I suppose I feel that they are very pleased that they have been able to say it and I can sort of receive it in a certain way, which makes it probably feel comfortable for the client and sort of accepted (participant 5).*

The participants perceived that 'bringing up the unspoken' resulted in clients feeling accepted by them, which is reflected in the above passage. The participants

also described that accepting their clients made their clients feel heard, which is illustrated in the following quote:

There was a moment where he felt heard (participant 8).

Feeling overwhelmed

'Feeling overwhelmed' refers to participants' experience of their clients. The participants perceived their clients to feel overwhelmed, uncomfortable or overexposed by the experience of attunement. 'Feeling overwhelmed' is a sub category of 'bringing into view'. The feelings of being overwhelmed, uncomfortable or overexposed are contrasted with aspects of 'bringing up the unspoken' where participants perceived their clients to feel accepted and seen.

'Feeling overwhelmed' describes participants' experience of their clients as being overwhelmed by the experience of attunement or not being fully prepared and ready to experience attunement with them. The following excerpts reflect 'feeling overwhelmed':

It feels like the abyss for some clients (participant 8).

It could feel for a client that you are going in with a scalpel into a raw wound, and the client just feels too exposed (participant 1).

Other clients tense up and are scared 'oh my god I do not know this, what is this?' and they either act out like this lady or they withdraw even more like some other client did (participant 6).

Too scary for the client (participant 2).

The participants experienced their clients as not always being fully prepared or ready to experience attunement, which is illustrated in the following excerpts:

> *For some clients, this is not something that they are ready or prepared to do (participant 8).*

> *You have to be very careful because if I tune in for instance to deep wounding, I have a need to know that wounding and understand it but I need to be mindful then that the client might not be ready to go there, and I need to be mindful of that (participant 1).*

The participants described that 'bringing into view' could result in clients feeling overexposed as reflected in the following quote:

> *The power of it [attunement], how it works, is that the person that you are tuning into if you respond to that attunement verbally or by some action, could feel quite exposed when they are not quite ready for that exposure (participant 1).*

Consequently, clients that felt overwhelmed or overexposed because of their experience of attunement reacted by missing sessions, which is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *For a lot of clients, it is scary and a lot of clients miss sessions because it is something new, they do not come anymore (participant 6).*

The context

This section presents participants circumstances that form their experience of attunement. The existential practitioners described their experience of their clients as an embodied constructed experience.

The context describes participants' supervision as a facilitating factor for attunement to occur. The context also describes the relation-specific circumstances of attunement. The participants' experience of the context was elevated to the concepts of 'being supervised' and 'being relational-specific'. The subsequent section presents the elevated concept of 'being supervised'.

Being supervised

'Being supervised' refers to the importance of supervision. 'Being supervised' describes how participants can facilitate their experience of attunement through supervision. 'Being supervised' is reflected in the flowing quotes:

> *I bring that to supervision to explore why it is that I am drifting away (participant 7).*

> *I use that space [supervision] to tune back in with somebody else reflecting back, tuning in to what is going on for me so they [supervisor] tune into me to see what is actually happening and I really trust that. So tuning in to whatever blockage there is in there [within herself] or whatever issue or whatever emotion is evoked in me and then I can use that to have clarity and understanding (participant 9).*

Several participants expressed that 'being supervised' caused them to become more self-aware and enabled them to change their way of relating to their clients. One

participant described her experience of supervision and how that resulted in her becoming attuned to her client, which is reflected in the following excerpt:

> *I brought it to supervision and realised that I would basically not force her [client] to change something but at the same time, I continued to enable the situation because I did not connect her to her feelings. And when I realised that attunement basically happened already in supervision in a sense because I think attunement starts with me, not with the client. I need to be aware of my own agenda with what is happening in myself (participant 6).*

The participant perceived supervision to facilitate her experience of being attuned to the client. Supervision enabled her to become aware of her inner state of being and as a result, she could relate differently and become attuned to the client.

Being relational-specific

'Being relational-specific' refers to participants experience of attunement to be dependent on the relationship and/or the situation they found themselves in. 'Being relational-specific' describes participants' experience of attunement as fluctuating depending on their relationship with their clients and/or the psychotherapeutic moment. The relationship and the psychotherapeutic moment were described as unique experiences. 'Being relational-specific' also refers to participants' temporal perception of their experience of attunement.

The concept of 'being dependent on the inner self' is interactive and interlinked with 'being relational-specific' because existential practitioners' experience of attunement is also dependent on their inner state of being. Thus participants' experience of attunement is dependent on their inner state of being, their

client and the specific moment they are engaged in. ‘Being relational-specific’ is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *It depends a lot on the client but also on the specific situation (participant 6).*

Existential participants expressed their temporal perception of attunement as being a momentary experience with a sense of stillness. The participants’ temporal perception of attunement is presented in the following quotes:

> *It is more momentarily and there is a felt sense of connection in certain moments within the session (participant 8).*

> *It is intense but very calm, sort of a stillness (participant 10).*

Several participants expressed that the intensity of their experience of attunement fluctuated depending on their psychotherapeutic relationship to the client. One participant described this aspect of ‘being relational-specific’ in the following quote:

> *It is as though with other clients when I touch their world view it sometimes feel like I am wearing a glove and that glove is sometimes thicker or thinner depending on how well we are getting on but with this client [being attuned] it feels though I got a naked hand we are just so close (participant 7).*

The processes

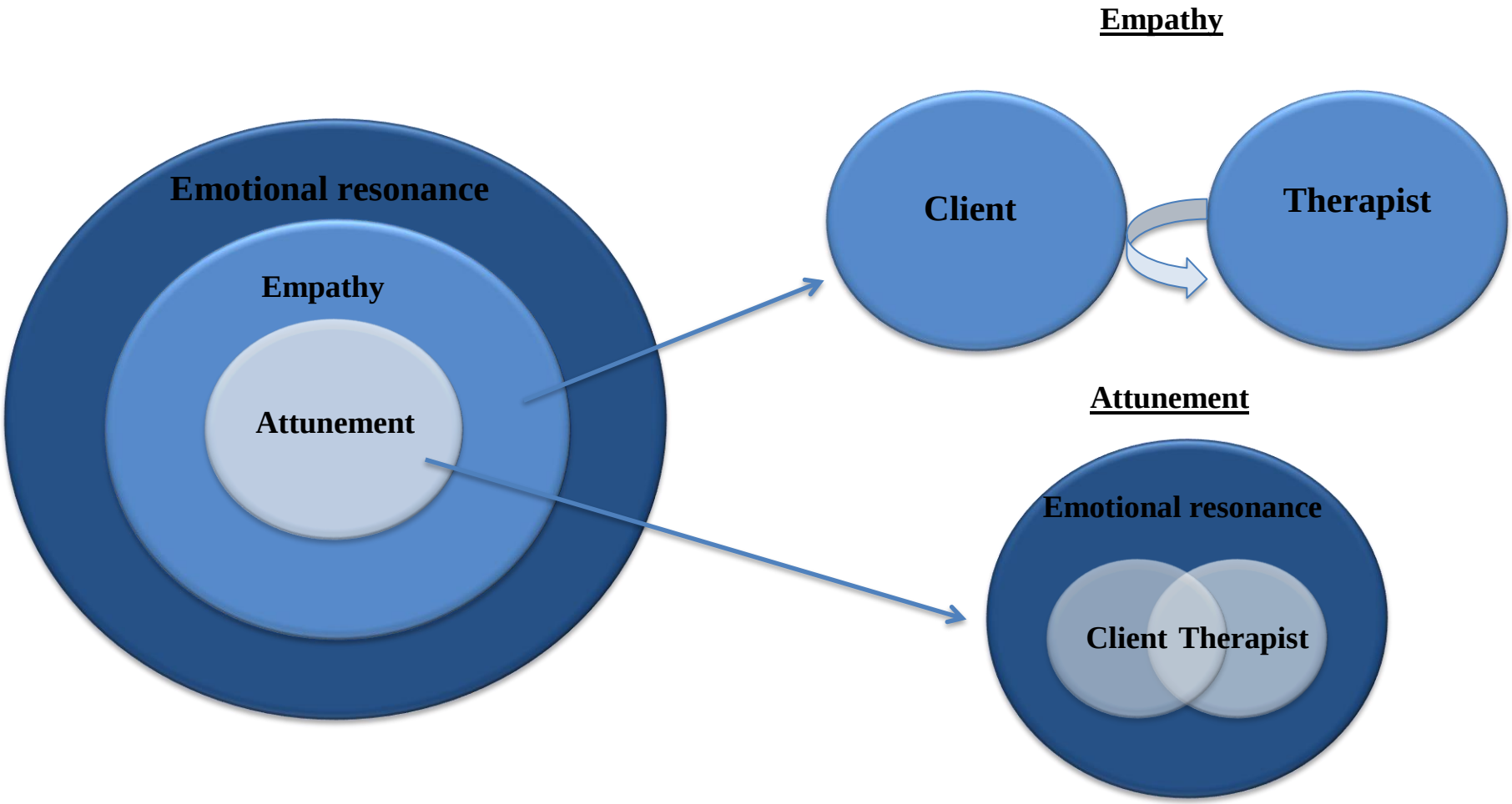
This section is concerned with the processes that existential practitioners were engaged in as they made meaning of their experience of attunement. In this study, a process was defined as "an unfolding of temporal sequences in which single events become linked as part of a larger whole (Charmaz, 2014, p. 344). 'Being empathic and attuned' and 'being within and between' were the two processes identified from the abstraction and conceptualisation of the data.

The process of 'being empathic and attuned' is a process at a macro-level and describes attunement's relationship to empathy. A macro-level analysis in this study describes the process of attunement as a whole. The process of 'being empathic and attuned' illustrates how the pieces fit together to create a sense of the whole.

The process of 'being within and between' is a process at a micro-level that describes the process of participants' sense of self when being attuned to their clients. A micro-level analysis in this study is an analysis of existential practitioners' sense of self being directed inwards, towards their inner state of being, and outwards towards the other. 'Being within and between' makes up one part of the process 'being empathic and attuned'.

In order to assist the reader to see how all the pieces fit together to create a sense of the whole, the two processes 'being attuned and empathic' and 'being within and between' are illustrated in the diagram below in Figure 5: The processes.

Figure 5: The processes



In the subsequent section, the process of 'being empathic and attuned' is presented.

Being empathic and attuned

'Being empathic and attuned' describes the process the participants were engaged in when constructing a sense of being attuned to their clients. 'Being empathic and attuned' is a macro process that describes the relationship between empathy and attunement. A macro-level analysis in this study describes the process of attunement as a whole. The relationship between empathy and attunement is illustrated in a diagram (see Figure 6: The process of being empathic and attuned, p. 145). Several participants expressed in a very similar way, how they experienced attunement in relation to empathy, which is presented in the following excerpts:

> *If I am attuned I am always empathic but when I am empathic I am not necessarily attuned (participant 6).*
>
> *I think attunement does involve empathy but empathy does not necessarily involve attunement (participant 8).*
>
> *Being attuned involves empathy but I can be empathic without being attuned (participant 10).*

Thus empathy seems to share the same emotional resonance as attunement. Although existential practitioners cannot be attuned without first being empathic there are certain unique aspects of attunement that makes the experience of attunement different from the 'pure' experience of empathy.

The participants described empathy as more an involvement of the mind compared to attunement. In this study, the mind is defined as the ability to think and reason, thus the mind encompasses the intellect. The participants described the difference between attunement and empathy and referred to empathy as illustrated in the following quotes:

[Empathy] a meeting of the minds (participant 7).

It is possible to empathise with someone on an intellectual level but to tune in with someone involves more depth (participant 8).

One participant described her experience of empathy in the following way:

[Empathy] It is a cycle of feeling, thought and action (participant 1).

The aspect of 'thought' from the above excerpt was further elaborated on and involved an inquiry into the feeling state of the self and the other and an attempt to identify with the other. One participant expressed this aspect of 'thought' illustrated in the following excerpt:

[Empathy] by deliberately stopping and thinking; 'How does that feel like for the other', 'How does that feel for the client, 'Did I have a similar experience?' 'What does it feel like for me?' (participant 5).

The aspect of 'action' (previous excerpt from participant 1) in participants' experience of empathy was described as a verbal interaction with their clients. Contrary to attunement, a verbal interaction was necessary for participants to express empathy. Empathy was verbally expressed to inform clients that they had been heard

and understood. The following quote illustrates the aspect of 'action' in the experience of empathy:

> *When I am being empathic I would be disclosing how I was feeling or paraphrasing to show that I got what was happening to them [clients] (participant 9).*

The participants experienced empathy as being an involvement of the intellect part of the self whereas the experience of attunement was expressed to be more of an embodied involvement of the self.

Consequently, participants had to express empathy verbally to their clients in order for the clients to feel heard and understood. However, the participants described attunement with their clients as a 'shared experience' where both understood each other non-verbally.

The participants experienced empathy as different to attunement in relation to the role of their inner self. The participants described being empathic to be 'a coming close to' and stepping into'. The following quotes illustrate this aspect of empathy:

> *[Empathy] feels more like a relational sense-making, a sensing, a coming close to, a stepping into (participant 9).*

I reflected on what role the self played in existential practitioners' experience of empathy. The participants described one aspect of empathy as a 'feeling state' or emotional resonance. I believe this aspect is the 'shared experience' of empathy, a 'stepping into' (excerpt above participant 9) and describes the intersubjective quality of empathy. In order for empathy to be a 'shared experience', I found that the aspect

of ‘feeling’ in empathy required the participants to be present in the moment and within themselves.

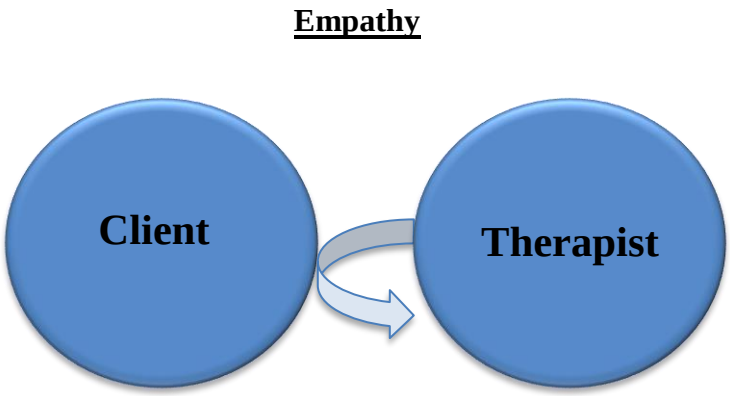
However, the existential practitioners brought themselves out of that ‘feeling state’ and engaged in thought processes and expressed actions. As previously illustrated as a part of attunement in the concept of ‘being internally preoccupied’, being engaged in thought processes prevents an individual from being present in the moment and therefore feeling ‘attuned’ to the client. I reflected upon why the participants removed themselves from the ‘feeling state’ with the other and moved into thought processing and expressed actions.

There can be several reasons for why existential practitioners remove themselves from the ‘feeling state’ with the other and instead engage in thought processing. One reason could be that staying in a ‘feeling state’ or a ‘shared experience’ with the other requires the participants to continue being present in the moment and within themselves which can be exhausting. Existential practitioners’ expression of feeling exhausted is previously illustrated as a part of attunement in the subcategory of ‘being present’. Another reason could be that the participants recognise that they are ‘sharing a moment’ with the client and therefore are taken out of the experience as illustrated in the concept of ‘being internally preoccupied’.

Thus I found that the self plays a different role in empathy compared to attunement. Contrary to being attuned, when being empathic the self does not need to be so invested in the ‘shared experience’ with the other. Illustrated as a part of attunement in the subcategory of ‘being open’, being empathic does not require the self to be as open and vulnerable as when being attuned to the other. In my understanding, being empathic requires participants to verbally express an empathic response to their clients because the self is not shared with the other. This process is

illuminated in the figure below: the process of being empathic and attuned is further discussed as a part of the presentation of the process of 'being within and between'.

Figure 6: The process of being empathic and attuned



Being within and between

'Being within and between' refers to the micro process of participants' sense of self when being attuned to their clients. A micro-level analysis in this study is an analysis of participants' sense of self being directed inwards towards their inner state of being and outwards towards the other. The concept of 'being within and between' also involved participants' sense of openness and receptivity toward their clients. The process of participants'' sense of self when being attuned to their clients is illustrated in a diagram (see Figure 7: The process of being within and between, p. 148).

The participants described an aspect of the process of 'being within and between', as a directedness towards their inner state of being. When participants directed their sense of the self inwards that enabled them to become self-aware. Being self-aware was seen to give rise to the concepts of 'being dependent on the inner self'

and its sub categories ‘being present’, ‘being open’ and ‘self-adjusting’. The aspect of being self-aware in the process of ‘being within and between’ is illustrated in the following quote:

> *I need to be aware of my own agenda with what is happening in myself (participant 6).*

The participants expressed the importance of supervision in order to become self-aware. The process of ‘being supervised’ was therefore seen to give rise, in some instances, to the participants’ self-awareness.

The aspect of being self-aware in the process of ‘being within and between’ resulted in existential practitioners perceiving it easier to attune to their clients. This is presented in the following excerpt:

> *If you are in touch with that part of you, then it is easier to connect to it in others (participant 1).*

The process of ‘being within and between’ also reflected participants’ sense of self being directed outwards towards the other. All the participants expressed a sense of intentionality towards their clients where they sought to ‘attune’ to the client, which was previously presented in the concept of ‘occurring naturally’.

In this study, the word intentionality means that the awareness is ‘directed towards’ the other. Intentionality was required for participants to facilitate a sense of openness and receptivity toward their clients. This aspect of the process of ‘being within and between’ reflects participants’ self-awareness, openness and receptivity in relation to the other’s presence is illustrated in the following excerpts:

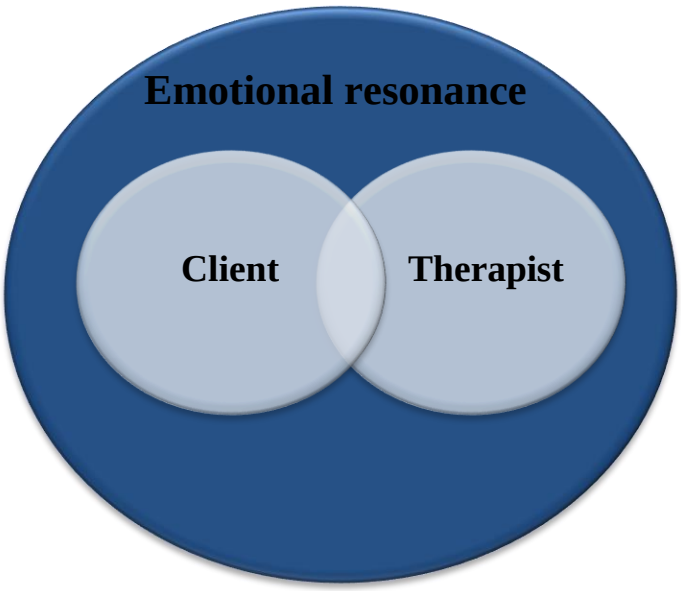
I am tuning into myself and what is actually the impact that their [clients] presence is having on me (participant 9).

I reflected on what role the self played in participants' experience of attunement. The participants described attunement as 'emerging' out of and move 'beyond' empathy. The existential practitioners experienced attunement as an openness and receptivity where they fully took in the presence of the other's being. They experienced a part of their sense of self as being open and 'shared' with the other, which resulted in feelings of being vulnerable. This is previously illustrated in the concept of 'being open'.

The intentional act of being open and receptive towards the client also resulted in a sense of 'sharing' the client's inner world, which is previously presented in the concept of 'communicating non-verbally'. Thus the participants experienced being attuned to their clients as a reciprocal interaction where being attuned revealed the other but also disclosed a part of their sense of self to the other.

The participants described that being attuned to their clients allowed their sense of self to return to 'the essence of being'. They experienced themselves and the other as two human beings meeting as equals. Contrary to empathy, being attuned was communicated non-verbally where existential practitioners described the non-verbal communication as a shared understanding of the moment with the other. This is previously illustrated in the concept of 'communicating non-verbally'. This process is illuminated in the figure below: the process of being within and between.

Figure 7: The process of being within and between



The next section builds on these findings and presents the theoretical and interpretive renderings that gave rise to a substantive theory of how existential practitioners construct a sense of being attuned to their clients.

A theory of attunement

A substantive theory of how existential practitioners construct attunement from their perspective has been developed from this constructivist grounded theory research. The substantive theory is based on my analysis and interpretations of the participants' account of how they constructed attunement and what attunement meant for them and their relationship with their clients, from the existential practitioners' perspective.

This theory presents a beginning not a conclusive end to an aspect of existential practitioners' non-verbal and embodied experiences with their clients, which I have come to call attunement or being attuned. The aim of an interpretive theory is "to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 231).

The substantive theory is presented in the textbox below and then further discussed in the following chapter.

A theory of how existential counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists come to construct a sense of being attuned to their clients.

Existential practitioners construct a sense of being attuned to their clients that they experience as an embodied constructed experience of contrasts. Their experience of constructing a sense of being attuned to their clients is affected by their own presence, openness, self-awareness and being grounded within themselves whilst experiencing a range of the client's emotions. Existential practitioners hold a sense of intentionality directed towards their clients where they seek to attune to their clients on a non-verbal and embodied level. They perceive being attuned to their clients as a reciprocal interaction where being attuned reveals the other but also discloses a part of their sense of self to the other. The existential practitioners' experiences of being attuned to their clients are perceived by them to be an experience of two unique human beings meeting as equals. However, the experience of attunement might have a contrasting affect on the psychotherapeutic relationship where the existential practitioners perceive their clients to become overwhelmed by the experience. The existential practitioners draw upon supervision to facilitate their self-awareness in order to reintegrate their experience of being attuned to their clients. The existential practitioners' sense of being attuned result in them feeling a deeper connection and understanding of their clients and a sense of sharing their clients' inner world.

Conclusion

The analytical process revealed how participants construct attunement from their perspective. The experience of attunement is described as an embodied constructed experience of contrasts that included the concepts of 'being dependent on self', 'being internally preoccupied', 'communicating non-verbally', 'meeting as equals', 'bringing into view', 'being supervised' and 'being relational-specific'.

The processes identified in this research were 'being within and between' and 'being empathic and attuned'. A substantive theory of how existential practitioners construct attunement, from their perspective, has been developed and presented in this constructivist grounded theory study.

In-depth exploration of how the concept of attunement was perceived by existential practitioners to be constructed with their clients provided an increased understanding of what it is like for them when being engaged in the process. The subsequent chapter provides a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 6 Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss the findings presented in the previous chapter. The focus of this chapter is to discuss the research findings together with the relevant literature and my own interpretive perspectives. I explore the existential themes derived from the findings and discuss those in relation to the existential literature. I review prior theoretical works and locate this study's substantive theory and its processes in relation to those theories. I then present my reflections upon the participant sample, the participant's withdrawal, evaluate the research study and reflect upon my research journey.

The discussion is organised under the headings presented in the previous chapter: 'attunement – an embodied constructed experience of contrasts', 'the experience of the other', 'the context' and 'the processes' and each finding is discussed in the same order as in the previous chapter. In applying such a conceptual link between the two chapters, the connections within and between concepts are made clearer (Charmaz, 2006).

The findings of this study suggest that not only do existential practitioners experience moments of being attuned to their clients; they also perceive these experiences to be significant moments in their psychotherapeutic relationship with the clients. The existential practitioners perceived attunement and its processes to be an integral part of their clinical practice where they felt a deeper understanding of their clients and a sense of sharing their clients' inner world. The findings highlight the importance of existential practitioners' use of their self when sensing, understanding and being with their clients on a non-verbal and embodied level. The participants describe their experiences of attunement as bringing their whole self into the

encounter with the client, being completely and actively engaged in the moment on a multiplicity of levels – emotional, physical, psychosocial and spiritual.

In this study, attunement was therefore understood to be an embodied constructed experience for the participants. Embodiment in this work recognises that "thoughts, feelings and behaviours are grounded in bodily interactions with the environment" (Meier, Schnall, Schwarz & Bargh, 2012, p.1). This view is supported by Merleau-Ponty (1962) who argued that we exist in the world as embodied subjects constantly in interaction with other embodied subjects, where we are intertwined with one another and it is through our bodies and in interaction with others that we come to perceive and understand the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This aspect of attunement as an embodied constructed connection is an important part of the psychotherapeutic relationship for the participants.

Attunement – an embodied constructed experience of contrasts

Existential practitioners constructed a sense of being attuned to their clients that the practitioners experienced as an embodied constructed experience of contrasts. The research finding suggests that being attuned plays a much broader role in participants' experiences with their clients than previously described in the literature. This is a key finding of the current study, as previous studies have not described attunement from this perspective. I argue that the lack of literature found around this original finding is because attunement until now has not been explored from a qualitative perspective.

The existential practitioners' contrasting feelings of warmth and love to feelings of discomfort and pain reflected the complexity of their experience of attunement. These contrasts were found to be evident within the same participant as

well as between participants. The existential practitioners might be immersed in the discomfort and pain of the other but at the same time, they feel a sense of being grounded and centred within themselves. Similar findings have emerged demonstrating psychotherapists' abilities to be grounded within self whilst experiencing a range of difficult client emotions (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). This finding underlines the importance for existential practitioners to be grounded within self by maintaining a sense of awareness of their self and as such prevent becoming overwhelmed by their clients' contrasting experiences.

This study found that constructing a sense of being attuned to clients was affected by the participants' inner state of being. Existential practitioners described an aspect of their experience of becoming attuned as being dependent on their inner state of being and their responsibility towards their inner state of being. Existential practitioners' responsibility in relation to the concept of 'being dependent on the inner self' is a core notion discussed in existential philosophical writings. Sartre (1943) wrote, "man is condemned to be free because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre, 1943, p. 41). Man is therefore condemned because he did not create himself but he is still responsible for all his actions (Sartre, 1943). Heidegger (1996) took the idea of responsibility a step further and described our responsibility in relation to the other. We can relate by 'leaping in' where we remove the other's responsibility by telling the client what to do, or we can 'leap ahead' and allow the client to take responsibility for his/her own responses.

Sartre's (1943) concept of responsibility reflects this study's findings in that the participants hold a sense of responsibility towards their inner state of being. Heidegger's (1996) notion of 'leaping ahead' also reflects this study's findings where the existential practitioners allow the clients to take responsibility for their own

experience of attunement. Yet, this study illustrates that there is a mutual responsibility for the experience of attunement where existential practitioners need to be attentive to the clients' contrasting experiences. This will be discussed further in the subsequent section. The existential themes identified in this research are summarised and outlined in the following diagram (see Figure 8: Existential themes, p. 164).

The participants' experience of being present, being open and having the ability to adjust their inner state of being were important facilitating factors when constructing a sense of being attuned to their clients. Being present gave rise to participants' inner state of being. Therefore, being present was an important facilitating factor for becoming attuned to the client, and was essential for attunement to occur. The findings of this study reflect the findings of other studies. Hycner and Jacobs (1995) argued that being present is about being fully engaged in the moment with and for the client. However, I found that not only did being present mean being fully engaged in the moment, as others have argued, this study further illustrates that participants' experience of being present could at times be exhausting. In contrast, existing studies have tended to focus on the benefits of being present (Hycner & Jacobs, 1995; Brown & Ryan, 2003).

I argue that this finding challenges current research by illustrating that being present plays a much broader role in participants' experience of being attuned than previously described in the literature. Being present is the only way we can come to have a directly felt experience of our reality yet we struggle to fully be present (Tolle, 2011). William James (1924) noted, "compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake" (James, 1924, p. 237). The finding of this study provides an explanation as to *why* we might struggle to constantly be present in the moment with the other. It

suggests that one reason for being unable to stay present in the moment with the other is because it might at times be too exhausting. I think that what might be exhausting is to be fully present not only within oneself but at the same time towards the other and what is happening between oneself and the other. Being preoccupied was another reason for participants to be unable to be fully present, which will be discussed later in this section.

The existential practitioners described an aspect of being present as time itself was slowing down. This is supported by Geller and Greenberg's (2002) findings in which they describe being present as having a sense of 'timelessness' where the time seems to 'drop away' (Geller & Greenberg, 2002, p. 81). In existential philosophy, time is described as one of the boundaries of existence because we will all one day be confronted by death (van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). According to van Deurzen and Adams (2011), we cannot 'have' time or 'waste' it because we are time. Time is manifested within us and it is transformational, and we are that place for the transformation (van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). When the perception of time seems to be slowing down, in existential writings this would then be a result of the participants slowing down within themselves because time is within not outside us.

Stern's (1985) amodal perception of time seems to point towards a different experience compared to that of this study. Stern's (1985) amodal perception of time illustrates how the mother's temporal quality of behaviour is matched with the infant's temporal quality of behaviour. I believe this is because Stern's affect attunement involves a form of matching of behaviours between the mother and her infant, which was not a part of existential practitioners' experiences of the phenomenon under study. Similarly, Seikkula and colleagues (2015) found that their notion of attunement between the psychotherapists and the clients to involve the

automatic nervous system being synchronised with participants' movements and facial expression, which arguably is a form of matching. Stern's (1985) and Seikkula and colleagues' (2015) findings do not reflect this study's findings, either because 'matching' behaviours and 'synchronised' bodily functions are too subtle and complex to notice when attuned to the client or the participants did not experience them.

The aspect of participants' experience of attunement as being present within oneself, the other and the environment present a novel aspect of attunement that has previously not been described in the literature. Arguably, this is perhaps because it is only until now that the experience of attunement and its aspects of being present have been explored from the participants' perspective. Hence, the participants have been able to provide a more in-depth and comprehensive account of their experience of presence when being attuned to their clients than previously explored in the literature.

In existential writings, presence is referred to as an aspect of Buber's (1958) I-thou relationship (Buber, 1958). According to Buber (1958), healing emerges from the meeting that occurs between two human beings as they become fully present to each other. The I-thou relation is, therefore, one of openness in which individuals' whole beings are present to one another and engage in mutual dialogue (Buber, 1958). Buber (1958) highlighted the importance of being present and open to the other in order to encounter the other on a non-verbal and embodied level, which mirrors the findings in this study.

Being open was an important facilitating factor for becoming attuned to the client where the participants experienced a willingness to open the self to be vulnerable in the presence of the other. The findings of this study reflect the finding of another study. Geller and Greenberg (2002) argued that being receptive to the other

requires a willingness to allow the self to open and remain open to the other. However, in this study, being vulnerable could at times make the participants feel anxious because a part of the self was open and exposed in the presence of the other, which has not previously been described in the literature. I argue that this finding extends current research by illustrating that being open and vulnerable might at times be anxiety provoking for the existential practitioners.

In existential writings, a key theme is the notion of existential anxiety. Existential anxiety is described as an uncomfortable awareness of the unsolved dilemmas of existence such as death, isolation, responsibility, and failure to live up to our moral code (van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). Existential anxiety is a basic 'given'[6] of human existence and the dilemma is about how each of us comes to live with the anxiety (Kierkegaard, 1980). Existential anxiety relates to this study's finding in that participants could take responsibility for their inner state of being by being open in the presence of the other despite their anxiety.

This study found that participants experienced being open to involving a sense of being curious about the other and that the boundaries between themselves and their clients became blurred, which led to an experience of 'sharing' the other's inner world. The experience of attunement involved extending one's boundaries to the client and meeting the client in an immediate way. This finding is supported by another study, where being present and open to the other makes the boundaries 'drop away' and the experience becomes one of 'merging' with one's self and the other (Geller & Greenberg, 2002). I will discuss the experience of sharing the other's inner world in relation to other theories on the topic in more detail later in this chapter.

[6] Givens are conditions of existence (van Deurzen & Adams, 2011).

The participants experienced being attuned to the clients as having the ability to adjust their inner state of being to their clients in the moment. Hazler and Barwick (2001) argued that the psychotherapist's ability to recognise and adjust to changing situations is essential for a productive psychotherapeutic environment. This study builds upon Hazler and Barwick's (2001) work by explaining *how* existential practitioners might adjust to changing situations with their clients. In this study, the participants expressed the need to adjust their sense of self because of being in the presence of the other. The existential practitioners sensed within themselves what impact the other's presence had on them.

One participant described that she had to adjust her sense of self because she experienced a conflict between what she sensed within herself in relation to the client compared to what the client presented to her. This aspect of self-adjusting was found to be relational specific. When the existential practitioners adjusted their sense of self to the presence of the other by meeting the other on a non-verbal and embodied level, the practitioners felt they could perceive an unacknowledged part of the client's sense of self.

Self-adjusting was also described as having the courage to 'being more' and 'doing less' in the session, which is a vital quality for existential practitioners and their experience of attunement. So what might 'being more' mean for the existential practitioner? In existential practice, the concepts of 'being with' and 'being for' the client are two concepts that mirror the findings of this study of 'being more' in practice. Existential practitioners attempt to 'be with' their clients rather than 'do to' their clients (Spinelli, 2007). Being with the client is when the existential practitioners attempt to accept and respect the client's worldview (Spinelli, 2007). Being for the client is when the existential practitioners attempt to resonate with the client's

worldview (Spinelli, 2007). Resonating with the client's worldview means to avoid judgement, adjusting, or overwhelming the client's presenting worldview with an alternative that is preferable by the existential practitioner (Spinelli, 2007). Thus the concepts of 'being with' and 'being for' the clients provide an explanation from an existential perspective as to what 'being more' might entail in the psychotherapeutic encounter.

Existential practitioners experienced being attuned to their clients on a non-verbal level where they perceived attunement to be expressed non-verbally between them and their clients. This is supported by symbolic interactionism, the theoretical perspective underpinning this study, which contends that social interactions are 'symbolic' and are dependent on both the spoken and the *unspoken* language and meanings (Blumer, 1969).

According to Birdwhistell (1952), a substantial part of a conversation or an interaction is carried out by non-verbal communication (Birdwhistell, 1952 as cited in Seikkula et al., 2015). Yet, the emphasis in clinical practice is disproportionately placed on verbal communication (Philippot, Feldman & Coats, 2003). Hall and Bernieri (2008) argued that non-verbal communication is more emotionally impactful than verbal communication. This viewpoint is echoed by Philippot, Feldman and Coats (2003) who argued that many non-verbal behaviours are unconscious and may present a more accurate picture of a client's emotional state than verbal communication. These views support this study, where both non-verbal communication and being in silence when attuned was shown to have a powerful emotional impact on the psychotherapeutic relationship. This resulted in participants feeling that they had a deeper understanding of their clients' inner emotional world.

The existential practitioners also expressed that the non-verbal communication between them and their clients was an embodied energy, and they experienced an intensity of that energy between them and their clients. The embodied energy experienced by the participants might be further explained by Stern's (1985) work on vitality affects. According to Ammaniti and Ferrari (2013), the vitality affects are the affects of attunement. The vitality affects are present continuously in the background of any behaviour and are described as the dynamic, kinetic qualities of feelings (Ammaniti & Ferrari, 2013). Although Stern's (1985) theoretical construct of affect attunement is based on mother-infant research the aspect of vitality affects does provide an interesting insight and potentially a deeper understanding into the intense energy described by the participants in this study. Despite the critic and if Stern's (1980) vitality affects was to be taken into account, existential practitioners would sense the vitality affects, intense energy, by the subtle and fluctuating details of their clients' body postures, contour and speed of movements, changes in muscle tone, and the intensity, time and shape of vocalisations. The vitality affects might give us a deeper and broader understanding of existential practitioners' experience of attunement as an intense embodied energy with their clients.

For one existential practitioner though, the experience of attunement involved a spiritual dimension. Rogers (1980) once wrote: "I am compelled to believe that I, like many others, have underestimated the importance of this mystical, spiritual dimension (Rogers, 1980, p. 130). Clarkson (2003) argued that including a spiritual aspect in psychotherapy could be challenging for the psychotherapist who needs to find a way of managing and addressing the spiritual dimension in the psychotherapeutic relationship. Tolle (2011) suggests a way to work with the spiritual dimension in a psychotherapeutic context.

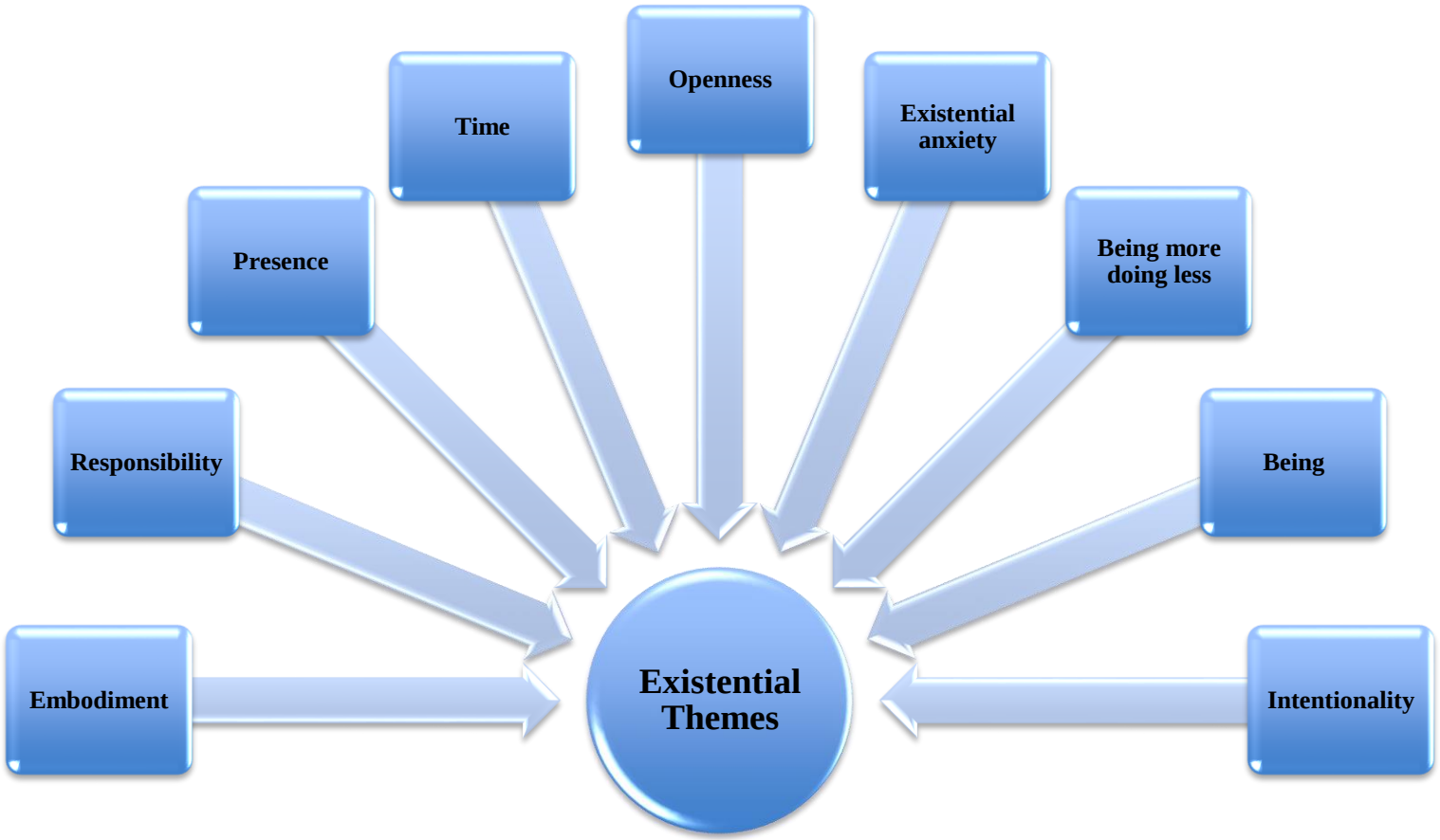
Tolle (2011) argued that the key to accessing the spiritual dimension is to be in the present moment where we are free from time, issues, thoughts and the burden of our personality. According to Tolle (2011), it is only when we are in the present moment that we can become aware of and experience the inner spirit of 'Being'. In existential philosophy, it is argued that 'existence precedes essence', which means that we are first and foremost conscious 'Beings' rather than an assigned role, definition or preconceived idea of ourselves (Sartre, 1943). Tolle (2011) described 'Being' as 'watching the thinker', which means to observe the voices within our mind. When we listen to the voices in our mind without judgement we soon realise: *there* is the voice and here *I am* listening to it. This *I am* realisation is a sense of our own presence, which arises from beyond our thoughts and mind, it is 'Being'. Tolle's (2011) view of spirituality is supported by the findings of this study. Existential practitioners described becoming attuned as a meeting between two human *Beings* that were *present* in the moment. Thus this study illustrates how being attuned could encompass a spiritual dimension into practitioners' clinical practice.

The participants held a sense of intentionality directed towards their clients where they sought to attune to their clients on a non-verbal level, which occurred naturally for them. In the existential phenomenological literature, Husserl's intentionality is described as a fundamental given of our consciousness in that we are constantly conscious of something (van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). In this study, the word intentionality was defined as when one's awareness is 'directed towards' the other. Although the existential definition of intentionality is generic, it reflects this study's description of intentionality.

This study found that being internally preoccupied presented existential practitioners with the difficulties in becoming attuned and being unable to be present

and fully engaged with their clients. Surprisingly, participants experienced that noticing that they felt attuned brought them out of the experience of attunement. This finding is supported by other studies. Erskine (1998) argued that 'attunement' is facilitated by psychotherapists' ability to de-centre from their own experiences. Psychotherapists, therefore, need to clear their space by putting aside any personal concerns, needs and expectations to enable them to approach their clients with a sense of openness and curiosity (Geller & Greenberg, 2002).

Figure 8: Existential themes



The experience of the other

Existential practitioners perceived their clients to experience attunement as a contrasting embodied experience where clients felt heard and accepted or overwhelmed and overexposed. The existential practitioners' experience of attunement with their clients was perceived by them to be an experience of two unique human beings meeting as equals with a mutual openness towards one another. At times, the participants found the experience of attunement and the aspect of meeting as equals to be difficult because of the shared intimacy between them and their clients.

The aspect of meeting as equals reflects the work of Greenson (1972) who placed an emphasis on the 'real relationship'. According to Greenson (1972), a real relationship is where the psychotherapist interacts with the client as a real human being, as opposed to a detached practitioner. Carl Rogers (2007) argued that being a congruent, integrated and a genuine practitioner is a necessary and sufficient condition for psychotherapeutic change. It is not necessary that the practitioner exhibit this degree of wholeness in every aspect of his/her life but that the practitioner is accurately him/herself during the encounter with the client (Rogers, 2007). This aspect of attunement as a 'real' relational connection appears to be an important facet of the psychotherapeutic relationship for the participants.

An important yet complex aspect of the existential practitioners' experience of attunement was the concept of 'bringing into view'. The participants allowed their clients to become aware of a part of themselves they had not yet come to acknowledge. 'Bringing into view' either facilitated the process of attunement or resulted from the process of attunement. According to Omylinska-Thurston and James

(2011), practitioners must carefully decide how to appropriately use and express their internal experiences in response to the client. Any self-disclosure can be assessed for its effectiveness by paying close attention to the changes that occur in the client. This requires the practitioner to have a high level of self-awareness in order to not misuse power in the psychotherapeutic relationship (Omylinska-Thurston & James, 2011). The importance of self-awareness will be discussed later in this chapter.

Existential practitioners described an aspect of being attuned as letting clients become aware of a part of themselves they have not yet come to acknowledge. The concept of 'unacknowledged part of self' gave rise to the concept of 'bringing into view'. The findings of 'unacknowledged part of self' are supported by Carl Jung's (1959) work and his model of the psyche where one aspect of the ego structure termed the 'shadow' seems to be analogous to the concept of 'unacknowledged part of self'.

The concept of the shadow is referred to as an unconscious aspect of an individual's personality. Jung described the shadow as a part of the personality that is repressed or hidden from the individual and the individual is therefore unaware of this aspect of the self (Jung, 1959). The concept of the shadow also includes elements such as talents, virtues and the potentials of the individual, which might remain in the shadow because of the individual's anxieties, low self-esteem or false beliefs (Mayes, 2005). The finding of this research, the concept of 'unacknowledged part of self,' therefore reflects Jung's (1959) theoretical notion of the shadow.

The concept of 'bringing up the unspoken' was described by the participants to be where their clients disclosed something for the first time or talked about something of great importance to them. 'Bringing up the unspoken' could either be a result of being attuned or it could enable the existential practitioners to become attuned to their clients. The participants perceived their clients to feel accepted and

seen. This finding has not been previously discussed in the literature and it reflects how attunement and its processes are both complex and multifaceted. The finding gives an example of how existential practitioners come to understand their social interaction and how they interpret and make meaning of their experiences of it. The participants' engagement in making meaning of their social interactions is consistent with a symbolic interactionism perspective, which is this studies underlying theoretical perspective.

'Bringing up the unspoken' where participants perceived their clients to feel accepted and seen are contrasted with the concept of 'feeling overwhelmed' where participants perceived their clients to feel overwhelmed, uncomfortable or overexposed. At times, the participants experienced their clients to be overwhelmed by the experience of attunement or not being fully prepared and ready to experience attunement with them. The existential practitioners, therefore, understood their experience of their clients as being an experience of contrast for the clients.

The concept of 'feeling overwhelmed' stands in stark contrast to Stern's (1980) mother-infant studies. In mother and infant research, affect attunement can give rise to an experience termed 'misattunement' (Osofsky & Eberhart-Wright, 1998). A misattunement occurs when the mother misjudges her infant's inner state or interrupts an infant's play (Stern et al., 1985). Thus the mother fails to appropriately attune to her infant. However, this study identified that the existential practitioners' experience of their client's contrasting feelings was not about 'misattunement' as they felt attuned to their client's experiences. Instead, this studies finding suggests that the participants perceived their client to feel overwhelmed by their own experience but they were unable to foresee such a client reaction.

Omylinska-Thurston and James (2011) study demonstrated the importance for practitioners to be mindful of when to disclose something by considering the appropriate time and the client's vulnerability. This study shows the potential consequence of disclosure when the client is not being fully prepared and ready to experience that aspect of attunement and therefore feels overwhelmed by the experience. Thus practitioners need to ensure that the client is ready to experience this aspect of attunement.

A recognition of the possibility that the process of attunement, as perceived by the participants, can be an overwhelming experience for clients could enable existential practitioners to become more attentive to the subtle signs that their clients might display of not being ready to experience attunement. Consequently, an increased awareness and understanding of clients' contrasting experiences could facilitate existential practitioners to 'slow down' the process before the clients feel overwhelmed or overexposed by their experience.

The context

Existential practitioners drew upon supervision to facilitate their self-awareness in order to reintegrate their experience of being attuned to their clients. Supervision, therefore, had a profound impact on existential practitioners' self-awareness of their inner state of being in that it enabled them to change their way of relating to their clients. This finding is supported by the work of others, where several models of supervision attest to the importance of self-awareness as it relates to personal and professional growth for counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists (Holloway, 1995; Stoltenberg, McNeill & Delworth, 1998; Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

Torre (2005) argued that engaging in self-reflection is the first step to become self-aware. Counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists need to be willing to 'step back' from the process and reflect on their own experiential process. It is in the process of 'stepping back' that there is an opportunity to become more aware of one's personal involvement and internal feelings (Torre, 2005). This argument supports the findings of this study, where being engaged in supervision and being self-reflective gave the participants an opportunity to 'step back'. Consequently, the participants became increasingly self-aware of their inner state of being, and becoming self-aware enabled them to both relate differently and become attuned to their clients.

Existential supervision is focused on the qualities of 'Being', and how the supervisees are 'Being' in their work (du Plock, 2009). Thus supervisees are encouraged to reflect upon how they experience themselves in relation to their supervisor, their client and their sense of self (du Plock, 2009). Existential supervision relates to the findings in this study as it is about being self-reflective and subsequently becoming more self-aware of one's sense of self and one's relationship to the other. A key finding of the current study is the importance of being self-aware in the process of attunement, which will be discussed further in the subsequent section: the processes.

This study found that participants experienced attunement as momentarily with a sense of stillness. The experience of attunement was dependent on participants' inner state of being, their client and the particular psychotherapeutic moment. The existential practitioners described that the intensity of their experience of attunement fluctuated depending on their psychotherapeutic relationship to the client. I initially conceptualised the participants' intensity of attunement as being on a continuum ranging from a position of feeling less intense to a position of feeling more intense in relation to different clients.

However, such a linear presentation did not fully explain the process that the participants were engaged in. It did not take into account that the participants could feel more or less intense towards the same client as well as between clients depending on the moment they found themselves in. The intensity of attunement also fluctuated depending on the participants' inner state of being. For example, one participant expressed that when being attuned to one particular client, he felt the experience was more intense compared to his other clients because he could strongly identify with that particular client. The intensity of attunement did not move through the experience in a linear direction but rather as a dynamic process depending on multiple factors.

The processes

In this section, I discuss the findings in this study in relation to the relevant literature on the area of intersubjectivity. I review prior theoretical work and locate this study's substantive theory and its processes in relation to those theories. The processes identified in this research provided an understanding of existential practitioners engagement of self on a non-verbal and embodied level in the psychotherapeutic encounter. The existential practitioners were engaged in the processes of 'being empathic and attuned' and 'being within and between'.

The process of *'being empathic and attuned'* was a social process found in this study that described existential practitioners' sense of attunement in relation to empathy. According to the existential practitioners, empathy shared the same emotional resonance as attunement. The participants described attunement as 'emerging' out of and then moving 'beyond' empathy but staying within emotional resonance. The findings of this study reflect the work of others.

Stern (1985) argued that 'empathy' and 'affect attunement' shared the initial process of emotional resonance and from that place, the two concepts evolved separately. Similar to Stern's (1985) work, this study found empathy and attunement to share the same emotional resonance. Yet, this study identified attunement to emerge out of and then move beyond empathy. This is supported by Erskine's (1998) work where he described attunement as a two-part process that begins with empathy and then goes beyond empathy to create a two-person affect experience by providing a reciprocal affect and resonating response.

Kohut (1959) argued that empathy was "the capacity to feel and think oneself into the inner life of the other" (Kohut, 1959, p. 82). However, I found that not only did empathy involve stages of thinking and feeling, as Kohut argued, this study further illustrates that participants' experience and the process of being empathic involved three distinct stages: feeling, thinking and verbally responding to the other. Thus this study advances our understanding of empathy and its processes.

In contrast, Rogers (1980) found advance empathy to only operate on a feeling state, which in comparison to this study sounds more like attunement than empathy. According to Rogers (1980), advanced empathy involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings that flow in the other. "It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgments, sensing meanings of which he or she is scarcely aware" (Rogers, 1980, p.142).

Advance empathy mirrors the experience of this study because advance empathy is described as a momentary non-verbal and embodied experience. It is about sensing and sharing the client's inner world and finding meanings that the client has yet to acknowledge. Although the term advanced empathy is used in this context the

experience itself seems to be similar to that of this study's theoretical findings.

This testifies to the complexities found on the area of intersubjectivity where not only is the word 'attunement' used to describe different theoretical frameworks (Finlay, 2015) but theorists such as Rogers (1980) seem to describe this study's set of experiences using the term advanced empathy. I argue that by comparing two concepts against each other this study was able to provide a clearer account of each concept's action, interactions and processes and the two concepts' relationship to one another. As such this study provides a unique understanding of the concept of empathy and attunement and how the concepts are interlinked.

The existential theoretical work on empathy stands in stark contrast to how the existential practitioners in this study identified empathy. Husserl argued that empathy is when the body of the other is given to us in propria persona (Zahavi, 2011, p. 227). The other is, therefore, 'given' to us as 'embodied with lived experiences' (Stein, 1989). According to Stein (1989), our awareness of the other's pain derives from our empathic recognition of the same kind of pain experienced within ourselves. Thus the existential literature does not support how the participants in this study defined their set of experiences they termed empathy.

The process of *'being within and between'* was a social process that described the actions and interactions of existential practitioners' sense of self that was directed inwards towards their inner state of being and outwards towards their clients. The process of 'being within and between' involved existential practitioners' sense of openness, vulnerability and receptivity toward their clients. The participants experienced being attuned to their clients as a reciprocal interaction where being attuned revealed the other but also disclosed a part of their sense of self to the other.

This is supported by symbolic interactionism, which contends that the self emerges out of relationships of bodies interacting with each other (Mead, 1934) and social interactions are based on a reciprocal 'exchange' of the self (Simmel, 1921). Cooley (1983) argued that an individual's sense of self is reflected and formed by the imaginary perspective of the other. There is no sense of an 'I' without a correlative sense of the other and the sense of self is therefore seen as being reflective (Cooley, 1983).

In this study, the participants' 'shared experience' of the other is based on an imaginary perspective of the other where the process of attunement is reflective and in constant flux because it is dependent on its imaginary perspective of the other. This study builds upon symbolic interactionism by offering an explanation as to *how* the existential practitioners construct a sense of having a 'shared experience' with the other. Thus symbolic interactionism is the basic underlying theoretical perspective in this study, which this study's theory builds and expands upon.

Symbolic interactionism stands in stark contrast to the theory-theory and the idea of emotional contagion. Symbolic interactionism contends that the only way to have a shared experience of the other is to form an imaginary perspective of the other. The theory-theory, however, asserts that holding an everyday understanding of folk psychology to make inferences about another's inner state will form an understanding of the other (Ratcliffe, 2006). The theory of emotional contagion states that automatically mimicking and synchronising postures, vocalisations, and movements with those of another will form an experience of the other (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1993). Thus these two psychological theories do not reflect the premises of symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism is, however, supported by the simulation theory, which postulates that individuals use their own mental apparatus to understand the other's mind by putting him/herself into the other's shoes and imaginatively occupy the other's point of view (Gallese & Goldman, 1998). Symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective, therefore, underpins the principles of the simulation theory.

According to Gallese and Goldman (1998), the basis for the simulation theory is the mirror neuron system. Subsequently, Siegel (2007) argued that Gallese's (2006) notion of the mirror neuron system is the neurological underpinning for attunement. There are difficulties with such assumptions because the issues as to how to measure the mirror neuron system in humans, which has left us with an ambiguity surrounding the mirror neuron system. Thus it makes it difficult to draw any conclusions around whether the mirror neurons are directly and exclusively responsible for, on a neurological level, a shared experience of the other.

Gallese and Goldman (1998) claimed that the mirror neuron system could give us a direct experience of the other, which contradicts the basic premises of the simulation theory. The simulation theory holds the position that one imaginatively occupies the other's point of view to understand the other. Although the observer might have neurons firing in the same region of the brain as the one who is performing an action; we would not be able to tell if our experiences are similar to that of the other because the other's mind is simply not accessible to us.

Gomez (2003) implied that attunement is distinct from countertransference and is related somehow to the process of countertransference but did not describe such a relationship in any great detail. I reflected on how countertransference differs from attunement. Countertransference is described as a redirection of the psychotherapist's feelings towards the client (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1998), which the

psychotherapist often becomes aware of upon reflection by examining whether their experience was a personal countertransference or a diagnostic countertransference (Casement, 1990).

In a sense, the psychotherapist seems to share an experience with the client without owning it; the psychotherapist is not entirely aware of the experience because the psychotherapist does not know whether the experience belongs to him/her or the client (Casement, 1990). As such the countertransference is significantly different from attunement because attunement is an experience where both parties are aware of sharing a moment together and both own their experiences. Furthermore, the participants in this study described their experience of attunement as being firmly grounded in their own experience and could therefore in the moment distinguish between their own experiences and that of their clients.

In light of this distinction between attunement and countertransference, the question then is whether these two concepts have a relationship. Gomez (2003) suggested that a relationship does exist, I can here only speculate on such a relationship. I can imagine that countertransference might share the same emotional resonance, as attunement and empathy, because like attunement, at least diagnostic countertransference has an element of a shared experience of the other. The countertransference experience then evolves into another experience where the psychotherapist seems to become entangled in the client's emotional world and lose their grounding. However, working through the emotional entanglement, for example, in supervision might provide the psychotherapist with an understanding of what belongs to him/her and what belongs to the client.

Existential philosophers and practitioners reject the notion of the self because it gives the impression of being fixed rather than being a process. At a first glance,

this view is problematic because existential scholars write extensively about the subject of the self. However, van Deurzen and Adams (2011) argued that it is about how the self is viewed; the noun 'the self' should be changed into the verb 'to selves' because it is always in flux, always in the process of becoming and always in relation (van Deurzen & Adams, 2011). I believe the view of the self being in flux supports the findings of this study. The existential practitioners' self when being attuned is in constant flux in regards to their inner state of being, their clients, and the particular psychotherapeutic moment as previously illustrated in the concept 'being relational-specific'.

Buber (1965) argued that the way we sense the other's being in the world is by 'imagining the real' where we imagine the other as a unique being from the other's perspective as him/herself, which supports this study's theoretical framework symbolic interactionism. In contrast, Sartre (1943) argued that the gaze of the other allows us to achieve a sense of objectivity regarding ourselves. In this study, the gaze of the other did not allow for existential practitioners to achieve a sense of objectivity about themselves, instead being grounded within themselves when being attuned to the client allowed for a sense of subjective objectivity.

A key finding of the current study is the importance of being self-aware when being attuned which is illustrated in the process of 'being within and between'. Being self-aware gave rise to participants' 'being dependent on the inner self' and its subcategories 'being present', 'being open' and 'self-adjusting'. Being self-aware was, therefore, an important facilitating factor for becoming attuned to the client, and was essential for attunement to occur. The existential practitioners described that directing their attention inwards enabled them to become self-aware, which resulted in making it easier to attune to the client.

This finding builds upon and extends a part of Siegel's (2007) work where he argued that attunement is about a mutual focus of awareness on the other's mind to achieve a shared experience of the other. Yet this study identified the process of attunement to be dependent on being self-aware. This underlines the importance of maintaining a focused awareness on the self in order to stay grounded within the self, as well as holding a mutual focused awareness on the other. This finding taps into a broader discussion on being aware of the self as a whole entity including the practitioners' inner conflicts, desires, and demands as such parts might enter and affect the psychotherapeutic relationship.

This viewpoint is echoed by Kahn (2003) who contended that the psychotherapist views events through the lens of his/her own internal templates and unconscious fantasies. Similarly, Clarkson (1995) argued that the psychotherapist's own pathology, even when undisclosed, could feed into and influence the psychotherapeutic process. Existential practitioners must therefore develop their awareness of how their inner world participates not only when being attuned to the other but also in the broader context of the psychotherapeutic process.

I recognise that there exists a tension between the belief of having a shared experience of the other's inner world and knowing that the other's mind can never be directly accessed. If we have an actual experience of the other, which is more than mere analogical inference it does not imply that we can experience the other in the same way as he/she does, nor that the other's consciousness is accessible to us in the same way as our own.

According to Hyslop (2005), we depend on others not merely for our existence but for our very sense of ourselves, and our awareness of the other is the foundation for our own awareness of ourselves. Similarly, Buber (1958) asserted that the 'I' came

to existence through the experience of relation; therefore the 'I' cannot develop without being in relation to the other. However, we are 'self-enclosed' where we need to reach an understanding of the inner lives of the other based on our own awareness of our inner lives (Hyslop 2005). Thus we can never directly access the other's mind. Although attunement allows for a *perception* of a shared experience of the other, ultimately we live forever with a gap between ourselves and the other (Hyslop, 2005).

Participant sampling

This section provides a brief discussion about the participant sample. In this research, eight existentially trained counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists were interviewed. The existential practitioners' level of experience ranged from newly qualified to over thirty years of practice. Initially, I thought that the participants' year of experience would demonstrate a difference in how participants constructed a sense of being attuned to their clients. However, I did not found a difference between a newly qualified participant compared to one with years of experience.

I reflected on why existential practitioners' years of experience did not matter when constructing a sense of being attuned to the client. The participants told me that as existential practitioners they *sought* to connect with the other at this level, which is illustrated in the concept of 'communication non-verbally'. As previously discussed in the introduction chapter, existential philosophy and clinical practice place an emphasis on our relationship with the other and on the experience of the inner world of the other (Buber, 1958; Sartre, 1943; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Thus the participants' *willingness* to connect with the other at this particular level might stem from their existential training and a need to connect at this level with the client.

All the participants had some form of training in existential philosophy and psychotherapy. I reflected upon what aspects of the participants' experience of attunement might be specific to existential clinical practice. As previously discussed in the above section, existential clinical practice places an emphasis on the relational aspect of the psychotherapeutic encounter and an understanding of the inner world of the other (Buber, 1958; Sartre, 1943; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Thus the non-verbal and embodied relational aspects of attunement might be more relevant to existential practitioners than, for example, to practitioners practising Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). The CBT approach is more focused on cognitive processes and how to change and solve the client's unhelpful patterns in cognition such as their thoughts, beliefs and attitudes.

However, I do believe that the non-verbal and embodied relational aspects of attunement might be relevant to practitioners within the humanistic approach. The humanistic approach puts an emphasis on the relational aspect of the psychotherapeutic encounter and is focused on the client. So practitioners practising gestalt therapy, person-centred therapy and transpersonal therapy might all find that aspects of this study's theory are relevant to their clinical practice.

Furthermore, the psychoanalytical and psychodynamic theories and practice are relational based practices with a focus on intersubjectivity. I believe practitioners practising the psychoanalytical and the psychodynamic approach might also find this study's theory relevant to their clinical practice. Therefore psychoanalytical and the psychodynamic practitioners' understanding of how they encounter their clients might reflect many aspects of this study's findings.

Participant withdrawal

In this section, I discuss the participant withdrawal, the reason why the participant withdrew, my reaction to it and the potential implications that had on this study. I interviewed nine participants however, one participant, unfortunately, decided to withdraw from the study after reviewing the transcript. The participant gave me permission to openly discuss her reasons for withdrawing from the study and as a part of the constructivist grounded theory approach and reflexive writing I discuss it in this section.

The main reasons for the withdrawal were the following: firstly the participant did not feel that the transcript depicted how she perceived herself to communicate in real life. She pointed out that she found herself repeating the same words over and over again and did not perceive that was how she talked. Secondly, she did not feel 'in tune' as she expressed it to my questions during the interview, which became apparent to her once reviewing the transcript. In accordance with the participant's wish the participant's data was therefore not included in this research.

I interviewed the participant when I was eight months pregnant, and I had to travel two hours to get to her office and conduct the interview. During the interview, I felt that we were both comfortable with each other. However, I did notice that at times the participant struggled to answer some of my questions. After the interview, we exchanged several emails where she at first made some changes to the transcript and then after a few months gave me her reasons to withdraw from the study.

Initially and naturally, I felt surprised, disappointed and frustrated. I felt surprised because I thought by allowing participants to view and amend their transcripts, I would lower the risk of a withdrawal. I felt disappointed and frustrated

because of the time I had spent travelling to get to the location and the time I had spent from my newborn baby to transcribe the interview.

Once those initial feelings had subsided, I came to understand the reasons to why the participant withdrew from the study. The participant had never been interviewed before and it was the first time she saw how she communicated in a transcript. I think we rarely pay attention to what we say and how we say it so it can be quite a surprise once you see how you communicate in a transcript. I also noticed, going through her transcript that she was correct about not being 'in tune' to my questions.

I can now appreciate why the participant withdrew from the study. Attunement is a very complex subject to talk about as it is such a felt non-verbal experience. Several participants expressed how difficult it was for them to describe their experiences of attunement. In the end, I believe the participant felt comfortable with me so much so that she felt she could discuss her reasons for withdrawing from the study even though that was not a requirement.

I considered the ethical implications and the psychological consequences for the participant's well-being, health, values and dignity by responding to her request to withdraw from the study in a supportive and understanding manner (British Psychological Society, 2005). Prior to the interview, I sought informed consent where the participant was informed about the risks, the benefits and the withdrawal procedure of the research.

After the interview, the participant was debriefed, feedback was provided, and the participant had a chance to raise any concerns or questions about the interview and the research. In the debrief form, phone numbers and contact details to UK Council for Psychotherapists and the British Psychology Society were stated, in case the

participants felt any distress and needed to get in touch with a psychotherapist or a supervisor.

As a novice researcher, the implications of the participant's withdrawal from the study made me feel anxious that other participants might feel the same way after reviewing their transcripts. The feeling of anxiety subsided as time went by and I grew in my role as a researcher. The participant's withdrawal did not have any implication on the analysis procedure, the categories and concept, or the theory itself because I only analysed a transcript once it was fully approved by the participant.

Evaluation of the research

In this research, I have used Charmaz's (2006) criteria to evaluate this study. I will now discuss how this research has met these criteria, which are the following: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness.

Credibility

Credibility is concerned with whether the data, the analysis and the findings of the research are plausible. In this study, the research presented an intimate familiarity with the research topic through an engagement with the data, which demonstrates the credibility of the study. Whilst the source of the data was only interviews with existential practitioners, the sample group was diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, training in other approaches, and experiences in the field. This facilitated the credibility because it resulted in a broad range of perspectives on attunement.

The process of constant comparison was employed to compare different categories; the credibility was demonstrated by comparing newly gathered data with previously collected data and coding. The participants' experiences of attunement

occurred in a number of empirical settings such as the National Health Service (NHS), private practice, charity organisations, and private hospital providing experiences from a range of different settings and therefore meeting this criterion.

The final criterion for credibility was met by providing excerpts taken from the interviews in order to demonstrate that the work was firmly grounded in the data. The excerpts taken from the interviews demonstrate a link between the development of categories, concepts and the theory. These excerpts were provided to allow the reader to form an independent assessment of the research.

Originality

Originality is measured in terms of whether the research presents "a new conceptual rendering of the data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182). The categories that were presented in this study are original and offer new insights into how existential practitioners come to construct a sense of being attuned to their clients. Prior to this research, there was limited knowledge and understanding of the experience of what the participants and I call 'attunement' in an adult psychotherapeutic setting. The concepts developed in this work have elements of originality and offer new insights into the process of attunement in which existential practitioners were engaged in with their clients.

The analysis of the data and the interviews have provided a new conceptual rendering that resulted in the theorising outlined in the research findings. The theoretical and clinical significance of this work are reflected in the implications of this study, which are discussed in Chapter 7. The research findings can influence current adult psychotherapeutic clinical practice.

Resonance

Resonance refers to the assessment of the depth and breadth of the data. The resonance of this study is demonstrated through reaching theoretical saturation where at the end of the data collection no new issues regarding attunement were being raised in the interviews. The study has revealed meanings that are taken-for-granted such as the contrasting experiences of attunement and the impact that has on the psychotherapeutic relationship.

Further to this, the study has drawn links between the individual experiences of the participants and the wider literature that relates to the set of experiences the participants and I call 'attunement'. The developed substantive theory provides the reader with a deeper understanding of the non-verbal and embodied aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship that existential practitioners are engaged in with their clients. This insight is achieved through the theory, where the theory explicates the concepts and their relationships.

Usefulness

Usefulness of the research is measured in terms of its contribution and relevance to existing knowledge in the substantive area of research. The analysis demonstrated a substantive theory that offers interpretations that the counselling psychology academia and profession can employ in an effort to better understand the non-verbal and embodied aspects of the psychotherapeutic relationship. The interpretations that are offered in this research allow for the integration of theory into practice both within the counselling psychology and psychotherapy profession and the counselling psychology and psychotherapeutic educational system.

The theoretical categories in this study proposed generic processes and there were a number of tacit implications inherent in those generic processes, which were examined in the analysis of the data and described in the findings and the discussion. This research also provides suggestions for further research that relates to the counselling psychology and psychotherapeutic profession and other substantive areas such as research within supervision and self-awareness.

Limitations of the research

This research provides a robust and explicit review of attunement compared to the limited literature currently available on the topic. In this section, the word 'attunement' will exclusively refer to the set of experiences I explore in this research. There are limitations to this research as there are limitations with all theoretical frameworks (Burns & Grove, 2001). There are, nevertheless, specific limitations that need to be highlighted in order to further illuminate the process.

I chose to explore how attunement might be constructed seeking only the participants' perspective. Thus I did not include the clients' understanding of attunement. In the literature, attunement is perceived to 'give rise' to 'feelings' within an individual of an embodied interpersonal experience with the other (Erskine, 1998; Siegel, 2007; Laub, 2008). Consequently, I could not know if participants were talking about attunement as 'an actual experience' that occurred between them and their clients. What participants perceived to be 'an actual experience' of attunement with their clients, might necessarily not be what their clients were experiencing.

Nevertheless, I was interested to explore how the participants felt they constructed a sense of being attuned to their clients. As such, the scope of this

research was not to explore the *fact* that existential practitioners were attuned to their clients rather that participants come to construct what they felt was a sense of attunement with their clients.

In this study, I chose to identify the phenomenon that I wanted to explore which was discussed in Chapter 1. I used the words 'attunement' or 'being attuned' to point towards a set of experiences within a particular area, and these experiences were identified as 'how one makes sense of feeling that they are resonating with the inner world of the other'. One issue in the literature is that the word 'attunement' is used to describe different theoretical frameworks and theorists use the word attunement in different ways (Finlay, 2015). It was, therefore, necessary to predefine the phenomenon this study intended to explore to ensure that the participants and I were referring to the same social interaction during the interview process. In the first instance, this might be problematic because in constructivist grounded theory the researcher tends to start from a set of experiences and then find a set of concepts and processes to explain the phenomenon under study (Charmaz, 2006).

In the light of this issue, I took several steps to ensure that this research was focused on participants' set of experiences. Firstly, I identified and described this phenomenon in a broad way to ensure that the participants and I were referring to the same social interaction during the interview process. I used the word 'resonating' as a part of identifying the phenomenon under study, which in its natural form means, "when an object's natural vibration frequency responds to an external stimulus of the same frequency" (Duarte, 2010, p.15). In this research, to resonate with someone was left up the participants to identify and explain what it meant to them. Thus I made

clear what the phenomenon this research intended to study and the participants provided me with their set experiences of that phenomenon.

Secondly, I carefully formulated open-ended research questions that were viewed by my research supervisors to ensure that the data would be firmly grounded in participants' experience of what they felt was a sense of attunement. The open-ended research questions were formulated to focus explicitly on participants' subjective experience of what they felt was attunement to them, how that experience was like for them, and how they made sense of it.

Finally, I asked participants about whether the experience they described to me was similar or different, if at all, to other experiences such as empathy. In the literature, 'empathy' seems to be the experience that comes closest to the phenomenon under study (Erskine 1998; Siegel, 2007). Thus to ensure that the participants and I were referring to the same relational experience, I asked participants about what they felt was an experience of empathy. The open-ended research questions allowed participants' to talk about their experience of what they felt was attunement compared to what they felt was empathy in a way that has not yet been reported in the current literature on the area of intersubjectivity. Thus in line with constructive grounded theory, the participants in this study described a set of experiences from which I identified a set of concepts and processes to explain the phenomenon under study.

In order to illuminate my influence on this research, I engaged in memo writings and reflexive writings, which are presented in chapter 4. In my reflexive writings, I recognised that I held an opinion about attunement prior to the research because of my experience of it as a counselling psychologist and psychotherapist

trainee. Charmaz (2014) recognises that a researcher typically holds extensive knowledge in his or her field of study before deciding on a research topic (Charmaz, 2014). Thus the researcher does not enter the research field as a tabula rasa, which was previously argued in Chapter 2. Thus constructivist grounded theory method acknowledges that the researcher holds preconceived notions about the topic prior to the research. In this study, the data and the emergent theory were therefore seen as being co-constructed (Charmaz, 2014).

I also recognised that the experience of attunement is an experience that is real to me because I had previous experience of it. Constructivist grounded theorists believe that rather than one truth there are multiple realities (Charmaz, 2014) and I was aware that I represented only *one perspective* out of many that might exist on attunement. I was open to participants' experiences of what they felt was attunement and that their experience might be quite different from my own. The constructivist grounded theory is a particularly helpful method because it applies specific coding techniques that help to preserve participants' views and actions in the codes themselves (Charmaz, 2014). The data is therefore firmly grounded in participants' experience of what they felt was attunement. For example, one participant talked about a spiritual aspect of attunement, which was not a part of my own experience of attunement. The spiritual aspect of attunement is discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

In the literature, attunement is described as an 'embodied' experience (Erskine, 1998; Siegel, 2007) and as being 'expressed' non-verbally (Siegel, 2007). In this research, I tried to gain access to participants' experience of attunement through the use of language. In the first instance, this might be problematic because

attunement is described in the literature to be a felt experience (Erskine, 1998; Siegel, 2007). However, an experience cannot be accessed other than through a descriptive account. Thus I initially asked participants to focus on a particular experience of what they felt was being attuned to their clients and tell me how that experience was like for them.

Personal reflection

In this section, I will reflect upon the impact this research journey has had on my clinical practice and me. After five years, I can hardly believe that I now have reached this stage of my journey. It is with a sense of relief and loss that I look back at these five long years it has taking me to reach this final stage of my journey.

The research findings have had an impact on my clinical practice. My initial experience of attunement was relatively limited compared to the majority of the participants. In my clinical work, I experienced attunement as a unique 'reciprocal meeting' with the other that gives rise to feelings within me, where I experience 'sharing the other's inner world'. These momentary meetings seemed to have a significant affect on the psychotherapeutic relationship between my clients and myself. I experienced that 'being attuned' to the client seemed to facilitate a greater trust, understanding and closeness between us.

However, the participants' account of attunement and this study's theory provided me with a deeper understanding and invaluable insights into the experience of attunement. In my clinical practice, I have now a better understanding of how I can create an opportunity for the experience of attunement to occur with the client by being present, open and grounded within myself. At the same time, I have come to

understand that there is a mutual responsibility for the experience to occur naturally between the client and me. In the past, I was often disheartened when the experience of attunement did not occur and I reflected upon what I had done wrong. This research taught me that attunement is not only dependent on my inner state of being but also on the clients, our relationship and the moment itself.

I am now more sensitive to the experience of attunement as a whole because the research findings have demonstrated that it is an experience of contrasts. I am aware that at times this experience might make the clients feel overexposed and overwhelmed. Previously, I believed that the experience of attunement was an experience that only benefitted the client. I believe I held this biased view due to my own experiences of attunement as a client, which I discussed previously in Chapter 4 'the researcher's positionality'.

The theory has illustrated to me that there is an important underlying social process of attunement where not only is a part of the other revealed to me but a part of me is disclosed to the other and that is how I come to have a feeling of a 'shared experience' of the other. Thus the theory has broadened my understanding of the process of attunement as a whole.

Furthermore, the underlying social process of attunement increased my understanding of how I use the self in relation to my clients on a non-verbal and embodied level. The implications of this finding on my clinical practice have been that I am more aware of the importance of being open and vulnerable in the presence of the other in order to become attuned to the client.

Throughout the years the greatest challenge has been the several changes of

supervisors. I have had four different ‘first’ supervisors and different circumstances have unfortunately led to the change of supervisors. At times, it has taken months to allocate a supervisor and to introduce that supervisor to the research topic and the issues at hand. For me, the constant change in supervisors made me even more anxious because of the added element of uncertainty. It also interrupted the work where I at times could not seek support or feedback from my first supervisor.

Although my ‘second’ supervisor Dr Mark Jepson has been a constant support throughout my work it has been within the limits of one hour per term. Though, he has worked way beyond an hour most of the terms, and one term he stepped in and acted as my first supervisor. Dr Mark Jepson, an expert on constructivist grounded theory, has challenged and scrutinised my research work like no other supervisor has done and it has been anything but easy. Nevertheless, he has inspired me to do my very best and because of him, I can now present a thesis that is at a doctorate level.

Life circumstances have been another challenge when trying to find the time and strength to complete my research. In December 2013, my dear father suddenly passed away from cancer. His death was and still is very difficult for me to come to terms with. In the spring of 2015, the joy of my life arrived, the birth of my daughter Emily. I decided to stay home with her for over two years, which made it very difficult to find time to work on my thesis. I started to work every other evening and every weekend when my husband could take care of our daughter. It was a great sacrifice to make as we rarely had time together as a whole family.

I feel a sense of relief that I can soon resume life with my family and get my evenings and weekends back. I feel a sense of relief that I managed to see this

doctorate research through and did not give up on myself. I also feel a sense of loss that this research is coming to an end. I really enjoyed working on this research and I am very grateful for the participant's contribution to this research theory. I am thankful for the chance I have been given to conduct research on a topic that I am so very passionate about.

Conclusion

A substantive theory of existential practitioners constructed sense of being attuned to their clients, from their perspective has emerged from this study. The focus of this chapter was to discuss the research findings together with relevant literature and my own interpretive perspectives. The findings underline the broad differences found on intersubjectivity in an adult psychotherapeutic setting compared to what has been found in a mother and infant research setting.

The existential practitioners perceived attunement and its processes to be an integral part of their clinical practice where they felt a deeper understanding of their clients and a sense of sharing their clients' inner world. The findings highlight the importance of existential practitioners' use of their self when sensing, understanding and being with their clients on a non-verbal and embodied level. I explored the existential themes derived from the findings and discussed those in relation to the existential literature.

I reviewed prior theoretical works and located this study's substantive theory in relation to those theories. Symbolic interactionism provided the underlying theoretical framework for this study. I reflected upon the participant's withdrawal, evaluated the research study and reflected upon my own research journey. The final

chapter presents the significance of the research findings and the implications for practice and further research.

Chapter 7 Implications and Conclusion

This study presents a substantive grounded theory of how existential practitioners constructed a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients, and in doing so provided insights into the phenomenon from their perspective. The chapter focuses on how this research contributes to the field of counselling psychology and psychotherapy, the implication for training and practice and suggestions for further research.

Substantial and original contribution to counselling psychology and psychotherapy

The aim of this research was to identify and explore what 'being attuned' might mean to the participants and the psychotherapeutic relationship. This study also aimed to develop a substantive theory that explained how existential practitioners felt they came to construct a sense of being attuned to their clients, from their perspective, and these aims have been achieved.

I believe that one of the most important contributions of this research is that it draws attention to and deepens our understanding of the non-verbal and embodied relational experience of the psychotherapeutic encounter. The participants perceived these non-verbal and embodied experiences they referred to as attunement to be significant moments in their psychotherapeutic relationship with their clients.

This study's theory, in particular, the summarised theory in the textbox at the end of Chapter 5 Findings, provides the existential counselling psychology and psychotherapeutic profession with a greater understanding of attunement and its processes on a non-verbal and embodied level. It is important to understand the non-

verbal and embodied communication because a substantial part of our social interaction with the other is dominated by non-verbal communication (Birdwhistell, 1952 as cited in Seikkula et al., 2015). The theory of attunement contributes to knowledge and gives a unique in-depth insight into the actions, interactions and the processes of attunement. In particular, the theory and its processes provide a deeper understanding of counselling psychologists' and/or psychotherapists' use of their sense of self when being attuned to the other in the psychotherapeutic encounter.

This study addressed an under-researched area in the current literature by contributing to a deeper understanding of how attunement is constructed in an adult setting, from the participants' perspective. The findings highlight the contrasting experiences of attunement for existential practitioners and their clients, as it was understood from existential practitioners' point of view. To my knowledge, this has not previously been covered in the literature because it is not until now that attunement has been explored from a qualitative stance.

Implications for training and clinical practice

This study has implications for counselling psychologists' and/or psychotherapists' training and clinical practice. The participants described attunement as a non-verbal and embodied relational based experience constructed between two individuals. The findings of this study indicate that attunement emerges naturally and organically for the participants. I would, therefore, refrain from teaching practitioners and trainees techniques of how to facilitate attunement in the psychotherapeutic encounter. Instead, I would like to advocate for the importance of understanding how the conditions, that are necessary for attunement to occur, can be cultivated naturally and organically in the psychotherapeutic encounter.

An essential part of attunement involves the existential practitioners' awareness of the self. In this study, self-awareness was found to be a facilitating factor for attunement to occur as self-awareness gives rise to being present, open and receptive towards the other. The participants described being self-aware as twofold: being aware of one's inner state of being and being aware of the other.

Torre (2005) argued that engaging in self-reflection is the first step to become self-aware. According to Tolle (2005), engaging in self-reflection would enable practitioners and trainees to take a step back from the psychotherapeutic process and engage on their own experiential process, which would give them an opportunity to become more aware of their personal involvement and internal feelings. The findings of this study indicate that supervision provides an important platform for practitioners to engage in self-reflection in order to increase their self-awareness and become attuned to their clients.

The participants of this research described how the presence of the other impacted their sense of self and the psychotherapeutic relationship. Drawing on the findings of this study, I would encourage practitioners and trainees to pay particular attention to how their inner world is engaged with and affected by the presence of their clients on a non-verbal and embodied level. Moreover, I would advocate for the importance to proactively explore this non-verbal and embodied relational aspect of the psychotherapeutic encounter during training and in supervision.

Personal therapy and personal development already forms a substantial part of counselling psychologists and/or psychotherapists training, however, I strongly encourage training providers to design training programmes that enable trainees to become aware of their inner state of being and relational style on a non-verbal and embodied level through experiential learning. Increasing trainees' awareness in

regards to how their inner world is engaged and affected by the other through experiential learning could deepen their understanding of the role of the self in the psychotherapeutic encounter and improve their clinical practice.

The findings of this research indicate that being attuned and in particular the aspect of being present could at times leave the participants to feel exhausted. This finding taps into a broader discussion within counselling psychology and psychotherapy about the importance of self-care. Counselling psychologists' and/or psychotherapists' clinical practice can be highly rewarding yet this endeavour can be emotionally challenging and demanding if practitioners do not attend to their own well-being (Elman & Forrest, 2007). Self-care includes activities that promote our emotional, physical, spiritual and relational well-being. It is therefore vital that each counselling psychologist, psychotherapist and trainee participate in the ongoing practice of self-care throughout their career.

Implications for clinical practice, policies and further research

This research has implications for the counselling psychologists' and/or psychotherapists' clinical practice and their policies, in particular for the existential practitioners' clinical practice and their policies.

In this study, existential practitioners' use of their sense of self when experiencing attunement was shown to be a fundamental and essential 'instrument' when sensing, understanding and being with their clients on a non-verbal and embodied level. The Health and Care Professions Council's (HCPC) guidelines (2015) emphasise how counselling psychologists should "be able to critically reflect on the use of the self in the therapeutic process" (HCPC, 2015, p.12). The British Psychological Society (BPS) division of counselling psychology professional practice

guidelines (2005) outline how counselling psychologists must gain an understanding of their use of self in their professional work and to develop their reflective skills. This is also reflected in counselling psychologists' training programmes, where personal therapy and reflective writings are mandatory.

Despite the importance placed on facilitating counselling psychologists' use of the self and reflectivity, there is no clear definition as to what the 'use of self' actually is. The BPS and HCPC practice guidelines refer to counselling psychologists' use of self' numerous times, but they do not explain what the term means. The counselling psychologists take this recommendation on board, but they might have little idea as to how to implement it in their clinical practice.

What is more surprising is the lack of reference and explanation to working on a non-verbal and embodied level, especially when considering the importance of the non-verbal aspect in social communication. Foley and Gentile (2010) argued that being aware of the unspoken subtleties could provide practitioners with valuable information that clients might be unable to put into words. The HCPC guidelines (2015) mention that 'psychology practitioners' need to be able to use appropriate forms of non-verbal communication and be aware of the consequences of using such forms of communication. However, there is no clear understanding as to how to use appropriate forms of non-verbal communication in the psychotherapeutic encounter. This might be challenging for counselling psychologists and in particular counselling psychologist trainees with little clinical experience to implement non-verbal communication into their clinical practice.

The UK Council for psychotherapy's (UKCP) professional occupational standard guidelines (2017) for existential psychotherapists under the umbrella of humanistic and integrative practitioners do not reference to the use of the self or

working on a non-verbal and embodied level. In this study, existential psychotherapists experienced being attuned as a non-verbal and embodied relating with the self and their clients. The existential practitioners perceived 'attunement' and its processes to be an important part of their clinical practice yet there is no reference to this aspect of their work in their professional occupational standard guidelines.

The UKCP's professional occupational standard guidelines (2017) are set out to make clear the psychological depths and specialist skills, knowledge and understanding held by the practitioners. It is therefore important to include existential psychotherapists' experiences of attunement because it would give commissioners, practitioners and trainees a better and more complete understanding of existential psychotherapeutic practice. The existential psychotherapy training programmes might also benefit from implementing attunement into their curriculum because understanding the process of attunement provides trainees with a deeper knowledge of how the self relates to the other on a non-verbal and embodied level and how to implement it into their clinical practice.

I argue that there is a lack of clarity and explanation under the current HCPC, BPS and UKCP practice guidelines and this study can, therefore, make a useful theoretical contribution towards understanding how on a non-verbal and embodied level the self is involved with the other in the psychotherapeutic encounter. I suggest that implementing a relational based understanding of existential practitioners' use of their self when being attuned on a non-verbal and embodied level might bring an extra dimension to their individual clinical practice. This places responsibility on the individual existential practitioner for their personal development and clinical practice.

Personal development already forms a substantial part of existential practitioners' training, however, it is unclear what such activities are aimed to achieve (Donati &Watts, 2005). This study contributes to illuminating the process of personal development further by demonstrating the importance of inner self-awareness when relating to the other on a non-verbal and embodied level. I believe it is only through increased efforts to qualitatively research counselling psychologists' and/or psychotherapists' non-verbal and embodied relating with the self in the psychotherapeutic encounter that a greater insight and understanding can be achieved

It is my hope that this study can stimulate future research in this area. Future research could focus on counselling psychologists working with a particular client group. How is their experience of attunement working with adults on the autism spectrum or children? I also think that it would be interesting to explore how supervisors work to enable their supervisees to become attuned to their clients through an increased awareness of the self. Such research could further enhance supervisors' understanding and skills when working with supervisees around facilitating attunement between the supervisees and their clients.

In conclusion, the aim of this research was to explore how existential practitioners constructed a sense of being attuned to their clients in order to develop a substantive theory, and this aim has been achieved. The rationale for this research stemmed from the paucity of qualitative research in the area of attunement, particularly within an adult psychotherapeutic setting. This research adds to the body of work and presents a theory of existential practitioners' accounts of a particular set of experiences within the non-verbal and embodied aspect of the psychotherapeutic relationship.

This study contributes to a unique in-depth understanding of the actions, interactions and the processes of attunement. In particular, the theory and its processes provide a deeper understanding of existential practitioners' involvement of their sense of self when feeling attuned to the other in the psychotherapeutic encounter. Implementing a relational based understanding of existential practitioners' use of their self when being attuned on a non-verbal and embodied level will increase their understanding of their role in the psychotherapeutic encounter and potentially improve their clinical practice.

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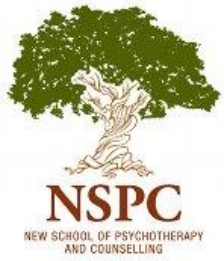
Appendices

Appendix A



How do existential counselling psychologists and psychotherapists construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients? A grounded theory study.
This research study is being carried out by Jaqueline Dias, as a requirement for a DCPsych from NSPC and Middlesex University.

NSPC Ltd

61-63 Fortune Green Road

London, NW6 1DR

Middlesex University

The Burroughs

London, NW4 4BT

Dated:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the research?

This research is being carried out as part of my studies at NSPC Ltd and Middlesex University. The study aims to develop a theory about the process by which existential counselling psychologists and psychotherapists experience attunement. I am looking to speak to BPS and/or UKCP accredited existential counselling psychologists and psychotherapists that have experienced a sense of being attuned to their clients in their clinical practices.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I would like to interview you on one occasion for one hour and a half, and will include around 20 minutes for debriefing where you can raise any questions or concerns about the interview. It will be a semi-structured interview with questions around your experience of attunement in your practice with your clients. The interview will be conducted at your convenience, and will be held at the Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy or at a suitable place such as at your office or via Skype. If you choose to be interviewed via Skype, you need to ensure that the interview will be held at a private location where you will not be interrupted. Any issues such as potential technical problems or anything else related to the Skype interview will be discussed via email prior to the interview. The data will be used to build a theory, and analysed using a constructivist grounded theory methods.

What will you do with the information that I provide?

The interview transcript will be fully anonymous, and participants will not be identifiable. I will be recording the interview on a digital recorder, and will transfer to a password-protected laptop, deleting the files from the recorder. All of the information that you provide me with will be identified only with a project code and stored either on the password-protected laptop, or in a filing cabinet. The information will be kept at least until 6 months after I graduate, and will be treated as confidential. If my research is published, I will make sure that neither your name nor other identifying details are used.

Data will be stored according to the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act in the UK.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

Although this is very unlikely, you might experience distress where you for example might question your practice or reconsider your way of practising. If so, please let me know, and if you wish I will stop the interview. There will be time after the interview to raise any issues or concerns. You can also contact me up to a month after the interview via email. Although this is very unlikely, should you tell me something that I am required by law to pass on to a third person, I will have to do so. Otherwise whatever you tell me will be confidential.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This research might not have a direct benefit to you but your participation will contribute to knowledge and theory, potentially improving counselling psychologists' and psychotherapists' practice, and the knowledge from this research might generate training for future counselling psychologist and psychotherapist trainees.

Consent

You will be given a copy of this information sheet for your personal records, and if you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign the attached consent form before the study begins. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is entirely self-funded.

Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The NSPC research ethics sub-committee has approved this research study.

Expenses
As this research is self-funded there will be no reimbursement of travel expenses.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

If you have any further questions, you can contact me at:
JB1557@live.mdx.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the study, you may contact my supervisor:

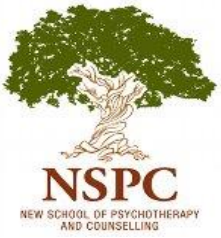
Dr Niklas Serning or Dr Mark Jepson
NSPC Ltd. 61-63 Fortune Green Road
London, NW6 1DR

Admin@nspc.org.uk

Or

The Principal
NSPC Ltd. 61-63 Fortune Green Road
London, NW6 1DR
Admin@nspc.org.uk
0044 (0) 20 7624 047

Appendix B



How do existential counselling psychologists and psychotherapists construct a sense of 'being attuned' to their clients? A grounded theory study.
This research study is being carried out by Jaqueline Dias, as a requirement for a DCPsych from NSPC and Middlesex University.

Written Informed Consent

Title of study and academic year: How do counselling psychologists and psychotherapists construct a sense of being attuned to their clients? A grounded theory study, 4th year.

Researcher: Jaqueline Dias

Supervisors: Dr Niklas Serning and Dr Mark Jepson

I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so. I consent to have my interview audio recorded by the researcher for the purpose of this research. I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and provide my consent that this might occur.

_____ _____

Print name Sign Name

Date: _____

To the participants: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Social Sciences Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: _____

Appendix C

How do existential counselling psychologists and psychotherapists construct a sense of being attuned to their clients? A grounded theory study. This research study is being carried out by Jaqueline Dias, as a requirement for a DCPsych from NSPC and Middlesex University.

Thank you for participating in this research study, your information is valuable and your time appreciated. The purpose of this research was to explore counselling psychologists and psychotherapists experiences of attunement.

I invited people who were BPS or/and UKCP accredited counselling psychologists and psychotherapists that had experienced attunement in their practice. In this research study, you were asked questions about your experience of attunement. I hope the results from this study will contribute to knowledge and provide a theory of the process of attunement.

In the unlikely event that you feel concerned or distressed about anything around this research study; for example if the interview might have brought up questions around your own practice that you feel concerned about please feel free to contact a supervisor/psychotherapist at the British Psychological Society Tel: +44 (0) 116 254 956, website: http://www.bps.org.uk or the UK Council for psychotherapy Tel: 020 7014 9955, website: http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Thank you again for your participation in this study. If you have further questions about the research study, please contact me, Jaqueline Dias at email address: JB1557@live.mdx.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the study, you may contact my supervisor:

Dr Niklas Serning or Dr Mark Jepson
NSPC Ltd. 61-63 Fortune Green Road
London NW6 1DR
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Or
The Principal
NSPC Ltd. 61-63 Fortune Green Road
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Appendix D

[Removal of confidential information] – client, clinical practice and personal information

Excerpts from the interview transcript

Jaqueline: Could you take a minute to think about an experience you have had with one of your clients where you felt attuned or resonating with your client? How was that like for you?

Participant:

I am working at the moment with someone that I would say that we get on really well. The metaphor I always think of when I try to attune to a client is that I see myself walking along a path normally sort of on the country side and I am trying to walk alongside my client and I am trying to not walk ahead of him or behind him and to be within a reasonable distance from him although that is constantly in flux.

[Later]

And I am working with a client who is very similar to me not only in age but in background and in outlook of life. It is proving paradoxically more difficult to be with him than with clients that I struggle to be attuned with. I was saying in supervision the other day it feels as though I can experience the pain the upset that he is going through in a little bit more rawness than it would normally be. The metaphor I used with my supervisor was that it is though with other clients when I touch their world view it sometimes feel like I am wearing a glove and that glove is sometimes thicker or thinner depending on how well we are getting on but with this client it feels though I got a naked hand we are just so close.

Could you tell me a bit more?

Yes, it feels as though I am experiencing in reality what he is experiencing. So where I am struggling to attune to a client, it feels as though I am drawing a lot on my imagination that I am trying hard to reach out to see the world through their eyes but

then when I am in harmony with the client it feels as though I am almost experiencing their experiences for myself.

[Later]
So the closeness that you were describing could you tell me a bit more about that?

[Removal of confidential information] when I am with him and he is talking about howling in pain, and he means literately and physically howling in pain. I feel some of that, I feel that it would be the way that I would behave and how I would feel if my wife died suddenly and it's not a pleasant experience, it is not something that I enjoy. It is something that I, on one hand, feel that I want to be there with and for him and the fact that I can understand him so well is helpful for our therapy together. I want to experience that and I do not want to back away but, on the other hand, I also feel that I really do not want to feel this pain and this upset. I feel that it is a natural thing that anyone would not want to feel that depth of anguish.

So you physically feel what the client is experiencing?

Yep, I am and I can feel some fear, sickness and dread **[Removal of confidential information]**

You said that you feel, with some clients, you become more attuned to but with others not, so with this client what is it about him that you feel it is easier to tune into him compared to others?

I think it is the similarity between us it is not only his age, background and philosophy of life. We are quite similar and stepping into his shoes is not a very difficult thing at all. If I contrast it with one of my placements last year where I was working with adolescences. You know sitting with a thirteen year girl who is self harming is quite a stretch for me to see the world through her eyes to understand the pain she feels from being excluded from Facebook by some friends. I do get close and I can try to understand but it feels a bit like as the metaphor to touching something with a glove

on. Whereas this other client that I am working with it is not like that, it has never been like. I am just closer and I just get what he is saying without any effort.

[Later]

How do you recognise that you are becoming attuned to a client?

I think for me it is emotional rather than intellectual. So I do not *think* I am closer or I do not *think* that this is going well, I just feel it. I just feel a harmony in the room, and the client sometimes say to me "yeah yeah that's it, you just get it". And I feel I get. It is a sense rather than a thought or an analysis.

Could you tell a bit more?

I think, there is something about intellectually trying to understand what is going on? What are the issues? What is it the client wants to achieve? What is the way of working? So that is one thing but I think for me the word attunement means sort of reaching out and feeling as much as I can what they are feeling. And going back to my analogy 'walking by their side', if I don't feel that then I am not really by their side.

Can you tell me a bit more about 'walking by their side'; you have used that line several times as an analogy for your experience of attunement?

[Removal of confidential information] In therapy, I was very different, I am not an expert on life and I certainly cannot be more of an expert about their life than they can so I cannot direct them. I cannot do that and I would not want to try, so it is about for me not getting in front, not saying 'this is what we should do' and it is more than just observing. So it has been helpful for me to keep this analogy in mind, of walking by their side. **[Removal of confidential information]** If I am confused or not aware of what they are saying or not aware of what they are talking about then that feels that I have gone too far behind and I have lost touch with them. So for me it is a lot about being alongside at the right pace and the right distance. If I am too close to them then we start to get enmeshed and I can't quite see where we are. Whereas if I am too far

behind them, I am too distant it becomes an intellectual exercise in the room. So it is all about for me to walk by their side and be with them. And I find keeping that analogy in my mind, I don't think about it during session but pre an post session I might think about that, and if I am writing notes on some clients, I reflect as to how close I was and should have been.

During the session is there any time where you feel you are not attuned, you described to be far away from the client that sounds to me like not being attuned to the client?

Yes

How is that experience like for you, could you tell me a bit more?

Yes, I have caught myself sometimes not thinking about the client or what the client is saying. A client might say something and I suddenly find myself thinking about an activity I am doing later that day and I sort of catch myself doing so. I normally make notes of that and if it looks as though it is a pattern with that particular client then I bring that to supervision to explore why that is that I am drifting away. **[Removal of confidential information].** I think we are all human beings we all have troubles and sometimes it is not easy to leave things that are upsetting at the door and they intrude on the therapy session.

[Later]

And what happened where you able to tune into the client afterwards?

I found it really helpful. I think I have always been a bit nervous about doing it because it sort of could suggest that you are not up to the task that you don't value the client enough or interested enough or not good enough therapist. So I don't do it without some hesitation but I think that when I have done it actually the client has responded really well because they have seen that I am genuinely authentically trying to understand them but that I am struggling to understand them. And on the whole they have been pleased that I have raised it and so their experience have been of

feeling a little nervous at the start but then they seem quite relieved and happy that I have raised it with them. And it sort of becomes a joined issue and my difficulty in standing with them has ceased to be my difficulty it has become our difficulty and we can then work it out together. And that openness with the client helped me to feel tuned in the client again.

[Later]

Is that the transition that happened for you?

Yeah, absolutely it ceased to be. I suppose going back to my analogy of walking along side of him, because he was a young boy in school, I think I was sort of stepping a bit too much in front of him and worried about wasting our time together. However, that was a wrong assumption and actually it was better for me just to wait for him and talk about what he wanted to talk about and not trying to reach anything even with the best intentions. Just to be another human being in the room with him despite the fact of a huge age difference between us.