



Becoming a Pilgrim:
THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF MEN WHO
BECOME THERAPISTS FOLLOWING A
FORMER CAREER

*WHAT MEANINGS AND MOTIVATIONS ARE INVOLVED IN
THIS TRANSITION?*

SUBMITTED AS PART CONTRIBUTION TOWARD A
PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE (DPROF) IN EXISTENTIAL
PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COUNSELLING

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March 2016. WORDS: 59,638 MDX No: M00315168

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to the participants who kindly shared their experiences; I hope I have done them justice and wish them well in their chosen path.

This thesis has developed through several iterations of feedback, without which I would be lost at sea. I am most grateful to Linda Finlay for helping me navigate this route with so much expertise and generosity and for raising my confidence with each communication.

Thank you to my Mum for her support and the sustaining containers of home-cooked food whenever I visited and for understanding the many times when I couldn't. Thanks to Adrian for the annual hiking expeditions which created space and difference to recharge and for a London crash-pad whenever travelling was impractical.

Finally, whilst this has often been a lonely process, it was always comforting to know that you were with me, urging me forward and believing in me. Thank you Maria.

This work is dedicated to my Dad, Uncle Rod and those others who listen.

ABSTRACT

Changing career can be a meaningful experience: it challenges our sense of identity, allows us to discover new skills and presents opportunities for novel experiences, excitement, and growth. It can also be a daunting and costly step into a way of being without the safety net of the familiar to rely on. Less than 25% of UKCP psychotherapists and 16% of BACP counsellors are male. Those who qualify have often changed career and embarked on several years of training which may even result in lower paid work than their former career. What is it that motivates these men and what is their experience like? This project seeks to explore the lived experience of becoming a therapist following a former career for seven men over 30 years of age. It applies van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological approach and explicates three themes: "Fermenting Discontent", "Pilgrimage as Project" and "The Ambivalent Allure of Acceptance". It sees the transition as meaningful, paradoxical and complex, re-shaping their relational world and sense of identity. It also reveals the difficulties of being a minority whilst expressing otherness against a tide of otherwise homogeneous points of view with implications for the therapy profession and the society it supports.

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis is written by Nigel Smaller 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 Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling. The author is wholly responsible for the content and writing of the thesis and there are no conflicts of interest.

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1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Changing career can be a meaningful experience: it challenges our sense of identity, allows us to discover new skills, and presents opportunities for novel experiences, promoting excitement and growth. It can also be a daunting and costly step into an unpredictable way of being, without the safety net of the familiar to rely on. Depending on the choice of new career, it can have an impact on income, too. In counselling and psychotherapy (terms I will now combine under the title 'therapy'), pay scales are roughly 6 per cent lower than the national average for salaries in the UK¹. This suggests that financial reasons alone cannot justify the significant investment in money, effort and time it takes to retrain.

¹ The UK national career service website (National Career Service, 2015) describes the average annual salary across all sectors of the UK to be £27,017 (in May 2015) contrasting with the average counselling salary which is listed as £25,368.

In the UK, considerably fewer men than women choose to make this career change². As one of the men who have made this transition, I am curious about its impact on men's lives and the meanings they make of it. In particular, I wish to explore the lived experience of men for whom this transition involves a major career shift. By limiting the demographic to men who transition after the age of 30, I hope to capture the experience of male therapists who have had at least one other career but who remain representative of the typical male therapist: current statistics from the BACP suggest that the average age of male registered therapists is 45.5³. This also means that midlife issues are a necessary aspect of the research, whilst not necessarily its focal point.

In this research, I pose a number of key questions. Is there something about becoming a therapist that holds special meaning for such men? If so, to what extent is this meaning realised as they progress through their plan? What motivates this change? What are they hoping will be different for them as a result of this transition and what is their lived experience before, during and after it? In other words, I seek to explore the essential factors that motivate and sustain the cost, time and effort to retrain.

² Personal Correspondence with BACP – March 2012

³ Personal Correspondence with BACP – March 2012

Becoming a therapist has long drawn curiosity (Dryden & Spurling 1989; Rodman 1986; Sussman 1992; Rosbrow-Reich 2001; Orlinsky & Ronnestad 2005; Reppen 1998) with many therapists questioning their motivation, and often applying an analytical lens to its possible factors. Qualitative research may reveal something missing from this perspective, while presenting phenomena and experiences to which many therapists will feel able to relate in a more direct and concrete way.

A further reason for undertaking this research is the fact that only 16% of BACP members are male⁴, a statistic which makes it safe to assume that men are underrepresented in the UK therapy profession. Understanding the experiences of some men will perhaps contribute to the overall awareness of gender within the therapy profession and stimulate more research and discussion around men's emotional lives and society.

As the literature review in Chapter 2 makes clear, a number of significant social problems in the UK (for example, violent crime) appear to be largely attributable to men, yet are not being adequately addressed from an emotional, social or mental point of view. It is possible

⁴ Personal Correspondence with BACP - Jan 2012

that the underrepresentation of men in the fields of social care and psychotherapy is contributing to the lack of understanding surrounding certain male issues. If more men are to be encouraged to join these fields, it seems important to understand the experience of men who have already made this journey.

From my experience and philosophical outlook, I understand gender to be a socially constructed concept with variances spread along a continuum and that the very mention of 'men' rather than 'people' co-constructs a binary world where gender can be either one or the other. Yet, whilst holding the view that gender lines are blurred, I am also aware of the presence of relatively few men in the therapy classroom, in professional conferences and among counselling service providers and charities. This suggests that the therapy world is populated by a particular space on the gender continuum and imbalanced regarding the society it seeks to support. Further, it is frequently suggested that the qualities which contribute to being a proficient therapist -- empathy, kindness, compassion and the ability to listen -- are 'feminine'. It is unclear whether these are indeed therapeutic qualities or whether they simply reflect the socially constructed view of therapists (and/or women). If there are feminine qualities along a male-female continuum, then polar opposites must exist: for example, inner strength, stoicism, fortitude, self-reliance, courage and tenacity. Such qualities might also hold value for therapists and their clients, despite being less recognised as offering a significant role within practice. Maybe the more masculine associated quality of 'aggression' (whose Latin roots, *ad-* plus *gradi*, mean 'to move forward without hesitation') is an asset undervalued in therapy. I wonder whether certain attributes

have become more readily open to discussion than others in therapy training, and whether this may be contributing to a 'therapy culture' which is reflected in therapy's user community (and in the high proportion of men who would rather find other means of addressing their emotional problems).

Whilst certain extremes of crime and violence (to self and others) constitute one end of the gender continuum, at the other end softer, more harmonious qualities are to be found. The writer Robert Bly (2001) discusses a shift in men's masculine behaviour towards their more 'feminine' qualities: eschewing violence and domination, men embrace a softer, more gentle approach to relationships and the world. What Bly refers to as the "soft male" (2001, p.4) involves a man being raised with fewer male role models, and influenced by a culture embracing equality and feminist principles while rejecting more traditional masculine attitudes. On the basis of his men-only workshops, Bly argues for a new way forward, which transcends antiquated masculine attitudes and modern-age softer attitudes to embrace new values. At the same time, he underlines the need to hold on to what is important and meaningful for men:

In every relationship something fierce is needed once in a while: both the man and the woman need to have it. But at the point when it was needed, often the young man came up short. He was nurturing, but something else was required – for his relationship, and for his life. (Bly, 2001, p.4)

Bly discusses the missing mentor in a boy's life: the father or grandfather figure that helps the boy become a man, as revealed in myth and folklore throughout the world. Without

this, the author fears, many men are simply boys in men's bodies. Referring to *The Odyssey*, Bly uses the example of Hermes telling Odysseus that on approaching the woman Circe (who has particularly strong matriarchal energy) he should 'show' his sword. This act, the author feels, is one that modern 'softer' men are unable to manage since they cannot distinguish between the act of showing and the act of hurting. Clearly, some men are unable to demonstrate their masculinity without hurting and hence we live in a society where violent crimes are almost wholly perpetrated by men and where suicide is the main cause of death for many young and middle-aged men (Wiley & Platt 2012).

Whilst never being challenged to fight mythical beasts, I can relate to Bly's (2001) notion of being a man who has struggled to be accepted and also authentic whilst growing up in a particular culture and period. The next chapter introduces some of the experiences which have been milestones in my development as a man and as a therapist.

1.1 Personal Background

In March 2004, I was working in corporate software sales. During the previous two years, my achievements had been rewarded by several of what American software organisations refer to as 'President's Club' trips: stays in places like Monte Carlo, Barcelona, Las Vegas and Florida. Although this might sound glamorous, I never felt truly rewarded or satisfied. While relieved at achieving business targets and excited to visit interesting places, I never felt

really content; occasional moments of excitement were doused by my sense of living a very inauthentic existence. I cringed at the insincerity of the relational world in which I dwelled. Ensnared in a lovely hotel in Monte Carlo, I would find myself with numerous other 'achievers' and their partners, none of whom cared who I was or what I had done to get there. It was like a big circus, where laughing and music masked a more sinister reality behind the scenes: a depressing vision of poorly treated animals and sad clowns when the circus act ended. It all felt like a big game and one that I increasingly felt resentful of playing. To extend this analogy, my managers seemed to reward as part of the circus show but never truly cared, or so it seemed.

Publicly, and to my friends and family, I was seen as holding a responsible, professional job that afforded me with accoutrements beyond my more humble and familiar roots. This helped me feel validated at one level whilst disconcerted and confused at another. I realised that my income was largely incidental through working in a rapidly expanding industry during a kind of technical revolution. The trappings of this good fortune played on my mind as a symbol, not of status, but of my inauthenticity in the world.

This aligned with the research conducted by Halper (1989), who interviewed over 4,000 "successful" male professionals and found many feeling that they sacrificed their personal lives for their professional lives, leaving them feeling empty. Among the minority who claimed to be happy there was one consistent factor: all had at some point survived some kind of trauma in their lives and no longer viewed work as a mechanism for demonstrating

power over others; they were realistic about the difficulties life posed and coped better with life's ups and downs.

In my own case, the way I viewed my work was certainly linked to a sense of cultural identity. But it was also being quietly questioned by a different perspective, gained as the result of certain challenging and traumatic experiences in my past. Losing my father to cancer when I was eleven years of age, attending Dick Sheppard School (Brixton's worst performing comprehensive school⁵) during the time of the 1980s race riots, and developing a chronic, life-changing illness at the age of 19 all shaped my personal development. Work perhaps became a way of coping – but not necessarily a way of learning from those past traumas.

As 2004 came to an end so did my job and personal relationship, which involved parting company with the stepchildren I had come to know over the previous four years. The 'collateral' loss of the children in particular came as a great sadness and only served to magnify the lack of meaning in other areas of my life. Unwilling to plough my emptiness or

⁵ See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/failed-four-schools-to-close-1620430.html>

sense of vulnerability into work-related activities I began an experimental search for evening classes before enrolling on a course in hypnotherapy and counselling. The course was run by an inspirational therapist who challenged my world-view. The experiential work felt supportive and genuine, reminiscent of personal development workshops and meditation training I had attended 20 years earlier.

For the next few years I struggled to understand what I was doing and where I was going. I continued to work part-time in corporate roles, inadvertently straddling two worlds which felt poles apart: I even ran two cars – one for the corporate car park and another that was practical and plain-looking. I really liked both and they became a metaphor for the parts of me that were emerging and the tension of finding the single solution that represented me in entirety. I felt that a perfect hybrid of the two would ease the tension and a job or way of life might do the same if only I could discover it.

This tension was familiar to me from moments during my childhood when I had fought to be me whilst trying to meet the needs of others. Born to mixed heritage immigrants, I often had a sense of not quite fitting in: I was the same as my London peers yet also different. The more I favoured one aspect of myself, the more the unexpressed part would yearn to be heard – to be lived.

For me, beginning therapy training was a way of stepping off life's traveller to take stock of life. Although I was still uncertain, taking this step felt safer than continuing down a path

that felt mostly wrong. I began with no ambition to become a therapist, although I really enjoyed what I was learning. Then I started to feel that this might be a more satisfying way for me to live. However, the safety net of financial security on which I had relied would have to go and I wasn't sure if I would be enough for others without it. As I pondered this dilemma, I became aware that my part in embracing a more material existence might be exactly what was preventing me from living a more meaningful existence. This challenged my identity and how I felt seen by the world, including myself.

During my years of training I became aware of how gender and age manifested in both the tension and the energy to change. It was also obvious that very few men occupied spaces on therapy training courses. This both attracted me and concerned me simultaneously. My trepidation as I inched forward exposed many questions to me about life and the forces which shape our sense of meaning. I wondered if this was similar for other men in my situation: might they too experience the tensions involved in finding meaning in the face of the seeming inauthenticity of a materialistic existence? Out of such questions a research project began to take shape.

By continuously acknowledging my own position, I have sought reflexivity throughout the research process – naming my assumptions and using awareness to mediate between them and the research findings, notwithstanding the intersubjective hermeneutical process I follow. As a phenomenological therapist I regularly alternate between different vantage points to view beyond my everyday role in clinical practice and to embody my internal

supervisor. Heightening my reflexive awareness for research felt like a natural extension of this process.

1.2 Overview of Chapters

In this thesis I have sought to capture the lived experience of men who have become therapists following a former career. The chapters that follow detail the question(s) and theory which shape the research and through which I analyse and present the findings and implications for the profession.

Under 'Literature' I argue that gender is a factor which distinguishes the lived experience of individuals and presents specific challenges to society and the therapy profession. I go on to argue that becoming a therapist is meaningful to all who undertake this journey, yet little is understood of the lived experience of those who do, less still when we focus purely on men. Finally I outline key themes from two significant existential philosophers, identifying the horizon from which I view human experience and through which I interpret my participant's words.

The process and philosophical beliefs which steer my approach are described in the 'Methodology' chapter. This serves to explain the epistemological and ontological assumptions I make and through discussion of approach, to demonstrate an awareness of

ethical codes of practice regarding participant safety and confidentiality. It demonstrates the methods I use including the practicalities of interview techniques and transcription as well as different modes of analysis. It also explains my attitude to reflexivity and how I plan to bring this into my research, without compromising my epistemological stance.

Having obtained my data I carry out in-depth interpretative analysis. By adopting a phenomenological approach I need to manage the interplay which emerges out of the relationship between me and the research participants. Accessing their pre-reflective experience holds the pitfall of confusing my own assumptions and interpretations with theirs (Smith et al. 2009). For this reasons, I place strong emphasis on a reflexive analysis which concludes most chapters and is integral to others.

The chapter 'Findings' begins by introducing the participants using idiographic summaries of their interviews and then explicating three essential themes across all of them. Here I hope to evoke resonance in the reader by aiming for a deep, rich, hermeneutic retelling of their lived experience. In addition, I strive to be critically self-aware throughout analysis, naming how I might have influenced or been influenced by the process.

Finally, the chapter 'Discussion' forms a critical review of the findings against the objectives and the literature review before arguing its relevance to the therapy profession in the chapter 'Clinical Implications'.

2 LITERATURE

In this chapter, I conduct a review of extant literature relevant to this subject. In the process I hope to clarify my research question and its primary focus. The seemingly simple research question diverges into several possible branches regarding men, career change and becoming a therapist, and about the therapy profession as regards gender. This opens up the research to diverse areas, including career choice, masculinity, midlife and the meaning of becoming a therapist. Since the research aims to explicate lived experience through an existential phenomenological lens, I also intend to describe this lens through the works of two existential philosophers: Kierkegaard and Heidegger.

The review process has proved complex and organic, involving both physical (hardcopy) and electronic resources (see Appendix H). Standard search engines, databases and queries were used to identify relevant material. In order to be thorough and efficient I adopted a top-down approach which revealed pertinent studies and pointed further to relevant literature through the reference material detailed therein. As the research progressed I was introduced to news articles, books and research papers through a variety of sources and contacts in more informal and sometimes unexpected ways.

Certain keywords were deployed, including lived experience, phenomenology, men changing careers, becoming counsellors/psychotherapists, and career change in midlife. These were used in strings such as “the lived experience of men who change careers” and “the phenomenology of becoming a counsellor/psychotherapist.” Partial keyword searches included “lived experience of changing career”, “male psychotherapists/counsellors”, “midlife career change”, “men and midlife change”, “masculinity and career choice”, and “midlife and career.”

I construct the literature review by first focussing on the evidence that constitutes an empirical rationale for the study before addressing the more philosophical rationale. (A methodological rationale which aligns with the proposed philosophy is covered in the subsequent chapter: ‘Methodology’.) The literature review is therefore divided into two parts. The first part covers the cultural backdrop of masculinity with respect to the psychotherapy profession, both from a client (or potential client’s) frame of reference and from the point of view of gender within the profession. It also looks at the current research around the experience of *‘becoming a therapist’* and *‘men and midlife transitions’* with respect to various theoretical approaches. In both cases these tend to be mainly psychoanalytic and Jungian influences, which form the bulk of the data on this subject. I then take a more philosophical turn, employing the existential literature of Kierkegaard and Heidegger to position the lens through which I will interpret the findings of this project.

1.3 Masculinity and Therapy

This literature review begins by exploring the current statistics around masculine-related issues in society. It seeks to set out the case that, from a therapeutic point of view, men's emotional issues are neither fully understood nor effectively addressed through counselling services (or others). It introduces concerns about how to reframe counselling services to attract more men. This section therefore, serves to respond to the question 'why men?' It builds a case for researching the male experience of becoming a therapist as a first step to reviewing the cultural backdrop to counselling and psychotherapy in the UK.

Over the past sixty years, the equality and feminist movement has attempted to address career-based issues in areas of accessibility, promotion, salary, pension, child care, maternity/paternity rights and so on. Despite this, gender remains a major differentiator across many careers in UK society. In terms of pay, a substantial gap remains in place, even if official figures suggest it has narrowed in recent years (ONS, 2014). In addition, gender-based challenges persist regarding individuals' status, earning potential, work-life balance and cultural associations between certain jobs and a particular gender (McIntosh 2010).

While in popular culture, the term 'psychotherapist' still tends to summon the image of a man with a couch and a pocket watch, the reality is that clients are four to five times more likely to see a female therapist if referred by another professional. Clients, too, are twice as likely to be female (ONS 2014).

After reviewing the literature on men who undertake *non-traditional*, atypical gendered careers such as nursing, air crew service, and elementary (primary school) teaching, Heppner and Heppner (2009) found that many such men had responded to the feminist movement of the 1960s by asking questions about career options and issues relating to the quality (and quantity) of life. The men were aware of statistics suggesting they would on average die 7 years earlier than women, and frequently reported regret that work demands often encroached on family time. The men cited four main reasons for entering non-traditional careers: “(a) desire for a less stressful lifestyle; (b) greater freedom to pursue interests and talents not available in traditionally male sex-typed occupations; (c) increased stability of the positions and (d) greater interaction with females in the workplace” (Chusmir, (1990); Hayes, (1989) cited by Heppner and Heppner, 2009, p. 53).

Later research cited in the same article (Heppner and Heppner, 2009) suggests that men believed that their minority status in a non-traditional role was to their advantage at work. They were viewed as offering something different, to be more career-focussed and therefore as more likely to be promoted to senior positions (ibid). The research showed that whilst it was relatively easy for women to explain their decision to enter male-dominated fields (for example, on the grounds of greater earning capacity and better job advancement prospects) men found their reasons for entering a traditionally female career was often treated with suspicion.

Heppner and Heppner's (2009) article, while covering five decades of research, tends to focus on men's experiences from an empirical position in which quantitative and qualitative research studies are merged. Its conclusion that there is scarce research in this area points to an even smaller body of research into men who change career to become therapists, and less still involving a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective.

The current study focusses on men who become therapists in the hope that such research will shed light on the profession and on other phenomena associated with masculinity, career choice, midlife, and the psychological and emotional lives of men, including their readiness to seek help. The disproportionate number of men who commit suicide and violent crime in the UK further highlights gender related problems which are largely unaddressed and perhaps hidden by a societal view which tends to normalise it.

Some statistics help set the scene. By ignoring male emancipation, society has unintentionally reinforced male stereotypes and contributed to a decline in the quality of men's lives, argues Biddulph (2004). He cites UK data relating to gender, crime, marriage and suicide, noting that men are three times more likely than women to commit suicide, with an average of 18 men taking their own lives in the UK every day; that men routinely fail at intimate relationships (with four out of five divorces being initiated by women); and that males form 90 per cent of prison inmates as well as 90 per cent of children with behavioural problems. On this basis, Biddulph (2004, p.12) draws the following conclusion:

Through the twentieth century men have been suffering uniquely and severely from problems of unhappiness. Not just suicide but premature death from stress, accidents, violence, and addiction – the statistics are all dominated by men. And hurt men tend to hurt others. Physical violence against spouses, sexual abuse of children, divorce, moral bankruptcy in business and politics...all point to something badly wrong with large numbers of men.

Statistics issued by the British Crime Survey in 2011 found men responsible for more than 90 per cent of violent crime (Chaplin et al. 2011). Highlighting the cost of crime, Cockburn and Oakley (2011) attribute this to certain traits of masculinity, arguing that the bulk of violent crimes that result in long prison sentences (as well as emotional and financial costs to the victims) are perpetrated by men. UK Ministry of Justice figures for 2009 show men to be responsible for 98 per cent of sexual offences, 92 per cent of drug offences and 89 per cent of criminal damage (Cockburn and Oakley, 2011). Refuting claims that such behaviour is simply a matter of biology, with the male hormone testosterone being a determining factor, Cockburn and Oakley (2011) argue that diet, activity and circumstances have been shown to alter levels of testosterone in both men and women. Despite this, the authors tend to avoid engaging with the possibility that gender roles are socially constructed and therefore shaped by complex messages from every part of society.

Therapist and feminist author Rogers (1980), argues that men “loathe to give up some of their power” (Rogers, 1980, p.138) and are boxed by the ‘hero myth’ into competitiveness, success-seeking and being the breadwinner, at the expense of sensitivity, intuition and nurturing. In contrast, Bly (2001) argues that society has lost ancient wisdom in the process of attempting to re-balance gender inequality. The hero myth, he believes, contains age-old

wisdom, including the notion of exposing boys ritualistically to a series of trials on a journey to becoming adult men, one on which they were often escorted by elders or wiser men. Bly (2001) blames the combination of fathers who are absent (whether physically or emotionally) and mothers who co-create that space.

Interestingly, although coming from opposite corners of the gender debate, Bly and Rogers arrive at a similar conclusion about men in society: one which includes certain expectations about role, career and identity. Such expectations may reinforce stereotypes whilst paradoxically pressuring men to be something different.

Recent research on young men with problems and the agencies that support them lends weight to the need for further work in this area. The lack of male role models in the UK, widely reported in the media, prompted the Open University to conduct a study (Robb et al. 2015) which involved interviewing agencies and individuals across the country in an attempt to gauge the impact on society of having relatively few men in classrooms and in the care and welfare sector. The study found young men's masculine identities to be strongly defined by locality, with those 'at risk' tending to be embedded in local cultures of hyper-masculinity, often with problematic consequences. Many aspired to a 'safer' and more responsible masculinity, with their aspirations again being largely shaped by local expectations. Support services were found to provide a vital 'third space' in which young men could make the transition to safer and less risky adult masculine identities, with activities providing the gateway to practical advice, emotional support and the building of

relationships. Young men using support services were found to value the personal qualities and commitment of staff above their gender or other social identities. In particular, young men valued the respect, trust, consistency, and a sense of care and commitment shown to them by support staff, and these qualities were identified as key to developing effective helping relationships. A sense of shared experience and social background between young men and staff was shown to be valuable in developing effective relationships, and in 'modelling' transitions to a more positive masculine identity.

The findings also found that activity-based engagement was seen by most of the young men interviewed as more efficacious than simply talking about their feelings or emotions:

While some may be sceptical about the value of providing spaces where young men can play pool or table tennis, such activities can provide an important focus for staff to engage with young men. Moreover, many young men don't find sitting quietly, talking and thinking about how they feel very easy, and engaging in activities can help young men to express and explore their feelings; for workers, activities can also provide a vehicle for building relationships with young men. This knock-on impact was evident in the projects visited for this research (Robb, Featherstone, Ruxton, & Ward, 2015, p.18).

This 'hyper-masculine' response to traditional counselling spaces, while not particularly surprising, challenges established views of the 'unchanging' therapeutic environment, particularly those fostered in training institutions.

Regardless of possible causes, the statistics reveal a startling gender imbalance in relation to crime and behavioural problems, especially anger-related ones. At the same time, there seems to be a general acceptance of this state of affairs, a sense of masculine antisocial

behaviour as “just the wallpaper” (Cockburn and Oakley, 2011). Perhaps the everydayness of this phenomenon blinds us to the truth.

In contrast, the propensity for suicide among certain groups of men comes as a surprise to many people. Although less widely discussed, the evidence is irrefutable. Commenting on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suicide figures for 2012, the Samaritans (Samaritans 2014) stated that while it was encouraging that there had been no increase in the suicide rate from the previous year,

The excessive risk of suicide in men in mid-life continues to be a concern. The group in the UK with the highest rate of 25.9 per 100,000 is men aged 40-44. Suicide is the leading cause of death for men aged 20-34, but it is also the leading cause for men aged 35-49... Men in the lowest socio-economic group living in the most deprived areas are approximately 10 times more likely to die by suicide than men from higher socio-economic backgrounds, living in the most affluent areas. (Samaritans 2014)

Research conducted by the Samaritans (2014) and by others suggests that more men than women feel a need to remain stoic in the face of emotional problems, precluding any demonstration of vulnerability or demand for help. The strength of their emotions has been found to clash with their lifelong attempt to rise above them. In order to resist being seen as failing, weak or vulnerable men often adopt an attitude of even greater independence and self-reliance (McCarthy and Holliday, 2004); they are not prepared to admit to needing support. Commissioned by the Samaritan’s research conducted by Wiley, Platt et al (2012, p.2) notes,

The way men are taught, through childhood, to be 'manly' does not emphasise social and emotional skills. Men can experience a 'big build' of distress, which can culminate in crisis...Women are much more open to talking about emotions than men of all ages and social classes. Male friendships tend to be based on companionship through doing activities together. The 'healthy' ways men cope are using music or exercise to manage stress or worry, rather than 'talking'. Men are much less likely than women to have a positive view of counselling or therapy. However, both men and women make use of these services at times of crisis.

This recommends talking therapies for men but notes that some will be less likely to use these services since they do not consider 'talking' an efficacious response to their distress. It encourages counselling services to *reframe their approach* to make talking therapies more acceptable across gender. The report draws on previous research to make a number of recommendations. It advocates the reframing of help-seeking so as to strip away connotations of 'dependence' in favour of maintaining independence through action/control and solving problems (Wiley et al, 2012). Therapy is recommended to take place in venues where men feel comfortable (for example, pubs, snooker halls and sporting venues), and be enabled through organisations engaged with. Use should be made of non-threatening 'hooks' that interest and attract (Wiley et al, 2012), while changes should be made to the 'face' of services to make them less 'feminine'. Men who went through similar difficulties can be used as volunteers and advocates, while individual relationships of trust can be established towards helping men into projects (Wiley et al, 2012). Men should be allowed to be 'spontaneous' in seeking help, given their propensity to view planning to seek help as emasculating. Finally, ensuring the availability of anonymous, confidential services is recommended as likely to pose a reduced risk to 'manliness' (Wiley et al, 2012).

Wiley et al (2012), provide valuable insights into suicide-related factors in men, recommending changes and inviting discussion around masculine issues, but do not specify how exactly services should adapt. One possible mechanism could involve counselling services treating gender as an aspect of diversity in a multicultural agency, applying principles similar to those introduced to address other cultural inequalities. An early example of this was the Multicultural Counseling Competencies set up by the American Counseling Association (ACA) in the 1970s. McCarthy and Holliday (2004) apply the spirit of this framework to explore whether greater sensitivity might make counselling services more accessible to men. They note that the framework considers gender to be an example of diversity within the user community (with subcultures of difference including sexual, racial and ethnic variations), enabling men to be perceived as domineering or non-domineering, oppressed or oppressing, across cultural variations

In 2014, the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2014) in the UK published results for the government's 'Improving Access to Psychological Therapies' (IAPT) programme. Across the various IAPT service organisations in the UK for this period, 136,669 new service requests were received for females as opposed to 79,669 for males. Although many of these clients are likely to have been referred by their GP, no such breakdown is provided, making it difficult to gauge whether gender stereotyping plays a part in GP referrals in relation to emotional issues.

In a survey for the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Brownlie and Anderson (2011) conducted 52 in-depth interviews with men and women of different ages and backgrounds about their attitudes to discussing emotional problems. Older women (aged over 85) were found to share the reluctance of young men (aged 18-24) to discuss their emotions, making it difficult to make gender-based generalisations. In general though, men were found to prefer action-based responses over talking. The authors recommended policy adjustments to services so that clients could access other strategies. They also argued that it was important to understand 'not talking' as existing on a continuum, with emotional failing at one end and demonstrated resilience at the other. Some participants described their ability to gain emotional support through particular strategies, such as sitting in the car during work time, walking the dog, and wearing headphones around the house. Male participants were more likely than female ones to want to bottle things up rather than talk about them and explained that if they did opt to speak to someone, it was more likely to be a friend or family member than a professional.

According to some studies, mental health problems can also be gender-related. There are conflicting reports about depression, for example, with some research finding a higher prevalence among females and others the exact the opposite (McCarthy and Holliday, 2004). One possible reason for the contradiction was put forward by Cochran (cited in McCarthy and Holliday, 2004), who argues that men may express their depression in different ways, for example through alcoholism, drug abuse, withdrawal, anger and antisocial behaviour. How different individuals respond to emotional problems may also be

socially and culturally constructed, both in terms of the symptoms of the problem and how it is dealt with. Some men may regard seeking counselling for a 'non-serious' problem as self-indulgent (BACP 2014), and that the best way to respond to, for example, losing one's job is with classic stoicism. This appears a perfectly adequate response when the individual feels they have the resources to cope, but it may not be the optimal default position when things go wrong. Having a choice requires sufficient awareness and autonomy to make that choice freely, unencumbered by gender-biased cultural constraints.

Good and Brooks (2005) argue that the concept of Gender Role Strain (GRS) plays a significant part in men's emotional and psychological issues and should always be taken into account. Central to this concept is the idea that while gender role norms are inconsistent and contradictory, individuals feel pressured to conform to them and experience negative consequences when such norms are violated (for example, if men allow themselves to show weakness or ask for help). In the case of alcohol abuse, the authors suggest that "ambivalence" is a common response to GRS-related issues where, for example, to drink is perceived as a manly response to a problem while also being acknowledged as harmful in other aspects. This tension can result in non-compliance which is often misdiagnosed by professionals as "denial" (Good and Brooks, 2005, p.139).

This opening section has confirmed the existence of major problems relating to masculinity, serious crime, suicide and emotional support, problems which remain largely unaddressed or poorly served. If the counselling profession is to respond effectively, it must become

aware of these problems, including the role of GRS and how counselling services are perceived by those caught up in these worrying statistics.

Male therapists might be able to model difference and challenge the social constructions mentioned by Good and Brooks (2005). During training, greater gender awareness might influence the quality of dialogue for both male and female therapists, inviting more creativity and difference into the arena and promoting greater flexibility and openness to all sections of society. My own personal experience in therapy training courses and workshops during the last decade is testimony to the current gender imbalance. Always in a minority throughout training and during practice, I have often felt marginalised: by male peers who are *not* therapists/trainees (and who therefore find my career change puzzling or threatening), by female therapists who tend to view therapy from a predominantly female perspective, and by non-therapist females who find my career choice lacking the power and status of other males. Finally, it should be added that another group, drawn from all the above categories, considered my choice brave and admirable.

Significantly, the USA has seen a significant decline in male therapists over the last forty years. Carey (2011) found that less than ten per cent of members of the American Counseling Association (ACA) were male, compared with 30 per cent in 1982. This decline was seen to impact how the profession was seen by the general public (the potential users of such services). Carey describes the outlook from the perspective of an actual male client seeking therapy:

“They were all female, and they did give me some comfort,” said Mr. Puckett, 30, who works for a domestic-abuse program in Wisconsin. “But I was getting the same rhetoric about changing my behavior without any challenge to see the bigger picture of what was behind these very male coping reactions, like putting your hand through a wall” [sic] (Carey 2011).

Mr Puckett eventually sought out a male therapist, with whom he could relate. Carey’s example suggests that only like-gender can relate to like-gender and fails to disclose the many other factors which may influence efficacy in the therapeutic encounter. For example, Mr Puckett’s own attitudes or beliefs about gender may have played a part in the development of the relationship. Carey’s article clarifies that quality of therapy has no correlation with gender, although choice of gender can be a factor in whether a client considers therapy a viable option in the first place. There is also a suggestion that issues surrounding shame, especially of a sexual nature, might be easier to discuss with someone of the same gender.

Cynkar (2007) cites American Psychological Association (APA) data indicating that while women formed 20 per cent of US doctoral students in psychology and psychotherapy in 1970, by 2005 this had risen to 72 per cent. Whilst the reasons for this remain unclear, Cynkar (2007) suggests that this trend has more to do with men leaving the profession than with women joining in greater numbers. Diamond (2012) argues that status and economics have played a part in how men view counselling as a profession, that the decline in male membership can be correlated with declining health care budgets, and that it has become “increasingly difficult to earn a decent living as a psychotherapist of any discipline...For men

who have a family to support or must support themselves, the mental health profession, especially private practice, no longer provides a viable source of steady income.” However, Diamond (2012) also notes that other factors are involved, including the likelihood that many men look to money to bring a sense of status and power and therefore seek professions most likely to deliver this.

In the UK, the British Psychological Society (BPS) reports male (chartered) membership as less than half that of females (5608 men against 12,398 females⁶). Whilst the UKCP could not provide details of their organisational members, their general membership of 8074 contained only 2010 male members⁷. The Universities Psychotherapy and Counselling Association (UPCA), a UKCP organisational member, provided the following data: 1598 members of whom 358⁸ were male. Similarly, the National Counselling Society (NCS) reported 2484 members, of whom only 518⁹ were male. An example bucking the trend in the decline in male membership is the Society for Existential Analysis (SEA), another UKCP organisational member, which provided me with the following information: 112 members of

⁶ Personal Correspondence with BPS in Jan 2012

⁷ Personal Correspondence with UKCP in July 2013

⁸ Personal Correspondence with UPCA in July 2013

⁹ Personal Correspondence with NCS in July 2013

whom 61 are male¹⁰. It should be noted that the SEA was the smallest organisation I questioned, with only 112 members, and one that by definition takes on a more philosophical approach to therapy. While the data it supplied suggests that existential therapy may attract greater numbers of men than women, it constitutes too small a sample size to be conclusive.

In general, then, the gender imbalance within the membership of the BACP (with only 16 per cent being male¹¹) appears to be shared by other counselling and psychology organisations across the UK. Does this reflect a drop in the number of men wanting therapy? Apparently not; the BACP (2014) reported a rise in the number of men seeking support from their membership. They asked 250 therapists whether they agreed with the statement “men are more likely to see a counsellor or psychotherapist now than they were five years ago”. 72 per cent of participants agreed with this statement, with 62 per cent reporting that they were actually seeing more male clients than five years earlier (BACP 2014). Andrew Reeves, a BACP governor and counsellor, reported the existence of more male-only counselling services and some reshaping of how psychological and emotional

¹⁰ Personal Correspondence with SEA in May 2014

¹¹ Personal Correspondence with BACP in July 2013

support was provided to men: for example, via men-only drop-in centres which acted as a stepping stone towards more formal counselling (BACP 2014).

Whilst no causal relationship can be assumed between the issues facing men and the gender make-up of the counselling profession, we can surmise that some of the issues facing society (for example, crime and violence, substance abuse, marriage/family breakups and suicide) are mainly attributed to men, that men are failing to address some powerful emotional and psychological issues, and that the social response mechanisms available to men are flawed and inadequate.

1.4 Becoming a Therapist

Researching psychotherapy and counselling has been an ongoing challenge for over 50 years (Orlinsky & Ronnestad 2005). A number of studies (Klein et al. 2011; Kottler 2010; Rodman 1986; Dryden & Spurling 1989; Sussman 1992; Welwood 2002; Sussman 1995; Orlinsky & Ronnestad 2005; Kopp 1987) have attempted to explain the phenomenon of becoming/being a therapist, suggesting that this career choice is not arbitrary but complex and meaningful in ways which differentiate it from other careers and that the 'being' of a therapist itself is of interest. This is not a newfound interest; Szasz (1956) researched the experience of analysts more than half a century ago. He argued that case studies rarely take a scientific approach to testing or validating the opinions found in them:

Accordingly, what we sorely miss – it seems to me – is an adequate account of the analyst’s experiences in the psychoanalytic situation; an account which in scope as well as depth would be comparable to our knowledge of the experiences of the patient in the same situation. (Szasz 1956)

For Szasz (1956), obtaining feedback from both client and analyst enabled a more rigorous evaluation of the process. He wanted to examine the claims and motivations of the psychoanalytic community and shine a light on lesser discussed or hidden motivations. Consequently, his study takes an analytic view and uses research literature based on similar approaches to support its claims. It attempts to explain and define rather than seek empirical evidence of the real lives of the men and women it refers to. In doing so the reader enters the realm of intellectual argument and explanation, discovering little about meaning and the human essences which might be involved.

Another approach, aligning with a more Jungian analysis, suggests that therapists follow a “healer-patient archetype” (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989, p.11), whereby therapists “wish to care, cure or heal...Alongside this however, may be a hidden need for power.”

Orlinsky & Ronnestad (2005) argue that “much less consistent attention has been given by psychotherapy researchers over the years to the professional and personal characteristics and contributions of *psychotherapists*” (ibid, p.5). They set out to change this with a study to be carried out over 15 years. The research invited responses from nearly 5,000 psychotherapists, drawn from more than a dozen different countries (the UK was not included) and attempted a largely quantitative analysis of the data. However, the list of

professions does not represent the psychotherapy profession as we recognise it in the UK. Instead, it uses Sussman's (1992) definition of psychotherapy as the "Fifth Profession" (Sussman, 1992, p.11), according to which psychotherapy can be an activity carried out by psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, social workers, nurses and lay therapists. All these professions are treated equally in the study, which fails to capture the special character of therapists' lived experience, instead focussing on averages and variations along quantitative lines.

Previous research has not looked at the specific experience of men, including men who have changed career to become therapists. By focussing on this demographic I hope to explore reflective, considered transitions that feel personal and meaningful rather than lifelong career therapists who may be following a family tradition or have sidestepped psychiatry or a career in medicine.

The relative abundance of research on the broader topic of becoming a therapist suggests a need to explain and understand this process, something which may be a trait of this career choice. Equally, the need to explain implicitly reflects the mysterious, curiosity of this career which is not resolved by the 'doing' of therapy alone.

Many authors examine the phenomenon from angles typically aligned with their therapeutic modality. Not surprisingly, most seek out unconscious motivation or drives. Klein et al (2011) believe that one's early life experiences impact how one's life unfolds and that clues

are always to be found in the childhood of the therapist (Klein et al, 2011). While not subscribing to the idea that therapists are in some way resolving their personal issues through their choice of profession, Klein et al (2011) argue that therapists “need to deal with their wounds if they are going to be successful in their professional roles” (Klein et al, 2011, p4).

Rodman (1986) reflects on becoming a psychiatrist and then psychoanalyst in an autobiographical way, discussing the influences and forces which shaped his work. Since then, the proliferation of modalities and other talking therapies has provided therapists with alternative routes, including social work, counselling, psychology and psychiatry, often with overlapping qualities. Sussman’s (1992) idea of the ‘Fifth Profession’ where all routes converge is synonymous with psychotherapy in the United States. For this reason, although my focus is on counselling and psychotherapy alone, I do not distinguish between the different modalities therein. I assume psychotherapy (therapy) to be a generic label for multiple modalities: psychoanalysis, gestalt, CBT, existential, humanistic, REBT, person-centred, transpersonal and others. I do however refer to modality when a particular stance or interpretation is seen through a specific lens.

Sussman’s (1992) analytic approach provides a comprehensive overview of the different possible unconscious motivations which may be involved and is quite compelling in respect of repressed desires, familial dynamics, wounded healers, and unfinished business. Sussman (1992) builds a case for analytic explanations, some of which resonate with me as someone

'programmed' to look for causal justification. For example, Sussman cites the analyst Farber's view that psychotherapists "since childhood felt acutely aware of the 'hidden meanings' of other's messages...Many remember feeling lonely and even 'different' as a result of having a perspective that others could not share" (Sussman, 1992, p.11).

While Sussman's work remains an analytic interpretation, independent of gender and age, he does refer specifically to male psychotherapists when noting that the role represents "a continuing maternal identification as well as a way of dealing with unconscious anxiety and guilt regarding aggression and libidinal impulses" (1992, p.240).

In a subsequent study, Sussman (1995) comments on the hidden dangers of the therapy profession, which reveal themselves only after one begins to practise. He criticises the profession for being closed when it comes to talking about the personal lives of therapists, blaming a culture of taboos around self-disclosure, Freudian introjects that the analyst must be a blank screen, and therapists' tendency to subjugate their own needs in favour of those of others. As a result, much of the literature on psychotherapy has little to say about the therapist's being, as if their role can be as easily substituted as that of a supermarket checkout clerk at the end of a shift. Sussman (1995) counters this with an honest and open account of his personal reasons for becoming a therapist. As well as conscious decisions, these include the unconscious motivations underpinning his fantasy of being a therapist:

I wished for magical powers...
I hoped to be admired and idolized...

I hoped to make up for the damage I believed I had inflicted on my family as a child...
I hoped to transcend my own aggression and destructiveness...
I hoped to escape my own problems by focussing on other people...
I hoped to internalize my own therapist better by doing what he did...
I hoped to achieve a level of intimacy within a safe context...
I hoped to meet my own dependency needs vicariously by attending to those of my patients...

(Sussman, 1995, p.16)

For Sussman, the reality of his working life, far removed from these ideals, in some cases magnified the issues which had influenced him to begin, including his early experience of not feeling good enough in childhood. He describes this as “an ingenious formula” for ensuring the perpetuation of the profession (1995, p.18).

Unlike his semi-autobiographical first (1992) book on psychotherapists’ unconscious motivations, Sussman’s (1995) follow-up draws on the narratives of several therapists. It tends to focus on lifelong career therapists, rather than those who change career, and describes little of the person of the therapist without resorting to the analytic stance peculiar to his theoretical modality. One of the contributors is Edward Tick, a therapist with extensive experience of war veterans and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Citing Joseph Campbell’s 1949 study into mythology and psychology, Tick concurs with authors such as Bly (2001) that there are stages to a man’s development, also known as the “hero’s journey” (Sussman, 1995, p.32). The first stage represents a departure from the ordinary world into a new space with different rules and risks. The second stage is about initiation:

the passage through potentially life threatening ordeals, in which the person and their former concepts of life are broken down and much courage, strength and resources (both inner and external) are required in order to survive. The final part involves a return to the shared world with “wisdom gained and the intent to give that wisdom, in some form to the culture” (Sussman, 1995, p.33). Tick goes on to discuss his journey as a therapist, realising that his work with veterans enabled him to understand and heal his own wounded parts, to complete his own journey of psychological maturation whilst treating those whose battle wounds were otherwise ignored by the society to which they returned. By supporting the veterans to heal and find learning and wisdom that they can re-integrate into society they find a new home and meaning in their plight. The sharing of this journey is paralleled by the therapist’s own healing and re-integration of disavowed parts.

The literature on becoming a therapist often reveals a startling honesty. Kottler (2010), for example, references research pointing to unfulfilled narcissistic needs, need for recognition, and therapists’ desire to work through their own problems, be better understood and to understand themselves more fully. But although the author describes the everyday challenges of being a therapist (for example, stress, technology, new theories and financial concerns), there remains greater emphasis on ‘why’ (possible causation) than on ‘what’.

Dryden and Spurling’s (1989) study is a welcome attempt at a more phenomenological approach. Here, ten therapists narrate their own personal journey from childhood, revealing

their thoughts, feelings and influences along the way. The use of semi-structured questions facilitates a self-reflective narrative. As one participant (Brian Thorne) observes,

when I decided to seek therapist training I do not recall anything approaching an 'Eureka' experience. On the contrary there was a sense of inevitability mingled with something akin to dread. I knew I had little choice if I was to obey the voice inside me (Dryden & Spurling, 1989, p.67).

Thorne's experience was not unique among the ten therapists. Responding to the question "when did I decide to become a therapist?" others echoed Thorne by saying 'never': "Perhaps the answer is 'I am still in progress' – but I do not think so" (Fay Francella, cited in Dryden and Spurling, 1989, p.126). Eddy Street replied "I never at any stage of my school career set out to become a psychologist" (1989, p.136). Jocelyn Chaplin answered: "At the moment I feel that I will always be 'becoming a psychotherapist', I cannot imagine a moment when I would say 'Aha now I have arrived at my destination and here I will stay' (1989, p.169). As Hans H. Strupp, points out in his chapter (p.101), the response to the question 'how did you become a psychotherapist' is highly personal and it is rare for a therapist to be completely honest about their motivations, failings and neediness. Dryden and Spurling's valiant attempt succeeds in capturing something more personal about the therapist than most analytic work on this subject.

They extracted a number of themes from the interviews, including psychotherapy as a calling; the drive to understand and repair; Homeopathic healing; a sense of isolation and the development of empathy; and the search for wholeness and integration.

The work of Dryden and Spurling (1989) can be criticised on a number of grounds. To begin with, self-disclosure by therapists regarding their fallibilities can pose risk, since clients may come across it (clients are often therapists, too). The therapist must strive to balance being self-aware and courageous with remaining professional, ethical and competent. As a therapist who has had several trainee and qualified therapists as clients, I have heard many times about their fear of my professional judgement when they reveal private thoughts and emotions. I therefore question how open and honest Dryden and Spurling's (1989) study can be without the confidentiality or anonymity provided in an ethical research project. Furthermore, the participants were not interviewed but invited to complete a questionnaire, presumably in their own time. This is more likely to produce a reflective piece rather than revealing the pre-reflective mysteries of their lived experience.

1.5 Men and Midlife Transitions

The theory and concepts surrounding life span, in particular its middle years, are also of relevance to the current study. Unlike infancy and teenage, the 'middle years' lack any well-defined starting point or duration. As humans progress into adulthood and onwards towards middle age and beyond, they do so without predetermined milestones to signal the arrival or departure of each stage.

Hollis (2001) describes midlife as involving a marked transformation, a shift away from the characteristic forces which drive us in early adulthood. In the second part of life, we are invited “to leave ambition behind as well as the preoccupation with self-esteem” (Hollis, 2001, p.92). He describes the sense of being in midlife as a period of confusion and not knowing, noting that “one of the signal events of what I have called the middle passage is the recognition that, having achieved one’s goals, one still hungers for the inexpressible” (2001, p.92)

Much of the literature takes a deterministic approach to midlife. The concept of ‘midlife crisis’ became popular after its inclusion in Jaques (1965). Curious about the change in creativity observed when artists passed through their 30s, Jaques used Kleinian Object Relations theory to explain this crisis as a re-encounter with death and a return to the depressive position. While his paper is a commentary on the creative work of the artists involved, his tendency is to let their work do the talking, an approach which leaves certain avenues unexplored. Jaques’ paper, while logical, feels distant and separate from the actual lived experience of the artists whose lives he analyses.

On the other hand, Miesel’s (1991) conducted a more phenomenological exploration of career change in midlife. This involved both men and women and found motivation to be diverse and variable. Miesel’s (1991) research reinforces my sense that the ‘why’ of this phenomenon is less important than the ‘what’ and ‘how’. In addition, Miesel describes his own midlife transition from sales executive to therapist, something in tune with my own

personal journey. His paper takes a more empirical phenomenological approach and the themes derived are reflective descriptions, in contrast to the evocative lived experience revealed by hermeneutics.

Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic approach seeks to reach beyond description to capture the phenomena of lived experience by reproducing its complex, rich and often indeterminate layers. Following this approach, Bahr (2009) conducted a hermeneutic study of 14 women who had undergone a career change in midlife. Her focus was on women at different stages of career transition: a few were still studying whilst others had already begun their new careers, so that for some, their desires were still anticipated rather than realised. The research embraced all careers, rather than a specific career change. Bahr (2009) uncovered several themes in her study including *timing* (being just the right age for this change), *confidence/empowerment* (development of), *self-efficacy* (gaining greater sense of capability), *quality of life/making a difference* (sense of meaning) and *being a role model for nieces and children*. Hence the study focuses on the anticipation and hopes of midlife career change for a group of women rather than the actual lived experience of a specific career transition, which I intend to address here. By focussing on men in my study I can also rule out the influence of menopause on identity during midlife, which the participants in Bahr's (2009) study might have confronted.

Levinson (1991) conducted a ten-year study in which he followed a sample of men and women in order to create a developmental model of adulthood similar to the many models

of childhood produced over the years. In his introduction, he explains the link between the research and his own uncertainty about the meaning of his life: "At 46, I wanted to study the transition into middle age in order to understand what I had been going through myself. Over the previous ten years my life had changed in crucial ways; I had developed in a sense I could not articulate" (Levinson, 1991, p.x). The research attempts to understand adult development from a psycho-sociological point of view, examining environmental and relational lives of their subjects. It leads towards a structural model of human development suggesting there are fixed "eras" (p.18) which are transitioned via cross-era phases. This study concludes that there exists "developmental periods" (p. 40) which are sequential and predictable like childhood developmental phases. Like many positivistic studies, it feels scientific and therefore distant, seeking generic structures and theory rather than explicating lived experience. Levinson (1991) does capture a sense of lived experience though, when he discusses the phase from age 36 to 41 which he refers to as "Becoming One's Own Man" (p.144). During this phase, the individual is challenged with "becoming more independent, more true to himself and less vulnerable to pressures and blandishments from others" yet also wants "affirmation in society" (p.144). These conflicting forces create a tension that needs to be navigated in order to successfully complete this phase.

This is echoed by Hollis (1993) who describes similar midlife struggles but contrarily sees this as a psychological experience that cannot to be defined in chronological terms. He argues that midlife involves a passage one must undertake in order to emerge triumphantly at the

end. Using Jungian themes, he talks about a re-emergence of the shadow self, which demands to be acknowledged. Hollis contends that one is “wakened” to midlife “when one is radically stunned into consciousness” (Hollis, 1993, p.18). He distinguishes between *chronos* (sequential, linear time) and *kairos* (our relationship with time when we are awakened into consciousness). Although strongly Jungian some of his ideas feel distinctly Heideggerian too, especially regarding the emergence of a more authentic self. This idea was also addressed by Gerzon (1996) who argued that the previous attempts to explain midlife, inadequately failed to describe it: “[other authors] rarely capture ...the experience of inner struggle” (p.6). He prefers to think of midlife as a kind of metamorphosis where life is re-invented more authentically. Understanding and discovering this more authentic self can generate anxiety unless we embrace it as an on-going quest. Gerzon suggests that these significant changes do not occur seamlessly but have to contend with our resistance. In this sense midlife is a drama more worthy of a playwright than a scholar: “We are characters in the play, caught in the opening of the second act, and we do not know what will happen next” (Gerzon, 1996, p.6).

We don't know what will happen next because according to Gerzon (1996), we enter new territory. Jung (1961) considered this territory to involve a struggle between the person we wish to be and who we had become. Discussing the decline of religion in the US during the 1930s, Jung wrote about the period after a man or woman turned 35 as one where the individual seeks more of what they lacked in the first part of their life. In this time of changed social consciousness, many individuals suffer neuroses and marriages are prone to

breaking down. Men might become more effeminate, making more use of their feelings, whilst women might embrace intellectual development.

The afternoon of the human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning. The significance of the morning undoubtedly lies in the development of the individual...But when this purpose has been attained – shall the earning of money, the extension of conquests and the expansion of life go steadily on beyond the bounds of all reason and sense? Whoever carries on over into the afternoon the law of the morning – that is, the aims of nature – must pay for doing so with damage to his soul...(Jung, 1961, p.126)

Jung goes on to ask how the individual can undertake such a difficult journey when there are no “schools” for such transformation (p. 124). This is a reference to the lack of religious instruction, following the decline in church membership.

Whilst many author-therapists have explored midlife, none thus far have combined a purely phenomenological approach to midlife with becoming a therapist as a second career.

1.6 Existential Themes

Significant career change can often bear the hallmarks of the clichéd ‘midlife crisis’ (Jaques 1965), with its classic themes of loss of youth and fear of getting older. However, existential thinkers avoid such superficial labelling, which they regard as largely an attempt to reduce our anxieties about life by building a sense of knowing and order in a relatively unknowable and unpredictable world (van Deurzen 2009). Instead of attempting to pigeon-hole a unique

and indescribable experience, existential authors invite us to open our eyes to what really is.

As van Deurzen (2009, p.1) puts it,

Every now and then the human mind becomes so engrossed in itself that it replaces its humble search for the truths that surpass and define us with the illusion of absolute knowledge and mastery over these same truths.

Existentialists consider the lifespan as a process of becoming or being during which we are confronted by our own concerns for how we live in the context of growing awareness of our mortality (Guignon & Pereboom 1995). This might imply that significant career change is of existential importance – that it might shed light on the meanings behind the decisions we make in the context of our becoming. Some existentialist thinkers, for example Sartre and Kierkegaard, view humans as self-conscious beings who harbour the tension of unavoidable conflicts in their struggle to control a naturally nonsensical (absurd) and unpredictable world (Cooper, 1999; van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005). For them, a career change would tend to be seen in terms of its meaning for an individual in their particular situation. Others, like Heidegger, understand people as interconnected -- inseparable from each other and the world. Common to all existential philosophers is their avoidance of abstract philosophy and theoretical models in favour of an exploration of the person as they exist in the world. They share a curiosity about 'what is' in the field of human understanding.

In this section I review some of the concepts important to Kierkegaard and Heidegger, both of whom made contributions that dramatically shaped existential thinking. Kierkegaard was the first to put forward such radically different ideas and I see his work as laying the

foundation for subsequent work. Heidegger carried forward this work by expanding it beyond the individual and into the world. My hope is that the insights provided by both philosophers will help facilitate a richly existential interpretation of the data.

1.6.1 KIERKEGAARD - LIFE STAGES, ANXIETY AND DESPAIR

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) led an unconventional existence, and it is impossible to describe his thoughts and ideas without reference to him as an individual. Although financially privileged, he seemed bereft of meaning for much of his adult life (Pattison 2005). He never had to work for a living but wrote like a demon possessed, often against the flow of public opinion. Frequently isolating himself from others, he positioned himself, through his writing, as an object of eccentricity or even ridicule (Carlisle 2006; Pattison 2005; Grøn 2008). In his writing we can sense his frustration about identifying and conveying human truths he felt were lacking from science, religion and contemporary philosophy. It was possibly this sense of 'lack-of' that was integral to his personal development and the thrust of his ideas. His work often mirrored aspects of his own life, disguised by pseudonyms and fictional characters. It was also deliberately indirect; the reader was invited to wrestle dialectically alongside his characters as they puzzled their way through their own existential struggle (Malantschuk 1974).

Kierkegaard is considered the first existential thinker to turn philosophy back to the basic problem of how to live. In his foreword to Kierkegaard's "Works of Love" (Kierkegaard, 2009, p.viii), Pattison argues that Kierkegaard coined many of the themes used by subsequent authors, including "anxiety, paradox, the absurd, the leap of faith, the temporality of human existence, and not least, the specifically modern sense of the term 'existence' itself." His existential frustration led to a body of work, language and concepts that might serve as a useful lens through which I can make sense of the lived world of others who have changed careers.

As a young man, Kierkegaard inherited his father's fortune and after a period of study developed a talent for writing, not to earn a living but to make a life for himself. Whilst he was celebrated for his wit and conversation in social circles, he struggled with major life choices, felt meaningless at times and wished to be seen and valued for achieving something different and special:

You are getting on in years, I said to myself, and becoming an old man without being anything and without actually undertaking anything. On the other hand, wherever you look in literature or in life, you see the names and figures of celebrities, the prized and highly acclaimed people...who know how to benefit humankind by making life easier and easier, some by railroads, others by omnibuses and steamships...and brief publications about everything worth knowing...and what are you doing? ... You must do something...take it upon yourself to make something more difficult. This idea pleased me enormously; it also flattered me that for this effort I would be loved and respected, as much as anyone else, by the entire community. (Kierkegaard, 2013b, p. 168)

Kierkegaard discarded the rule book, asking his readers to grapple *unscientifically* with the challenges of being human. He offered them an opportunity to understand the problem

from the point of view of the living individual, so that they might understand and reflect more wisely about their life. He opposed the scientific attitude which served to make life 'easier', an idea he regarded as a myth which, if pursued, would only result in a growing sense of emptiness and despair. Reacting against Enlightenment notions of rationality, he held that human beings were "primarily not creatures of reason and rationality but caring, desiring and feeling beings that act and make decisions based on this nature" (O'Hara, 2007, p.10).

Kierkegaard's privileged position may have encouraged him to question the value of riches and easy living in the light of his own hollow existence. His high level of education may also have led him to believe that reason (a skill he was well practised in) was insufficient to account for the feelings he experienced, or help him respond to them. Instead, his writing became a way of exploring his internal dialectical struggle without fending off his own insecurities completely. Through his writing, he entered a journey of self-discovery in which he implicitly revealed his *angest* (anxieties) and carved a way to-be in the process.

Kierkegaard's struggle with life choices was exacerbated by the lack of solace to be found in the work of contemporary philosophers or theologians in 19th century Denmark. In "Either/Or" (Kierkegaard et al, 1949), Kierkegaard sought to bring otherwise abstract philosophical theory to life through the thoughts and behaviours of fictional characters simultaneously challenging Hegel's concept of mediation (Watts 2003).

Here, Kierkegaard goes straight to the point of what he feels philosophy should be about i.e. the existing person. The pseudonymous editor, Victor Eremita introduces his discovery of a set of letters in the secret compartment of a writing desk. The letters are written by two authors "A" (who lives life aesthetically) and "B" (Judge Wilhelm (who lives a more ethical life)). The two men exchange thoughts on the relative merits of each life.

"A" describes conquest after conquest, yet the pleasure he lives for seems fleeting and empty – whatever you do "you will regret it" (Kierkegaard et al., 1949, p.37). "B", espouses the *ethical* sphere of existence - rejecting purely subjective needs and seeking to serve the greater needs of others and society. The *aesthete* is left in a state of despair, temporarily countered by an increase of the kind of behaviour which began it in the first place. The ethical sphere is considered to take a harder route, that of acknowledging the freedom to choose. Rather than assuming a responsibility-free life through indecision of hard life choices, the ethical subject commits to a choice and in doing so carves out a meaningful life in the process (Pattison 2005). This too is ultimately challenging (*despairing*) since to choose one option is in the same moment to discount others and therefore live with possible regret and not knowing. Whilst freedom might be the very thing that the aesthete fears and so avoids "...this self-choice offers freedom the freedom to make itself the defining feature of one's existence" (ibid, p.96).

The freedom to choose a path e.g. a particular career is to take a stand and to find a way which conveys our subjective truth as individuals. But, we also choose in order to satisfy

societal or familial pressures and are therefore ultimately, forever in tension (anxiety). In the aesthetic life, each moment is always a choice but moments are always passing. We therefore choose through our inaction as much as through our action. Both spheres of existence may lead to a third sphere which Kierkegaard called the *religious* stage. In this, the individual transcends the either/or debate and discovers a way of being that moves beyond ethical or aesthetic, not based on self-centred desires, nor societal or state acceptance. The religious phase requires the awareness and acceptance of an inner truth that cannot be proved in theory or by example; it has to come from within (Watts 2003; Pattison 2005), like acceptance of Christian doctrine. Absence of this phase can lead the individual into a sense of despair which Kierkegaard referred to as a 'sickness unto death' (Kierkegaard, 2008). This distinctly spiritual sickness differs from anxiety in that the individual can overcome it with *faith* whereas anxiety is an aspect of being which he/she must learn to embrace as an unavoidable attribute of human nature (Kierkegaard, 2001).

To Kierkegaard the human being is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, the finite and the infinite, the necessary and the possible (freedom), and it is this position which provokes a feeling of anxiety. Anxiety is therefore an inescapable and natural condition of the human being. Kierkegaard invites the reader to learn to *be* anxious (Grøn 2008), to actively engage their anxiety as a way of being, to embrace anxiety as a quality to be discovered and accepted. It cannot be stumbled upon but is pursued and revealed to those who seek it in the correct way:

In one of Grimm's fairy tales there is a story of a young man who goes in search of adventure in order to learn what it is to be in anxiety...I will say that this is an adventure that every human being must go through - to learn to be anxious in order that he may not perish either by never having been in anxiety or by succumbing in anxiety. Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate...the more profoundly he is in anxiety, the greater is the man... Anxiety is freedom's possibility (Kierkegaard, 2013, p. 155).

Hence anxiety is not an emotional state that has an object, like fear; rather it lies in one's expectations about a possible future. Understanding anxiety requires the "psychological observer" (Kierkegaard, 2001, p.177) to enter a kind of phenomenological enquiry, mirroring, interpreting and reflecting back any experience in body and mind. This facilitates a sense of release in the other, "rather as lunatics do when someone understands their obsession, grasps it poetically, and proceeds to develop it further" (Kierkegaard, 2001, p.178). O'Hara states that "Kierkegaard says that "Anxiety is a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy". This means that one wants what one fears and one fears what one wants" (O'Hara, 2007, p.57).

This is not the case with the experience of despair. Unlike anxiety, which is to be discovered and embraced, despair pertains to the relationship of the individual to the self. The individual who does not embrace the calling to confront their finitude in the face of life's possibilities will fall into despair. This individual is each of us as we fail to be the selves we actively and consciously choose to be. Kierkegaard defines various types of despair (Kierkegaard, 2008) and calls upon the reader to regain their faith and salvage their soul from the sickness of despair:

Anxiety is a response to the tension between the finite and the infinite aspects of human existence, whereas despair results from the way the self as a whole is in some sense untrue to its wholeness. Whilst anxiety is a symptom of poor mental or emotional health, despair is a symptom of poor spiritual health (Carlisle, 2006, p.102)

All of us, no matter what our religious or spiritual belief, are in despair, according to Kierkegaard. "There is not a single human being who does not despair at least a little, in whose innermost being there does not dwell an uneasiness...an anxiety about a possibility in life, or an anxiety about himself" (Kierkegaard, 2008, p.21).

Kierkegaard suggests that the self is a process of becoming through an oscillation between a sense of the infinite and of the finite, in which "the finite is the confining factor, the infinite, the expanding factor" (Kierkegaard, 2008, p.32). If the self fails to alternate between, it ceases to become itself and then experiences despair. In infinitude, we lack finitude (necessity) and naturally gravitate towards it. In finitude we lack infinitude (possibility) and gravitate towards that. In each state, one is in despair in relation to that which is missing.

Kierkegaard cites the example of someone who is seemingly living a very successful life, both socially and economically. Under the surface, however, there is a feeling of despair. Such an individual exists in a state of the infinite, so far removed from grounded reality that they become lost. Conversely, an individual living in finitude is bounded by a temporal existence and fears the loss of each moment or the possibility of each moment being carved through their actions in a way they will later regret. It becomes easier to refrain from taking

a stance or taking a risk. Better to blend in with others and what seems safe. But in doing so one never becomes an individual.

Kierkegaard communicated to his readers indirectly so that they might see themselves in the protagonists and struggle alongside them to find their own way – to make their own choice. It was not up to Kierkegaard to choose for the reader, since this would be defeating the purpose. Instead, he made use of irony – a subject from his own master’s dissertation, as a mechanism to promote thinking by jarring with the normal everydayness of facts and knowledge (Malantschuk 1974; Watts 2003).

1.6.2 HEIDEGGER, AUTHENTICITY AND THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE

Like Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) belonged to a group of philosophers with a similar distaste for the idealist approach endorsed by the likes of Hegel, Kant and Schopenhauer. However, Heidegger developed a response more befitting his secular frame of reference.

Heidegger agreed that humans should not be treated like objects to be labelled but rather seen as contingent creatures open to change and ‘becoming’. He challenged the idealist view in his first major work, “Being and Time” (Heidegger 2010), which propelled him to fame and introduced several of his key concepts. One objective in ‘Being and Time’ was to

understand how the modern trend towards an objectified worldview had culturally shifted *being* towards an increasing “loss of meaning” (Guignon, 1995, p.179). While viewing the world in purely theoretical terms might be useful in some circumstances, it also created a sense of detachment which provoked tension. Heidegger was frustrated that certain idealist assumptions failed to address what he saw as the most important issue of all: “the question of the meaning of being” (Heidegger 2010). Heidegger wrote extensively on this subject, extrapolating ideas from Brentano, Kierkegaard and Dilthey and extending the phenomenology of his own teacher, Edmund Husserl. He then proposed a more hermeneutic phenomenology to explore the lived experience of this tension. For Heidegger, the scientific age had concentrated on the ‘why’ of our existence as if humans were simply objects. Instead, he proposed that we consider the *what* and *how* of our existence, and looked to establish the common dimensions of being which he called ‘existentials’.

In relation to the current research into men making a significant career change, Heidegger can help us understand the *what* and *how* of their transition.

Heidegger believed that humans differ from other beings in that their being is of importance to them. How we live and how others relate to our existence becomes meaningful. However, the challenge to making sense of our being is that this being cannot be understood directly. We never observe our lives or the world as unbiased receivers of data; instead we view them through the lens of what something means for us by virtue of its use and value. Heidegger termed this way of seeing “interpretation” (Heidegger, 2010, p.64).

Things already in the world are always seen in terms of their “handiness” (Heidegger, 2010, p.71) (often translated as ‘ready-to-hand’). It is therefore futile to attempt to step outside of this interpretative way of being. To answer the question of the meaning of being we have to begin by understanding how the natural tendency of being obscures itself by itself. Indeed the biggest assumption is that this question (the meaning of being) is so obvious that it hardly warrants further analysis. Yet, the more obvious the question, the more likely we are to miss it altogether or at best misunderstand it. Heidegger’s initial quest was therefore to penetrate the natural, taken-for-granted aspects of being. Although he never managed to fully answer his question, he was able to reveal several important ontological themes, some of which I present here.

Heidegger argues that by attempting to look directly at being we miss something; as van Deurzen (2009, p.35) puts it, “I must accept that everything I throw light on will also cast a shadow and that things will therefore remain mysterious no matter how well I elucidate them.” We are therefore invited to allow being to show itself for itself (Heidegger 2010). To Heidegger this imprecise, non-specific conclusion was a form of *holzweg* (woodpath leading to a dead-end). Whilst we may have to turn back from the *holzweg* the journey is not unfruitful; we are nevertheless “different, even wiser, than we were before we took this path” (Polt, 1999, p.7).

For Heidegger and other existential philosophers, the Cartesian split has created a world in which things exist as entities separate from the human being. The world and everything in it

have become things to be understood as distinct from us and able to be examined objectively. To Heidegger, this was not the case. Human beings inherit a way of being in the world which is inseparable from the world. The way I see a fish, even a strange and unusual species, is never with indifference and pure objectivity; instead I view the fish through the lens of everything I associate with being fish-like (and not like me). Humans are always situated in a context they inherit and which influences their intention. In other words, they are temporal creatures (meaning they are historical rather than impermanent (Polt 1999)) and inherit certain facts about their existence. Heidegger referred to this sense of inheritance as “thrownness” [*Geworfenheit*] (Heidegger, 2010, p.131). This *thrownness* forms the horizon or backdrop to their being and is co-constitutional of their existence. This means that humans are not entirely free agents but are always immersed in an inescapable culture and facticity into which they are *thrown*. More than just organic creatures, they are factually, historically and culturally situated in place and time with others who are co-constituents of their being.

Here, Heidegger takes existential philosophy along a different route from that of Kierkegaard or Nietzsche, both of whom emphasise a more individualistic and subjective take on being. For Heidegger, the human is *Dasein*, a *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 2010, p.53) and therefore always in a position of care for the world. Even loners who separate themselves from others only do so because others hold a value and meaning for them; they still care. This care for others results in a positioning of the being-with-others, such that:

The way one differs from them, whether this difference is to be equalized, whether one's own *Dasein* has lagged behind others and wants to catch up in relation to them, whether *Dasein* in its priority over others is intent on suppressing them...Existentially expressed this being-with-one-another has the character of distantiality (Heidegger, 2010, p.122)

Heidegger suggests that *Dasein's* care for others is mediated by an awareness of how it relates to others through the possibility of distantiality (*abständigkeit*). These others are not specific individuals necessarily; they represent the indefinite otherness of *they* (the crowd or 'das Man'), which conveys itself in the form of *theyness* or "averageness" (Heidegger, 2010, p, 123). Whilst we are inextricably always a part of *they* (*das Man*), *Dasein* is always capable of choosing a way of being that enforces distantiality or uniqueness relative to its position within the 'they'. Lostness occurs when *Dasein* ceases to recognise its own potential for being, follows the crowd rather than exploring its own possibility, and disowns any responsibility to be its own authentic self.

Whilst confusion surrounds some of the terms Heidegger uses, I subscribe to the idea expressed by Egan (2012) that *Dasein* becomes lost when it suppresses its awareness of distantiality and thereby ends up conforming to a more normative existence as *das Man*. The movement between distantiality and becoming lost in *das Man* is the mediation between modes of authentic (*eigentlich*) and inauthentic (*uneigentlich*) being. Since such mediation is governed by the self, *Dasein* is solely responsible for its response to *theyness* (Gelven 1989; Egan 2012).

When we fail to take responsibility, we lose our “I-ness” to das Man, a process Heidegger referred to as “fallenness” (Heidegger, 2010, p.267). In response to this fallenness, some individuals are pulled back into a more authentic being by a ‘Call to Conscience’ – also translated as the “voice of conscience” (Heidegger, 2010, p.258).

Following this, Heidegger turned his attention to what he referred to as “understanding” (Heidegger, 2010, p.141). *Understanding* is a way of preconceiving how we find ourselves in the world, such that the world becomes understood in terms of its possibilities for us. He suggests that *understanding* is therefore also an existential mode of being. In contrast to thrownness, which reminds us of the facticity of our existence and therefore of our limitations, understanding is an act of project-ing our possibilities (making a project of our possibility). Hence, projecting (or throwing) our possibilities co-exists with being thrown (Polt 1999) but since projecting and thrownness are modes of existence, *Dasein* is both facticity and possibility at the same time. As Heidegger puts it: “It [*Dasein*] is existentially that which it is *not yet* in its potentiality of being” (Heidegger, 2010, p.141). Each moment *Dasein* has an opportunity, through understanding, to elect one of several possibilities which are available, restricted only by facticity or non-choice. Even the act of not choosing is a choice since each discrete moment passes over to the next whether we actively choose or not (Mulhall 2005).

By neglecting to take responsibility for its choices, *Dasein* enters the realm of das Man and the mode of inauthenticity, effectively allowing others to choose for it – whilst benignly

actually choosing. For Heidegger, *Dasein* exists in the world in a state of “entanglement” (Heidegger, 2010, p.169), where *Dasein* has “fallen prey” to an inauthentic everydayness in its being. *Entanglement* is characterised by our tendency to take things for granted in our everydayness. Heidegger points out that this is not a lower level of being, nor is it secondary to more authentic ways of being; rather, it is a necessary, normal mode in which *Dasein* “maintains itself” (Heidegger, 2010, p. 169). It can, however, limit *Dasein* to a more superficial understanding of the world and its being since its mode of interpretation is so constrained. Without this mode of maintenance, *Dasein* is exposed to the uncertainties of its existential concerns. It therefore relies on the soothing balm of entanglement to pacify or tranquilise itself from itself.

On this basis, Heidegger suggests that anxiety (*angst*) is a mood we find ourselves in when we are brought out of this entanglement and into a state of uncanniness (*unheimlichkeit*) or “not-being-at-home” (Heidegger, 2010, p.183). In this state we are more authentically aware of our existence but feel unsettled and alienated, too. The things we associate with the normal everydayness of entanglement adopt a different meaning when we are in a state of uncanniness. For example, tying one’s shoelaces when one has a bad back suddenly becomes a challenge, one which can also take on meanings and provoke insights unavailable to the everyday mode of existence.

Given that being in the inauthentic mode of the *They* has some benefits in terms of reducing the anxiety of uncanniness, what brings *Dasein* out of this mode and why? For Heidegger,

this is wrapped up in *Dasein's* ability to project its future possibilities. At times, one possibility emerges more sharply and powerfully than others: that of death.

In recognition of its mortality, however many years away that might be, Heidegger suggests that *Dasein's* natural tendency is to always be ahead of itself, concerned with its "potentiality for being [Seinkönnen]" (Heidegger, 2010, p.84). This potential can only be realised upon death, making *Dasein* a being-towards-death, with death the point at which 'wholeness' is achieved. Until then, *Dasein* seeks its wholeness (ibid), mediated by its relationship to death and temporality. When I sink deeply into the everydayness of the world I tend to lose sight of my mortality as a possibility for me. Even if others talk about sickness, hospitals or death, all this remains as something pertaining to the *They*, and not something particular to me for most of the time. However, certain events, thoughts, changes in relationships or changes in health or physical function can bring me back to the clarity of death as a possibility for me, not just for others. This is what Heidegger refers to as the "voice of conscience" (Heidegger, 2010, p.258), which he describes as a silent calling (or summons) to itself by itself: "Conscience calls the self of *Dasein* forth from its lostness in the they" (p.264). The summons of the conscience is indefinite, yet "the peculiar indefiniteness and indefinability of the caller is not nothing, but rather a positive distinction" (p.264). It is in its uncanniness that we know it as different from the call of the *They* and in its uncanniness that we are anxious as beings that are no longer at home in our being: "In this occurrence there is a wrench out of the everyday. That is why *unheimlich* means uncanny and not-at-home" (Mugerauer, 2008, p.56). Heidegger says:

Uncanniness reveals itself authentically in the fundamental attunement of anxiety, and, as the most elemental disclosedness of thrown Dasein, it confronts being-in-the-world with the nothingness of the world about which it is anxious in the anxiety about its ownmost potentiality-of-being. (Heidegger, 2010, p.266).

Hence the uncanny is experienced in the anxiety revealed through understanding, which in turn exposes *Dasein* as possibility. We experience a sense of not-being-at-home when we realise (in understanding) that we are what we are not yet and (in thrownness) that we are no longer what we once were. Being in the *They* would normally reduce this sense of thrownness, yet “Dasein flees from thrownness to the relief that comes with the supposed freedom of the *They*-self ... in the face of the uncanniness that fundamentally determines individualised being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 2010, p.266). Heidegger therefore sees *Dasein* as living in the pretence of freedom while occasionally drawing back to authenticity during moments of insight.

These themes from Heidegger highlight a similar struggle to that described by Kierkegaard: one where the pressure of making life meaningful is highly valued yet not clearly mapped out; where the need of the individual often contrasts with the need to care and be cared for by others from whom we seek acceptance; and where the pressure to accomplish these things waxes and wanes with awareness of our inevitable, accelerating passage towards non-being.

Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger seek to capture and present textural qualities of the human existence in all its subtlety and mystery. Rather than highlighting a series of ‘facts’ for me to

check against my data, the themes emerging from their ideas offer to me a way of dwelling with the data and interpreting it through the lens of their particular horizon. Their ideas offer a means of exploring the lived experience of my participants in a way which has the possibility of being evocative and concretely known/knowable.

1.7 Reflections

This literature review feels like a tale of two stories and there is something here that feels a little 'clunky'. Yet the two parts are necessary components, which have evolved directly out of the original question and so cannot be ignored. Since I am attempting to explore the phenomenon of relatively few men opting to change careers to become therapists there are at least two important stakeholders: the men undertaking such a transition, and the profession that shapes and is shaped by this experience.

The focus on men has revealed gender differences which call for further research, validating the need for mechanisms to facilitate the sometimes unspoken emotional lives of men. This is evidenced through significant gender discrepancies in relation to suicide, serious crime and mental health, and also with respect to the users and potential users of counselling and psychotherapy services. This imbalance is paralleled with the gender composition of the therapy profession, which plays a role in modelling such services to the wider population. Whilst the latter is not the focus here, I hope to explicate the experience

of being a man going through this transition and to invite participants to explore how they believe this has influenced their experience.

The second tale is one of understanding the meaning(s) and experience of the transition from a human lived experience point of view. The obvious avenue of enquiry might lead me and the participants to interpret their choices and experience through a cultural understanding of midlife issues. I have reflexively avoided the use of this term (midlife), both in my invitation to participants and my interview questions. During the research, I aim to be reflexively aware of my own midlife narrative and any existential meaning it might have for me. My aim is to stay close to the what, when and how of participants' narratives so that any existential themes can emerge naturally.

As this literature review has revealed, my curiosity about why I became a therapist is not unique. Sussman's (1995) work is humbling to read. I was conscious of a wry smile when I came face to face with the irony of my own aims as a therapist and the general hopelessness of these more personal endeavours. Nevertheless, the occasional, if not consistent, feedback I receive from clients temporarily fills me with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. I feel I have left an impression on a client, one that might long exceed our period together, and this gives greater meaning to my life. In contrast, there is a meeting between strangers, an ensuing dance of voluntary unilateral discovery, an unusual felt sense of intimacy – maybe even an “I-thou” (Buber 1984) connection. Then each session, each discrete encounter, reaches a temporary end until the next week.

Eventually a final, reflective and complete ending is reached: sometimes joyful and touching, at other times sharp and painful. In all endings I am renewed as a temporal being in the world, brought back from the disillusionment of being special to the reality of being mortal.

I found the literature on the subject of becoming a therapist always enlightening and insightful. It was intriguing to see how a particular therapist combined their skills, reflection and knowledge when making sense of their situation. The powerful arguments they provide resonate with my own knowledge and awareness, providing many 'ah yes' moments of acknowledgement or identification. It is possible, however, that these moments are only shared with such resonance since comparable theoretical knowledge, training, common literature and years of experiential similarities have shaped our respective levels of awareness, enabling them to run along culturally parallel lines. Perhaps our coping methods and ways of responding have aligned over the years so that we develop a kind of *therapist's vision* of the world, in the way that an engineer might look at a bridge: that is, no longer as an aesthetic and practical solution, but a steel and concrete seven-span cantilever. Here, familiarity leads me to easily accept as plausible what I read about other therapists simply because it fits with my existing *weltanschauung* (Heidegger 2010).

The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach used in this project, however, attempts to create a clearing in which new information might be revealed. Thus far, none of the authors on this subject have attempted a view which approaches from a place of not-knowing; each

has attempted to use their existing reflective skills and theoretical knowledge to tell their stories.

I have focussed primarily on Kierkegaard and Heidegger in this review as they stand out for me within the existential literature and therefore shape my understanding. Like all existential philosophers, both have views regarding what it means to be human and therefore in pursuit of a well-lived life. It is my belief that certain motivational forces underpin meaning in human lived experience and are crucial to explicating the 'what' and 'how' of our existence, regardless of career or gender. Both philosophers shape the lens through which I intend to interpret the data. However, I remain aware that others might play a role in refocusing this view at some point in the future.

3 METHODOLOGY

All research is underpinned by a set of philosophical assumptions or beliefs. In this chapter I describe the process of arriving at an appropriate research methodology by beginning with my own philosophical beliefs and research aims. I go on to explain how I gradually narrowed down my options before settling on an approach that supports and aligns with my world view as a researcher. I then set out the method I followed: how participants were selected, how data was gathered, the procedures involved in data analysis, and the ethical considerations taken into account. The chapter concludes by considering issues relating to evaluation of findings followed by a reflexive summary.

Whilst most research questions can be explored via a number of methodologies, the type of understanding desired will influence how and what information is to be discovered. For this reason, the research question to some degree suggests the methodology through what it posits or seeks to uncover. Looking at 'why' men become therapists is different from asking 'what men experience' when becoming therapists, while the latter is different from 'how many men' will become therapists over the next decade, and so on. Each can be answered from a different underlying philosophical point of view and associated methodology.

I seek an approach that will help me reveal human lived experience in the case of men becoming therapists following a former career. Even at this stage the question begins to assume a qualitative form of research aiming at rich, textual description. Exploring lived experience, or the life world, implies capturing what Laverly (2003, p.4) describes as “what we experience pre-reflectively, without resorting to categorisation or conceptualisation, and quite often includes what is taken for granted or those things that are common sense.” That I hope to uncover the evocative, resonant qualities that dwell within the phenomenon in a manner which feels recognisable to the reader necessarily steers my choice of methodology.

This chapter begins by exploring my worldview and how this connects to my choice of methodology.

1.8 Quantitative versus Qualitative

Central to any approach is the researcher’s attitude to knowledge and reality (epistemology and ontology). The researcher’s ontological stance signals how he/she makes sense of reality and the degree to which the world reveals truths which can be objectively determined and measured. In psychological research, the spectrum varies from a ‘positivist’ to a ‘constructivist’ position, broadly aligning with an objective (reality purely ‘out there’) perspective to a subjective (reality internally constructed and personal) perspective (Breakwell et al, 2006). Within this spectrum lie many other epistemological and ontological

stances, including constructionism (where knowledge is considered to be gained through experiential means) and social constructionism (where knowledge of reality becomes socially influenced and negotiated) (Burr 2003). Burr points out that while there is no single definition of social construction that suffices, in general it aims to take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world including ourselves. It invites us to be critical of the idea that through our observations, the world unproblematically yields its nature to us. In opposition to positivism and empiricism, social construction challenges the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world and that what exists is the same as what we perceive (Burr 2003; Finlay & Evans 2009)

As a mathematically trained former IT professional, I might have been expected to grasp the positivist approach with both hands, seeing it as a mechanism for rigorously applying scientific research principles so that clear and unambiguous answers may be obtained to validate a claim. The approach appears to take a clinical view of the subject, untainted by subjectivity and bias. In the past, I did indeed tend to prize clarity and certainty over the obscure and variable, even in matters psychological.

However, my ten years as a phenomenological therapist - and several more as a confused young man - have broadened this worldview such that I recognise the limitations in such an approach especially with regard to subjective, pre-reflective experience and the interplay of social construction towards perceived reality. Today, I consider that social constructionist

approaches are better able to capture the textures of human meaning in the way I directly experience them; they help convey the non-specific, nuanced and paradoxical qualities I recognise but cannot easily capture with more positivistic approaches.

That said, I would still prefer my car to be crash-tested in very positivistic way; there is little room for nuance and paradox when it comes to potentially lethal technology. In such a case, we look for certainty and predictability, especially as the users of such technology are typically unpredictable humans. Quantitative researchers tend to subscribe to positivistic views about the nature of things, including humans, where they believe it is possible to discover 'truths' pertaining to the phenomena under investigation. They therefore seek out precision and predictability, relying on controls and prior findings to determine accuracy.

However, in the realm of human motivations and meanings, where we want to understand rather than predict, the need for certainty is outweighed by the need to capture an essential 'something' -- typically less distinct, variable and ambiguous -- and to use a variety of means to do so. Qualitative researchers tend to believe that humans are not predictable or precise, whether in their behaviour or the meanings they attribute to experience. The relevant methods are therefore tentative and aim to reveal rather than deduce: "Qualitative research is inductive and exploratory rather than deductive" (Finlay and Evans, 2009, p.5).

For many positivist researchers, this approach is less scientific and therefore holds no certainty or value through generalisation. Positivists would argue that the subjective

experience distorts reality and makes it impossible to demonstrate transparency or to replicate the findings. Kvale and Brinkman (2008) use the metaphors of 'miner' and 'traveller' to distinguish between those who believe the truth is out there to be uncovered and revealed through polishing and process (miners) and those who believe that truth is uncovered like a conversation or experience that occurs between the traveller and the environment.

Like most people, I often buy things online. I first look at the basic description, assuming it represents some of the facts of the item. I then seek out the reviews and the experiences others may have had. In other words I recognise that even the factual descriptions about the product are actually marketing statements which also have a particular bias or constructed element. Personal experience, gleaned from reviews, tells me the 'more' of the item that helps me make a decision. As a therapist, I view human motivations, feelings and meanings as changeable, paradoxical and contingent in a way which can be resonant and identifiable when revealed but not necessarily consistent and repeatable across individuals or time. The 'truth' here is not hard and fast, but rather relational and socially negotiated or co-created.

As an extension to this, my own view suggests that I adopt an interpretivist approach to the phenomena of human lived experience as described in my research question. Sitting somewhere between social construction and constructivism, interpretivist researchers see human phenomena from the perspective of constructivism but do not constrain all research

phenomena to being viewed through a purely subjective lens (Kishore and Ramesh, 2007). Reality for interpretivists is “socially, culturally, historically, and linguistically produced: in other words ... our situatedness determines our understanding” (Finlay & Evans, 2009, p.19).

1.9 Selecting a Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research has evolved out of differing requirements across several fields of social, behavioural and human sciences, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, nursing and psychotherapy (Creswell 2007). Choosing an appropriate methodology within the qualitative framework has required me to clarify my own view of what kind of outcome I am seeking. To respond to my research questions, I sought an approach which would help me uncover and reveal meanings and ‘*is-ness*’ about the phenomenon of men becoming therapists following a former career. Following Kvale and Brinkman (2008) I opted to be more of a ‘traveller’ than a miner and sought an approach that would support this endeavour.

According to Gadamer (2004), formal method can hinder access to the truth, whether when collecting or analysing data. At the same time, I acknowledge the need to follow guiding principles to prevent me sliding into solipsism and navel-gazing. I therefore sought a simple framework which fitted my philosophical beliefs and which would facilitate the evocation of

truths from within the narratives of the participant: an approach that would help me mediate between science and art without resorting to a form of 'painting by numbers'.

The three qualitative approaches I consider below -- grounded theory, heuristic enquiry, and phenomenology – are all firmly within the qualitative tradition, although relating to different paradigms. Over the next few pages I describe my considerations in relation to each as I move towards further clarification and selection.

3.2.1 GROUNDED THEORY

This approach is so-named from its aspiration to develop theory directly from the data and because the approach to analysis is also rooted in the derived data (Breakwell et al, 2006). Grounded theory is qualitative whilst retaining an edge of scientific rigour. This is possibly due to the rather organic development of grounded theory within a more positivistic American hospital environment in the 1960s. Strauss and Corbin collaborated to help uncover awareness about death and dying in a hospital since it was largely unspoken about and their success was then deconstructed into a series of steps (Charmaz 2014).

Grounded theory also aims to reveal meaning in addition to theory. Variations on the original Strauss and Corbin approach have become more interpretivist (Creswell 2007). For example, Charmaz proposed a greater emphasis on the views, values, beliefs, feelings,

assumptions, and ideologies of individuals than on the methods of research, while still describing the processes of data gathering, processing and documenting (Creswell, 2007). Following further evolution of her work, Charmaz (2014, p.41) states that the methods of grounded theory “consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves.”

Whilst it aligns with my interpretivist stance and permits flexibility of method, this approach still involves theory-seeking rather than a focus on explicating human lived experience. At this stage I feel that the generation of theory might well interfere with my ability to see the phenomenon *itself*. I therefore decided to focus on lived experience, in the process discounting Grounded Theory as a suitable approach for this project.

3.2.2 HEURISTIC INQUIRY

Another possible approach I considered was heuristic inquiry (developed by Clark Moustakas), which is more focussed on explicating human lived experience than developing theories or testing assumptions (Given 2008). This matched my research interest and seemed to serve the objective of revealing something about the lived experience of the phenomenon of interest. It also involves the motivation and experience of the researcher within the findings in a way which fits a non-positivistic stance.

Moustakas believed that the strength of heuristic inquiry lay in its systematic and structured approach (Moustakas 1994; Given 2008). In this instance, heuristic research would invite me to look at my own relationship with my change of career as the basis for research. These thoughts and feelings would then be central to the investigation. Whilst I cannot escape my own natural attitude to this phenomenon, I want to refrain from taking centre-stage so that I can more clearly experience the phenomenon as revealed by each participant. Heuristic inquiry places greater emphasis on subjective experience (constructivism) than interpretivism. In addition, the structured approach of heuristic inquiry seemed restrictive and challenged my desire for a more organic approach, thereby opposing Gadamer's critique of method (Gadamer 2004). Heuristic inquiry was therefore also discounted on this occasion.

3.2.3 PHENOMENOLOGY

The previous considerations may appear to constitute a linear selection process. The reality is that this process is often more iterative than linear and involves some consideration. Typically, a number of possible options enter my awareness, rather like items on a menu in a restaurant. I tend to discount some directly, ponder others and eventually settle on two or three possibilities. This process itself is hermeneutic, and iterates until settling on an outcome that feels most appropriate.

Phenomenology is a way of understanding human lived experience as it appears to us in consciousness (Husserl 2012; Gallagher 2012; Langdrige 2007). It is not surprising that phenomenology has interpretations and variations since it is principled upon our experiences being continuously revised by social, cultural and historical forces and factors which are both shaping and being shaped by it. How we make sense of one unique experience will never be exactly the same for anyone else. Phenomenological research requires a passion to understand human lived experience in all its triumph and majesty, in all its light and dark. It is, as Wertz (2011) suggests, an act of love:

I am personally attracted to phenomenological methods by my desire to move from abstract theories, experiments, and pseudoscientific propositions that are remote from life toward the experiences lived through by persons in actual life situations. My own characteristic attitude of wonder in the face of human experience, my fascination with its complexities, intricacies, multiple dimensions, depth, and ambiguities draws me to phenomenology. I experience research as a form of love in which I immerse myself in other people's lives and experiences, which I find surprising and even astonishing as I think more carefully about it. I am sensitive to the dark sides of human experience, and I am drawn to the precious value and dignity of actual human lives (Wertz, 2011, p.6).

Objects are not a constant when brought to the awareness of the conscious; rather, they are steered through contingent factors which influence, and are influenced by, our intention in that precise moment (Langdrige 2007). We make meaning based on our unique temporal, spatial, social and corporeal situation (Wollants, 2012; van Manen, 1990). If consciousness represents the window through which we observe the world, the qualities inherent in that window, including dirt, impurities in the glass, age, aspect, and so on, will influence what we can see (Gallagher 2012).

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) differentiated between the window and its position (how we see the world) and what's beyond the window (what we see) as intentional components of consciousness. *How* we see the world is often referred to as the noetic component (or noesis), whilst *what* we see in the world is known as the noemic component (or noema) (Langdrige 2007; Gallagher 2012; Moran 1999), although the definitions of each are disputed (Gallagher 2012). According to Husserl, the noema and noesis form correlative aspects of the mental process (Giorgi 2009). The noesis is responsible for "bestowing sense, for constituting the meaning of what it grasps" (Giorgi, 2009, p.156). For Gallagher (2012, p.8), phenomenology is more "a way of seeing than a set of doctrines or theories...In fact, part of the way one starts to do phenomenology is to push aside any doctrines or theories – including scientific or metaphysical theories. This pushing aside is part of the method of phenomenology."

Husserl put forward an approach to return to the natural way of seeing the world: seeing afresh, as Finlay (2013) refers to it, or *zu den sachen selbst* (Husserl, 2012). The latter is often translated as 'to the things themselves', although *sachen* more closely translates as 'affairs' or 'matters' (Finlay 2013). An extension to this is the need (whilst returning to the things/matters themselves) to bring ourselves to the evidence such that "the concrete affairs (*Sachen*) of everyday conscious life should provide the basis for philosophical reflection" (Churchill and Wertz, 2014, p.6).

Whilst both Hegel and Kant used the term 'phenomenology' prior to Husserl, it was Franz Brentano who inspired Husserl to develop it in the way it is understood today (Moran 1999). Brentano was mainly interested in the empirical evidence of cognitive acts, as opposed to genetic psychology, which aimed to uncover the physical causes behind psychic phenomena. He therefore favoured phenomenology as an approach to this new "descriptive psychology" (Moran, 1999, p.8). A possible issue with this is that the very consciousness that we are interested in understanding is the same consciousness that is doing the understanding. Hence, Husserl posited "a new way of looking at things" (Husserl, 2012, p.3), one which moves beyond empirical investigation and transcends everyday consciousness. However, it would require deliberate and considered attention on our part to set aside prejudices and open up the world as though we were seeing it afresh or for the first time. Husserl's transcendental approach to phenomenology required the use of guiding principles to set aside, or bracket (*epoché*), one's natural attitude. Moran refers to this as "escaping from the natural attitude which constantly seeks to reassert itself" (Moran, 1999, p.146). The use of reductions (from the Latin *reducere*, meaning to 'lead back') represents an attempt to return to a pure way of experiencing phenomena, unprejudiced by existing beliefs, theory and assumptions, including common sense.

Husserl describes several variations of reduction which can be employed in the attempt to adopt the transcendental stance: one above, and disconnected from, the phenomenon, and aimed at preventing its contamination by the researcher's prior assumptions (Gallagher 2012). It is possible that Husserl, a mathematician, was simply transferring the principles of

mathematics to philosophy. In the same way that mathematics reduces complex ideas to basic equations, Husserl sought to capture the structures of intention within consciousness. Unlike mathematics, however, consciousness is not readily reducible and the use of bracketing, or epoché, is far less clear-cut or obvious.

Many researchers have grappled with the meaning of phenomenology with regard to psychological investigation. Alternative ideas have been advanced about how to restrict the influence of cultural and personal bias whilst maintaining the natural intersubjective factors which are both influenced-by and integral-to the phenomena of human meaning. An example of this is the difficulty of capturing the experience of shame in a research participant without having felt similar emotions in the past and being able to connect with the participant's subjective experience as though it was one's own. In parallel to this, the act of observing might contribute to re-generating the experience of shame as it is being recalled in the presence of another. Having a robot ask the same questions might not elicit the qualitative texture, depth and strength of the phenomenon in quite the same way. Equally, the presence of a judgmental other might induce even greater strength of feeling. For this reason, Finlay (2009) argues that the researcher must mediate between being reflexive and being reductive.

Reflexivity, an essential practitioner quality within qualitative research, determines the attitude towards use-of-self in the research process. This can range from some self-awareness as an aspect of the research to first person accounts being integral to the

research process e.g. auto-ethnographic and heuristic research methods (Etherington 2004). Finlay (2008) elegantly describes this process of interplay as a “dialectical dance” between reduction and reflexivity in which each informs and shapes the role of the other. It is within the movement of this dance that most researchers, including myself, find the steps and rhythm which suit both our personal attitude to research and the research question(s) we seek to address.

Giorgi (2009) refrains from identification with the participant by re-writing the participant’s words into a third party format before rewording them to explicate meaning. This, he argues, is so that the research can “discern from the perspective of the researcher’s consciousness” (Giorgi, 2009, p.154). In other words, the researcher avoids identification so that he/she can transcend their natural relationship to the phenomenon and create a sense of distance and disconnectedness. For some researchers this stance leans towards a form of objectification, an impossible goal given our inability to transcend ourselves from our own experience of the other. Even if we were able to do so, it would be undesirable as a method for understanding human lived experience. The idea that we can transcend our already existing thoughts and feelings about an experience is a fantasy to some phenomenologists:

Pre-understanding is not something a person can step outside of or put aside, as it is understood as already being with us in the world. Heidegger went as far as to claim that nothing can be encountered without reference to a person’s background understanding (Lavery, 2008, p.8).

Yet over-identification with the phenomena might prevent the researcher from seeing things as they are: we might end up seeing the phenomena as *we* are. These opposing tensions in phenomenology have opened up a spectrum of views. At one end are those who, by applying a more descriptive approach, have advanced Husserl's thinking into a more practical application of phenomenology suitable for psychological investigation (for example, Giorgi, 2009). At the other end are others who have adopted a more interpretative approach, for example Smith and van Manen (Breakwell et al, 2006; Langdrige, 2007; van Manen, 1990). In the case of the latter, the *dance* leans towards greater use of self, with less emphasis on reduction and transcendence. In contrast, Giorgi and others aligning with a more descriptive phenomenology tend to adopt a more purist approach which leans towards transcendentalism and away from interpretation and use of self.

Interpretive (or hermeneutic phenomenological) followers believe that our interpretation is always already an essential element of our consciousness and must also be addressed as integral to all experience, however much we attempt to separate ourselves from the object. This is much more apparent when the object is another human being.

Some researchers refer to phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology as interchangeable because of their similar roots and aspirations. Lavery (2008) suggests that the approaches more closely represent a movement rather than any static theoretical position.

In my own case, I was beginning to find resonance in phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology in particular seemed to offer a pathway to explicating human lived experience in all its subtlety and nuance. My inclination towards hermeneutic phenomenology was influenced by the evolution of hermeneutics and my sense of alignment with both Heidegger and Gadamer, whose turn away from Husserl's approach seemed more in tune with my own experience as a therapist seeking understanding and meaning through co-created dialogic relationship. I see hermeneutics as a distinct path, with roots in translation, which grew in parallel to phenomenology, merging when Heidegger takes phenomenology down a more interpretative path. Understanding the developmental roots of hermeneutics and phenomenology helped me draw a distinction between the blurred lines at their crossroad as summarised below:

Hermeneutics, the ancient science of interpreting theological texts, has gone through several developmental interpretations and iterations, with each theorist challenging and extending the definition of those prior. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) describes hermeneutics as the art of understanding what is spoken or written by another (Schmidt 2006). For Schleiermacher, there are two aspects to this art: the grammatical and the psychological. If an interpreter was to focus on the grammatical alone, he/she would possibly miss the intention of the author, which is rooted in the author's historical, cultural and situational life. He described the hermeneutic circle as that process by which one moves between the whole and parts of both the grammatical and psychological aspects of the text in order to grasp what Friederich Ast (1778–1841) referred to as the "spirit" of antiquity

(Palmer, 1969, p.76). As Palmer (1969, p.86) notes, "For Schleiermacher, understanding as an art is the re-experiencing of the mental processes of the text's author. It is the reverse of composition, for it starts with the finished expression and goes back to the mental life from which it arose."

Whilst Schleiermacher and his predecessors were primarily interested in the interpretation of ancient texts, William Dilthey (1833-1911) saw hermeneutics as a way to understand human experience. Dilthey was concerned with how natural science would reduce human experience to something more mechanical, devoid of feeling, thought and emotion (Schmidt 2006). To Dilthey, hermeneutics was the manner by which human science could distinguish itself and reconnect with those lost aspects that natural science systematically removed. Language was key to accessing the structure of consciousness, and hermeneutics the mechanism by which we interpret language and can make sense of that structure. He distinguished between explanation (*Erklären*), which occurs in the natural sciences, and understanding (*Verstehen*), which is what occurs in the human sciences, while also acknowledging the interdependence between these two modes of knowing. The natural sciences explain phenomena by relating to them through natural causal laws. The human sciences will sometimes depend on data from the natural sciences but understanding occurs when the observer can relate to the inner state of another through the empirical expression of the other. A grimace signals to the observer that the person might be in discomfort. Equally, poetry or song lyrics might indicate the emotional state of the author at the time of writing.

Dilthey believed that “lived experience is a basic category of the awareness of life” (Schmidt, 2006, p.38). Every object in nature is understood in terms of its importance or relevance to the observer, which Dilthey termed “lived experiences” (Schmidt, 2006, p.37). Lived experiences combine to form a sense or meaning through which we understand our lives. Lived experience involves our “immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness unaware of itself” (van Manen, 1990, p.35). As such, we can never fully grasp lived experience in the present but only through a process of reflection, which is why van Manen describes lived experience as “the starting point and end point of phenomenological research...Lived experience is the breathing of meaning” (van Manen, 1990, p.36).

Dilthey struggled to elevate hermeneutics in the human sciences to a position of equal footing with the natural sciences but his ideas laid the groundwork for others, including Heidegger, to develop further. Heidegger, who was motivated by a desire to make sense of *being*, had at his disposal the phenomenological approach of Husserl and used this to take hermeneutics down a different path. The manner in which Heidegger and Husserl fork away from one another might be explained by Husserl’s former training in mathematics and Heidegger’s in theology. Whereas Husserl looked for rigour and pureness in approach, Heidegger sought meaning and considered scientific reduction an obstacle to this endeavour (Palmer 1969). Heidegger defines the basis of phenomenology as “letting things become manifest as what they are... it is not us who point to things; rather things show themselves to us” (Palmer, 1969, p.128). Whereas Husserl was concerned with how we can

know what we know (epistemology), Heidegger believed that, as humans, we are forever situated historically and culturally and that this way of being will always form the backdrop to our experience of the moment (Heidegger, 2010; Lavery, 2008). For Heidegger, the idea of bracketing was both impossible and undesirable (Lavery 2008); rather than seeking to reduce researcher bias, the need was to make explicit the influence of researcher assumptions. These are considered foundational aspects of the rich relationship between self and other that shapes human lived experience and is essential to our understanding of it. This stance appealed to me as a gestalt and existentially trained therapist leaning towards a more intersubjective and mutually co-created experience.

1.10 Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Embracing a more hermeneutic phenomenological attitude, I considered both Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al. 2009) and van Manen (1990) as possible vehicles for balancing scientific rigour with the art of capturing and presenting evocative lived experience.

3.3.1 INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA)

IPA would have been the obvious choice, given its recent popularity and acceptance among therapy and nursing research students in the UK. Yet my understanding of IPA was that, although flexible and accommodating in its approach, it retained a fairly process-driven framework. This left me questioning its validity as a method-less strategy (Giorgi 2011). Furthermore, an ongoing debate between Giorgi and Smith suggested that some phenomenologists remained unconvinced of IPA's efficacy, which has been criticised for being prescriptive and lacking a sound philosophical phenomenological basis (Giorgi 2011).

In defence of IPA, Smith (2011) has rebutted such claims, explaining that IPA offers newer researchers a more flexible approach which can be tailored to researcher experience (Smith 2011). Smith explains that, far from being prescriptive, IPA offers guidelines only, leaving plenty of room for researcher adaptation and interpretation. Having reviewed other IPA research projects, I understand that IPA can indeed offer a flexible and yet rigorous approach with experience.

During the pilot which preceded this project, I was certainly not an experienced researcher. I also felt I might benefit too much from IPA's supportive structure, which could become a crutch that altered and possibly weakened my natural stance. In the end I elected to follow a different path - van Manen's approach - which offered suggestions more than method, upon which the researcher could base, mix or match his/her own interpretation.

3.3.2 VAN MANEN'S RESEARCHING LIVED EXPERIENCE

Van Manen tells us that every time we capture someone's narrative, photo, poetry, art work, writing, and so on, we instantly transform the essence of human lived experience that dwells for us when directly encountered. In other words, the attempt to capture in some way reduces or contaminates true lived experience through its limitations. For van Manen, "the upshot is that we need to find access to life's living dimensions while realising that the meanings we bring to the surface from the depths of life's oceans have already lost the natural quiver of their undisturbed existence" (van Manen, 1990, p.54).

Van Manen goes on to describe the various different techniques that might be employed to uncover and reveal these living dimensions in their fullness. One of these involves using "personal experience as a starting point" (van Manen, 1990, p.54). One of the hazards in this is that the translator/researcher is implicated in the meaning-making and translation process and can become too subjective. Philosophically there is some debate about how best to minimise researcher influence on data. Whilst some, like Husserl, recommend a focus on the phenomena (*the matters themselves*), others (for example, Heidegger and Gadamer) bring the researcher more firmly into the picture, arguing that researchers need to make explicit any prejudgements while recognising their inseparable intersubjective nature. Researching lived experience is like being a translator between worlds. It requires a way of capturing and conveying phenomena so that the reader might momentarily step into the world of the other. It evokes the reader through a poetising retelling, developing the

explicit whilst surfacing the deeper, hidden meaning that colours and shapes the phenomena. This obliges the researcher to dwell deeply with the text.

Unlike Giorgi's critique of IPA, van Manen's approach is deliberately non-prescriptive (therefore more in line with Gadamer's critique of method), and calls for the researcher to deeply attune to the research question. As I followed his approach by attuning to what Finlay describes as the key qualities of phenomenological research: *seeing afresh, dwelling, explicating and languaging* (Finlay 2013), I sought to obtain, transcribe and reveal the phenomenon's live, evocative and poetic meanings within a textual representation:

The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflective re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own experience (van Manen, 1990, p.36).

3.3.3 Reflexivity and Bridling

Reflexivity refers to critical self-awareness and the active awareness of (inter)subjectivity and its influence on the research process, towards the goal of grasping the phenomenon under investigation (Finlay 2008). In qualitative research, the researcher is generally considered as a co-constructive participant. At the same time, the value of subjectivity within research can be debatable and confusing, especially since some approaches attempt to distance the researcher from the phenomena.

Phenomenological writers like Giorgi and van Manen do not mention the term reflexivity, instead emphasising different aspects of the phenomenological reduction. The philosophical concerns revolve around the role of the subjective in an approach that attempts to describe phenomena by reduction to better see 'the matters themselves'. In hermeneutic research, van Manen brings the subjective back into research by arguing that the researcher mediates "between interpreted meanings and the thing towards which the interpretation points" (van Manen, 1990, p.26).

In this project I cautiously subscribe to the delicate balance put forth by Finlay (2008) and Dahlberg (2006): the notion of a dance between "striving for reductive focus and being reflexively self-aware" (Finlay, 2008, p.3), applying what Dahlberg refers to as "bridling" (Dahlberg 2006). Bridling refers to the shift in attitude from a strictly Husserlian reduction towards a more relaxed yet restrained use of the self: "We bridle the understanding so that we do not understand too quick, too careless, or slovenly" (Dahlberg, 2006, p.16).

Given my own mathematical beginnings, I naturally consider brackets in their mathematical sense. Their role is to predicate an order over how mathematical elements are treated. However, I am aware of the positivistic overtones of making a direct comparison between mathematical brackets and phenomenological reduction. Bridling eliminates the mathematical overtones of bracketing, suggesting to me a dynamic interplay between rider and horse, which is organic and relational not hard and fast. I aim to strike a balance that is both reflexively aware and deeply attuned to the discovery of what-is. This requires a

constant paying-attention-to both the participant (how and what they say and do) and my own thoughts and felt response concurrent with each encounter. This process then continues throughout the research process, including the stages of transcription, analysis and write-up. Finlay describes this as an attitude of “openness” where the researcher is “open to being surprised – even awed – by the research; prepared for preconceptions to be shredded; open to the possibility of a shift in understanding” (Finlay, 2011, p.77).

In the mathematical use of brackets, we do not ignore the elements contained therein in favour of those which are not. Instead, brackets suggest a way of relating to them and bringing them into the equation. This is not necessarily how some therapists or researchers interpret Husserl’s guidance (Gallagher 2012; Moran 1999; Giorgi 2009). In this respect, bridling is similar to bracketing for me, although it more accurately depicts a relational restraint as artful awareness and attuning (with an-other) rather than a clear-cut (dualistic) separation. We are never separate from our experiences. Heidegger describes our historical and cultural situatedness as a pre-understanding we can neither “step outside of or put aside, as it is understood as already being with us in the world” (Lavery, 2008, p.8). Hence, I work with my pre-understanding rather than assume to push it away.

In this project, I became mindful of how my assumptions could, and did, encroach on the act of inquiry. Not believing I could simply ‘be reflexive’, I instead followed Finlay’s idea of balancing dwelling, eidetic reduction and bracketing (bridling) (Finlay, 2009a). As an example of this, I was mindful not to include specifics about midlife or relevant existential

givens, although the demographic clearly fitted the stereotypical profile. By avoiding direct reference to midlife, I did not separate it from my study either; rather, I enquired about phenomenological experience around change and age, unhindered by any pre-existing cultural beliefs (mine and my participant's) that certain terminology might have evoked. That way I could dwell with the phenomenon based on the actual lived experience rather than the reflective and cultural experience of participants' journeys.

Langdridge (2007) suggests possible questions that the researcher should ask of themselves to become more aware of self-constructs throughout the research process (see Appendix D). Such questions invite me to consider my pre-existing situation within the research and to remain conscious of how my questions, interaction, interpretation and re-telling of the participant's narrative are contingent to my own situation. As Creswell (2007, p. 179) points out, "All writing is 'positioned' and within a stance. All researchers shape the writing that emerges."

1.11 Methods and Procedures

In this section I provide a detailed account of the method followed in the current research. I explain how I arrived at an optimum number of participants; how participants were selected; my method of data collection; how I went about data analysis; and the ethical considerations which are foundational to each and every aspect of this project

3.4.1 PARTICIPANTS

The number of participants was carefully considered based on certain factors, including optimisation of quality and depth of hermeneutic research (without getting saturated with data), the likely reflective experience of the participants, and a comparison with other van Manen hermeneutic studies. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) describe the challenges of identifying the 'right' number before interviewing and arriving at the optimum directly. They cite three variations for phenomenological research:

Morse (1994:225)... recommended at least six participants for phenomenological studies; approximately thirty-fifty participants for ethnographies, grounded theory studies, and ethnoscience studies; and one hundred to two hundred units of the item being studied in qualitative ethology. Creswell's (1998) ranges are a little different. He recommended between five and twenty-five interviews for a phenomenological study and twenty-thirty for a grounded theory study. Kuzel (1992:41) tied his recommendations to sample heterogeneity and research objectives, recommending six to eight interviews for a homogeneous sample and twelve to twenty data sources "when looking for disconfirming evidence or trying to achieve maximum variation" (Guest et al, 2006).

Evans (1999) produced 'The Pedagogic Principal', an award-winning hermeneutic doctoral dissertation based on van Manen's approach that was subsequently published as a book. Evans sought participants capable of offering something reflective of their experience (uniquely and collectively) which might also resonate with others. He conducted interviews with a total of seven school principals, selected, he argues, to obtain evocative, concrete experiences rather than generalisations or idiosyncratic narratives. He felt a larger sample would have hindered this objective. At the same time, the sample required sufficient

participants to ensure texture and variation. He settled on seven (school principals), believing this number to be optimum to ensure the richness and depth he sought.

Considering this, and aided by the results of a pilot study, I concluded that interviewing between six and eight professional therapists would be ideal to yield the evocative, textural data I was seeking. As things worked out, I was able to identify seven volunteers quite quickly, and it became evident (by working through each interview) that it would be counter-productive to continue recruiting beyond this point.

The participants all responded to my advertisement for research participants (see Appendix E) and subsequently volunteered. The seven were considered eligible since all were aged over 30, had retrained after leaving a significantly different career, and were members either of BACP or UKCP. **(See section 4.1 for further information about the participants' backgrounds).**

I explained to each participant that they could withdraw from the project at any time (a point also stated on the consent form and information sheet). Each participant had a discussion with me in which I explained the objectives, benefits and risks, and how data would be handled (see Appendix C). Each participant was shown a consent form, which they signed. It was checked with each member that they had access to private therapy should the subject matter arouse any thoughts or emotions which they would want to address as a result of dwelling on their journey to become a therapist. It was explained to all participants

that on-going consent was an integral aspect of this process and that they were free to withdraw at any time and for any reason.

3.4.2 DATA COLLECTION

The participants were invited to meet me for their interview at my therapy practice in Reading. During interviews, my style was quite casual, to help participants to relax and to facilitate a fuller encounter with their natural attitude. Following van Manen's (1990) approach, I remained focussed on my main interview question, hoping to capture narrative as well as specific, concrete examples at certain points: for example, 'can you describe the physical sensations associated with your expression of relief?'

Churchill and Wertz (2014, p.8) recommend a series of questions that "facilitate the researcher's 'taking up' and 'reliving' of the original experience...that makes possible a subsequent intuition into the immanent meanings of the experience under investigation."

To facilitate the interviews, I had with me a list of semi-structured questions (see Appendix A) and also three stick men characters annotated with the lived-world existentials of corporeality, temporality, spatiality and lived relations. Each stick man depicted a different stage in the transition to becoming a therapist (before, during training, now). These served as aide-memoires rather than a fixed structure for my interview, whilst permitting the

interview to develop organically too. It also enabled me to clarify or drill deeper into moments of felt experience which seemed relevant to the research question.

During interviews, I sought to embrace Kvale and Brinkman's (2008) twelve aspects of qualitative research interviews, which include 'Meaning', 'Deliberate Naiveté', 'Ambiguity', and 'Change'. 'Meaning' reminded me to focus on both the themes and the interpretation of these themes in the moment; 'Deliberate Naiveté' guided me to adopt a fresh approach to the subject rather than rely on ready-made assumptions or beliefs; 'Ambiguity' helped me keep in mind that statements might often reveal contradictory meanings which nevertheless reflected lived reality; and 'Change' reminded me that, through reflection and discussion, statements made at the start might be altered by the time we reached the end.

As a therapist, with several clients that are also therapists, I am aware of the dilemma some have about being honest and open whilst fearing judgement from a fellow professional for their otherwise normal human feelings/needs – as if therapists need to be 'perfect' or problem-free. My presence as a peer and interviewer for this project could have presented similar dilemmas for participants. This was mitigated through heightened reflexive awareness and balancing care of the participants with the desire to capture essential phenomena. Attending to the 'double hermeneutic' (Smith et al. 2009), I attuned to both my own interpretations as well as those of my participants to better manage this aspiration. Prior experience as a phenomenological therapist helped maintain the reflexive attitude required.

All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and recordings were stored securely. Once each interview was complete, I transcribed the recordings into a Microsoft Word document (see Appendix B for an example). Some researchers choose to outsource this process but I elected to persevere with the painstaking task since it was very much part of the hermeneutic approach – a process of deeply listening to (Finlay's (2013) 'dwelling with') each response and also paying equal attention to the "significant non-verbal and para-linguistic communications" (Hycner, 1985, p.280): the structure of sentences, the pauses, intonation, laughs, and coughs. On one occasion, even the question was forgotten, so evocative to both of us had the narrative become.

3.4.3 PILOT STUDY

Prior to embarking on the main project I undertook a small (8000 word) project interviewing just one participant. This facilitated my understanding of methodology and method, helping close some gaps in my knowledge whilst also practising analysis using van Manen's (1990) guidelines. Whilst this was a Middlesex University requirement, it was also very welcome and served as a learning ground for the larger project. In my former career and also as a therapist, I have frequently advocated the use of 'experiment' and adoption of a 'what would happen if...' attitude to tackling complex problems. Prior to undertaking the pilot, the unfamiliar aspects of my chosen approach often left me dangling on a precipice between security and freedom. The pilot produced findings (albeit from a single participant) and

more importantly helped me develop the confidence to navigate hermeneutic research without clear instructions or a method to follow. The pilot revealed five themes:

1. Homelessness, uncertainty and confusion
2. Dawning and enlightenment through kindred spirits
3. A firm persuasion, optimism and hope for the future
4. Being a marginal other and identity
5. Vantage point, readiness, perspective and timing

I learned to be more ruthless in the identification of themes going forward and to notice how my own assumptions might influence the findings. For this dissertation I decided to limit the themes to those that really stood out, rather than to include them because I ascribed significance or importance to a particular subject. Completing the pilot helped develop my confidence and become a more reflexive, hermeneutic researcher.

3.4.4 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Following interviews and transcription, van Manen (1990) describes an approach to help uncover themes within the data. He argues that development of findings occurs within a reflexive and organic process involving lengthy periods of dwelling with the data: listening to recordings, reading transcripts, highlighting key phrases and metaphors, writing, re-writing

and noticing any pre-reflected responses at each stage. Stepping away from the data is equally important, enabling distance and perspective to help reinforce or challenge any developing meanings.

Hycner (1985, p.280) argues that “the phenomenological reduction is a conscious, effortful, opening of ourselves to the phenomenon as a phenomenon.” In the case of the current research, the process was iterative, following the principles of the hermeneutic circle: moving between whole and parts so that implicit meanings are brought to the surface. Following Gadamer (2004), I let go my need for a structured method, instead allowing a more organic approach to emerge, one which often provoked uncertainty and anxiety about whether it was right. Finlay (2009), too, suggests adopting a phenomenological sensibility rather than attempting to follow a recipe. By engaging this phenomenological attitude I reviewed the data from multiple angles in an attempt to ‘see afresh’ (Finlay, 2009).

I listened to each participant’s recording and transcript repeatedly -- in the gym, on train journeys and whilst driving – over the course of three or four weeks before beginning analysis. It was helpful to use different settings since this placed me in different modes and helped me re-orientate to hear something new each time. I also used different methods to capture any thematic elements. While I sometimes used software to help highlight and categorise, I also used post-it notes and a flipchart to manually capture tentative subthemes. I also wrote reflective summaries of each participant in my reflective journal. In all cases, the interview, transcription and analysis took on the tone of Wertz’s “...act of love”

(2011, p.6); I sought to adopt the natural wonder of a child watched over by a caring and reflexive internal parent. This safely gave me an attitude of relaxed openness and a curiosity to know and to reveal.

Van Manen (1990) proposes a model of hermeneutic phenomenology to help uncover contextual meaning. Rather than being a prescriptive process it offers a guide through optional, overlapping activities (Langdrige, 2007). The activities include '(i) Turning to the nature of lived experience while applying hermeneutic reduction (operationalized as 'openness') as part of the phenomenological attitude; (ii) Investigating experience as we live it; (iii) Reflecting on essential themes; (iv) Applying the art of writing and re-writing; (v) Maintaining a strong, orientated relation; and (vi) Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole' (van Manen, 1990, p.30). Some or all of these activities are iteratively applied to develop a textual uncovering of lived experience to the reader.

The third activity, 'reflecting on essential themes', can involve three different approaches '(i) The holistic or sententious approach; (ii) The selective or highlighting approach; [and] (iii) The detailed or line by line approach' (van Manen, 1990, p.92).

As I applied all three approaches to the transcripts and recordings, a few explicit themes began to emerge. I also paid attention to van Manen's advice to maintain a strong and orientated relation, not just to the whole and parts of the data, but also to my relationship with the process.

Using van Manen's second activity (1990, p.92) as a guide, I read through the transcript, highlighting anything that seemed to stand out as thematic or meaningful, which I then attempted to label appropriately. An example which I labelled 'frustration' is shown below:

PATRICK2: There was...and I say this Nigel, that it stopped feeding my soul. I was going to work and ...was I unhappy? I worked with a great bunch of people so you know we always had a laugh, we always went out and did stuff together but no, I felt erm...like I wasn't fulfilled anymore. I wanted to do something else I didn't know what it was and the company went into liquidation so it closed down. [Patrick2, p.2]

In addition, the subthemes 'lost', 'unfulfilled' and 'something missing' emerged from the above. Bridling (Dahlberg 2006) my approach, I searched for resonance within me and checked that I was attuning to the data rather than my own narrative of this phenomenon. Was there an overlap? To what extent was it their experience, rather than purely my own? How might it be different and in what ways might it be similar?

I also approached from the other direction, listing possible themes from van Manen's lifeworld existentials of lived body (corporeality), lived relations, lived time (temporality) and lived space. In the case of Patrick, for example, I kept them in my awareness as I attuned to Patrick's words, highlighting any possible sentences where they might be found. For the same quote above I felt that the term "it stopped feeding my soul" had a corporeal, felt sense to it. This metaphor captured Patrick's visceral sense of being lost combined with

a lack of fulfilment; it was therefore also noted as belonging to subthemes under the heading “Corporeal.”

Before arriving at implicit themes from the emergent explicit subthemes, I also attempted an idiographic summary of the rich content of each transcript as a whole: van Manen’s (1990) ‘Holistic Approach.’ In the case of Patrick, I noted the following:

Patrick is almost 46 and began training when he was 38. Since leaving school at seventeen he had served in the printing industry where he experienced many changes as technology advanced and reduced the need for traditional printing skills. It was a male dominated arena and one in which he felt a great deal of camaraderie yet suffered from the gradual demise of staff and creativity as the work evolved. He says that it ‘stopped feeding my soul’. When Patrick said this I had a strong sense of understanding what he means. The not-being-fed aspect of this comment related to a kind of hunger that is physically, emotionally and mentally experienced. It is a longing that has no definite object and therefore can’t be easily satisfied since its origin is not in the stomach but in the ‘soul’...

Having written the summary, I noted any implicit meanings or themes which stood out for me. In the case of the above summary, I noted: Subthemes: Endings and Uncertainty, Sense of Purpose, Respected, Marginal, Determination, Identity. Some of these subthemes emerged from the complete summary, not just the extract shown above.

Once these themes had been identified I had the following: (i) Explicit subthemes from van Manen's second activity or sententious approach: for example, 'unfulfilled'; (ii) Lifeworld existential subthemes (van Manen, 1990, p.101) from noting those theme which fell under the headings of Lived Body (corporeality), Lived Relations (Sociality), Lived Space (Spatiality) and Lived Time (Temporality); and (iii) Implicit subthemes, from re-expressing the participant's words in my own idiographic summary, dwelling with the data and moving between parts (explicit subthemes) and whole.

For Patrick, this looked like: (i) 'Frustration', 'Lost', 'Unfulfilled', 'Something missing'; (ii) Lived existential subtheme: 'No Longer feeding my soul'; and (iii) Implicit subthemes: 'Uncertainty', 'Sense of Purpose.'

I then moved to the next transcript, and so on. At each stage, I remained reflexively aware of my own narrative and any tendency to align with those parts that fitted it rather than those parts that opposed it. Eventually, I was left with similar examples across all my participants. Once again, I employed a movement between parts and whole to help me find similarity and difference. Comparing the implicit subthemes across all of the participants, I looked for overall themes which stood out for most or many of the participants. Some themes made sense but failed to capture something essential. In those cases I would step back from the work and allow the emergent themes to settle a bit more before trying to discover what was missing from any attempted theme. When I was happy with a theme, I would leave it for a while, then return and test it sometime later. Did it still resonate and

was there anything missing? Of course, themes are never perfect for all participants (except in their imperfections and paradoxes), and within this hermeneutic process I imagine my own interpretations varied with time.

The themes are therefore not set in stone but reflective of an essence, or a number of essences that help capture and evoke something of the phenomenon under investigation. I was not expecting to find commonality for all participants but rather powerful meanings which would also vary and/or contradict in some cases. I was particularly concerned with the possible poetic and evocative terms that might somehow convey more than the words alone and offer the reader a sense of the depth and complexity of my participants' lived experience as I experienced it.

3.4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations lie at the heart of all research, especially that which engages the participant's existential concerns, as in hermeneutic projects. During the current research, I adhered to standard BACP guidelines. Acknowledging my own interest in this subject I also adopted an active reflexive attitude, supported by engaging in supervision with two research supervisors as well as peer supervision groups with fellow researchers. Full details of the ethical considerations involved in the study were put forward to the NSPC/Middlesex

Ethics Committee, which approved them prior to my commencing the study. Participants were informed that the research proposal had received this approval.

I consider **informed consent** to be an *on-going aspect* of collaboration between researcher and participant and adhere to BACP guidelines for ethical concerns during research projects. This means that participants must be as informed as possible about the research project, including its aims and methodology; the degree of confidentiality that will be adhered to; the storage and use of data; the likely timeframe; the participants and what will be expected of them; the practical requirements involved; and possible risks and benefits. In addition, participants should be given the researcher's contact details along with those of his/her supervisor

All of the above were set out on an information sheet (Appendix C), which participants received before agreeing to take part. We then discussed the contents of the information sheet, both over the phone and in person, to ensure that participants fully understood their involvement. Aware that informed consent is not a discrete task but rather an *ongoing aspect* of collaboration between researcher and participant, I also spoke with participants at regular points during their participation to ensure they felt fully informed. They were made aware that they could change their mind about participating at any time and without needing a reason.

As regards **confidentiality**, participants' details were anonymised wherever possible to avoid any possibility of identification. In order to secure confidentiality I used pseudonyms in the final transcript, where I also changed certain personal details (for examples, names of other people and places) to avoid identification. The file was then transferred to an encrypted USB stick which was stored securely in a locked filing cabinet when not in use. Other copies of this file were deleted. Any other information provided to me was stored under a project code, made unidentifiable by anyone without the project key, and kept separately in a locked filing cabinet. I checked (verbally) with the participants whether excerpts from the data might be published verbatim in order to highlight certain findings, and all agreed.

Occasionally, for auditing purposes, researchers are asked to provide data to the institutional auditors, in which case names may be disclosed. Participants were given the option to be exempt from possible participant data audits by ticking the box on the consent form.

In accordance with BACP and UKCP ethical guidelines, participant confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if, for instance, a participant discloses an intention to harm themselves or others, or indicates an association with terrorist activities. As trained therapists the participants were already familiar with these exceptions, which were mentioned for completeness, nevertheless.

Data was stored according to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. It was made clear to participants that should the research be published, names would be anonymised and other identifying details omitted.

Attention was paid at every stage of the research to **participant risks and concerns**. For each participant, there might be ramifications to considering career choice and reflecting on their thoughts and feelings associated with this transition. For some, the interview process might evoke strong reactions, upset, disturbance or anxiety. Making this possibility clear and discussing the participants' ability to identify the need for support and access to it, was made an on-going aspect of the project, beginning with the information sheet and initial phone discussion. Debriefing took place at the end of each interview, enabling me to enquire about the participant's ability to explore avenues for further support and offer guidance if necessary.

The participant in the pilot study said that he found discussing the material to be a meaningful experience which stirred his passion once more. He felt safe throughout, and found the discussion beneficial since it reinforced his original reasons for entering the counselling profession. However, this might not have been the case for future participants, and I was aware of the need to remain open to all kinds of outcomes and pre-empt distress through sufficient checks and discussion before the interview and afterwards.

3.4.6 EVALUATION AND QUESTIONS OF VALIDITY

Like 'reduction' and 'reflexivity', the term 'validation' is contested and engenders a mixed response in qualitative research. To what degree can a participant validate the analysis or findings? Of course, this varies depending on one's interpretation of 'validation' and which philosophical model is followed.

For this project, the participants were not asked to discuss or check my analysis since I felt that their present (reflective) attitude might obscure the natural attitude that I sought to reveal. However, I did have an informal conversation with one participant about how the research was going and the type of themes that were arising. He nodded and smiled throughout and concluded that he would like to read the final dissertation when it was complete. Whilst in no way proof of validity, his reaction constituted the evocative response I was seeking, rather than some kind of exact and repeatable truth. This added an air of confidence that what I was producing remained in keeping with the original discussion. A more formal engagement might have held possible pitfalls. As Kvale and Brinkman (2008, p. 218) point out,

the search for real-meaning nuggets may lead to reification of the subjective...[the researcher] forgoes the search for true fixed meanings and emphasizes descriptive nuances, differences, and paradoxes...[moving from a] search for the one true and real meaning to a relational unfolding of meanings.

Personally, I don't believe that truth exists within the findings for the participant to verify, but rather that meaning is constructed and revealed through the circular and self-validating

style of interview and continues as part of the analysis phase. What emerges is a co-created set of essences contemporaneous with the interview. Finlay warns that a belief that participant validation confirms the 'truth' might be misplaced for many reasons; after all, participants vary in terms of insight, motives, needs and interests, and what was true for them when interviewed may no longer be so (Finlay 2011). This does not mean that participant involvement cannot contribute to a more ethically acceptable set of results, something that I will reflect on for future work. For example, inviting two or three participants to reflect on the findings and share the degree to which they find the themes relevant and/or important might be a means to increase ethical and methodological validation. Van Manen describes what he calls 'Collaborative Analysis' (van Manen, 1990, p.100), where participants (or other formal or informal others) read the themes and share their views about what resonates (or not) with them. Here, "themes are examined, articulated, reinterpreted, omitted, added, or reformulated." In the case of the current research, my themes were reflected on by at least one other academic supervisor, yielding feedback which I dwelt with and embedded into my thinking and ultimate themes.

Van Manen (1990) recommends attending to four evaluative conditions when assessing the quality of the research and writing: **orientation, strength, richness** and **depth**. To start with, the text should be "oriented, strong, rich and deep" (van Manen, 1990, p.151). My attitude is that of a therapist who cares about the meanings revealed through this research and a man who has also navigated the same journey. This attitude as an interested party steers my orientation. Strong text is convincing in its interpretation of the phenomenon, whilst rich

text explicates understanding through story or anecdote. Deep text is that which shows the phenomenon in its natural state: full of rich complexity whilst also hidden and ungraspable.

I have also sought to test the validity of my findings by presenting them at research gatherings. For example, I presented my early findings at the 33rd International Human Science Research Conference (IHSRC) in Nova Scotia in August 2014, titled “Embracing Paradox, The Future and Phenomenology” (See Appendix H). Several male therapists attended the talk, interacted and gave feedback at the end. Some energetically echoed the findings based on their own lived experience. Whilst I do not conclude *validity* from this experience, I was satisfied that the evocative conditions I aimed for had been achieved through the overall response. This, for me, was akin to Buytendijk’s ‘phenomenological nod’ (van Manen, 1990, p.27).

I also presented my findings at the Middlesex University Summer Research Conference in June 2014. This similarly evoked a lot of energy from various members of the audience. Although there were no other male therapists attending on that occasion, it was reassuring to have questions, affirmation and interest from both men and women who could resonate with the themes despite their own circumstances being different. As Churchill and Wertz (2014, p.18) note, “in the end, the value of the findings depends on their ability to help gain some insights into what has been lived unreflectively. Other insights from different viewpoints may then supplement, and thereby extend and possibly radically decenter, what always is essentially a partial knowledge of human life.” Churchill and Wertz (2014, p.18)

clarify that this does not mean that 'anything goes', since "phenomenological findings must be able to be evidenced by concrete prescientific experience of oneself and others."

Once again, I return to Finlay's dance between reflexivity and reduction (Finlay 2008), and the delicate monitoring of self and other as I navigate this path. I do not want to lose myself in otherness and become too scientific and disconnected from my felt sense and I also resist the tendency to remove the other through self-centred subjectivity. Still, I refrain from seeking a mid-way point and instead adopt a movement (dance) between, where I adjust and monitor the validity of my work from within and without on a continual basis.

1.12 Reflections

In 2003, most large software projects were known to fail (they were either over budget or didn't deliver on requirements) and my former role would be to help organisations resolve this problem. As 'engineers' they sought to find solutions through logical or practical means that rarely worked. Instead, I encouraged them to treat software project management more like 'directing a film' than 'building a house', since people formed the building blocks of these projects, not bricks or concrete. Modern software engineering is no longer a sequence of steps but a more dynamic, organic process requiring iterations of feedback to arrive at

the right solution. I think this background helped me relax into the tension between not-knowing and possibility whilst navigating a method-less approach to research. In the words of Chödrön (2005, p.5): “Like all explorers we are drawn to discover what’s waiting out there without knowing yet if we have the courage to face it”. At times I felt overwhelmed by the darkness and at others enlightened and reassured by the unexpected discoveries. In this way, I progressed along unfamiliar territory; the strangeness facilitating the anticipation of surprise as my participants’ revealed their stories. This process was different from but redolent of my former role. The framework I followed helped me be reflexive within the non-prescriptive approach. At different challenging moments I could momentarily stand back from the detail and see myself as if from above, curious of my position and reflecting on questions such as those listed in Appendix D.

4 FINDINGS

The themes explicated in this chapter have had an evocative impact on me, and I have wrestled with descriptors to ensure they felt sufficiently alive, paradoxical, ambiguous and concrete. As themes began to emerge, I developed a felt sense when they 'fitted'. This does not mean that they are perfect, or that perfect themes are possible: the paradox here is that themes can only work through their inherent contradictions and imperfections. Human life is never exact or precise but often intangible, fleeting and contingent. The challenge is to explore and explicate the phenomenon in all its complexity and indecipherability in a way which rings true when read or heard and reverberates with the reader as something distinctly human.

I begin this chapter by introducing each participant and summarising my experience of what emerged in their interview. I have tried to honour each man's story. The narratives provided are my attempt to engage a rich idiographic sense of each individual's lived experience. I conclude each narrative by introducing sub-themes. These themes combined in turn to inform my overall explicated themes, which I go on to describe in the second half of this chapter (section 4.2).

1.13 Idiographic Summaries

Table 4.1 below presents the participants in terms of their name, age, former career (or, in some cases, the 'role' they were known for immediately before retraining), modality and the age at which they began training as a therapist. Whilst the modality and age-range vary quite a bit, this was more by chance than selective criteria. A contrastingly positivistic approach would be more systematic regarding selection of a 'representative' sample. This is less of a concern with phenomenological methods whose primary goal is to access the essential human qualities of the phenomena (van Manen 1990).

TABLE 4.1 PARTICIPANTS

| Name | Age | Former Profession | Modality | Age Training Began |
|-------------|------------|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Patrick | 48 | Printer | Person-Centred-CBT | 38 |
| Pete | 50 | Legal copywriter | Person-Centred, Existential, Transpersonal | 44 |
| Richard | 64 | IT project manager | Psychodynamic | 49 |
| Jeff | 58 | Teacher | Gestalt | 50 |
| Jack | 71 | Audio-visual equipment engineer | Pluralistic | 63 |

| | | | | |
|------|----|----------------------------------|-------------|----|
| Neil | 56 | Stay-at-home father (and writer) | Integrative | 49 |
| Mike | 51 | Oil and gas industry consultant | Existential | 35 |

The participants required little prompting to reflect on their journey; all were experienced therapists and quite familiar with speaking candidly and eloquently on aspects of their lives. An open-ended question beginning with ‘tell me about...’ often resulted in a ten-minute response with little or no interjections from me. From time to time I would ask a more specific question leading to fuller explication and more concrete evocation of their experience: for example, ‘do you recall the moment when...?’

1.13.1 PATRICK

After leaving school at seventeen, Patrick worked in the printing industry, where he experienced many technological changes, each time reducing the need for traditional printing skills. The industry was a male-dominated arena in which he felt a great deal of camaraderie. At the same time he experienced the gradual demise of staff morale and creativity; as he put it, the work “stopped feeding my soul”.

The not-being-fed aspect of this comment seemed to speak to a kind of hunger that is physically, emotionally and mentally experienced. It is a longing that has no definite object and therefore can't be easily satisfied since its origin is not in the stomach but in the 'soul'.

Patrick eventually recognised that he needed to change his career but didn't know what to do. His urge to transform began as a compulsion to discover fulfilment in his life. This was a fulfilment that required personal transformation in the process. Eventually his partner suggested he might want to look at counselling and he decided to dip his toes in the water by training in hypnotherapy. His motivation was also to be 'seen by others' and to be valued – something he associated with life passing him by and the urgency to feel important and respected before it was too late to change. He regarded the counselling work as having a certain 'depth' which resonated with how he felt as an individual and drew upon his natural talents as opposed to the printing skills he learned as a means to an end.

After several years of doing "the hardest thing I've ever done" [Patrick12], Patrick's training came to an end. His journey had involved great personal and financial commitment: he had had to sell his house and undertake part-time work as a live-in carer for a wheelchair-bound man. Despite this, he had been adamant about completing one step at a time. Some parts of the training were more adequate than others, resulting in Patrick undertaking further training to fill the gaps and make him feel comfortable in his new role. His need to be valued eased, and was replaced by a sense of alignment with the person he now felt himself to be.

Patrick felt that the training experience was impaired due to the lack of men. He observed what he referred to as a “different energy”: a feminine quality that enveloped the people and the flow of the discussions. As a gay man he felt that his own energy moved between the feminine and the masculine and that more male energy would have balanced the room, providing a “grittiness” that was missing from debate. Such male energy, he thought, would have told him more about the world as seen from a masculine point of view. This lopsided environment presented one end of the gender spectrum better than the other; the whole spectrum was assumed to be represented simply by default. More men in the group might have better prepared Patrick for the mainly male client base he now sees as a professional therapist.

What the training did bring him, Patrick said, was a depth to his life, a sense of purpose that felt “meaningful”. However, while describing himself as being at the “end of the transition”, Patrick also talked about the role of therapist as involving

a lifelong journey...I think we're always in transition...whatever that means...it's dynamic isn't it?...but I've done my time, I've done my training [PATRICK24, p.27]

To me, this comment suggested something about the initial phase of proving oneself to the world, before entering the eternal beginning of a life of development and growth. For Patrick, men are “defined by our work” [PATRICK27]; for him, the title of therapist helps him feel of value, in part owing to the enormous effort it took to achieve.

Patrick spoke about his readiness to become a therapist, noting that one has to have

some ballast behind your empathy...life experience...is not something you can get from a book...you have to go through these knocks...it's the essence of who you are, it moulds you...I don't know...I can't explain it [PATRICK43, p.12]

As he reflected, Patrick spoke of feeling “earthed”, with a sense of purpose. This view was endorsed by the observations of others who had witnessed his transformation and reflected it back to him.

Subthemes: Loss and Uncertainty, Sense of Purpose, Respect, Marginal, Determination, Identity

1.13.2 PETE

Pete’s journey reminded me of the Goldilocks tale: after first trying a career that was attractive in one dimension but ultimately unsatisfying in another, he then changed tack by focussing on what was missing only to find it lacking somewhere else. He then discovered a new option, one which transcended both former domains and felt just right. However, the ‘just rightness’ only emerged after a period of struggle and torment.

Before arriving at his decision to become a therapist, Pete was in a place of uncertainty and confusion. Feeling lost, he searched for answers and it took some years before something emerged for him. Prior to becoming a therapist, Pete had transitioned from a career he

considered very “exotic” and interesting but emotionally and financially lacking to one that was “boring” and financially rewarding. Both roles left him wanting and anxious.

This period, with its quality of dwelling with uncertainty, is reminiscent of Heidegger’s homelessness (Heidegger 2010), reminding me of a certain not-at-homeness which results in knowing something is not right while lacking clarity as to what is missing or wrong. Pete struggled in his homelessness, reading psychotherapy literature for three or four years while getting on with his “boring”, “meaningless” job, before discovering that being a therapist was what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. He did not say whether he had ever considered becoming a therapist before, only that there was a particular moment of clarity in which his uncertainty dissipated instantly. What he experienced was staring him in the face while simultaneously missing from view.

From that point, Pete’s life took a different direction and he started to breathe again. For this to occur there had to be a kind of catalyst: a means by which Pete could see that which had eluded him. In his case, the catalyst involved his identification with a kindred spirit: he found his own reflection in the words of the writer and therapist John Welwood (Welwood 2002). Welwood had also struggled to find a place in the world, straddling as he did both eastern and western sensibilities. For Pete, the realisation arrived like a soothing balm, pacifying the tension he had been experiencing like a ray of sunlight evaporating the morning dew. In this moment, sitting with a book written by an author he identified with, the opacity of his confusion dispersed and Pete was able to locate his self in the clearing:

I was in a park across the street from where I lived...and err it was that afternoon that it dawned on me that this is probably going to be what I was going to do for the rest of my life... So umm I think reading John Welwood just gave me the confidence that err that I could do it then and it was actually the correct thing for me to do once I had seen that somebody else had actually made that transition [PETE4, p. 18]

Welwood (2002) had found in psychotherapy a communion between two otherwise contradictory worlds, a bridge between and above two worldviews from which neither feels compromised since it elevates beyond the challenges they present and offers an unexpected vista where the unease dissipates or no longer seems to matter.

Pete's transformation holds many possibilities for him. It alters how he sees himself and how he feels seen, but more than this the possibility of growth emerges as exciting and expansive. Ontologically, this path opens Pete to possibility. It offers him fulfilment and the chance to grow by adding new competencies and opening opportunities for novel experiences. Pete feels alive; during training, he rediscovers his own sense of being as he uncovers more of himself:

I don't think I've ever been as emotionally alive and feeling the true intensity of life as I went through my whole journey of training as a therapist [PETE15, p.8]

Becoming a (male) therapist has a paradoxical impact on Pete's relationships. He embraces a new identity that commands respect and even presents him as powerful and knowing. At the same time, however, the isolating nature of his work inclines him to withdraw from relationships.

Pete explains that gender has been a differentiator at different stages of his becoming a therapist. At each stage he has had a sense of being 'other gendered' in a largely female populated profession. Socially, the experience of otherness combined with the individual nature of the work has heightened Pete's experience of isolation in the world. I am aware of a resonance here, which perhaps impacts my interpretation. I imagine that most therapists (as holders of secrets) experience a strong sense of isolation from time to time and I don't want to assume his experience as being the same. Pete sees clients during his working week, usually on a one-to-one basis, and then rarely meets up with other professionals or friends who can relate to him or his work. Again, Pete sees this as a downside to being a man in this field. He also speaks about how he sees his relationships in general, and how he has experienced a change in how others see him.

In his two previous careers, Pete felt subject to the judgement of others and unsatisfied with how he imagined being seen. As a therapist, however, Pete feels quite valued. Whilst also subject to judgment, he believes the general perception is one of the relative power associated with being a therapist. His skills, combined with the perception of therapist-as-healer, leave Pete feeling powerful, respected and valued and he embraces this aspect of his otherness as something special.

Sub-themes: Not fitting in, Uncertainty, Marginality, Respect, Valued

1.13.3 MIKE

Mike worked in the oil industry for many years before becoming a psychotherapist in his late thirties. On this occasion I use the full nomenclature instead of 'therapist' since Mike revealed that this was an important aspect of his transformation. He saw himself as a psychotherapist rather than a counsellor, a view based on an impression of his potential income as well as how he felt seen by others. A psychotherapist was considered to be of 'postgraduate' level of training and this sat better with Mike as he envisioned his life.

As we spoke there was a feeling that Mike was unsure about his future as a therapist. He said he was quite "disillusioned" and that the scene he imagined had not manifested as he had hoped. He had envisioned a relatively busy practice in which he would see clients from home, in the process covering his financial needs and spending more time with his family. In this picture Mike was respected and valued for what he did, and able to give his family the attention they deserved. All this was in contrast to his former career, which had involved frequent travel away from home and uncertainty about when he would return. The pay was good but there had been disruption to family life and he witnessed many colleagues suffer divorce or redundancy. The industry was in decline and his customers took advantage of this by 'demanding more and valuing less'. His sense of self-worth and personal value was also threatened.

Despite Mike's wealth of experience in the oil industry, he seemed to manifest the same unease about his value there as he did in his subsequent career as a psychotherapist. There had been little safety for him in his former role and so he sought something he thought would be more manageable and secure.

Mike began his training as a psychotherapist before leaving the oil industry, and experienced a sense of otherness in comparison with his former career. As a man, he found himself part of a small minority in the therapy world and felt his views offered an alternative to that being expressed. In time, however, his comments took on the quality of a "stuck record": he was always the one to say that there was another side to what he saw as a particular 'feminine' outlook. He felt his views were less valued than those of the female majority.

During Mike's training and the early part of his career, this sense of otherness manifested in a way he found confusing. It was as if simply by being a man he was somehow subject to the projection of other's views of masculinity, including accusations of aggressive behaviour or exerting undue power in the group. To Mike, such behaviour on his part was subconscious and never intentional, if indeed it happened at all. He felt challenged by what he tentatively described as the "bitchiness" shown by the women he worked with. He contrasted this with his memories of a very supportive male environment in the oil industry, where there was camaraderie based on a mutual understanding of the dangers and difficulties of working in that field, often away from home and families. Mike found the discrepancy ironic given the "ruffy-tuffy" label ascribed to men in that industry versus the imagined qualities of the female therapists and health workers he worked with in the NHS. He believed that, as a man,

his emotional needs were not being met by colleagues who seemed unaware of his feelings of insecurity. While instinctively anticipating the distress of female colleagues, around whom they would rally to offer support, such colleagues did not register Mike's equal need for such a response at times. It was as if they didn't see his vulnerability, which Mike imagined was owing to his being a man.

Perhaps Mike was particularly good at hiding this side of himself. He has a quiet confidence about him until he speaks about his present position: that of an NHS therapist who has been recently made redundant. He now has a single private client and is actively looking for new work.

When Mike reflects back on his previous career and his journey to where he is now, he conveys a sense of *deja-vu* as he talks about feeling undervalued in both professions. I get a sense of Mike's frustration at being misunderstood and underutilised, despite the experience and skills he has to offer. In his role as an NHS therapist, Mike was overlooked for promotion, and perhaps this feeds his sense of otherness and not being seen fully or valued, as not fitting with the model of working that defines that operation. At the same time, his present state of uncertainty could reflect the fact that he is currently between jobs and questioning an unfulfilled dream.

Subthemes: Frustration, uncertainty, invisibility, otherness, discrimination, recognition

1.13.4 JEFF

Jeff worked as a school teacher from the age of 22, before retraining as a therapist when he was 50. He had always known that people, especially students, could turn to him when they had problems, and when I met him I could imagine that to be the case. He presented himself with vulnerability and a self-deprecating humour that belied his wisdom and knowledge; he readily put me at ease. He referred to his favourite author, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, whose writings portray a similar juxtaposition between children's innocence and grown-up wisdom.

Jeff felt that his own share of problems during his lifetime had provided him with the ability to connect with others. From the start, he had never considered teaching to be a life-long career, but rather something he would do for a few years before moving on to something else. As time passed, he found his work becoming more of a chore and less of a pleasure, not because of the teaching aspect, which he loved, but because the incessant inspections and measurement of performance made the job increasingly stressful. During his middle years, his own need for personal therapy reignited an interest in psychology that had begun when he was still at university. Over the years, he had retained a theoretical interest in the subject:

a part of me was hiding behind the reading...I saw it from an academic background rather than something that would put me in touch with how I was feeling...I could easily hide behind my books...so I think it was something subconsciously that was pushing me towards it [training/practice] [JEFF8, p.4]

Through his own personal therapy, Jeff was able to see himself as a therapist. Although still unsure about taking this step, he began a training course which confronted him with the challenge of putting his theoretical knowledge into practice and making himself openly vulnerable. During this process, it gradually dawned on him that this could be an alternative to teaching, and a fulfilling one.

Through becoming a therapist, Jeff realised that there was another way of earning a living, one which avoided the more painful aspects of his teaching career. He also believed that his age and life experience would make him a better therapist now than he would have been in his twenties.

My sense of Jeff was that he had long possessed a certain way with people, which put them at ease and enabled them to open up to him. At the same time, perhaps he had needed to find a reason to trust his instincts and change career. His increasingly stressful work environment, his age (approaching 50) and his vision of the future had provided the necessary impetus.

During training, Jeff found the open expression of emotion in group work to be “very difficult”: both challenging and rewarding. My observation was that here was a man very accustomed to wearing his heart on his sleeve. When beginning his training, Jeff was aware of “some ambivalence...whether I’d be good”. At the same time, he thought he would

probably find it fulfilling “trying to help others... helping myself in the meantime”. He described his reluctance to travel from work to the training course as

a bit like going to the gym...you don't want to do it but at the end of the exercise you suddenly feel, you feel very good...So I felt really alive, it made me feel alive and it made me feel in touch with my emotions [JEFF12, p.6]

Although his male status placed him in a minority, Jeff saw his ability to work in this female-dominated field as a badge of honour. He saw himself as someone prepared to break the everyday expectations of his gender and move beyond projected limitations. It was further reinforcement of his specialness and right to pursue this path. Gender also proved to be a factor in how clients selected their therapist, with Jeff's minority status attracting the interest of the numerous clients who sought a male therapist rather than a female one.

Training itself was very challenging, and this stretched Jeff to become what he considers a much more balanced and grounded individual, capable of engaging with people at a “more profound level”, able to listen better and balance anxiety and uncertainty with an attitude of curiosity and wonder.

Subthemes: Vulnerability, Increasing Dissatisfaction, Specialness, Ambivalence

1.13.5 RICHARD

Richard first dipped his toe into counselling training when he was 49, eventually beginning a formal certificate course two years later. Before retraining, Richard had worked for a large public service provider. His role developed over several years of continuous promotion and relocation around south-east England until eventually he was overseeing substantial projects worth millions of pounds. Most of the projects involved introducing new technology to streamline a particular operation and hence reduce the manpower required to carry it out. For his employer, the end result of a successful project was significant cost saving through job cuts. This pattern repeated itself year after year. Richard found the ultimate technical improvements a tangible yet increasingly futile declaration of his efforts, which often involved acrimonious and unpleasant disputes with third party contractors.

As Richard described his past career, he sounded like a veteran telling tales of bloody battles with bitter hindsight and regret for being placed in such compromising situations. As his management level increased he became more involved with “beating up contractors” and personal staffing issues. The latter seemed to offer respite from the disputes he routinely faced; he saw this “soft personnel” role as something he was good at; people would often “do things for him”, things that they wouldn’t necessarily do for other managers. It was an aspect of his work he really enjoyed.

During this time, Richard sought counselling following the loss of his father. There was something about the quality of being-with this counsellor that began an emerging awareness which he later explored by enrolling in an introductory counselling course at a local college. There was never a decisive moment when Richard felt he wanted to become a counsellor. Rather, he continued to explore counselling training as though a tractor beam were luring him in this particular direction. It required determination and huge effort since his classes followed a demanding working day with a long commute each way. Added to this he had the usual requirements of a placement and supervision to fit into his already busy agenda. The training classes mainly consisted of women – a sharp contrast to the male-dominated arena of his main job.

During this period an opportunity arose for Richard to volunteer for redundancy and the timing seemed right for him to make a move. The new career felt meaningful, since it required so much effort to acquire the skills and knowledge to do the work. It also required a kind of relational contact that was “satisfying” since Richard had to struggle with his clients as they worked through their issues. The training also revealed aspects of himself which had been largely obscured by the tasks and processes of his previous career: a revelation which once again brought impetus to his life. The counselling world offered a form of change that was intimate and felt, not abstract and technical as with his former career. For Richard, counselling kept him balanced,

because it gave, you know, a sense that there are other things out there besides this sort of nightmare that you're working in now [RICHARD12, p.9]

It seemed to me that training had also given Richard a sense of hope; it acted as an antidote to his feelings of meaninglessness and unpleasantness.

In his classes, workshops and supervision, Richard was often the only man. This left him feeling disconnected and “magnetically drawn” towards other men in CPD events, should one appear. For Richard, this sense of otherness seemed to be a kind of tension he equated with being in a minority and not fully able to express his sometimes alternative point of view. It left him feeling like an outsider. Likening this to being black or gay in white or heterosexual company, he saw this otherness as throwing him into uncertainty about his own views of the world, since the majority view appeared so different.

His interview became quite challenging for me, as I struggled to identify concrete aspects of his life world from his narrative. It turned out that Richard was the only psychoanalytically trained therapist I interviewed without my knowing at the start. I felt frustrated as I sought to identify moments of feeling and I think it was frustrating for Richard to be asked the same question in different ways as I attempted to extract a felt sense from his interpretations. At one point Richard gave a wry laugh before saying “Yeah – we kind of want to find these transition points, don't we? You know, I find it hard to look back and say, yeah it was that Tuesday evening, yeah...” [RICHARD5]. Through the smile I sensed anger – maybe his, maybe mine -- and what came with it was a request to refrain from pushing this point further.

Subthemes: Unpleasantness of Former Career, Meaningful Work, Will to Become, Tension of Otherness.

1.13.6 NEIL

Neil began his certificate in counselling at the age of 49. I noticed feeling a low energy in myself from the start of this interview: I felt a little uncertain and uneasy and wondered if this was something familiar to him. Later he shared sentiments about his relationships with other men which lent support to this idea.

Neil began by telling me that he never “changed career”, despite the fact that there were three distinct phases to his working life. I suspect that by this he means that these phases reached a natural conclusion for him. The first phase involved him being a television producer, a high-profile, fast moving, creative yet serious role which commanded respect and opened doors. It was something he was proud to speak about at a party; it gave him a sense of status and significance. After being made redundant, Neil took the decision to become a house husband: he would bring up his young children and write for publication whilst his wife went out to work. This period, which lasted ten years, was fraught with pain and uncertainty. There were serious, sometimes life-threatening medical problems, and family deaths; the individual tragedies seemed to overlap and intertwine; like bowling pins knocking into one other, some would rock and fall whilst others wobbled and just about

stayed upright. The sequence of events created a sense of apocalyptic familial catastrophe and I felt quite overwhelmed by the extent of the loss and uncertainty the family had collectively endured. Yet as Neil narrated these events, he did so without any change in his voice. Nor was there any sense of change in his emotional register from when he had been narrating his career.

Neil spoke of reaching a point when the family was again able “to breathe”. Coming out of this period was also a time of taking stock and assessing his life; his writing career had not really taken off and his teenage sons needed him less. This left Neil with a sense of restlessness as though there was something he should be doing but didn’t know quite what.

Neil’s decision to enrol on a counselling certificate course was quite impulsive, although it followed several years of acquiring books and maintaining an interest in the subject. He describes it as a “whim that had built up over quite a long period of time”. In Neil’s former role as a researcher he developed many of the same skills and qualities he subsequently studied in counselling training. Neil was proud to be an “honorary woman” on the mainly female course, feeling his skills and demeanour fitted in quite naturally. Never having had many male friends, Neil frequently sought the company of women and felt at home there. However, his male minority status during training left him feeling marginalised: he felt part neither of the male minority nor of the female majority, especially if the women were speaking about sexual matters. Neil described needing to be invited to join in with what

other men were doing, leaving him “on the edge” as an outsider looking in and not sure where he fitted.

During this period, as he edged towards the age of 50, Neil took up running and eventually completed the London marathon. Running became a way of fighting his sense of mortality and proving to himself and others that he was not finished, that

I've got something else here, I've got something more I want to do...there was something there which was pushing me, nudging me into a new direction, to do something different [NEIL9, p.13]

This more-to-offer theme resonated with me. It suggested both a ‘lack-of’ and a ‘need-to’ – a sense of not fulfilling one’s own potential and an impending urgency to do so.

Today, Neil has a thriving therapy practice which attracts equal numbers of male and female clients. However, he still feels at a loss. Missing from his new career is the sense of camaraderie he took for granted in his original role as a TV producer. The lack of banter and social interaction coexists with the high degree of intimacy his new role engenders. Added to this, he misses the credibility, power, status and earnings he once commanded: he possibly feels insubstantial and insufficient without these aspects of his former life. However, when comparing counselling with his more recent phase as a house husband, Neil describes it as fulfilling and satisfying, bringing a sense of value and recognition for something to which he has taken very naturally. For all that, he continues to embody a potent sense of incompleteness along with a need to be seen as successful by wider society.

Reviewing the past few years during his interview, Neil told a story that made sense to him in a developmental and chronological way. At the time, however, the experience he passed through was akin to being homeless and lost: he describes his journey as “tentative and confusing” and only making sense in hindsight.

Subthemes: Loss, Boredom, Uncertainty, Motivation, Mortality, Recognition, Status

1.13.7 JACK

Jack, a sprightly 71-year old counsellor and supervisor, found it difficult to find a starting point for his journey to become a therapist. As a result he flitted back and forth through the many learning experiences that had influenced him. While Jack’s formal training began when he was in his early sixties, twenty years earlier he had embarked on a series of personal development workshops which emerged as important parts of his transformational process.

Jack’s journey begins with uncertainty in his former career as an audio-visual equipment engineer. Whilst there was plenty of work for him to do, he was becoming less happy with the more physically challenging aspects, particularly as he grew older. In addition, the technology was becoming more user-friendly and required less expertise from professionals like Jack. He preferred the more relational aspects of his role, like assisting presenters

overcome stage fright before big presentations. Jack saw his role as making the technical and emotional challenges his own concern, enabling the presenters to concentrate on the content of their message. Increasingly, it was this part of his work that Jack found meaningful.

Jack's initial training workshops introduced him to a different way of being with others, one in which he mentored and coached people with specific difficulties. Soon he found more trivial or superficial coaching problems like "helping someone with their golf swing" less meaningful than work that touched clients at a deeper level. However, the latter required more in-depth counselling training, which he embarked on at the age of 60.

Throughout this training and beyond Jack struggled to get sufficient information to help him understand what counselling was really about and how he could help others. It was only when he qualified and subsequently began supervision training that he really started to fill in the gaps. Jack had no firm plans to change career during training; it was something that emerged for him over a period of time and required much consultation with his family, especially regarding the financial implications of the step.

During training, Jack often felt excluded and marginalised because of his gender. During exercises, when trainees were asked to partner-up, he felt others avoided him: for example, women sitting next to him would turn away to their neighbour instead of working with him. This left Jack feeling left out, unwanted and "horrible". During his interview, he sought to

balance this by observing that men had oppressed women for so long that they “have a right to be angry” towards men and avoid such intimacy when it is presented to them. He received this behaviour as if it were a punishment for being male.

Despite the gender-related challenges and the difficulty in getting the kind of training he wanted, Jack was determined to get through it and become a therapist. Today, he describes himself as more confident; he regards the challenges he faced (and still faces) as a small price to pay for the sense of meaning he now enjoys from the relational and therapeutic aspects of his work. The psychological contact Jack develops equates to a sense of closeness – a way of being with another which is intimate and rare. It’s what he calls ‘special’ and is impossible to describe in words in any other terms.

Despite feeling happy with his new career, Jack has found it difficult to establish himself financially. He now juggles several different counselling jobs to cope financially, a situation he sees as only possible since his children have grown up and are less financially dependent on him. He links his situation to the expectations he feels placed upon him by his being a man and a provider.

In relation to the temporal aspects of his transition, Jack feels that there was a readiness: as he put it, “the stars came into conjunction” for him. Becoming a therapist required a readiness and an awareness which developed through experiences and challenges. These awakened something in him that was otherwise dormant or non-existent – as though he

had lived half of his life “being half aware”, so that his transformation was more of an awakening to his full self than the development of a new self. For Jack in his previous life,

anything touchy-feely was not even on the horizon...But actually I think there was always a craving for it but I just didn't know, I just wasn't aware of it [JACK18, p.13]

Subthemes: Uncertainty/Dissatisfaction, Energy/Determination to Change, Struggle, Passion, Meaning, Not fitting in.

1.14 Thematic Explication

Three overarching themes emerged through the process of iterative analysis: **A Fermenting Discontent; Pilgrimage as Project;** and **The Ambivalent Allure of Acceptance.**

No theme is standalone, precise or sufficient. Rather the three themes are emergent, tentative and partial, overlapping with each other. Together they help give form to the complexity of this overall phenomenon. Whilst there is a general resonance for all the participants, there is also variance and difference within each category. The idea of people being described by themes is challenged by this paradox. For Merleau-Ponty (2002, p.388), that which is identifiable as human experience is always ambiguous and mysterious in its

nature: “Things and instants can link up with each other to form a world only through the medium of that ambiguous being known as subjectivity.”

1.14.1 A FERMENTING DISCONTENT

The lived experience of changing career to become a therapist emerges from a fermenting sense of discontent during the former career. The discontent appears dimly in the background – possibly for years – before being brought sharply into focus during a period of change and uncertainty in the former role.

When applied to the context of participants’ work, the discontent is often referred to as *meaninglessness*. The meaninglessness within this theme includes a contrasting fusion of awareness of underutilised, relational and/or creative skills as well as a growing sense of despair and decline in the current career/lifestyle. The frustration is not definite and clear-cut since there appears to be no obvious object of discontent until work emerges as a possible source. However, the former role has served participants well and brings benefits in the form of income, status and friendships. It is unclear at this stage why they are ill-at-ease and what can be done about it. The possibility of being a therapist remains in misty obscurity, occasionally glimpsed before quickly disappearing again into the haze.

The men begin to feel lost and restless in their work. They know they have special qualities which are valued by others but are underutilised in their current workplace. Whilst these feelings may have existed for some time, it takes particular changes at work – for example, redundancy, retirement or technological changes -- to promote a response. The changes seem to both stimulate and reveal a sense of self; they bring the participants back to themselves as free, conscious beings who choose what they do. This reveals the truth about the current situation (the experience of fermenting discontent) and the kind of existential guilt described by Heidegger as belonging to *Dasein*: a motivation that cannot be easily reduced to words yet represents a clear summons to act (Heidegger, 2010).

Referring to his experience before training, Patrick describes his sense of meaninglessness in terms of lack of purpose and the inability to re-ignite it:

I'd lost it in my career, not outside of that but definitely in my career I'd lost that sense of purpose. I just felt like I was floundering a bit [PATRICK11, p.4]

The backdrop to change is a climate of meaninglessness, revealed to the men through changes at work. There is an experience in the previous situation which helps crystallise the discomfort and disillusionment, resulting in the emergence of an uncertain new beginning and a desire to evolve. The changes emerge as catalytic in their impact. Some participants describe personal tragedies or other emotionally challenging situations before the career change which also played a part in their shift in attitude while not being in themselves sufficient to promote movement.

Changes in the workplace include the modernisation of equipment to carry out tasks that formerly required significant human training and skills. As Jack recalls,

If you went for a conference or something...I would be the guy who would fix up the projector that put that PowerPoint on the screen... I mean these days you just buy this gadget from PC World and plug it in and away you go so it's kind of different now [JACK2, p.3]

Patrick, too, observed major technological shifts in the printing industry during his tenure.

As a result his work became increasingly routine and unsatisfying; the newer skills, while interesting, lacked the craftsmanship that had made employees like Patrick feel skilled and professional:

I did a five year apprenticeship and that's all I knew erm... and during the apprenticeship it was all done by hand it was all done by brushes, it was all done by scalpels erm and then Apple Mac computers came in and I was fortunate enough to erm be involved with those and to carry on my profession and it all went over to the electronic side and I really, really enjoyed it, I have to say, most of it I loved. Errm, towards the end, even...what started to happen was the designers started to create their own pdfs so we didn't have anything to do almost. They'd send us pdfs in and we'd just print them out onto a plate and the plate would go to the press, so we'd had hardly anything to do and it just become a bit boring really [PATRICK1, p.1]

Boredom seems to be a feature of the growing discontent. For Pete, work was “no longer satisfying to my soul” [PETE1, p.1], a view shared by Patrick:

[It] stopped feeding my soul. I was going to work and ...was I unhappy? I worked with a great bunch of people so you know we always had a laugh, we always went out and did stuff together but no, I felt erm...like I wasn't fulfilled anymore. I wanted to do something else I didn't know what it was [PATRICK2, p.2]

Patrick's ambivalence about that period is captured in his question "was I unhappy?" His memories of fun times with colleagues challenge his awareness of his growing inner turmoil. The former work was not without benefit. For one thing, the pay was often better than what participants would receive as therapists. As Pete recalls,

The work was very tedious, legal documentation anyone would agree was very boring. There was no scope for imagination or creativity...umm...it was just kind of tasteless and meaningless really and really it's kind of saving, redeeming feature if you will was that it paid well so it was something I did for financial security [PETE2, p.1]

The benefits brought by old careers form part of the mechanism which obscures other possibilities from presenting. As the men reflect on this past experience – perhaps for the first time since retraining -- all speak of a growing awareness of something missing from life, an emptiness they sought to fill without knowing how or with what. This concurs with Heidegger's idea of being summoned by *nothing*; the *disclosedness of being* is revealed in this experience: "The call does not say anything, does not give any information about events of the world, has nothing to tell...The call is lacking any kind of utterance. It does not even come to words, and yet it is not obscure and indefinite" (Heidegger, 2010, p.263).

In their fermenting discontent the participants experience the start of "not-being-at-home" (Heidegger, 2010, p.181) which depicts for them a sense of being lost. They find themselves stagnating, absorbed in the demands of their day-to-day life, determined by success/failure and ongoing commerce (relations with things).

This period appears to harbour an anxiety born of paradox: within what I know is the answer I seek, yet what I know also blinds me to the truth. While benefits in their former work can be enjoyed, there is a staggered quest for answers to the growing meaninglessness they felt. It's like believing that you have left your keys in a certain place and yet they don't seem to be there; you keep returning to the same place over and over until a certain disorientating impetus jolts you out of your everydayness, illuminating a different option. When the men speak about changes in their workplace there is a sense of an awakening of sorts -- maybe redundancy or a birthday milestone -- within an atmosphere of other changes and growing discontent.

This period prior to career change takes on a certain quality, a kind of dwelling with discomfort and meaninglessness. This is reminiscent of Heidegger's existential concept of 'uncanniness' (*Unheimlichkeit*), where the individual experiences a sense of "not-being-at-home" (Heidegger, 2010, p181). For Heidegger, *not-being-at-home* is a way of *being-in-the-world* which is concealed beneath the cover of unquestioned, taken-for-granted *everydayness*. We seek to throw ourselves into a tranquillised at-home world of day-to-day chores and *they-roles*. But if we expose the illusion of our taken-for-granted world and face our existential anxiety (attunement to angst) and finitude, we can grasp an authentic potentiality-for-Being. Here Heidegger refers to a kind of listening which one can only do for oneself. It is a listening that interrupts the normal everyday voice of the *they*: "Dasein fails to hear itself, and listens to the they, and this listening gets broken by the call...which, ...has a character in every way opposite (Heidegger, 2010, p.261).

The lived experience of changing career to become a therapist involves a glacial-like movement away from *they-roles* towards an *uncanny*, more conscious and tentative way of being. The *call* emerges for the men amidst the hazy discontent and uncertainty. It is both certain and unknown/unknowable at the same time.

The men all seemed aware that they had special relational skills, obtained through personal experiences, which had qualities of what was missing from their more meaningless work. This awareness was linked to loss of creativity and skill in the former workplace and a desire for something more:

I was working with the company that did the personal development services workshops as an assistant, as a sort of course helper, unpaid, voluntary and also seeing people on those courses as a sort of, as a helper, personal support it was called, it wasn't really counselling ... it got to a point where I was getting feedback from these people , 'hey you should do this stuff because, you know, you're good at it', thanking me for my help errm and so I suppose a number of factors came in really - dissatisfaction with what I had been doing and wanting to do something a bit more meaningful [JACK1, p.1]

Here Jack tells us about his prior history of psychological training and how it helped him, whilst being more of a hobby than an actual career (it took another fifteen years before he considered career change as a possibility).

For Richard, who described aspects of his previous work as “unpleasant”, the *call* was laced with the unpleasantness which now greeted him during the average day. The pain involved in laying people off routinely was no longer being offset by the technological and financial

gains he was bringing the company. The daily job of “beating contractors” left him feeling empty:

as is in the world of projects erm the contractor was singularly reluctant to do what we wanted them to do so the work was heavily about beating contractors on the head...it was quite an acrimonious sort of time for me. We got there in the end, but it was quite unpleasant and I knew from a long time back the firm had been shedding staff for a long, long time, so there's an annual cull, you just put your name down and if you were fortunate, then you would be allowed to go and I was convinced, there wasn't many people my grade left, you know [RICHARD2, p.3]

His experience was further captured through his projection at the time, of what might relieve this unpleasantness:

what I was keen on doing was getting out from where I was and getting into something which had more meaning for me and a kind of meaning for society as well you know. You know, beating up contractors for a living is not a fun game really, because it felt like that [RICHARD7, p.6]

As changes in the workplace accelerated the men became exposed to the reality of their situation. For Richard, the technological improvements he managed meant that people could be sacked and costs reduced. For many years, however, he had seen this as a necessary and inevitable aspect of growth in that industry, and as something that made sense. Then his own experience within therapy following his father's death opened up a different view of himself and the world:

My father passed on so I kind of had a taster of what counselling was. Somebody helped me a great deal with counselling, so here was an opportunity in my mind in the late mid-90s. Here was something that I might want to do [RICHARD10, p.8]

Richard's emotional distress helped open up for him another vista, one that hitherto had been in his blind spot. For him and the other men, a sense of meaning associated with their softer, relational skills was beginning to emerge.

Historically, routine pay increases and promotions as well as an attention to a *They-world* had kept at bay any sense of dissatisfaction for many years. In Kierkegaard's terminology it seems as though Richard and the others were shifting from the pole of the *finite*, the necessary where they carried out a day-to-day existence, to the opposite pole, the *infinite*, where possibility and uncertainty merge with freedom and responsibility (Kierkegaard, 2008). The men find it increasingly difficult to ignore a desire and responsibility to respond to a meaningless career.

Dissatisfaction and meaninglessness were inseparable from the men's projected view of the future, framed by the question 'how do I respond to this?' In Jeff's case,

I started to think about what I was going to do in retirement, what else could I do that I find really fulfilling and enjoy and think that I was possibly quite good at as well [JEFF8, p.3]

Neil was also floundering with a sense of what to do with his life after he and his family emerged from a period of grief and serious illness:

I think that in 2006, coming out of what was the shock really of probably about 2 years since 2004 the horrible stuff – 2005 was recovery – errm I could sense something in me that was just wanting to do something different because my writing wasn't really happening...and I think there was a restless feeling in me - a feeling of I want to do something but just didn't know what...[NEIL5, p.7]

The past (illness/loss), present (boredom and meaninglessness) and future ('What shall I do?'), merge into the sense of frustration and discontent experienced in the moment.

The men all spoke of previous encounters with counselling or a form of psychology at some point in their lives which stayed with them as significant, meaningful experiences and contrasted with their current situation. For most participants, moving towards becoming a therapist was gradual and tentative; many of them described it as a kind of dawning, with the idea gradually becoming more figural in their imagination. However, even 'dawn' has a source of illumination and a direction. It might not be obvious to start with but we know where it is. As Heidegger (2010, p.263) notes, "Whereas the content of the call is seemingly indefinite, the direction it takes is a sure one and is not to be overlooked."

In Pete's case, however, change came in the form of a 'eureka' moment, which he experienced bodily:

I really disliked umm having to live in Western society and having to do kind of meaningless office jobs so much that I was really looking for something different, something I could throw my heart and my soul into the same way I was doing with say my translating in India and so on. So it literally felt to me almost as if a door – a huge door opened inside of me which just pacified all this kind of anxiety and err tension I felt like almost being out of place like an Eastern person If you will in Western society – how am I going to earn a living? How am I going to spend my days? And err the possibility of training as a psychotherapist just err eased all of that and all of it became very clear, so I immediately began feeling much more comfortable in my own skin and comfortable my future had kind of come in focus all in one burst. So err yeah I felt like I found some harmony or some balance or something that I had been seeking which had eluded me up until then [PETE5, p.3]

For Pete, clarity came almost instantaneously when he connected with a like-minded soul. The idea of connecting with a like-minded soul is further discussed in the third theme (*The Ambivalent Allure of Acceptance*) and relates to the identification of self in another. In this phenomenon, participants felt secure enough to take a risk after seeing their own reflection in the life of another who had already followed the same path and survived -- or thrived.

In emerging from a career that has become increasingly meaningless, there is a moving away from a space that no longer nourishes existentially towards a radically different, uncertain future. This confused, uneasy space reveals both dissatisfaction and meaninglessness and a compelling desire for another way of being. It generates confusion and uncertainty as well as possibility and wonder and marks the beginning phase for these men who changed career to become therapists.

1.14.2 PILGRIMAGE AS PROJECT

To lose yourself is a voluptuous surrender, lost in your arms, lost to the world, utterly immersed in what is present so that its surroundings fade away. In [Walter] Benjamin's terms, to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery. And one does not get lost but loses oneself, with the implication that it is a conscious choice, a chosen surrender, a psychic state achievable through geography (Solnit, 2010, p.6).

The notion of pilgrimage refers to the feelings of strangeness and motivation within the lived experience of becoming a therapist following a former career. Pilgrims purposefully

leave home to find something special through trial and tribulation. In this very process they discover a new home in their homelessness. The participants present their becoming and being a therapist in the same way, as an unfamiliar yet more conscious engagement with their possibilities. It is a possible way of being -- not just a job or a means of paying the mortgage. This possibility emerges as a project, which they cautiously but definitely elect to pursue. The idea to become a therapist seemed to emerge from a vision of life projected into participants' future, a vision based on a sense of what was missing today and in the past. The ground of pilgrimage is therefore one of lostness.

This theme does not exist in isolation but is interwoven within the layers of other themes, anomalies to them and more. The *pilgrimage* is inseparable from the backdrop of *fermenting discontent* and meaninglessness which the previous theme described and also from the *ambivalent allure of acceptance*, described in the next section.

In discussing the second half of life, Gerzon says:

[...it] is a quest for wholeness. It turns the tables on the first half. It weighs the balance in favor of integrity. It asks us not to defend who we are but to be open to the mystery of what we have not yet become, the mystery of coming into our own, whoever that may be" [sic] (Gerzon, 1996, p.12)

Some participants stated that they imagined what their life might be like as a therapist but most never even knew that training would lead to a new career. All had a sense that they had some special skills which they could somehow make more use of and that this would give them more of what they considered meaningful in life. All found themselves *at sea*

before deciding to train. The meaninglessness and dissatisfaction which emerged out of changes in their former career revealed their lost-ness and placed them on a pilgrimage, not to *find* their project but *as* their project. The changes beforehand were not the cause of the dissatisfaction but a catalyst for bringing it to the surface.

Pilgrimage is the response which occurs when discontent and meaninglessness result in a change of direction. I imagine that many individuals feel a similar sense of dissatisfaction at some point in their life/career but address it in others ways, including denial or perpetuation of the familiar. Referring to the absurdity of Sisyphus' fate, Camus says "The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks and this fate is no less absurd" (Camus, 1988, p.109).

The pilgrimage, as I describe it here, represents the tentative steps towards uncertainty and meaning. It becomes a way of being that is in itself a 'project'.

The original definition of a pilgrim (*peregrinus*) is a foreigner or exile, at home where he or she is walking. This suggests that a pilgrimage can be a goal in itself, rather than Jerusalem, Canterbury or some other pre-determined destination. The search and the goal involve a way of being that is both *away from* home and *at-home* simultaneously. Pilgrimage involves struggle and determination; it is indirect, uncertain and feels risky, yet is penetrated by a vision of possibility and truth and energised by desire:

It was just before I was fifty and by that stage I was into my counselling training and I do think there was something for me around age, around that transition from that earlier stage – being a home parent, all that illness and stuff but also something about me wanting to say ‘no I’ve got something else here, I’ve got something more I want to do’. I didn’t really know what it was at that point but I think there was something in me that just felt ‘yes let’s just do it’ something different and I didn’t recognise in retrospect with both of those but I think there was something which took me into the running and then I’ve carried on running, I did London twice, I’ve done lots of half marathons and 10ks since erm I think that there was something there which was pushing me, nudging me into a new direction, to do something different.[NEIL9, p.13]

Here, Neil speaks of the silent, powerful energy that motivated him towards changes in his life, including training to become a therapist and also taking up long distance running as a serious hobby. The description of the energy “pushing me, nudging me” suggests the movement felt like it was, resisted, forced and tentative – even external in the sense that it seems to arise from behind, implied by the word ‘push’. When I consider what is behind, I am drawn to our temporality, or realisation of our *facticity*, as Heidegger (2010) describes it. Our *facticity* anchors us to a sense of what cannot be undone and therefore becomes the launch pad as we *project* ourselves into the possibilities of our future, towards a fuller unfolding of our wholeness, before and including our ultimate completion in death.

Mike reflected on his future with respect to his current disruptive work-home life balance:

I started thinking about what else I might be able to do, given my skills and attributes, and the vision was to be sitting in a private consulting room seeing a manageable number of moneyed clients every day and just sort of living a fairly comfortable home-based life [MIKE1, p.2]

The ‘dawning’ of this vision was often gradual for all of the participants, although Pete and Patrick both described a particular moment of clarity. In general, the idea of training

seemed independent from the idea of changing careers until it emerged for them sometime later:

No I don't think it was a single moment, it was something that crystallised over the space of about six months errm ...[MIKE6, p.3]

I started to think about what I was going to do in retirement what else could I do that I find really fulfilling and enjoy and think that I was possibly quite good at as well. So I think it was something that developed over a period of time. I can't think of one minute when I was thinking I am now definitely going to do it. It happened gradually, I went to look at open days, I read lots of stuff and prospectuses on line, that kind of thing. [JEFF8, p.3]

Richard was less clear about his expectations of being a therapist:

Oh dear...what were my expectations when I started, you know, errm I don't know...I could look back over my engineering career and think you know, what I achieved from that and what did I ever set out to do and I am not really convinced that I ever had a career plan ...so for me I don't think I was ever ambitious and I don't think I ever had a clear plan of where I was going you know, things...you kind of look a year or two ahead, you know? [RICHARD16, p.11]

Richard, Mike and Jeff's description resembled Bolgar's observation (Reppen, 1998, p.39):

"Being a psychotherapist is an endless becoming...It is not something that has a clear beginning..."

In contrast to these, Pete and Patrick told of having a clear vision of the future even before they began training:

I thought: that looks really interesting, that looks like a fascinating way to be – I think I could actually be quite good at that one day so why, why, even if it pays better why would I spend the rest of my life sitting in an office doing, you know, repetitive, monotonous work that has no value attached to it other than a pay cheque [PETE11, p.6]

Through his use of the words “looks like a fascinating way to be”, Pete reveals his projection as a visual image: he pictures himself as a therapist and this seems to placate the feelings he associates with his current monotonous lifestyle. The image seems powerful to him and motivates him towards this new way of being.

In Patrick’s case, a discussion with his partner led to the suggestion that he become a counsellor. It is as if his partner could already see those qualities within Patrick that perhaps he had overlooked in himself:

I said to my partner ‘I am really unhappy’ and it’s having ripples into all areas of my life and...’it’s work’. It’s just not doing it for me anymore...but I just don’t know what to do what can I do? I, I, I was thirty, I was thirty...I think thirty four yeah either thirty three or thirty four erm and well it’s a bit late for me to retrain it erm...he said...you know, ‘what about a counsellor?’ and I had not thought about it up till then I had not, I had not at all [PATRICK3, p.2]

Yeah, I grabbed hold of it and that was it...I grabbed hold of it and I just knew that ‘Number One’, you know I could gain some self-respect erm...people may look at me differently as well and very much at the beginning that was important to me [PATRICK5, p.3]

Patrick’s description contains an element of desperation about his situation; he “grabs” the possibility like a drowning man might grab a branch in a fast flowing river. It seems important to Patrick that this could be an opportunity to change how he feels about himself by changing what he does for a living and, in the process, how others see him. His response seems significant, urgent, important and necessary. For other participants, too, respect and status emerged as important aspects of their initial dissatisfaction and also featured strongly in their visions for the future. How they felt seen by others was an important element of

their impetus to change. This dimension will be returned to during discussion of the third major theme, below.

Whyte (2002, p.77) describes how work unchallenged and unchanged can become like a surrounding wall: "Often, in order to stay alive, we have to *unmake* a living in order get back to *living* the life we wanted for ourselves." Like Solnit (2010), he believes we have to learn to be lost. He distinguishes between ambition and desire. As Whyte (2002) notes, 'desire' comes from the Latin root *de sider*, meaning 'of the stars'. "To have a desire in life literally means to keep your star in sight, to follow a glimmer, a beacon, a disappearing will-o'-the-wisp over the horizon into some place you cannot yet fully imagine" (Whyte, 2002, p.78). In contrast, ambition is bereft of revelation; it is more like a torchlight you would point only at the places to which you already knew you wanted to go:

Ambition kills our sense of the miraculous; ambition, ironically, could hide the stars. Ambition also lacked surprise, it lacked a sense of belonging to the territory through which we travel...But desire is a conversation between our physical bodies, our work, our imaginations, and new worlds that is the territory we seek (Whyte, 2002, p.80).

Here, Whyte describes the difference between the ambition that motivates most of us in our careers and the inner glow of desire. We say of the ambitious that they are *driven*, implying that they are not in the driving-seat themselves; in other words, the force that motivates them forward is external rather than from within.

In contrast, the participants seem tentative, purposeful and self-motivated. The force of desire, as Whyte describes it, derives from an alignment between self and environment; it is

purposeful and alive even if uncertain and fearful. Desire also describes the energy which orientates an individual in a particular direction without their necessarily having a clear goal. In the case of the participants, this directional energy seemed to motivate them away from their former career even before the new career became clear. To “unmake a living” (Whyte, 2002, p.80), we must leave what has been familiar but no longer feels so. In the case of the participants, the familiar has begun to feel increasingly unfamiliar as their dissatisfaction is revealed to them. The old home now feels “uncanny” (Heidegger, 2010, p.181), and this discloses a desire to return to a home which seemingly no longer exists.

To what extent were the participants experiencing a “call out of uncanniness” (Heidegger, 2010, p.269), a preliminary step towards a mode of authentic living? The process perhaps began with their discontent: what Heidegger captures in his concept of *Langweile*, a fundamental mood or attunement which reveals something essential to ourselves about our existence. Moments of profound boredom can reveal us to ourselves as “thrown” (Heidegger, 2010, p.135) and push us to find new, more authentic and fulfilling ways of projecting ourselves, even if we just end up finding new ways of “falling” (Heidegger, 2010, p.176). In contrast, in “understanding” (Heidegger, 2010, p.145) Dasein is aware of its possibilities and facticity. It is the basis upon which we *project* ourselves forward and a mode of being which is ever present. For the participants, this mode of being undergoes a shift away from normal everydayness and the *they* towards a new, *uncanny* and deliberate existence which I refer to as the *pilgrimage*.

Not-being-at-home does not signify a passive acceptance of one's lost self. Pilgrimage is not a withdrawal from self and society, as in some forms of depression. It is quite the opposite: a powerful conviction that a state of coherence is there to be found and must be found. A pilgrim leaves something in order to find something: a return to coherence and meaning. Paradoxically, the understanding of one's *not-being-at-home* is at the same time a return to home, even if still lost. Pilgrimage takes us into "homescapes," places where we feel an inner rootedness, where we know intuitively that even if we are in a strange, wild, and faraway place, we are home (York, 2001, p.148).

The state of homelessness which the pilgrim finds him/herself can be accompanied by a sense of anxiety. To the participants who are discovering and exploring the future it seems as though they find themselves in this situation rather than necessarily choosing it. They have not *left* home; rather home has left them. Interestingly, in the original German, Heidegger is thought to say that the sense of anxiety is experienced as if it were given:

We find ourselves caught up in anxiety, in dread...The German says 'es ist einem unheimlich'. Here the use of the dative 'einem' directionally emphasises that the uncanny, the experience of the dis-ease, befalls or is given to one. (Mugerauer, 2008, p.56)

The participants find themselves on a journey from what once felt like home in order to discover home anew. In the meantime, they are in a strange land, betwixt an anxious not-knowing and a hopeful becoming. This juxtaposition emerges as a new *being-at-home* (Heidegger, 2010), in which growth and discovery sit alongside determination and struggle.

(Sigh) it was really hard academically (laughs)...it was hard work because we had to write an essay every single month. I've calculated, I think I've written about 45 essays erm... I've kept them all erm...that was hard and it made a lot of difference to my personal life erm I was always, I was always studying erm... but I enjoyed it and I threw myself into it completely, completely. I almost became obsessed by it. Because there's so much to learn and there still is, there still is [PATRICK13, p.5]

Here, Patrick describes both the desire and the struggle. In his description "I threw myself into it" he demonstrates his choice to immerse himself in the pilgrimage, perhaps in response to his frustration.

For Jack, the journey was filled with uncertainty, a sense of "not getting it", yet at the same time a strong belief that there was something to "get" from this process:

Well, well once I was in there I was going to get through it, I needed that, I needed that bit of paper...and I kept looking for, I kept looking for the essence you know, so, so what is it? I am here to learn something and I am not getting it and I am not quite sure why I am not getting it. And so long as that persists you know you keep searching, I keep searching. I don't think I really got it until err 2008 when I went and did my supervision course and that was really quite odd, I mean, at that point I didn't have any intention of doing supervision but I needed to something fairly meaty because I knew, I think I was reasonably good as a practitioner but there was always this sense of 'I haven't really got it' – there was always something missing...[JACK8, p.8]

Jack's journey is equally frustrating. He seeks something that will abolish his feeling of "I haven't really got it – there was always something missing..." In his case he engages with further training, seeking knowledge and understanding as a way to relieve his *uncanniness* (*unheimlichkeit*). Heidegger describes our response to *unheimlichkeit*, which represents mystery for us, as a necessary and normal part of being human. Although Heidegger views this way of being as one that involves thinking and questioning, we also turn from the

mysterious into the non-thinking nature of a more ontic reality (Mugerauer 2008). Perhaps Jack's frustration with his *unheimlichkeit* promotes a movement towards more concrete knowing, to finding fulfilment through being absorbed in the study of psychotherapy. Ironically, a thorough education in Jack's person-centred modality of therapy would leave him appreciating the facilitation of certain conditions of worth in order to naturally grow through periods of uncertainty and confusion. Perhaps Jack learned to trust the process rather than rely on knowledge to help relieve his anxious quest for answers.

Kierkegaard (2008) argues that faith is restored when we learn to oscillate between the polarities of the finite and in the infinite. For Jack and the other participants, the movement between necessary facts and the infinite choices of how to be a therapist represents a new way of being. In the process, a certain faith is required to sustain the forces of uncertainty, anxiety, possibility and acceptance. Faith emerges in the mode of pilgrimage as participants pursue a path through their new way of being and its unknown, uncertain and paradoxical territory. The journey challenges their relationship with others and in particular, how they experience being seen or known.

Pete's journey, which has three distinct parts, carries echoes of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, pseudonymously written by Johannes De Silentio (Kierkegaard, 1985). Here Kierkegaard introduces the *knight of faith* and the *knight of infinite resignation*. The former is able to reconcile the finite and the infinite, is equally infinitely resigned but reaches a higher level of being by virtue of his/her acceptance of the absurd. The latter lives an ethical

life based on the belief that life hereafter is the priority for which all earthly sacrifices are worthy; he/she exists in the finite world through a movement of infinite resignation. An extreme example of this would be a monk or nun who has vowed to live in hardship. While making no religious or spiritual statement myself, I tentatively suggest the use of the word 'faith' as synonymous with pilgrimage, understood as a marriage of necessity and possibility (the finite and infinite).

Pete describes the first part of his career as his move from New York to India in order to live in an Indian monastic order. This life which brought him a sense of the exotic while being lacking in other respects, both financial and emotional:

Umm, I originally started studying psychology in my late 30s to kind of augment my spiritual journey in life and I began to realise that an eastern spiritual way of looking at things wasn't addressing all the areas of myself that maybe needed healing or needed attention especially in the kind of emotional realm. So I started studying it originally just to help my spiritual journey along. I had no intention at that time of becoming a therapist [PETE3, p.2]

His subsequent move to the United Kingdom to work for a London publishing house reversed this polarity: it fulfilled his financial needs while bringing this *knight of infinite resignation* back to the finite world of the *aesthete*. This too left him feeling bored and ill at ease:

There was no scope for imagination or creativity...umm...it was just kind of tasteless and meaningless really and really it's kind of saving, redeeming feature if you will was that it paid well [PETE2, p.1]

It would be fair to say that Pete was in *despair*, literally and in the Kierkegaardian sense, too. He was struggling with his life choices, attempting to find a path that would meet both his practical and spiritual needs. Then, in the midst of his struggle, he identified with author and therapist John Welwood, who had undergone a similar struggle. In a single, life-defining moment Pete was able to envision himself as a therapist, which would meet his finite needs by offering a more recognised career than that offered by his spiritual lifestyle. The new way of being promised a greater sense of meaning while holding the spiritual value so important to him:

So it literally felt to me almost as if a door – a huge door-- opened inside of me which just pacified all this kind of anxiety and err tension I felt like almost being out of place like an Eastern person If you will in Western society – how am I going to earn a living? How am I going to spend my days? And err the possibility of training as a psychotherapist just err eased all of that and all of it became very clear, so I immediately began feeling much more comfortable in my own skin and comfortable my future had kind of come in focus all in one burst. So err yeah I felt like I found some harmony or some balance or something that I had been seeking which had eluded me up until then [PETE5, p.3]

Whether Pete (or anyone) can succeed in becoming a *knight of faith* is debatable, for the *knight of faith* must infinitely embrace the absurd and live in the paradox of the finite and the infinite through a perpetual *leap of faith*. The leap is not a discrete task but an ongoing movement between resignation and faith, one that is renewed over and over again. Pete experienced a moment when this way of being presented to him (“a huge door opened inside of me”). It addressed not only his finite needs, such as income, but also his search for meaning and purpose: “how am I going to spend my days?”

For Kierkegaard (1985, p.76), faith is absurd since it is simultaneously elusive and perpetual, intangible and concrete: “Faith is therefore no aesthetic emotion, but something far higher, exactly because it presupposes resignation; it is not the immediate inclination of the heart but the paradox of existence.”

The *knight of faith* and the pilgrim share a constantly renewed struggle to live consciously in the paradox. This does not suggest a harmonious and smooth ride through life’s ups and downs but rather a conscious grappling with life whilst embracing uncertainty in the perpetual renewal of faith. Again, as opposed to Kierkegaard, I make a completely secular parallel while sharing the spirit of his argument that faith is a way of living consciously and in paradox.

The *Pilgrimage as Project* reflects a forward movement towards a more meaningful and uncertain existence, one which holds hope and possibility for a richer, more fulfilling life.

1.14.3 THE AMBIVALENT ALLURE OF ACCEPTANCE

The lived experience of men becoming therapists following a former career includes a powerful desire to be accepted by self and others whilst wanting to stand out for being special, too. The standing-out-from is a necessary component of being special and belonging, which necessarily and paradoxically includes isolation and marginalisation.

Many of the participants expressed their relational world (Spinelli 2005; van Deurzen 2001) in contradictory terms. They would speak of standing out as 'powerful' and 'respected' for being a therapist whilst also feeling marginalised and different/other. This theme attempts to capture the powerful, ambivalent allure of self and relational acceptance which manifested itself across all narratives. It captures the push and pull at play in the relational movement of becoming a therapist, which I refer to as a *calibration of intimacy*.

The movement from former career to being a therapist is not seamless and flowing but testing and hesitant. This is not a seal pup that instinctively and gracefully slips into the water for the first time but a Labrador puppy's initial encounter with the ocean – eager and playful whilst also anxious and tentative. This jerky movement is evident as participants begin to reveal the ambivalent allure of acceptance in their lives.

For participants, being-seen at a deeper level takes on a higher priority in their *lebenswelt* (life-world) during this transition. While in their previous careers they were seen as doing a good job, this was not authentic, intimate and personal: what they accomplished was more important than who they were. The 'product' was more defining than the person. What they 'did' revealed little about who they were in an authentic sense and in some cases contradicted how they felt. Like the flora of a rainforest, there were parts of them that existed in the shade and yearned for the light. The men inch forwards, enticed by a desire for illumination. Unaccustomed to the full glare they look-away, squint and blink their way to becoming a therapist.

The lived experience of becoming a therapist following a former career involves a dramatic shake up of relational intimacy which is described through different experiences. The title of counsellor/therapist/psychotherapist is meaningful by virtue of how the men imagine others might respond to them/it. On the whole, they recalled fantasies of being respected whilst also expressing a frustration that, as a therapist, they sometimes experienced a lack of support (and camaraderie) relative to their previous career. In some ways there was a growing level of authentic connection, especially with regard to the actual client work, yet there was also a feeling of marginalisation due to the strangeness of their new career and the relative absence of other male therapists with whom they could share points of view.

The marginalisation, authentic connection and sense of respect experienced by participants can be seen as variations of acceptance of self and others, as calibrated by each participant.

The word 'calibration' can be jarring when applied to relational issues; it sits more comfortably in the world of engineering and mechanics than in that of therapy and relationships. This juxtaposition, however, captures something of the processes participants experienced. The men come from a place of otherness; their view of relationships is largely shaped by a cultural backdrop of male-centric, industrial and commercial environments and by a default position which sometimes clashes with that of the therapy world. It's like being a plumber and then attempting to use the same tools and skills to become a baker. This is not a statement about being a man, since many women might experience something

similar. It is about approaching the therapy profession from a position of otherness in a former career where relationships take on a different meaning and new skills are required.

The phenomenon speaks of what Heidegger referred to as “being-with” (Heidegger, 2010, p.114), an inescapable aspect of the being of Dasein. Heidegger argues that Dasein has a *care* for others, and that through that *care* the being of Dasein is revealed to the world, itself and others. For this reason, I considered the different relational themes as different modes of *being-with* and the active co-creation of these modes as a calibration of being-with (acceptance). They represent ways of challenging an otherwise average everydayness (the typical way *Dasein* is in the world) by stepping into an alternative space which demands a confrontation with otherness and reveals truth:

This nearest and elemental way of Dasein encountering the world goes so far that even one’s own Dasein initially becomes discoverable by looking away from its “experiences” and the “center of its actions,” or by not yet “seeing” them at all. Dasein initially finds “itself” in what it does, needs, expects, has charge of, in the things at hand which it initially takes care of in the surrounding world (sic) (Heidegger, 2010, p. 116).

In their former work, participants found themselves agents of productivity and capital gain, dealing with the things at hand within their respective industries. In some cases this involved other people, who become seen as resources. The men were defined by, and saw themselves through, this particular lens until change helped them reveal the *fermenting discontent* that bubbled under the surface.

The dramatic changing from one career to another might indicate a form of turning-away-from, revealing in the participants their *care* for the thing from which they turn. Their *care* for this thing, in turn, reveals something essential about this phenomenon. Even the things that begin to hurt us become an object of care so that we can avoid them: I am careful around a thorn as I hold and admire a rose. The movement towards that to which the participants are drawn further elucidates their way of being, through their *care* again (Heidegger, 2010). But *care* is paradoxical: the thorn and the rose can be so closely connected that we are both repelled and attracted simultaneously.

For participants, becoming a therapist also meant becoming marginalised. They were often lone voices in a room full of women, and in some cases this meant being silenced in favour of the majority view. The marginal status also meant that although they held special, more feminine skills that other men possibly didn't have, their more masculine traits were often unwelcome, and sometimes seen as aggressive. The men perceived this as a lacking which challenged their personal enjoyment of the course, their sense of safety and their awareness of the need for gender-balanced points of view. They found it difficult to present the masculine perspective.

Even for me, the idea that a section of society normally seen as particularly privileged -- white male professionals -- can be seen as being marginalised and/or silenced feels bizarre or even taboo. It's as if their normally favoured status should deny these men the opportunity to point out imbalance where it occurs, since their right to object was removed

by birth. Indeed, one participant spoke of his guilt at thinking he deserved to be heard against a backdrop of female oppression and injustice in society. However, avoiding controversy by skirting round this experience would be to perpetuate a censorship of sorts (and would be very 'un-phenomenological'). As far as possible, then, I have therefore allowed the men to speak through their own words. By so doing I emphasise the co-creative aspect of this theme. Rather than simply passive recipients of oppressive forces, participants are mutual collaborators through their agency and the choices they make along the way.

Much of the literature on Kierkegaard highlights his emphasis on being an individual, especially with regard to truth (Gardiner, 1988; Grøn, 2008; Kierkegaard, 2001; Malantschuk, 1974; Watts, 2003). Even being true as an individual is in the spirit of *care* for others, since Kierkegaard detested the impersonal nature of the crowd and lived his own life calibrating between societal pressures and isolation. In this theme, *care* emerges both in the Kierkegaardian form (that of aligning with subjective truth and sometimes standing against the crowd) and the Heideggerian sense of wishing to stand out as valued among others whilst hoping to be accepted as part of the community. Aligning with Heidegger, I would argue that it is impossible to contemplate being an individual without considering the tension of fitting in with others. Although coming from different positions, both Heidegger and Kierkegaard highlight a very similar relational problem.

This theme emerged as a response to the *allure of acceptance*. While sometimes on the margins and other times immersed in rich, deep, intimacy, all the participants found

themselves in a situation of stark contrast with their former career. They often felt isolated yet also experienced the awe and respect of others who found their work inspiring and meaningful. This paradoxical mixture of respect, isolation, marginalisation and profundity was reflected in all the narratives to different degrees and forms one of the overlapping layers in participants' lived experience, blending naturally with the two other major themes.

There are three sub-themes to the *ambivalent allure of acceptance*: Respect and Status; Authenticity and Depth; and Marginalisation and Belonging. While intertwined and inseparable in reality, these are presented separately for the purpose of clarity.

1.14.3.1 RESPECT AND STATUS

The experience of becoming a therapist following a former career includes a belief that the holder of this title commands deference, stands out from others for his ability and is somewhat mysterious to non-therapists. This possibility emerged by virtue of its absence in the former career. Something was missing.

The participants felt an increasing lack of meaning in their former career and this was manifest in how they saw themselves at the time. In Patrick's case,

I felt I wasn't being seen in the career I was in. I was being passed over erm... I felt a bit neglected erm... and life was just passing me by. So that was really important to me, that was really important to me that I would gain some respect from others, that I would be seen, that I would be a professional, again, looking back I never saw myself as a professional in the

print... I just held on to that and I didn't let it go, it was quite a profound moment actually [PATRICK8, p.3]

Some participants described their former career as no longer satisfying or meaningful. Richard started to notice the difference between seeing his co-workers as resources with a cost and value attached to them and seeing them as people with hopes and fears like himself. He had never thought like this until his own father died and he turned to counselling to help him deal with the grief. Something qualitative changed for Richard, and his ontic view of his colleagues became more ontological as he began to view them as emotional beings rather than expensive resources.

Mike witnessed many of his co-workers in the oil industry being made redundant, despite their efforts and commitment to the company. At the same time he found himself being valued less by his customers; his worth seemed dictated by oil prices rather than by his commitment, knowledge or skills. Even when he left the oil industry to work in the NHS, Mike once again found himself confronted by commercial metrics that impacted on his sense of worth:

Ummn it was very demanding errm you know particularly delivering theory modules, you know I had to make sure I was ahead of the students some of who were coming in with a high level of education and experience errm it was very stretching errm ... I was kind of aware that it didn't meet my requirements of being more valued. It was another environment where money counted and the objective was to get the most out of you for the least pay [MIKE9, p.4]

As Mike struggled to find a place in the therapy world that suited him, he felt his qualities as a therapist were not being exploited or were not in demand. The end result was a lack of available work that was enjoyable and financially sustaining.

In his former career in education, Jeff still enjoyed teaching but felt measured and objectified by a governing body that required evidence of his contribution, even if collecting such evidence was detrimental to his actual performance.

The backdrop of an increasingly demoralising career or diminishing job satisfaction left the participants depleted of self-worth. They imagined being replenished by their possible new career and fantasised about how others might react to encountering someone with the title 'therapist'.

Different aspects to this emerged from the interviews. The first was the point of view of the participants themselves, framed by the question 'what do I think when I imagine myself being a therapist?' The response often involved identification with someone they had met, read about or connected with through therapy or training long before the idea of being a therapist became a possibility. This phenomenon is echoed by Dryden and Spurling (1989), whose collection of narratives includes several where the therapists cite other therapists or authors with whom they strongly identified.

Among participants in the current research, one fantasy involved announcing one's career change at a party:

I think there was something in me that really was motivated to do something that I could succeed at in terms of society, in terms of the people around me because I was finding it very difficult as a home parent in that party situation where people say 'what do you do?' – you know it felt sometimes that I was just fudging it – I do a bit of writing, I look after the kids, it felt very amorphous, it felt very intangible to say what I did [NEIL11, p.13]

Like other participants, Neil saw becoming a therapist as something that would be highly valued by society while also making use of his own talents:

What I found almost immediately with counselling was that it was a bit like you know, a duck taking to water erm I felt very comfortable with it. I enjoyed it erm I enjoyed the academic study of it, I enjoyed the doing of it erm and I was pretty good at it, you know but in skills and the academic side erm and I was getting a lot of recognition for that which was quite nice and I think yes there was a sense of fulfilment in myself which felt good about this and in a sense also being valued by others in terms the doing of this erm which really did feed into something that I probably wasn't getting – being the home parent [NEIL10, p.13]

Patrick hoped to recapture a sense of status and respect on the part of society and himself:

I grabbed hold of it and I just knew that 'Number One', you know, I could gain some self-respect erm...people may look at me differently as well and very much at the beginning that was important to me [PATRICK6, p.3]

For participants, imagining being a therapist was affirmative and meaningful. This was only part fantasy, since all owned qualities that had been underutilised or were just being discovered; qualities which aligned with those of the imagined therapist, whose role demands special skills and knowledge and requires difficult training and personal

commitment. All participants were conscious of possessing these qualities prior to beginning training.

Another aspect involved considering how others might respond to someone with the title of therapist. For the wider public, the word 'therapist' may well summon up a very broad group, including practitioners who claim to read minds or can control the will of others through the power of suggestion. Myth and reality merge so that when an individual is confronted with an actual therapist, their reaction can lie on a spectrum of possibilities between incredulity and curiosity. Either way, the therapist stands out for what he/she represents to the other, which is something between fear and wonder. This is, at least, how the yet-to-be therapists imagine their new career. They expect or hope to be seen and respected, to stand out for being different:

So for me to become a psychotherapist, this was completely another thing, I mean this is not only something which is seen as respectable and very professional in Western society, people even feel intimidated when you tell them you're a psychotherapist because they immediately start thinking 'umm he probably knows what I am thinking' or something or probably he's got all sorts of theories about me already, so (laughs) it kind of felt like I was doing something that was err how would you say umm respected or valued I think in Western society and also your seen as kind of a healer you help people in crisis so I think the whole identity of being a psychotherapist was something that very strongly appealed to me [PETE7, p.4]

For Pete, the idea that others may feel intimidated confers power on the therapist. As others start to imagine being 'read' by the therapist, this leaves them vulnerable and thus makes the therapist more powerful. The very job title seems to afford the holder special, almost magical qualities that reach beyond knowledge, money, creativity, leadership or

financial skills to penetrate the core of their *being*. This suggests that others are made aware of their own (in)authenticity when in the company of a therapist. It's as if the therapist becomes an agent of *aletheia*, one who is able to reveal their truth, no matter what social constructs they employ to conceal it. That which is normally hidden is now unveiled, igniting vulnerability and therefore deference towards the agent of revelation. (Of course, most therapists realise that the strangers' fantasies are their own and are in any case impossible to achieve; they will attempt to reassure the protesting stranger, who has already become sensitive and guarded, fearing unconscious disclosure.)

1.14.3.2 AUTHENTICITY AND DEPTH

In their search for rich, authentic relationships, participants had become increasingly concerned with their inauthentic existence, revealed through a lack of meaningful work and relationships. Some discussed the difficult relationships they had encountered at work, where individuals behaved one way when everyone knew they thought and felt something else:

There was some nice people there, you know, and you began this ludicrous sort of thing every day you met them, they'd meet you at the door like a Royal line and you'd shake hands with them like you know, and you'd be saying 'you bastard' (laughs) forgive me – but it felt like that, you know and many of us on our side you know, when you've finished a meeting you just want to go wash your hands, you felt not contaminated but it felt unpleasant, you know [RICHARD7, p.7]

Richard's description of needing to wash his hands speaks to a deeper cleansing he was seeking to achieve. Unlike his former career, counselling seemed to focus on people rather than efficiency and profit. In his former career, Richard's way of being with others involved seeing his co-workers as costly resources, easily replaced by sophisticated technology. The otherness of the situation was not experienced as if co-workers were other *Dasein* for whom there exists mutual *care* (Heidegger 2010). This did not mean that Richard lacked guilt or sadness that people were losing their jobs, but rather that he learned to distance himself from the experience in a way which made it more acceptable. He learned to behave as if the ontological was ontic. Others were objectified as things with a cost and value and it was not until Richard sought counselling that his relationship with the ontological was renewed:

It felt to me that you were doing something for people as individuals, I mean working for a corporation if you like, you know, it's sort of an anonymous sort of thing, and then all of a sudden there was a sense of intimacy [RICHARD12, p.9]

The anonymous is another name for *Das Man*, or *they* (Heidegger, 2010). Heidegger says that we become anonymous when we lose our authentic being; we become *das man* and do as *they* do. This description is often applied to working within large corporates, where employees stop being individuals and adopt the corporate language, culture, dress code and so on.

In their therapy work, in contrast, participants derived a sense of meaning which came from the more in-depth connections they made with their clients. In the above quote, Richard

presents “intimacy” as the antithesis of anonymity. This was a truly satisfying aspect of the role, reflecting an experience that affirmed certain rare but concrete qualities long possessed by the participants. Most of them believed in their ability to earn respect and/or trust from those who turned to them for emotional support or wise counsel. This reflected moments in actual therapy sessions where powerful connections could be encountered. As Jack put it,

Yes... even though it's hard work sometimes and you feel like we're not getting anywhere but then after a while something will shift for them and then its, it's a joyful experience, there's a sharing I think that, you know, what do they talk about...that connection between people...I think is strong...words escape me at the moment, what they call it, 'psychological contact' I think in and of itself is profound and that's something I really enjoy because it's something I never did before you know, so just the sense of being with another person and really 'being with' another person in a way that you can't do anywhere else. You know I can't even be with my family in that way and I am pretty close with them, you know, but there's something really, really special about err something spiritual is it? I don't know, something meaningful certainly, something special about what happens when two people meet for therapy [JACK15, p.12]

This more dialogic, *I-thou* (Buber 1984) encounter had a felt sense to it that was enriching and meaningful. Therapists could maintain this unusual level of intimacy with the other person in a way which was rare in everyday life. As a result, they were seen as special individuals, capable of withstanding life's ups and downs and with a sense of wisdom and awareness that made them better able to cope with what their clients found paralysing or fearful. Their clients would reaffirm these special qualities whilst mentally and emotionally developing session by session. The quality of the contact was also affirmative in its authenticity; it yielded rich, deep dialogue that expressed vulnerability, uncertainty and

fear. This contrasted with the macho stoicism and game-playing of the former career environment, where people were secondary to commercial targets.

Participants felt themselves developing in personal terms as they learned to embrace intimacy: being seen and heard whilst seeing and hearing:

I think as a person it gave me something terribly important. I think it made me a...I think a more rounded person ... I think on that course it was impossible to engage with people really superficially and I think that up until then I was often engaging fairly superficially with a lot of people. I would be perfectly pleasant and nice but actually I found it very difficult... So I think that erm it benefited me enormously the training and something that can't really be quantified in terms of how many clients I've got or how much I am earning from it or whatever but I think it did have a very big effect err on me in a very positive way as well. And also I listen more. I think before I did the course I was wrapped up in my own stuff and I would often, you know, only be half listening ... So, err ... I think it affected me quite a lot actually and err gave me a yeah, made me more, I think more whole, a more complete person.[JEFF22, p.10]

Jeff's perception of becoming more "complete" echoes the yearnings of those seeking greater meaning in their lives, which equates to a fuller or more integrated sense of self. Jeff's new confidence was the bright light in his new way of being, despite the lack of clients and drop in income. He experienced growing relational depth with friends and colleagues and improved teaching ability. Jeff's face lit up when he described this change and I could sense his emotion, a mixture of sadness and joy at having come so far.

Like Kierkegaard's life stages, the different spheres of existence (aesthetic, ethical or religious) (Kierkegaard et al, 1949) were seen as less dependent on what one did than on how each was subjectively experienced: how one applied oneself to that life. After all, many

people can pretend to live a religious life without actually having faith and being congruent with religious beliefs. For the participants, there was never a tangible, financial reward to changing career; instead, there was hope for authenticity and depth of intimacy. This indicated a powerful motivation to be real and authentic, in contrast with the former context of superficiality and anonymity.

In the experience there is a growing attunement to intimacy, whether through presenting more of oneself to the world or through a sense of distance and marginalisation. Heidegger described the process of awareness as *distantiality* (Heidegger 2010), where through *care*, *Dasein* measures and manages its place in the world of others. Hence the men measure, size up and/or check out their differences, a process which takes on a new dimension in this world of richer relational contact.

1.14.3.3 MARGINALISATION AND BELONGING

'Being marginalised' sounds like something that happens 'to' individuals or groups. Yet for the participants their becoming part of a minority group seems also chosen at some level. Marginality, while carrying the meaning of being isolated and Other, also offers the potential to be different or special. I have worked with many therapy clients, for whom being marginal has arisen as a theme. In many cases, marginality was linked to clients developing a behaviour which enabled them to remain safe in actual or possible hostile

social situations. This behaviour was then continued years later through a pattern in which clients placed themselves on the margin to mitigate the risk of similar hostility. They were then treated as an outsider in response, suggesting a co-created pattern.

This suggests that there may be an intersubjective quality to prior and new relationships during career change and therefore a mutual, ongoing mediation of social and relational contact. The lived experience of becoming a therapist following a former career also includes exploring otherness, being different and therefore special whilst also wanting to be the same and accepted. The marginal position is both desired and rejected, contributing to the sense of uncertainty and anxiety which characterises the pilgrimage.

This phenomenon includes participants' sense of being special for their maleness while also excluded for the same reason. The experience of marginalisation they reported was mainly one of gender imbalance but in some cases reached beyond this. For most of the men, their transition was one away from a workplace either male-dominated or with a roughly equal proportion of men and women. However, in the case of two participants, their previous workplace had a high female to male ratio and this seemed to be reflected in their experience during career change, where the impact of gender imbalance appeared less acute.

The sense of marginalisation was felt most starkly during training but also continued into professional practice. Participants' stories indicated the existence of a significant gender

imbalance during much of their training. The textural quality of this lived experience included isolation and frustration (resulting from not feeling able to express points of view), and criticism of the lack of “grit” during encounters that were perceived as biased towards female perspectives.

During training, participants found themselves in a female-dominated environment where certain views appeared missing from the ongoing dialogue. One participant described training as having a predominantly “female energy” which resulted in a lack of “grittiness”. At the end of training he felt unprepared to respond to his mainly male clients, who were not ready for softer, less gritty counselling interventions. It was as if the classroom was run by females for females, with an assumption that no great differences separate male clients from female clients. Patrick recalled a time when

there was just me and another guy...errm I thought about this and I think it leads to a slight imbalance within the group because no matter how much your point of view is accepted it, it has a female energy to all responses the whole time...

I am so aware at even picking up the old Therapy Today, when you look at the therapists it's all female, it's mostly ladies errm it would probably be good to hear more stuff about what it means to be a male therapist you know, I think it would, to read about it a bit more, to get a guy's point of view on what it's like to be a male therapist. ... It's like there's a lack of grittiness to the therapists around here and I don't mean that to sound disparaging but that's my experience, that's 'my' experience errm so perhaps the therapy world is missing out maybe on the male-ness energy a bit more [PATRICK46, p.13

Patrick alludes to a *lack-of* when he talks about the absence of male energy. It is as if the lack of men weakened the essence of counselling for him since it was not truly representative.

During training, the men experienced feeling unheard and excluded by the female trainees, and some found speaking up about this in class (and possibly to me) risky. This was countered by their awareness that in wider society men are viewed as oppressive towards women and as such become justifiable targets for women's anger, including within the training group. That the men felt like "outsiders" implies the existence of a core community that represented the profession and guarded boundaries against otherness or change.

Richard described his experience thus:

So, in supervision groups, in talking to other counsellors, psychotherapists, that I know, it's often a different view point about what's happening, you know. I am in a peer supervision group up in Stroud, and there's five of us there and again I am the only man, you know. The number of times somebody's sort of described a case and ... I've said 'well I don't think so' – that's not my experience, how I feel about what you're describing and I don't think I am unusual, it's just the male perspective, you know... and err I used to feel as if I was a bit odd actually because my experience of, you know, what they were describing, that reaction was actually quite different, you know, and I realised afterwards, you know, cos you kind of put yourself down, ... you can feel errm ... kind of an outsider sometimes...[RICHARD18, p.13]

Richard's sense of being in a minority has an impact on the level of support he receives from peer groups and supervision groups, since a different viewpoint feels 'odd' and risky to voice. He draws a comparison with the oppression of racial minorities in Britain, suggesting that, like theirs, his views are unwelcome in the mainstream. This felt quite extreme to me and I wondered if it was that kind of comparison that was being tacitly censored by the group or whether it was something peculiarly male, as he suggests. I also noted hesitation in Richard's words, as though he was also concerned about my reaction to his experience and whether it was permissible to voice his sense of otherness out loud. Here I find echoes of needing to fit in with others, demanding a sacrifice of the self:

Dasein stands in subservience to others. It itself is not; the others have taken its being away from it. The everyday possibilities of being of Dasein are at the disposal of the whims of others. These others are not definite others. On the contrary any other can represent them (Heidegger, 2010, p. 122).

The men felt that if they kept on expressing points of view that were different, eventually they would feel like “a stuck record” and succumb to the voice of the majority through their silence. As Mike put it,

I was certainly aware of being in the minority errm having come from heavy engineering which was completely the opposite errm...I think I ended up checking myself from always responding if kind of issues of women’s rights and equality came up I ...my instincts were to say there’s sort of counterbalance to that as well errm that became a bit of a stuck record so I stopped doing it errm because of course in the NHS everyone’s equal and we value diversity and we don’t notice colour and gender and so - yes we do – don’t be stupid [MIKE15, p.5]

Richard’s previous line of work had been very male dominated and the new experience of being within a minority felt intriguing and limiting:

Well, that six week introduction course, there was a lot of men there – when the certificate course started, errm there were fifteen people there of which there was myself and another man...and when I did my couples training I was the only man and there was six other women there you know and that’s pretty much...most CPD events you go to, if you’re not the only man you know, it’s quite amazing if there’s anybody else [male] [RICHARD7, p.5]

The men’s experience of marginalisation involves frustration, anger, humour and sometimes sadness. I too experienced sadness when hearing aspects of their training and subsequent struggles. Some were able to express their own sadness directly, but for others it seemed embedded in their frustration and despair.

As the sole man in his training group, Jack frequently felt abandoned by his fellow trainees. Even when there were opportunities to work with other people, he found himself becoming invisible at the moment that fellow trainees had to find a partner. His experience echoes what Heidegger referred to as *being-alone* (Heidegger, 2010, p. 117): a mode of *being-with* that further validates *Dasein's care* for others. Jack can only be alone since he holds a care for others in the first place. Even if he did not want to work with anyone, he could only do so through a form of caring about how he experiences and is experienced by others:

For example, you know, you do a large group session and the tutor says 'ok I'd want you to get into groups of three now and talk about stuff' and the girls would go 'whoosh' like that and I'd be looking around and nobody was making eye contact with me, they did not want to engage with me and I felt very excluded and that was a resounding thing for me throughout and is still the case, I still find that... [JACK9, p.8]

I don't think I am particularly ferocious looking or anything but you know, there'd be rows of people and the people either side of you, they've gone, you know. Or you turn around and they're talking and people in front of you. Extremely, extremely rarely has the person sitting next to me turned to me and said 'let's work together' so that's been very definite [JACK10, p.9]

While I recognised this as something that occurs in therapy groups, I had never put it down to gender. In my case, if I ever felt left out I would wonder how I might be contributing to it. It was interesting, then, to hear Jack attribute this behaviour to the female response to his gender, rather than his general popularity in the group. Had there been more men in the group might he have reached a different conclusion?

Jack then went on to respond to his sense of being marginalised by prejudiced female counsellors by stating that 'they' (the women in the group) had a right to be angry/fearful

towards men and therefore demonstrate that anger/fear, perhaps passively. Perhaps this logic served Jack with a mechanism for being-with whilst facing 'hostile' or unfriendly others:

I did feel errm prejudiced against... I think that's a real shame. In a way I can't blame, I mean we live in a patriarchy. I think women have got every reason to be angry, I don't like it either. I hate the things that get thrust upon me as man you know, people assume I will be a certain way and that annoys me as much as it does now but perhaps I haven't got the experience of the fear of going into a car park late at night that most women have to live with day in day out so you know I respect that maybe it is more difficult for them and will seem to be forward by talking to a man, I don't know, what goes on in them though, but I know that I have often felt excluded err marginalised [JACK10, p.9]

Jack felt that by being a man he was overlooked as a valuable colleague. This reminded me of the opposite stereotype: the situation where, for example, some men typically ask other men about football results while not necessarily asking a woman or valuing her opinion if this were offered. Jack seemed to reflect an extreme view that was not expressed by other participants, with the exception of Richard.

Jack's experience led him to alter his behaviour in order to win his female colleagues over or make them more amenable to taking him into their trust. I asked what it felt like:

Well, it felt, it was horrible, you know, it just (sighs) I know you know, feel I had to maybe overcompensate, be nice or be careful what I said errm I mean I think I've just got used to it now and so it doesn't bother me as much and I just get on with it and I kind of can tap people on the shoulder but errm I just still recognise it's there and I still even today when I go on workshops where I am not known to anyone else this is what happens [JACK12, p.10]

By overcompensating, Jack possibly compromised the expression of his own views, thereby limiting his own growth and experience of training – and perhaps that of the rest of the group, too.

Not everyone had this experience. For Jeff, being in a minority was something to celebrate. His ability to roll up his sleeves and get stuck into the world of feelings and emotions suggested that he was a better-than-average man, someone with superior skills and special because of his minority status and ability to adapt:

Well errm counselling generally is dominated by women really so I was always one of a minority errm I don't think I had a particular big – I am aware of it obviously, the lack of men in the training – in the counselling errm it wasn't, I don't think that in of itself was a particular problem for me but that may tell you more about me errm but I was obviously aware of it, that there was sort of a great lack of err men on these courses... I think in a way it made me feel perhaps, in some ways, quite pleased because I felt that I was prepared at least to try to engage in the process at an emotional level that maybe some men find quite difficult [JEFF13, p.6]

Unlike the other participants whose previous work had been in very male-dominated industries, Jeff had worked for several years in a girl's school and was familiar with being the only male in a room full of women. Without drawing a direct link between gender patterns in each career, it is noteworthy that five participants (Richard, Patrick, Mike, Pete and Jack) all came from careers with a pronounced male bias. Jeff, whose previous career had involved teaching in a girls' school, was the only participant to mention the imbalance in the gender ratio during training without speaking of marginalisation.

For Neil, who had been a house husband prior to retraining as a therapist, fitting in with anyone, whether male or female, appeared challenging. For him, feeling special was aligned with feeling like an outsider or not fitting it. This seems to allude to something broader and perhaps reflects how Neil feels as an individual in society, like an outsider looking in:

I think that erm in some ways that experience of being a little bit on the outside, on the edge of things carries through into my private practice because I get a lot of contact obviously with my clients, you know I've got roughly about 25 at the moment, about 20 hours of counselling a week and, so I have a lot of contact with people but in terms of friendships, being part of groups, that sort of thing erm, that's still...I struggle to get into that sort of feel, now that's partly me still being the home parent, doing things for the kids and stuff, practical time stuff, but erm there's still a feeling that actually often to go along to local groups of counsellor things, again it becomes that being the man in the group of women, stuff and erm so I erm just finished a supervision course at the moment and there are again, there are two men in the group of ten other women you know, twelve of us in all erm and so I think that that does make me feel erm less included in some ways less erm, I feel sometimes 'do I stand out a bit on this?' [NEIL7, p.10]

Here, Neil echoes the voices of other participants who question their right to state their point of view in case it 'stands out' or is seen as controversial. Neil's words express a frustration and sadness at the lack of likeminded companionship, which contrasts with the number of private clients with whom he enjoys greater intimacy and depth.

The experience of changing career to become a therapist requires a re-calibration of how-to-be-with others. Those coming from predominantly male work environments have to learn new skills and can find this challenging and frustrating. Mike was used to the company of other men in his previous career but his customary, majority male point of view became unacceptable within the counselling space. He felt that his male presence positioned him as

an aggressive, abuser of power even before he opened his mouth. He felt often misrepresented because his approach was different and this spilled over into management reviews and possible promotions:

The specific thing that I found really difficult was that people will tell me that I was being aggressive or over bearing or that I was exerting a lot of power in the team errm and even if those things were true that they weren't deliberate and I think there were quite a lot of times that it wasn't true and that, you know, that I was the representative oppressive patriarch regardless of what I did or said... I was really confused for a while errm and I saw that kind of people being advanced in preference to me and I didn't know why [MIKE18, p.6]

Mike looked back at his former career in the oil and gas industry as a relatively supportive space where people looked out for each other; although offshore oil workers held a reputation for being tough, they were sensitive enough to know when someone was struggling. This was not the case in his new psychotherapy career, where only the women seemed automatically to generate support around them when they expressed emotion. Mike found it hard to express his vulnerability or to ask for help, and felt that women colleagues wouldn't necessarily notice if he was struggling with something:

The oil industry can be pretty...they use the term rufy-tufy but actually people are very aware of watching one another's backs, keeping each other safe...physically safe errm and noticing if someone's struggling errm... I think there probably could err I've probably learned over the last five or six years that I am not that brilliant at asking for support errm so there, there's a kind of mixture of the you know, there could have been more support there and I could have asked for more errm...I think with my female colleagues support was more spontaneously offered errm and it seemed like if they asked for support it was readily available [MIKE19, p.7]

Ironically, Mike is left feeling more vulnerable and unsafe in the counselling space than in his previous oil industry job.

Most participants reported receiving insufficient support from others during training. Perhaps 'others' here refers not simply to the men's fellow students/colleagues but also to broader, everyday interpretations of being a man and the meanings attached to men asking for help, expressing vulnerability and/or receiving support.

This left Mike feeling not good enough and not fitting in. He was providing neither for his clients (as per the norms of the NHS) nor for his family (as per the gender norms of society). As he put it, "the word that leapt to my mind was actually 'emasculating'" [MIKE26, p.9]

Mike stood out from the others in that he has not gone down the road of private practice, instead relying on an income from employment as a psychotherapist, primarily within the NHS. He appeared frustrated with his current situation and at a loss as to what he could do next. It all seemed a far cry from his fantasy of a fairly comfortable private practice involving just a few clients a week. Whereas the other participants shared a conviction and passion about their career that counterbalanced the uncertainty and strangeness, Mike appeared at odds with them. However, his relatively recent job loss needs to be taken into account, and it might have been useful to speak to him a few months later to see whether circumstances had altered his perspective.

Becoming a (male) therapist has a paradoxical impact on relationships. Participants embrace a new identity, one considered to command respect and sometimes feared as powerful and knowing, yet they simultaneously withdraw from relationships as their new career, isolating

and diverse in comparison with their previous work, unfolds. They perceive gender as a differentiator at different stages of becoming a therapist; at each stage there is a sense of being 'other gendered' in a profession largely populated by women. On the one hand there appear to be distinct advantages to being male, not least the lack of male competition for paid client work. On the other hand, the men find it difficult to form bonds with their mainly female co-trainees. The relative absence of other men makes it difficult to find others with whom they could be friends. There was a sense that the women had a different experience from theirs and that their stronger connection was gender based.

For participants, marginalisation involved increasing isolation at the same time as they were developing deeper, more intimate relationships. The very thing that brought such increased levels in intimacy and authenticity seemed also to involve a withdrawal from social circles that had existed hitherto. Their therapy world was a very private one, kept away even from partners and family. The rarity of other men in the profession meant fewer social and peer networking groups where they could safely share their experiences.

The experience of becoming a therapist involves a dramatic shake-up of relational intimacy. There is a co-creation of relational difference (or distance), through marginalisation in some cases but also through respect for developing skills seen as worthy of awe and reverence. Both aspects appeared meaningful in terms of how the participants felt about themselves (self-acceptance) and by others (belonging), and this marked a significant shift away from their previous career. The men now had a heightened sense of intimacy, one which they

calibrated in response to this ambivalent allure of acceptance. Their new career could sometimes be a source of frustration, contributing to the lostness and uncertainty intrinsic to the pilgrimage.

Like the pilgrim, the male therapist is often apart from the world, socially and professionally walking alone.

5 DISCUSSION

This discussion chapter is divided into two parts: firstly, an exploration of the findings as seen through the existential lens provided by Heidegger and Kierkegaard, and secondly, a critical review of the findings in the light of contemporary literature, with the focus on *masculinity and therapy, becoming a therapist, and men and midlife*.

1.15 The findings through an existential lens

Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger emphasise the importance of language, and both opt for a side-ways, indirect mode of communication. For Kierkegaard, the truth has to be found within the reader, who has to be guided towards inner revelation. Heidegger, too, is less concerned with subjective truth than with the revelation of being through works of art. His writing represents a poetic expression which reveals that which was concealed but recognised as truth only by truth's inherent conflicting and paradoxical nature (Heidegger, 1975)

My aim to understand this phenomenon through an existential lens is bound up with my wish to highlight lived experience by revealing the clearings through which dark and shade

fall naturally. Like the forest, that which is revealed, is both timeless and of the moment simultaneously.

My efforts to achieve **orientation, strength, richness** and **depth** in my themes are evidenced in the findings. A reflective discussion of each theme now follows.

1.15.1 A FERMENTING DISCONTENT

All the participants reflected on prior experiences which had honed their knowledge of therapy and facilitated an appreciation of being with an-other in a more dialogical, meaningful way. This meant that when they were confronted by change in their previous job (for example, redundancy or retirement), they could draw on these prior experiences. This facilitated their discovery of other, more authentic and fulfilling modes of engaging. In other words the possibility of an alternative mode of being was always in the background for these men, awaiting an opportunity to emerge. This mode of being also marked a change in attitude from one of compliance and conformity to one of defiance and rebellion, aligning with the Kierkegaardian idea of 'making [life] more difficult': in other words, finding a path that forces a confrontation with anxiety whilst enabling the pursuit of a more subjective truth (Kierkegaard 2013a).

As participants navigated a passage through training courses and workshops in their quest for a more fulfilling career/life, they embraced a more uncertain existence. They seemed to approach the new career with hope or faith rather than any kind of certainty about where they were going or what the end result might be. This is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's response to 'despair' (Kierkegaard, 2008): the idea that we struggle to live with the infinite and the finite (or between possibility and necessity). For Kierkegaard, we cannot navigate this through logic or reason. There is no safe passage to avoid our despair and offer sanctuary to our weary, concerned, uncertain response to this situation. However, there is a path that can support us in our despair, one which can only be discovered through a leap of faith.

I suggest that this is echoed by the participants, who hold a faith about their new career: one which, although filled with uncertainty and otherness, also holds meaning and the possibility for growth. There is a felt sense that it is the right path, despite it not having the financial justification, status or other factors that provided tangible reinforcement of their choices in the past. Yet, as with the more religious depiction that Kierkegaard offers, faith can also be tentative, wavering and without solid ground. It is therefore maintained on an ongoing iteration of despair, followed by faith, followed again by despair. Goethe describes this persistent re-establishing of the faith in the ultimate lesson learned by Faust:

Yes! To this thought I hold with firm persistence;
The last result of wisdom stamps it true;
He only earns his freedom and existence
Who daily conquers them anew. (May, 1973, p. 168)

1.15.2 PILGRIMAGE AS PROJECT

Heidegger's concepts highlight our tendency to continuously adjust our position in life and with others, shaped by facts over which we have no control yet are able to find the freedom and motivation to determine a meaningful destiny. In alignment with this, the theme 'Pilgrimage as Project' highlighted for me an attunement or *befindlichkeit*, an overall way of being corresponding to the transition from former career to becoming a therapist.

Whilst the three themes overlap and persist in one form or another, all eventually seem to come together under the umbrella theme of 'Pilgrimage as Project'. The initial awakening to meaninglessness is re-shaped towards an ongoing enquiry as part of the pilgrimage. According to Yalom (1980), meaning and sense of purpose, while closely related, have differing etymologies: with the former there is a sense of coherence, while the latter conveys a sense of direction. This suggests that 'Becoming a Pilgrim' depicts a sense of meaning rather than a sense of purpose, which is repeatedly discovered and lost along the way. All but two of the participants had only a vague idea of becoming a therapist, with the possibility of a new career emerging after a lengthy period of training. For all participants, there were milestones in their journey towards officially becoming a therapist, which was regarded as distinct from the ongoing training they engaged in and whose sense of continuous development and growth was seen to form part and parcel of being a therapist.

The pilgrimage also involved fluctuations in relationships, captured by the third theme (The Ambivalent Allure of Acceptance). This emerges not as a discrete process but as part of an ongoing, iterative awareness of one's relational dimension that contributes to the sense of meaning. Since becoming a therapist has no clear end point, the theme of pilgrimage seemingly persists well into the new career; it continues to develop, something which resonates with my own sense of uncertainty, homelessness, being-at-home, struggle and determination. The participants grapple with their new career with a familiar uncertainty.

Many therapists and philosophers suggest that in order to become conscious (in the sense of being aware), we need to unlearn how we see the world first (Gerzon, 1992; Heidegger, 2010; Husserl, 2012; Lesser, 2013; Spinelli, 2006). In other words we must learn to be lost again. This aligns with the existential philosophy of Husserl, who claimed that we must attempt to discover the world as it is (*zu den sachen selbst*), instead of how we imagine it to be. Doing this requires a kind of detachment from our everyday situatedness – a separation from our cultural, historical, already-in-existence way of previewing the world so that we can learn to relate to ourselves and the world with fresh eyes:

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time (Eliot, 1945)

This is also congruent with the existential literature referenced in earlier chapters. It is reminiscent of Heidegger's "voice of conscience" (Heidegger 2010, p.258), the response to a sense of *fallenness* where the individual slips into an everyday way of being by following

others and neglecting his/her own freedom to choose. This freedom arrives with its own inevitable dilemmas, not least the discomfort of uncertainty and the possible regret which accompanies free choice. Hence, each choice means confronting uncertainty and each confrontation is a way of being momentarily lost in the world if the pilgrim chooses to live consciously. In the literature review, Mugeraurer (2008) uses Heidegger's term *uncanny* to describe this experience of *unheimlichkeit* or *not-being-at-home*, which emerges when *Dasein* responds to the *call*.

1.15.3 THE AMBIVALENT ALLURE OF ACCEPTANCE

As Mugeraurer (2008) points out, *not-being-at-home* can only be experienced if there is an awareness of home in the first place. Homelessness ceases to be if a new home is discovered. Hence we are homeless when are not at home or away from home and only through our relationship to home. Without a connectedness to what we call home, there can be no homelessness:

Thus, to question homelessness is to question humans and that in respect to their being no longer or not yet at home. It is to question apartness and togetherness as occurring at the same time (Mugeraurer, 2008, p.61).

This brings the themes of *fermenting discontent*, *pilgrimage as project* and *the ambivalent allure of acceptance* closer together as interrelated aspects of the same phenomenon. To recognise our *discontent* (meaninglessness) is to dwell with our uncertainty; this is a way of

leaving home in order to find it and a way of relating to others (and otherness) simultaneously. We are away from home when we have a relationship to home that involves separation through relationship, time and/or space. Maybe we are returning to this home or maybe we will find a new home. Even the new home for a while is new only in relation to the 'old' home. Hence, our relationships and in particular our degree of closeness or togetherness are brought into awareness, which aligns with the calibration of intimacy described within the theme *Ambivalent Allure of Acceptance*. Heidegger referred to this awareness of intimacy as 'distantiality' (*abständigkeit*) (Heidegger, 2010, p.122), a means of measuring ourselves with respect to others as part of our care for them. In his research, Sussman (1995) included aspiration to a level of intimacy within a safe context as one of the factors for becoming a therapist, but did not go on to describe the ambivalence in this position.

Our experience of the other is also a key theme for Levinas (1979), who gives it a central position in his existential thinking. For Levinas, our confrontation with the other heightens our sense of individuality as we can only grasp at but never know the other as the other. The *ambivalent allure* becomes the pendulum swing of our relational being as we dip into what Levinas refers to as "infinity" (Levinas, 1979, p.48) in the face of the other (otherness) before retreating back to the self.

The participants experience homelessness (otherness) through the strangeness of their new working relationships. They plunge into a world of difference in terms of gender, levels of

intimacy and sense of being-seen. With their career change, participants shared a shift in relational awareness which made them more responsive to what they had experienced in previous careers as well as what they have today. A sense of distance was expressed through marginalisation and isolation whilst closeness was identified through relational intimacy and the sense of kudos related to being a therapist in the eyes of others.

Reflecting on my own existential assumptions and situation the themes which have arisen surprised me. They were not centred on ideas of mortality and midlife as I once thought they might. Instead, what was revealed said more about meaning and relationships. These also speak to my own experience but in a way which I find novel and thought provoking. It steers my focus away from temporality and urgency towards being more present and relational.

1.16 The findings in the context of themes from the literature

Here I critically examine the findings in terms of the themes highlighted in the literature review: *Masculinity and Therapy*, *Becoming a Therapist*, and *Men and Midlife*.

1.16.1 MASCULINITY AND THERAPY

The theme *Ambivalent Allure of Acceptance* reflected the many changes in the degree to which the participants' related to others. Regarding masculinity, I was at odds about including this subject in the literature review, feeling that my focus on men had inadvertently led me in this direction. A comment made by the Ethics Board during the approval stages for this research suggested that I had not fully justified the rationale for focussing on men. Personally, I was not in the least concerned – or so I thought – about masculine issues, feeling that feminist issues were more pertinent and that feminist theory represented a catch-all for most disenfranchised and oppressed members of society. What I hadn't considered was that some men also seem to carry with them a sense of inherent guilt about their masculinity in a context of continuing oppression of women, and therefore decline to have a voice when they find themselves positioned as a minority. In the case of the current research, Jack, Mike, and Richard seemed to manifest such guilt.

Additionally, the word 'men' invited me to consider the role of men in society, therapy, training, and work in general. The more I read, the more I realised that the lack of men in the therapy profession involved more than issues of equality or representation. It spoke to me about men and their freedom (or ability) to express certain emotions, thoughts, and feelings in a safe, empathic and healing space. This was echoed by my reluctance to engage with the participant's views on marginality for fear of condemnation or accusation of further male oppression. This in turn, was counterbalanced by the need to accurately, authentically

and reflexively represent the meanings behind the participant's words but made this particular theme one which I struggled with for some time.

That men feel subject to certain gender norms which impact their expression of emotions was highlighted in the literature review. It interested me that my own emotional response to participants' words as a researcher, could be a part of a co-created problem: that by maintaining a certain reserve in relation to controversial issues, I might inadvertently be colluding with the depiction of men as invulnerable, avoidant of emotional contact and outsiders to the therapeutic community. I sought to value my participants' candour whilst acknowledging that there is no blame to be found, just information to be revealed.

In the literature review, Heppner and Heppner (2009) refer to the adverse reaction of others to men who choose non-traditional work roles. Although none of the participants reported negative reactions of this type, I wonder if this might still be a facet of *ambivalent allure*. Perhaps the men, while made to feel special through their difference, also suffer rejection by others. Good and Brooks (2005) discuss the challenge of 'Gender Role Strain' (GSR), in which the demands of living up to contradictory and paradoxical gender norms can result in various mental health problems.

In the literature review, ambivalence was discussed as a particular response to the tension between conforming to gender role norms and consuming unhealthy levels of alcohol to cope with problems. Perhaps participants in the current research were experiencing a

similar ambivalence in relationships, as a result of GRS and the stress involved in adhering to inconsistent, contradictory gender role norms.

While the sub-theme, *being marginal*, could well have been a theme in its own right, I saw it forming part of an overall shift in how these men experienced different relationships in the transition from former career to being a therapist. This sub-theme, which emerged very powerfully both in the pilot interview and in the main project, highlights possible gaps in how services are offered and therapists are trained.

The ambivalence of male therapists towards feeling part of the therapy profession does not support the long-term aspiration of creatively modifying services to support those members of society who feel disenfranchised by the options currently available to them. The report by Robb, Featherstone et al (2015) concerning the lack of male role models in society suggests a need for more gender-balanced, creative and sensitive attention to developing alternative channels of support. This might lead the reader to conclude that counselling is simply an alternative for those who might still want *that* kind of support. However, counselling/therapy might also need to consider becoming more open to more imaginative ways of engaging disenfranchised members of society, not simply the inner city young men discussed by Robb, Featherstone et al (2015). Providing support for men requires further discussion and ongoing research.

The current study has revealed much about participants' sense of marginalisation and how this can in some cases result in a reluctance to express certain points of view. For some male therapists, it appears, marginalisation inclines them to self-censor, collude with the safe majority or never challenge opposing viewpoints. While gender neutralisation of therapy may offer one response to this problem, it might make therapy less accessible to clients unable or reluctant to share deep emotional feelings or demonstrate signs of vulnerability due to GRS (Good & Brooks 2005).

During training, I chose to work with an older female therapist whose nurturing tone of voice, kindness and empathy I connected with: this was what I wanted at the time. During my sessions with her, I rarely showed much emotion, and certainly didn't swear or raise my voice in anger. In some ways, I took care of her in the same way as I did my mother, who was widowed at the age of 43. Reflecting on that experience I wonder whether in the end my need to 'be good' involved adhering to the societal norm of 'being strong', which I then reflected back to the 'mother figure' in front of me. While I valued the warmth of this therapist, perhaps I might have explored further and deeper with someone (male or female) with whom I could take more risks. Such musings lend weight to the idea that, within the discussion about recognising difference across the gender continuum in therapy, more attention needs to be paid to such issues during training.

1.16.2 BECOMING A THERAPIST

The literature review provided an overview of some of the many articles and books on the subject of becoming a therapist. I resonate with much of the analysis offered. As already discussed, the topic of becoming a therapist was not the focus of this study, which began as a simple explication of the meanings involved in the transition from a former career to become a therapist. This research has revealed something of the complexity of this transition, and its possible relevance to issues of masculinity within the counselling and psychotherapy professions.

Within the findings there is an implicit acknowledgment of what Hawkins and Shohet (1989, p.11) call the “hidden need for power”. When participants anticipated “respect” or “status” in their new career, I heard this as a response to a former sense of powerlessness. Whilst they achieved that sense of respect from some of their clients and acquaintances, it is not conclusive from the data that they felt more powerful as a result although there were moments (like being at a party) when their title could incite fear and uncertainty in the other and lead to the perception of power [PETE7].

In Dryden and Spurling’s (1989) study, each contributing therapist was invited to write a chapter in which they responded to a series of questions. As the authors note, some contributors declined to answer some of the questions, while others felt the questions would constrain what they had to say by “trying to fit complex human experiences into

discrete numerical pigeon holes” (Dryden & Spurling, 1989, p.217). One chapter offered a critique of certain therapist goals and aspirations; among other things, it drew attention to the difficulty of being open when, in professional terms, therapists are called upon to operate quite clandestinely:

Appropriate discretion should be exercised in matters of this nature. Risks of exposure, undesirable admissions, unconscious distortions, retrospective methodology, and constraints of present day exigencies all detract from the possibility of uncompromisingly, honest presentations (Dryden and Purling, 1989, p. 216).

This was a suitable critique of the revelatory nature of the book, as well as of research such as mine. A further point of criticism involves the selection of contributors. Rather than being “run-of-the-mill” therapists, contributors were hand-picked as well respected, published authors and researchers in their own right. Arguably they came with a flair for writing and the artful ability to balance the line between honest reflection for educational purposes and unconstrained self-disclosure.

In contrast, the participants in the current research were random responders to an advertisement, drawn in some way to tell their story and share their experience. This in itself suggests that these were people with something to say. I was aware that the therapists in my research were interviewed by another therapist (myself) which could have introduced risk of shame or professional incompetence. Whilst personal details have been changed to prevent identification, the content might not guarantee this possibility and recognition of individuals may still be feasible to those with sufficient knowledge. This was

mitigated through seeking out more phenomenological responses by enquiring mainly about the *'what'* and *'how'* of their experiences rather than leading them towards speculation. While open-ended questions enabled them to wander quite freely, I was also able to help them focus in on meaningful moments, or ones that proved turning points when relevant. Since I was more interested in their phenomenological lived experience I attempted to attune to this during the interviews.

In the case of one participant this proved particularly challenging and I detected a little inner frustration on my part as I pushed for disclosure of a specific moment of clarity, one that stayed in his memory as a significant turning point. All the other participants had described such moments: perhaps times when they felt particularly disappointed with their first career or when the idea of becoming a therapist suddenly entered their awareness and brought about mental, emotional and physical change all at once. Aware that I was pushing for something I wanted to hear from this particular participant, I took this as a timely reminder of my need to remain phenomenologically open and in the therapeutic stance of inclusive detachment, with one foot in my world and one foot in his. I had to remember that in this instance I was a researcher, not a therapist facilitating change in the other. This meant that I needed to bracket my quest for concrete examples in a situation where they simply didn't exist, whether in the participant's vocabulary or in his memory. Interestingly, the modality of this particular participant was psychoanalytic, and perhaps because of this, I felt a slight disconnect with him during the interview. However, after dwelling with his recording and transcript, I discovered a delightfully rich narrative that avoided flowery, poetic and

corporeal adjectives in favour of a more journalistic approach that nevertheless revealed much about his journey.

Becoming a therapist seems to hold many possibilities for the participants in this study. It is a very meaningful transformation, one which helps them make use of existing skills whilst offering the potential for future development and growth. Paradoxically, it both enhances a sense of relatedness through the richness of the therapist-client connection and brings about a sense of isolation by virtue of reduced peer contact and solitary working. Such isolation is reinforced by the marginalisation associated with being a man in a largely female profession.

The metadata derived from existing research on becoming a therapist highlights another significant aspect: that the process of becoming a therapist also involves personal curiosity about the reasons behind this choice. Such curiosity leads some therapists to write about this phenomenon, and I wonder if it is further evidence of a new, uncertain and conscious way of being that occurs when we become a 'pilgrim'. Different philosophical backgrounds might lead each therapist towards their own (often psychoanalytic) mechanism for interpreting this motivation but none has attempted to explain 'what it is like' from a purely phenomenological viewpoint, as I have attempted here.

1.16.3 MEN AND MIDLIFE

My findings suggest that an existential view of midlife is more about growing awareness of meaning (or meaninglessness) than about time or age: more *kairos* than *chronos* (Hollis 1993). As mentioned earlier, this outcome surprised me. Only one participant (Neil) brought mortality (albeit implicitly) into his account of his situation before retraining. The others considered age with a sense of “I wonder what I’ll be doing when I am X years of age”: a projection into the future, with the realisation that what they had been doing was no longer sustainable or meaningful.

Interestingly, the idea for this project came to me following an exercise in which I had reflected on my current position by posing the question ‘where am I right now?’ Prior to this study, I had concluded that my career change was about midlife and growing appreciation of mortality. I was therefore surprised when such concerns did not really materialise for my participants. This is not to say that these are not aspects of their motivation to change, but rather that there was no phenomenologically significant emergence of midlife or mortality as a theme from their narratives. Whilst age was mentioned by some participants, it was not consistent or powerful enough to stand out.

For some participants, age meant retirement and ‘what next?’ For others it meant a sense of now or never in terms of a window of opportunity to retrain. Or it was simply an indication of life experience, one which contributed to participants’ sense of readiness for

work as a therapist. In other words, while age played a part based on an individual's particular vantage point regarding career change, it did not manifest as a major motivation. What emerged more powerfully was a sense of metamorphosis, a midlife turn towards greater authenticity (Gerzon, 1996).

Another theme to emerge from Dryden and Spurling's (1989) study was the 'search for wholeness and integration'. This raises the possibility that, for participants in the current research, this might be an aspect of their thirst for "meaning" (in the sense that Yalom uses when talking about meaning as a sense of coherence (Yalom 1980)). Gerzon (1996) argues that there has been insufficient research into the experience of midlife transformation. Although addressing this gap was not a specific objective of the current project, I would argue that the findings contribute to this overall goal. In the theme *Pilgrimage as Project*, the sense of uncertainty described by participants somewhat resembles the unsettling period of confusion whilst hungry for the "inexpressible" discussed by Hollis (2001, p.92). The ambiguous quality of this period, already identified by previous research, in turn receives fresh affirmation by the findings of the current study.

However, my findings challenge the view of Gerzon (1996) that anxiety is a result of failing to embrace the quest for greater authenticity in midlife. Participants' accounts suggest that anxiety may actually be a necessary aspect of the transition, and an integral part of living more authentically rather than a consequence of its avoidance. The findings do however

align with Levinson (1991) who described the ambivalence of seeking both authenticity and acceptance by society simultaneously, resulting in tension.

In the literature review, Jung was mentioned as seeing midlife as a challenging spiritual journey for which there was no “school”, since religion no longer fulfils that role for modern man (Jung, 1961, p.124). This research suggests that, for my participants, becoming a therapist involves a development of otherwise dormant aspects of the self; it provides a safer environment in which to explore, thereby perhaps fulfilling the role of Jung’s otherwise absent “school”.

In the literature review, authors such as Bly (2001) lamented the loss of mythology as a means to understand male development. This was also echoed by Tick (cited in Sussman, 1995) when commenting on Joseph Campbell’s monomyth concept involving stages of masculine development: Stage 1: Departure from the norm; Stage 2: Breaking down the former concepts of life, learning skills and gaining resources; and Stage 3: Returning to the world with renewed wisdom.

There are similarities between these stages, the themes uncovered in this study and a story told by the poet David Whyte (2007): One day, a thirty-year-old man discovers a corpse on the threshold of his home. Fearing that he will be blamed for the death, he flees the village, leaving behind his wife and sons. After travelling some time, he arrives at the house of Solomon, who offers him work. The man serves Solomon for the next 20 years. Upon leaving

Solomon's employ he is given three pieces of advice at a cost equivalent to his earnings over the 20 years of service. The advice seems bizarre and nonsensical but saves his life as he makes the long journey back home to his wife and sons. Armed with all he has learned about himself, the man establishes a renewed and improved relationship with them all.

Whyte sees the discovery of the corpse as a mechanism for revealing the death or loss of something essential within oneself (*fermenting discontent*). The man then endures a journey of struggle and isolation (*pilgrimage*) before returning as a more integrated self, able to embrace deeper relationships and discover more meaningful work (*ambivalent allure of acceptance*). The discovery of the corpse reminds me of the discovery of meaninglessness through changes in lifestyle. We find ourselves confronted with death – not necessarily in the form of our mortality, but in the form of the part of ourselves that we sacrifice in order to follow a certain path in life. The apprehension that this was our choice for which only we can be found guilty projects us onto a new path in a strange land. Here we lose the familiar relationships and habitual nature of everydayness and start to rediscover the parts we have hitherto neglected. Like new places, the lessons appear strange, vague and even meaningless until revelation occurs to demonstrate their value. The return home is a celebration as we discover the old relationships anew; those close to us have changed but more importantly we return more integrated and wiser than when we left.

2 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

This chapter begins with a critical evaluation of the methodology used in this study, before applying a critical eye to the method followed. In the third section, I explore the implications and relevance of the findings of the research to professional practice and training.

2.1 Evaluation of methodology

Hermeneutic-phenomenological methodology relies less on distancing the researcher from the data through controls and scientific method than on revealing the deeper meanings that can only be accessed via direct engagement and “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 2004, p.337). In the current study, my task was not to bring clarity to the participants words themselves but rather to reach beyond their words, body language, tone and metaphors in order to explicate their pre-reflective lived experience and implicit meanings. Here, the challenge is to remain aware “of one’s own constant inclination to be led by pre-understandings, frameworks, and theories” (van Manen, 2014, p. 224). In order to achieve this, I needed to be reflexively attentive to my process. I feel that my several years’ experience as a phenomenological therapist, together with my scientific background, have helped me maintain this delicate balance. Although I can identify with the themes myself,

they emerged unexpectedly from the data, yet with an evocative felt sense that feels resonant.

Given my interpretivist epistemological stance, I found Heideggerian phenomenology to be appropriate for this project. I feel this choice is validated by the rich, evocative themes, which may resonate with many readers, regardless of gender or profession.

I chose to deal implicitly with any lifeworld existentials (corporeal, relational, temporal or spatial) (van Manen, 1990), allowing these to emerge only where relevant or as revealed by the participants' own words. I began but then declined to follow a process whereby lifeworld existentials are reflected on individually. For me, this was becoming too procedural and a step towards the structured methodology I aimed to minimise or avoid. Instead I elected to allow the lifeworld existentials speak through meaningful themes which are also of the lived world e.g. words like *pilgrimage* and *fermenting*, which are richly evocative in their own right. Some of the original lifeworld existentials revealed in the initial analysis phase are presented in Appendix G as an example.

2.1.1 FOCUS OF STUDY AND CHOICE OF PARTICIPANTS

That most of the men participating in this study revealed strong feelings about being marginalised in their new careers has made me wonder whether this research could have

been carried out with both male and female participants describing their experience of career change. This way I could have avoided any assumptions or pre-existing hypotheses about male to female ratios in the therapy profession, which I think at least one participant hinted at. My interest was never one of exploring male experience as part of a minority but rather that of understanding male experience of becoming a therapist as a human lived phenomenon, one that might say something more about the being of a therapist and the meanings behind this career change for men. While such an exploration might also shed light on the process of metamorphosis or change as experienced by men, this was secondary to the more phenomenological and open goal. Women too might share many of the experiences discussed by the participants. My choice to focus purely on men in this study was to narrow the sample with respect to particular masculine issues including midlife career change which may manifest differently for women (Bahr 2009).

I am critically aware that, prior to their interview, some participants may have formed the view that I was implicitly making a statement about men in the therapy and counselling profession. After reviewing the poster and letter of invitation, I could find nothing suggesting I might hold such a position. However, I remain curious as to whether some participants assumed a generic meaning to my research by virtue of our shared cultural horizon. In response to this, my use of the word 'men' in the research question has brought to the surface a curiosity that might not have occurred had I not researched masculine issues in therapy.

The more I researched issues around masculinity, the more I realised that this was an important and inseparable aspect of this project. I could not elect to interview men without justifying my case for doing so. Yet by identifying the gender differences relevant to therapy and society I also opened the door to broader issues within the profession. This in turn might be seen to turn the focus of the study towards gender-related issues and away from the actual phenomena under investigation. However, I cannot see how it is possible to explore such phenomena without contextualising them. The context of men, their emotional expression (or the lack of it) and the gender make-up of the therapy profession form the cultural backdrop to all the phenomena described by these men and, in some cases, the foreground too. For this reason, the study contributes to our understanding of their experiences as men entering the therapy profession and goes on to say something about the profession and its role in co-creating this cultural backdrop.

If a gender-balanced equivalent study might prove a useful direction for future research, so too might be an exploration of the experiences of therapists working within specific modalities. This is suggested by the qualitative differences I experienced when interviewing the only psychodynamically trained participant in the current study. In this case, such differences had little impact on the thematic findings, since this participant was not an outlier or anomaly across any of the themes. However, I wonder if therapists trained in some modalities might better access the immediate corporeal aspects of lived experience than others and whether CBT therapists might respond differently from more relational-based practitioners, for example. I am also curious as to the impact of a broader spectrum

of participants on me as a researcher, especially given my momentary frustration with the psychodynamic therapist during his interview. The participant responses and their manner of reflection might influence my line of questioning or curiosity, co-creating a very different experience for both. Further modality-specific research could therefore illuminate other findings notwithstanding that other contingent factors might equally vary the experience of the phenomena for a different interviewer at a different time.

2.1.2 EVALUATION OF METHOD

During the first interview I experienced technical problems following a successful start. All interviews were conducted in a private space with two chairs and a table on which I could place a digital recording device. During the first interview the recorder was accidentally switched to auto-record mode, which meant it switched itself on and off through the interview depending on the volume of sound in its vicinity. The first part of any sentence following a silence was cut off during the lag between recognition of sound and the start of recording. I had to begin the interview again and it is likely that the responses were somewhat affected as a result. On the other hand, since this was the first interview, it enabled me and my participant to be more fully relaxed for the subsequent recording since we had now benefitted from an impromptu rehearsal. After this incident I decided to run a back-up recording device during each interview.

The process of interviewing the participants was aided by the pilot study with a single participant. During interviews, I applied Kvale and Brinkman's (2008) suggestion of adopting a naïve stance (Kvale & Brinkmann 2008) whilst also attending to the "taking-up and re-living" of the experience (Churchill and Wertz, 2014). Keeping one foot (reflexively) in the researcher's role I was able to move between the facilitation and direction of questions and moments of deeper explication at certain points when particularly rich aspects of lived experience could be obtained.

As reflected on above, in the case of one participant, I was aware of missing his felt corporeal experience and asked him more than once to expand on something, which he robustly resisted. In retrospect, I now see that I was overly keen to reveal an experience which may or may not have been available to the participant but was not an aspect of the experience he was able to comfortably provide. I noticed my own frustration at the time and subsequently his, which probably coloured the responses that followed and possibly making us both less expansive than we might have been. Maybe it also says something about the frustration described within the phenomenon itself. Perhaps in future I can learn to be a bit more tentative with felt expression and pay more attention to their pre-reflective, implicit meanings instead. This moment also reminded me that if therapists can at times struggle with emotional content, how much more so might those individuals (men or women) who have been culturally conditioned to suppress emotions all their life?

For the most part, the other interviews went smoothly. It is possible that my background as a former corporate consultant-cum-phenomenological therapist supported a stance that was both rigorous and supportive. Coming from a culture which avoids overt emotional expression, I am sensitive to the possible impact I have on a client's sense of gender role strain (GRS). My researcher stance is therefore pre-tuned to this position and I was able to empathise and work with the participants in a respectful and ethical manner. I feel that this held the participants safely and facilitated a richer evocation of their lived experience.

Transcribing was a long drawn-out process during which I considered and declined the possibility of external support (for example, a transcription agency). It was important to me to dwell with the data across several different situations, transcribing being one aspect that required very detailed listening to each word, embracing the 'opportunity to pick up on nuances, hesitations (and) pauses...' (Etherington 2004), p.78). I also purchased a foot pedal so that I could listen, rewind and play without having to stop typing to use the mouse. This enabled me to type much faster and to replay parts over and over.

Once transcription was completed I had typed transcripts as well as recordings, allowing me to listen and read at the same time. I then repeatedly listened to whole sections at a time to get an overall sense of what was being said directly and implicitly. At other times, I could play the recording whilst making tea or running in the gym. This helped me hear intonation and nuances, especially with regard to the overall sentiment or meaning being expressed; I could listen for changes in emotion and detect fatigue, excitement and frustration. Multiple

listening sessions enabled me to change my own emotional state for each listening and perhaps attune to the *more* of each participant. Whilst this is not specifically prescribed by van Manen, it is a process I endorse and will follow in future.

The method of analysis I used was deliberately non-prescriptive. Van Manen's (1990) approach to researching lived experience, while presenting options for creativity, also generates uncertainty and anxiety around issues of robustness and quality of analysis. The detachment from method presented a creative space within which I attempted to analyse the lived experience of this phenomenon but offered scarce guidance how best to penetrate the data or explicate any findings. The iterations that followed helped me shape the final product through a process of writing and re-writing.

During analysis, I found it helpful to keep the following ideas in mind. Firstly, dwelling with the data is both an active and passive process and therefore takes time. Secondly, research is writing: dwelling does not cease when I uncover certain themes but is integral to the writing and re-writing activity. Thirdly, the space between my thoughts and the words on the page form the canvas onto which I project the lived experience I wish to describe; being reflexive regarding my own thoughts and feelings is an important part of this process. Finally, my goal is a rich, deep and evocative re-telling of lived experience. The themes must evoke a response in me that says "that seems/feels right". Along the way there will be several that evoke "yes, but that's not all". When I observe the latter there is something more that I am missing. I am not there yet.

With these ideas in my awareness I was able to loosen my hold on 'method', trusting that the explication of lived experience can only be revealed through the adoption of a more relaxed and natural attitude. This helped me to review the myriad of possible themes and attune to those that emerged as meaningful and therefore significant for the participants. The titles of the themes themselves needed to be evocative and meaningful in an immediate way to the reader, too. All three major themes -- Fermenting Discontent, Pilgrimage as Project, and The Ambiguous Allure of Acceptance -- required several rewritings before settling into forms with the greatest resonance and granting the 'phenomenological nod' (van Manen, 1990, p.27).

To aid evocative writing, van Manen (2002) suggests the use of "insight cultivators" (p.125) – the words, metaphors or poetry of others that help expand or clarify phenomenological experience. I made use of the work of Heidegger and Kierkegaard throughout to obtain the existential viewpoint I sought. In addition, I derived insights from the work of contemporary authors and poets such as Gerzon (1996), Whyte (2002) and Solnit (2010).

As part of the hermeneutic phenomenological process I attended to the narrative of each participant in its entirety as well as through individual words or sentences. Van Manen (1990) describes a holistic approach as one of three suggestions for analysis. Following this, I read the whole transcript, zooming in and out of phrases and paragraphs so as to see them both in themselves and also as contingent aspects of the whole. This enabled me to reveal an overall sense of each participant, reaching into hidden meaning and bringing forth their

lived experience in a rich and evocative fashion. This worked well for me as a first step to the process of thematic analysis. It helped me get an overall picture of their journey to become a therapist, their elements summarised in the sub-themes which emerged from each description.

I would argue that the summaries constitute an invaluable step towards penetrating the major themes which emerged across all seven participants. The process I used involved highlighting significant sentences as I read through the script. Then, without reference to the script, I would write a summary based on what I thought and felt each participant meant by the journey they described. I then repeated this process to check if there were any major omissions. I would recommend this as a first step towards thematic analysis.

I believe that my unstructured approach, which began with an idiographic focus before moving on to thematic analysis, has resulted in a more evocative re-telling of human lived experience than would have resulted from my following a more structured method. Whilst I attended to van Manen's lifeworld existentials in the initial analysis of the data, I felt that the current analysis was already rich and evocative. Any specific, explicit focus on the participant's spatial, relational, corporeal or temporal horizons might have resulted in a less holistic existential focus and detracted from the data already presented. As mentioned, it would also have added structure and method to the process, both of which I sought to reduce.

This project has explicated certain themes which have an evocative felt-truth with which I strongly resonate though they remain tentative and emergent. The fact that they stand out for me and my personal experience might indicate insufficient reflexivity, but throughout the analysis I strove to maintain my reflexive stance. As in my therapeutic work, I sought to reveal the experience of the participant rather than direct or influence their narrative

I have learned that research has strengths and limitations and that both open the door to other ideas which might not have been revealed without it. In hindsight I might have asked fewer questions throughout the interviews and instead invited participants to tell me their whole story from start to finish rather than punctuating this journey into logical phases for example, pre-training, training and post training periods. However, the benefit of my own approach was to avoid a prepared and well-trodden narrative and to refocus onto the actual experience as it is remembered. If anyone repeated this project I would encourage them to consider the impact of modality and gender. Would it be different for a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist or a female therapist, for example?

I feel energised and optimistic regarding the possibilities that might follow this small beginning.

2.2 Implications for training and clinical practice

In terms of the implications of the findings of the current study for therapy training and clinical practice, three aspects stand out: i) the possible need for greater gender awareness during training, with schools encouraged to embrace 'otherness' by including both masculine and feminine studies in the curriculum; ii) viewing the concept of pilgrimage as a possible response to life changing situations, and seeing midlife change as a challenge to be explored and embraced rather than a 'crisis' to be endured or fixed; and iii) understanding the experience of becoming and being a therapist as a way of being, of engaging with the world, consciously and relationally, in search of greater meaning.

2.2.1 GENDER AWARENESS WITHIN THERAPY TRAINING

The findings of this research suggest that if the minority voice is quietened in counselling groups this can lead to an imbalance in the way counselling is understood for both men and women. In other words, the masculine point of view may hold value for every aspect of the gender spectrum, not just the male part.

This being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of being of "the others" in such a way that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, disappear more and more (Heidegger, 2010, p.123).

Davies and Barker (2015) argue that gender and sexual diversities (GSD) should have a practical and theoretical integration within therapy training. They see the current model as one of “tokenism” and disregard for several other forms of identity, in particular LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender):

At best, GSD training is a brief workshop delivered by an LGBT student because they are ‘the only queer in the classroom’... They (LGBT) are frequently extremely isolated and constantly have to decide whether to confront prejudices from their peers – and even staff – or whether to stay quiet about it. The decision is often between allowing poor training to continue (and pass the course) and being the one who constantly has to be labelled as ‘difficult’ (Davies and Barker, 2015, p. 9).

This reflects the experience of the participants in this project, who felt closed down by their too frequently being the voice of opposition/difference. Davies and Barker (2015) also state that adherence to gender norms or expectations are a major cause of mental health problems and that the inclusion of training in this area would aid awareness and be beneficial both to the profession and to wider society. Whilst the research by Davies and Barker (2015) primarily focussed on GSD minorities, I would argue that any attention to other gendered experience would be helpful to everyone.

The co-created silencing of some trainee counsellors may perpetuate gender norms and collude with expectations that incline men to bottle up their emotions (or worse). If this is not discussed, how will trainees engage with the otherness of male/masculine clients who find it difficult to understand, let alone express, their emotional dimension? If talking is seen by many men as an inefficacious response to emotional problems (Wiley & Platt 2012), how

can we make space in therapy training to allow for these views and explore other, more accessible responses? If many men profess a reluctance to engage with counselling, is this something our profession needs to acknowledge and respond to?

In the United States, the American Psychological Association (APA) has long recognised the need to treat men within the therapy field as a minority group requiring special attention. For instance, it has set up Division 51 (The Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity) (APA 2015) to focus attention on masculine psychological and emotional health care. In its mission statement, the society pledges to “advance knowledge in the psychology of men through research, education, training, public policy, and improved clinical practice” (APA 2015).

Contrastingly, in the British Psychological Society’s online journal, an article by three female psychologists (Morison, Trigeorgis, and John, 2014) discusses the lack of male representation in psychological services in the UK. It notes that while the NHS has made efforts to provide more gender-specific approaches to health issues, this has largely meant a greater focus on female-specific issues, resulting in significant improvements in women’s services. The NHS has not delivered a greater focus on male issues, especially in relation to mental health.

A different situation prevails in Australia and Ireland, where there has been a targeted drive to address male emotional and psychological health issues head-on:

As far as we are aware there seems to be little included in training curricula to date on the extent to which men and women might have differing mental health needs, the challenges this could raise and potential ways of addressing such challenges. We suggest that closing this training gap is an urgent goal that would be relatively quick and simple to attain (Morison et al, 2014)

Morison et al (2014) argue that not all types of therapy are suitable for males (or females) who conform to certain masculine personality traits like stoicism and rational thinking. Certain types of therapy might also be off-putting to those who avoid introspection and discussion of deep thoughts and feelings. This view is echoed by Good et al (2005) who argue that men with a positive attitude towards self-disclosure, thoughts and feelings would most likely relate well to therapists with the same relational style. They add that therapists:

...must thus develop alternative approaches based on the socialization of men, with an awareness of social and cultural influences that make traditional therapy unappealing. (Good et al. 2005, p.77)

Today, the popular image surrounding counselling continues to be at variance with the stoic, 'just get on with it' attitude that many individuals identify with their emotional coping strategies. If this is the case, and if counselling agencies wish to embrace those (women as well as men) who think of counselling in this way, then otherness in all its complexity and difference must be welcomed into training.

The participants in the current study often felt themselves to be disenfranchised within the counselling world. Beyond silencing their points of view, this situation may be contributing to an overall lack of safe emotional outlets for many men in UK society. Whilst the findings in this research remain tentative, emergent and partial, they indicate a basis for more

specific gender-based studies. They also appear to align with McCarthy and Holliday (2004) in supporting the need for a kind of multicultural sensitivity throughout training which places gender-awareness on an equal footing with ethnicity, for example. This would hopefully create sufficient safety for minority groups (in relation to both gender and ethnicity) within the counselling world to speak up and be heard. While these ideas require further development, it is hoped that the participants' words will form a useful starting point for discussions concerning social divisions and marginalisation within professional training.

2.2.2 'BECOMING A PILGRIM' UNDERSTOOD AS A POSSIBLE RESPONSE TO LIFE-CHANGING SITUATIONS

The findings of this study suggest that the phenomena of loss, uncertainty and anxiety associated with different stages in life can be a meaningful, significant response to the situation in which an individual finds him/herself. In this study, the term 'pilgrimage' has been used in an attempt to capture the complexities involved. Irrespective of how it is labelled, however, this experience can be viewed as revelatory, transformative and 'normal'. Such a perspective might inform how professionals, in particular phenomenological therapists, could relate to certain life-changing problems that are brought to the therapist's door.

The traditional response to such presenting problems might well involve attempts to limit or stop the possible *pilgrimage* – to get the client back on a familiar, well-trodden path. For some clients this might be desirable and necessary but for others it could represent a lost opportunity for them to become more fully conscious of their lives and the choices they make. Maybe the ‘fix’ for anxieties like these is not to be found in pills or avoidance but in the education, acceptance and normalisation of such human dilemmas.

Pilgrimage might serve as a metaphor for training institutions seeking to encourage alternative ways of being in response to recommendations to evolve. Were it to be embraced by counselling schools, the *pilgrimage* could provide a practical basis for the promotion of more creative forms of therapy, ones that steer away from the traditional model whilst still embracing some of its philosophical underpinnings. However, it is beyond the scope of this project to explore such possibilities further.

2.2.3 UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE OF BECOMING A THERAPIST AS A WAY OF BEING

The findings of this study suggest that therapy training institutions would benefit from a perspective in which the process of becoming a therapist is understood as ‘more than’, and different from, that of most other careers or vocations. With such an understanding, training schools would have a greater opportunity to bring about awareness and facilitate

exploration of the challenges and trials of this unusual, sometimes anxiety-provoking career. What does it mean to be a therapist and to what extent do training schools bring this central question into the curriculum? It would seem that each school has a role to play in explicitly supporting trainees as they explore their own motivations and behaviour.

During training, not every course requires students to enter personal therapy, and those that do have few expectations from students, apart from their engaging fully with the process. Psychoanalytic therapy at least attempts to uncover the client's underlying motivations in all aspects of their lives. I would encourage schools to formally require every student to undertake a deep-going personal reflection on their aspirations towards becoming a therapist, with this viewed as a necessary and important part of their development.

In my own practice I have supervised therapists with several years of personal therapy behind them who still approach their own practice with a strong orientation towards fixing their clients with techniques and set strategies. I am curious about the implicit motives possibly lurking behind some of these well-meaning activities.

At the same time, training institutions need to be aware of the challenges faced by those for whom becoming a therapist is indeed a *pilgrimage*: an experience laced with uncertainty and anxiety. For schools subscribing to a more phenomenological point of view, further data

might be obtained relevant to this idea. This would be enlightening for the whole profession and would fill a significant void in our current awareness.

3 CONCLUSION

I began this project by airing my own curiosity regarding the experience of men who choose to become a therapist after a previous career; I wanted to explore and explicate what it was like for such men. I also commented on the relatively few men in this profession, against research which suggests that men's emotional lives could be better understood and supported, one aspect of this being through appropriately reframed counselling services.

During the interviews I conducted for this study, I found listening to other men describe the silencing of their voice in therapy schools both sad and familiar. Their experiences also pointed to an increasingly feminised culture which might preclude individuals who already struggle with the experience of Gender Role Strain (GRS) (Good & Brooks 2005).

My findings suggest that by becoming more aware of the obstacles to therapy, training schools could begin to reframe their services from within – starting with the environment that develops the practitioners of the future. Perhaps the challenge of making this possible within the teaching environment will lead to creative shifts within practice also.

During the course of this research, I revealed themes which highlight the various meanings of becoming a therapist. These themes exposed existential questions and motivations, in particular a pre-transition restlessness which fermented a feeling of discontent and

prompted movement towards a new career. The men began to notice a lack of meaning in their work which for the first time troubled them enough to seek something else. Moving towards something new felt risky and uncertain whilst also meaningful and impassioned. There was a sense of gained wisdom that had come through various life experiences and positioned the men with an unexploited talent that craved an outlet and the recognition (*acceptance*) that might come with it. The new career as a therapist involved huge shifts in relational intimacy. Being special and being real (authentic) emerge as important aspects of this experience.

This project has uncovered several ideas about becoming a therapist which, while not ones I had ever considered in my prior self-analysis, felt satisfyingly resonant for me and others with whom I have shared the findings (including many women and non-therapists).

The experience of rigorously carrying out the hermeneutic process and explicating such unexpected themes has had a significant impact on my process as a therapist and an individual. Quoting Gadamer, Finlay notes that reaching an understanding in dialogue

is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were (Gadamer, 1960/1996, p.378-379) (Finlay, 2011, p.59).

I began with little or no interest in masculine issues and so explored this aspect of the research question for reasons of academic rigour alone. As I uncovered more data pointing towards the differences in emotional support surrounding one half of our society, I started

to realise how even I – a male therapist – was conditioned to see *through* this phenomenon, rather than look *at* it directly.

During the course of this research, I have also become aware of my own *pilgrimage* as a man and a therapist. The uncertainty and anxiety therein has not altered through this awareness or with the passing of time, as I once hoped it would. Instead, I hold a more optimistic stance that these feelings represent an authentic and conscious way of being – one that I may choose to temporarily escape from on occasions, too. I have a greater sense of my own identity, of my movement towards relational intimacy or withdrawal as a mechanism to manage being seen more fully and the paradoxical tensions immanent of this process. Through difference and otherness I am able to expand the reach of my projects. At the same time, familiarity and sameness bring comfort and safety. I oscillate between these extremes.

My practice as a therapist has also been enhanced by this research project. The metaphor of *pilgrimage*, understood as something involving meaningful and conscious choice, has resonated with many clients, and has been useful in holding clients who are anxious, lost and uncertain about their future.

As I sat with the research data, reading through the journeys described by my participants, I became aware of a need to break free from certain restrictive bonds. Ironically the process has drawn out of me a passionate desire to travel: not in any mainstream sense, but rather

in the sense of exploring the environment through wild camping, living on the contents of a rucksack, sleeping under the stars and waking to breath-taking scenery. I am not sure if this is a response to the impact of years of study and isolation or whether my connection with the theme of pilgrimage over the last two years has evoked in me a very physical response: that of myself engaging with the world as a pilgrim, embracing uncertainties and lostness, without purpose or destination except to 'be'.

Gros (2015) describes a monastic order called Gyrovagues who, by walking ceaselessly (stopping only to sleep and eat), exist as eternal strangers. I don't intend to extend my camping experiences quite this far but I can relate to the idea in many areas of my life. I was not even aware of the parallel between my growing fascination and my project work until a friend brought it to my attention in conversation. I am curious about what I will discover on my wild camping journeys; I worry about the possible dangers and about being alone at night. Yet there exists an energy within me to be more grounded through contact with nature, without clear boundaries or direction and often in isolation. Simultaneously, I feel a separation from the banter and communal experiences I had enjoyed as a corporate employee. My isolation as a therapist seems to have stifled an otherwise ready sense of humour and lightness. As I strive to find a balance, I am aware that I, too, am more consciously calibrating my experience of intimacy, sometimes drawn towards isolation (like wild camping or being a therapist) and other times lamenting the absence of lightness and social interaction in the day-to-day running of a private therapy practice.

Kierkegaard tells us about a tension between the finite and the infinite (Kierkegaard 2013b; Kierkegaard 1985). In the latter, there are endless possibilities and we lack grounding as we dwell more in their fantasy. In the former, we tend to follow others and lose sight of our being and potential. The *pilgrimage* describes a way of being that echoes Kierkegaard's *faith* (Kierkegaard 1985) – a movement that is both grounding and exploratory of possibility at the same time. A focus on the destination of the pilgrimage can be frustrating, whilst an appreciation of its inherent paradoxical uncanniness (Mugerauer 2008; Heidegger 2010) brings us back to home in our homelessness.

One of the questions I posed on more than one occasion was whether the act of seeking explanations for the mysteries surrounding becoming a therapist was itself an aspect of being a therapist. I feel that the *pilgrimage* captures and embodies this curious position. Along with Jung, Bahr, Miesel, Jaques, Levinson, Hollis, Gerzon, Dryden, Sussman, Kottler, Dryden, Spurling, Rodman, Orlinski, and Bridges -- all mentioned in the literature review-- therapists over the years have not just supported the journeys of others; they too have been challenged to respond to the confusion surrounding their own journey to be a therapist.

Becoming a therapist following a former career is a relational endeavour which re-orientates the individual from a world of familiarity to a place of mystery and uncertainty. In doing so it frees them to be conscious, existing pilgrims who, as they tread the path ahead, are simultaneously lost and found.

A Walk, by Rainer Maria Rilke

My eyes already touch the sunny hill,
going far ahead of the road I have begun.
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;
it has its inner light, even from a distance –

and changes us, even if we do not reach it,
into something else, which, hardly sensing it, we already are;
a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave...
but what we feel is the wind in our faces.

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APPENDIX A – EXAMPLE OF SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

1. Can you describe your situation immediately before becoming a therapist – how old were you and what were you doing?
2. Can you describe how you experienced your former career?
3. Do you recall a moment when you first thought about becoming a therapist?
4. What was it like during the transition to become a therapist?
5. What is it like to be a therapist now?
6. How has this career change lived up to your expectations?

APPENDIX B – SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT

MIKE1 is a 51 year old male counsellor.

NS1: Mike, first of all thank you for coming today. I wonder if you can start perhaps by introducing yourself, if you're happy to include your age, tell us a bit about how long you've been practising erm and then perhaps you can tell me a bit about what your life and career was like prior to even thinking about becoming a therapist if that's okay?

MIKE1: Okay, okay, I am fifty one now and the first practice I did as a trainee was in 1997 so that's what sixteen years now and at that time I was still in my previous career which was involved in the oil and gas industry and I worked for a company that made meteorological and oceanographic measuring systems erm...and really since school I'd been in the sort of science technology and engineering kind of areas erm...and it was getting quite tough in that industry because it was going into recession at the time err and I was doing a lot of travelling, international travelling erm quite often at short notice erm and things would happen like I would get called to go off shore just before Christmas and there'd be no guarantee that I'd be able to get back on shore if the weather came in or something erm...and I got married in 1996 and looking around my colleagues in the industry it occurred to me that they were nearly all divorced err which didn't seem like a good thing to

me err so I started thinking about what else I might be able to do given my skills and attributes and the vision was to be sitting in a private consulting room seeing a manageable number of (monied?) clients every day and just sort of living a fairly comfortable home based life. So I spent about three years still working in the in the oil industry and training part time and then I made the decision to kind of leap.

NS2: Do you remember, was there any specific moment when you thought gosh, this is what I'd like to do? How did the idea of counselling come up for you?

MIKE2: So the idea of counselling came sort of came from a review of...if people tell me what I am good at what sort of things do they say and you know, they say that I listen erm that I am generally non-judgemental or I try to be, that I am quite patient erm... and quite thoughtful erm...so yeah a combination of skills and the lifestyle that I envisioned.

NS3: So you had a sense that you already had the skills to be a counsellor. Did...the word counsellor, was that already in your awareness at this time?

MIKE3: I think from really quite early on in the process erm actually the title that I was aiming at was psychotherapist erm and I used to sort of joke with people I didn't know exactly what was the difference between counsellor and psychotherapist but I thought I was about ten pounds an hour...erm so there was some element of status seeking I think, probably the baldest way to put it.

NS4: Can you say a bit more about...what did it mean to be a psychotherapist at the time?

MIKE4: It's a big word, it's hard to spell erm...I think from the preliminary research that I'd done that that was a post graduate career erm and actually my impression at that time was that was a more rigorous path erm I don't think that would quite hold true now but it would be quite common for someone to do a kind of part time diploma and that's it, off we go erm...

NS5: So there's something about the status of being a psychotherapist that was appealing as well as fitting in with your skills?

MIKE5: Err...yeah I think kind of coming up with the status idea is probably only something I've worked out for myself now that you've asked the question, erm...but there was also an element of I mean the ten pounds an hour joke was serious because I was doing the sums in my head as to whether I could make a living out of it or not erm and I was coming from a commercial environment I err I could understand about money in and money out.

NS6: So do you remember a specific moment when it became clear, 'yes I am going to be psychotherapist' were you sitting somewhere, were you...

MIKE6: No I don't think it was a single moment, it was something that crystallised over the space of about six months erm my, my company had had to let some people go and that

was pretty tough and I was at a senior level in the company so I felt a sense of responsibility for that and also a kind of sense of empathy for the managing director because we were quite a small unit I knew that it really hurt him to do that erm I thought it was quite possible I could have been next. Of course customers know what the state of the market is and how they can demand more and value less erm...and I'd sort of you know I'd been aware of that for a while but given that I was already in training by that stage err and I was two years into the MA by the time I actually changed over erm...I think for me the value of valuing increased erm and actually I left officially on the 31st December 1999 so it's quite symbolic.

NS7: So were you qualified or were you still in training?

MIKE7: I was in training and actually right up to the point that I left I didn't have anything to go to, I was in the fortunate position that my wife was in a quite well paid job erm and almost kind of serendipitously someone came along and said we need someone like you to deliver our training courses so that became my living for the next couple of years while I was also doing training placements in various places.

NS8: And were the training courses in psychotherapy?

MIKE8: Yes, counselling skills and theory. So in a way, you know, it was the level I had covered three or four years previously erm but the material was all pre-written so you know what they needed was a deliverer.

NS9: Right. How would you describe that period of training – that period of transition if you like, as you started to become this psychotherapist. What was that like for you? What was your experience of it?

MIKE9: Ummn it was very demanding erm you know particularly delivering theory modules, you know I had to make sure I was ahead of the students some of who were coming in with a high level of education and experience erm it was very stretching erm ... I was kind of aware that it didn't meet my requirements of being more valued. It was another environment where money counted and the objective was to get the most out of you for the least pay.

NS10: So you didn't feel as valued as you imagined you'd feel during that time?

MIKE10: Not in a commercial sense, now, actually not in a personal sense either because, you know, I was always in a freelance capacity erm I was always working within a fixed term contract so I was very, very dispensable.

NS11: And how did that make you feel being dispensable?

MIKE11: Well, surprisingly it was quite empowering erm and I think that it felt like this is quite challenging but it might be leading somewhere err... and I was certainly learning from it and being stretched by it...erm...but actually after a couple of years of that, one of my training placements advertised a post and I applied and I was appointed and that felt like a huge relief. It felt much safer. It was almost like that was an opportunity to calm down a bit and take stock.

NS12: Because you were given a full time role?

MIKE12: Yeah I was given a full time post erm it was within the NHS which was again, you know, that time was pretty secure, err it was a very supportive team and so we were doing quite difficult work but people around me knew what they were doing and knew what it was like to be new to the field and erm... and it created a routine for me. It kind of satisfied my original aim of being at home and in fact it fitted in very well because my wife and I were going through fertility treatment at the time so having actually some stability and always being at home was essential.

NS13: How did that fit with your original thoughts on what it was like to be a psychotherapist?

MIKE13: Well that was quite tricky because, I think like a lot of NHS jobs it wasn't labelled as a counselling role or a psychotherapy role ummn and so there was a bit of an identity

tussle and you know people very keen to say 'you're not a counsellor here' you're not here to do counselling. But you know, you recruited me entirely on the basis that I had been counselling. While I was volunteering as a trainee I could be a counsellor erm but actually the first thing that happened when I went full time was my supervision was withdrawn. That's ...that's for the trainees...erm.

NS14: So it sounds as though there was, although you felt a bit of relief and safe, was there sufficient safety in that role?

MIKE14: I think overall there was...there was lots to learn erm at least I could see the value that my training was having in terms of what I was able to offer to clients and I learned new skills and I learned about the NHS erm... and I think I came to understand err different ways of thinking about treatment – we called it treatment erm... and about organisations erm...

NS15: What can you say about your experience of being a man during those early transition stages?

MIKE15: I was certainly aware of being in the minority erm having come from heavy engineering which was completely the opposite erm...I think I ended up checking myself from always responding if kind of issues of women's rights and equality came up I ...my instincts were to say there's sort of counterbalance to that as well erm that became a bit

of a stuck record so I stopped doing it erm because of course in the NHS everyone's equal and we value diversity and we don't notice colour and gender and so yes we do – don't be stupid...erm...

NS16: is there any particular example or any particular experience you had where...

MIKE16: It was pretty good for a number of years erm and then you know the continuous turnover in the team and everyone was coming under more and more pressure erm when the team became less functional there was a...I will label it bitching because it was actually the women that were doing it – there was a lot of stuff being said behind women's backs a lot of assumptions being made erm a lot of motives being attributed to people's actions without any real basis for that erm...

NS17: Did this have a basis in gender...is that what are saying?

MIKE17: It's hard to say really erm the specific thing that I found really difficult was that people will tell me that I was being aggressive or over bearing or that I was exerting a lot of power in the team erm and even if those things were true that they weren't deliberate and I think there were quite a lot of times that it wasn't true and that you know that I was the representative oppressive patriarch regardless of what I did or said.

NS18: What was it like for you to be experiencing that?

MIKE18: I was really confused for a while erm and I saw that kind of people being advanced in preference to me and I didn't know why erm and there were one or two specific incidents erm...something had happened when there were no managers on sight and it was to do with dealing with the relative of a client erm and so I had taken it on myself to deal with it and no one had any issue with what I had done or how I had done it erm but when the person who was responsible came back they sort of marched into the shared office and said 'well thank you very much Mike, thank you for telling me about that, I really need to know about it' and marched out again and we all sat and looked after her and I said 'and thanks for dealing with that Mike' (laughs) it was just, just, and actually the response from one of my female colleagues was actually that's how it is you can't do right erm...

NS19: So was that a very different experience from your prior career?

MIKE19: Very different, very different and actually the oil industry can be pretty...they use the term rufy-tufy but actually people are very aware of watching one another's backs, keeping each other safe...physically safe erm and noticing if someone's struggling erm...

NS20: It sounds like there was a lot of...

MIKE21: There's a lot of compassion...yeah

NS22: Do you think there could have been more support for you as a man going through that phase in your career as a developing psychotherapist?

MIKE22: I think there probably could err I've probably learned over the last five or six years that I am not that brilliant at asking for support errm so there, there's a kind of mixture of the you know, there could have been more support there and I could have asked for more errm...I think with my female colleagues support was more spontaneously offered errm and it seemed like if they asked for support it was readily available.

NS23: So there may have been some assumptions on you as a man which may have errm impacted the degree of support that was offered?

MIKE23: Yes, asking for help did not feel safe towards the end of that job errm and just weird things went on, because I had worked out that I needed to leave and I sought out a secondment within the trust and that was offered to me and I went to my management and said that I've got this opportunity to go away for four months – and what that really means is that I am going – and they said 'no we can't release you for that...we can't take the risk that you might want to come back'. What about a year after someone had come back from maternity leave and they'd had that kind of experience of walk back into the building and suddenly I don't belong here I can't be in this space...they were in a new job within a week errm so that was very stark and I managed to get the job I mentioned to you in Reading and I phoned up the same person from the incident I described to you errm and said I am just

letting you know that I am putting my resignation in and her response 'well you got what you wanted then?' erm I think I've made the right decision.

NS24: So now, a few years later (Mikes says "ummn Groundhog Day" in background and laughs)...as you look back over your career, as you look back over the transition the thoughts, feelings and expectations that you had right as the beginning, how does that fit with your life now?

MIKE24: Well life now is a bit exciting erm... and it's almost like being right back in that first transition because I , I , erm got sacked in January so I am effectively out of work and in place again, and do I go all out to build a private practice or do I try to get into the NHS and make sure the mortgage is covered every month erm...so it's an interesting time to be asking the question...and having been brought along that road erm kind of understand that counselling and psychotherapy isn't this ready-made package that you walk into and it's all just nice and like you see it on television sit coms erm but just a couple of days ago I was at a job interview and someone said why don't you set yourself up in private practice, so I can kind of see that that perception exists that you sort of put a brass plate on the door and away you go erm where the reality is, I am seeing you today, I am on my way up to London to see one client erm I would just about break even on the day erm and that will be it till next Friday. So actually one of the thoughts in my mind is should I reverse that transition and go back to the offshore industry where there's now a massive skill shortage because all the people my age got made redundant fifteen years ago (laughs).

NS25: So you're in a place now where you're re-evaluating whether, whether it's still the right thing to do to be in this industry?

MIKE25: Which, I haven't re-evaluated in what should I be doing to make the best use of my skills and abilities and to create the kind of life that I want for myself but what has happened is lots of priorities have shifted erm and so now we have two children, there're not tiny anymore. If I was working away on oil rigs a lot of the time they would cope and they would cope a lot better with that than being made homeless erm...

NS26: So how does it feel to be a psychotherapist right now?

MIKE26: The, the word that leapt to my mind was actually emasculating

NS27: Can you say a bit more?

MIKE27: So I am, I am in a position where I am not currently providing for my family, whilst there's no kind of template in our family that you know the man must go out and be the bread winner; my wife's not earning lots of money anymore she's doing what she wants to do for an occupation erm we can both be doing that at the same time.

NS28: So there's a sense that financially at least that being a psychotherapist isn't sufficient to support your family?

MIKE27: That's the current state of play, yeah, erm I suppose I am kind of hanging on to the belief that that can change again erm but actually losing my job in the IAPT programme was an awful lot to do with 'we don't value the way you do psychotherapy' – erm you know I had tried quite sincerely to do CBT and it didn't work for me and you know at the end of that process, 'if you can't become an accredited CBT practitioner then you can't stay here'

NS29: So you had to do psychotherapy a particular way in order to maintain that job?

MIKE29: Yeah.

NS30: Can you say erm anything about erm about age and the relevance of age in terms of your transition and again, how that feels to be a therapist in your fifties?

MIKE30: Ummn, cos there's lots of different facets to that because all my working life has kind of been planned on the assumption that retirement would happen at sixty and you know that's not true for anyone erm but I guess when I changed careers I was around about forty and retirement still seemed like a long way off erm but now I am passed fifty and sixty's not that far off so it's kind of, different bits of the hat...err it was really odd as a trained, qualified psychotherapist aged forty eight to go into IAPT and have the job title trainee, and that hurt, that was peculiar, and to be treated like a new graduate really. But actual numerical age is not a key thing for me, I am glad to be able to draw on range of experience and I find increasingly if I say that in any work context people say there's no

focus, there's no kind of specificity on what it is that you do. What I do is loads of different things erm...

NS31: Was the experience that you had at the time of thinking about becoming a counsellor was that relevant for that age would you say?

MIKE31: Yes, when I first started the only relevance of age was to think if I embark on a new career at the age of forty there's enough time to make it work and I think that probably links in with what I was saying about you know choosing a post graduate training rather than the fastest training that I could possibly do, I felt there was scope to really work for five or six years towards becoming registered erm and I think the flip side of that was that was that I am also aware that counsellors and psychotherapists don't have to retire ever erm you know that might be something that I could do for as long as I wanted to, maybe stepping down and doing less erm...

NS32: Is there anything else you'd like to say before we wrap up today about what it is like to...to have gone through this transition?

MIKE32: Well that, only that if I was advising my former self I'd have lots of sorts of tips and wrinkles, I wouldn't be saying don't do it.

NS33: Mike, thanks very much for coming today. END

APPENDIX C – LETTER TO PARTICIPANT

NSPC Ltd
258 Belsize Road
London NW6 4BT

Middlesex University
The Burroughs
London NW4 4BT

Dated: [TBC]

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why 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?

The study is being carried out as part of my studies at NSPC and Middlesex University. I am interested in exploring the experience of men who decide to become therapists following a former career. What was experienced by those men who have made the transition and are now practising therapists? What motivated this transition? Does it hold particular meaning for them? What were the thoughts and feelings that they experienced before, during and after the transition?

You are being asked to participate because you have replied to my advertisement for men who are older than 30 and have become a therapist following a former career.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to attend an interview/discussion at a venue in Reading, Berkshire called 'Health and Education South' but the interview will be purely in the interest of research and not any form of therapy. The interview will be based around a set of questions, but not

restricted to them, and will last approximately one hour. I will use a qualitative research methodology – following van Manen’s framework to analyse the data gathered. I do not anticipate requiring any further assistance once the interview is over but I may return by email or phone to any participant for clarification should that be required during the write up or analysis stage.

What will you do with the information that I provide?

Confidentiality

The interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. In order to secure confidentiality I will use a coded name in the interview and can use a pseudonym if you prefer. The file will then be transferred to an encrypted USB stick which will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet when not in use. Other copies of this file will be deleted. Any other information that you provide to me will be stored under a project code and be unidentifiable by anyone else without a project key, which will be stored separately also in a locked filing cabinet. Excerpts from the data may be published verbatim if it helps to highlight certain findings.

Occasionally, for auditing purposes, researchers are asked to provide data to the institutional auditors, in which case names may be disclosed. An option to be exempt from possible participant data audits is available by ticking the box on the consent form.

The information will be kept at least six 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.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

As a therapist you will already be aware that reflecting on any aspect of your life can bring up many thoughts and feelings. It is impossible to predict how any one will react but in the interest of your wellbeing I must mention the slim chance of distress or anxiety which could arise at any point before, during or after the interview. I would therefore urge you to consider the support you may need, either through self-care or your own therapy if required. If you would like to discuss any of this before the interview I am happy to do so.

Although it 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 treated in confidence and used anonymously for research purposes only.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

As with the previous question, any process that involves reflecting on your life can bring up unpredictable thoughts and feelings. For some, this opportunity to reflect will be helpful, which as a practising therapist you will appreciate. That said, there are no intended direct benefits for the research participants, nor is this interview seen as a form of therapy or designed for anything other than research purposes. The main benefit is seen as the possible relevance the findings may have to the industry of which you are a part and the anticipated future recipients of the services therapists provide.

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 has reviewed this study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The Middlesex Psychology Department's Ethics Committee have reviewed this proposal.

Contact Details

Researcher: Nigel Smaller, tel: +44 (0)207 6240471, project_nigel@btinternet.com (note that first part is project_nigel)

Supervisor: Dr Linda Finlay, linda@lindafinlay.co.uk

Thank you for reading this information sheet. Please get in touch if anything is unclear or if I can help have further questions.

APPENDIX D - QUESTIONS TO ENCOURAGE REFLEXIVITY

(Langdridge, 2007, p.59)

1. Why am I carrying out this study?
2. What do I hope to achieve with this research?
3. What is my relationship to the topic being investigated?
 - a. Am I an insider or outsider?
 - b. Do I empathize with the participants and their experience?
4. Who am I and how might I influence the research I am conducting in terms of age, sex, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and any other relevant cultural, political or social factors?
5. How do I feel about the work?
 - a. Are there external pressures influencing the work?
6. How will my subjective position influence the analysis?
7. How might the outside world influence the presentation of findings?
8. How might the findings impact on the participants?
9. How might the findings impact the discipline and my career in it?
10. How might the findings impact on wider understandings of the topic?

APPENDIX E – POSTER REQUEST FOR PARTICIPANTS

Hello Fellow Therapists

I am a doctoral student seeking male therapists who have changed career to become a therapist from what they consider to be a significantly different career.

The study is being carried out as part of my studies at NSPC and Middlesex University. I am interested in exploring the experience of men who decide to become therapists following a former career. What was experienced by those men who have made the transition and are now practising therapists? What motivated this transition? Does it hold particular meaning for them? What were the thoughts and feelings that they experienced before, during and after the transition?

Participants should be over 30 years old at the time of changing career.

If the participant meets the criteria, he may be asked to attend an interview lasting up to 1 hour, which will be recorded.

Confidentiality:

The interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. In order to secure confidentiality I will use a coded name in the interview and can use a pseudonym if you prefer. The file will then be transferred to an encrypted USB stick which will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet when not in use. Other copies of this file will be deleted. Any other information that you provide to me will be stored under a project code and be unidentifiable by anyone else without a project key, which will be stored separately also in a locked filing cabinet. Excerpts from the data may be published verbatim if it helps to highlight certain findings.

Please contact me for a discussion and/or more information or feel free to pass these details to anyone who might be interested.

Many thanks in advance, Nigel Smaller

project_nigel@btinternet.com 07802 433064

APPENDIX F - DISSEMINATION

As the project developed I was able to present evolving findings in three different settings which served to elicit feedback helping shape and reinforce the project. Two such opportunities included presentations during 2014. The first was at the Middlesex University, Research Student Summer Conference Programme in June and the second was at St Francis Xavier, International Human Science Research Conference in August. In both cases I presented on “The Lived Experience of Men who Become Therapists Following a Former Career”. A further opportunity arose during a workshop entitled: “Men at Work – A workshop for men who work as therapists” which I attended in February 2015. During December 2015 I delivered a one day workshop for a counselling charity on the subject of “Working Therapeutically with Men”. These are discussed further below:

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY – RESEARCH STUDENT SUMMER CONFERENCE PROGRAMME
– 19TH JUNE 2014, HENDON

<http://www.cwa.mdx.ac.uk/MDXConference/Proceedings2014.pdf>

The research programme was introduced by Professor Hemda Garelick and covered presentations and posters from the Schools of Art and Design, Health and Education, Media

and Performing Arts, Science and Technology and the Institute for Work Based Learning in order to explore common grounds across all disciplines.

I delivered a 15 minute presentation with the same title as this dissertation based on the pilot study and the 6 further interviews I had subsequently analysed. The presentation covered the rationale for the project including justification from research literature and studies into gender difference across society, the phenomenological approach including an explanation of hermeneutics, its background and usefulness, and two of the themes subsequently revealed through the pilot study. I also summarised with a few ideas for openings and further discussion manifesting from this work.

ST FRANCIS XAVIER UNIVERSITY 33RD INTERNATIONAL HUMAN SCIENCE RESEARCH CONFERENCE – AUGUST 2014, NOVA SCOTIA

This is the annual research conference organised by the journal “Phenomenology and Practice”. Attendees included Max van Manen, Robert Mugerauer, Scott Churchill, Linda Finlay and several more well respected thinkers and authors of phenomenological research from around the world. My paper presentation “The Lived Experience of Men who Become Therapists Following a Former Career” was accepted for a 20 minute talk followed by 10 minutes of questions.

MEN AT WORK – FEBRUARY 2014

A workshop for male therapists to discuss what it was like being a male therapist seemed like an ideal opportunity for me to explore my findings and perhaps uncover some more. Several men pointed out the relief of being able to speak freely about how they experience training and groups whilst being in the minority for most of the time. They spoke about difference in approach which they considered more masculine and therefore perhaps frowned upon as less therapeutic for example, there was a difference between the more feminine energy of 'holding' versus the more masculine energy of 'doing'.

WORKING THERAPEUTICALLY WITH MEN – DECEMBER 2015

Interest in my dissertation has resulted in the manager of a local counselling agency (No22) asking me to run a CPD workshop around what it means to work with men for their counsellors. Initially concerned about the duality inherent in such a title or objective, I decided to approach the subject as an experiential workshop addressing the assumptions, challenges and experiences of working with what the attendees describe as masculine traits. I encouraged dialogue and thought around the meaning of masculinity in therapy for both the therapist and their clients. I intend to develop this further and offer it to other agencies around the UK also.

APPENDIX G – VAN MANEN LIVED WORLD EXISTENTIALS

Some lived world existentials are described in the table below, along with my reflection – which is based on the actual example plus my overall sense of the participant’s narrative.

| Existential | Participant: Reflection | Short Example |
|-------------|--|--|
| Relational | Jack: Jack feels singled out for being male. Female therapists avoided working with him if there were women around with whom they could partner. He is used to feeling unwelcome in the group. | “I often felt errm marginalised as a man frankly, errm if for example, not so much on the training course but yes, to some extent there but certainly all of the you know, weekend trainings or whatever workshops that I’d been on, if, let’s say for example, you know, you do a large group session and the tutor says ‘ok I’d want you to get into groups of three now and talk about stuff’ and the girls would go (makes whooshing noise) like that and I’d be looking around and nobody was making eye contact with me, they did not want to engage with me and I felt very excluded and that was a resounding thing for me throughout and is still the case, I still find that.” |

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| Relational | <p>Pete: Pete felt that the women on the course enjoyed closer ties with each other. He found it hard to penetrate their naturally formed groups and equally challenging to bond with the few men on the course.</p> | <p>“I found a lot of the women a little bit more difficult to relate to in that respect and I found the women a little bit more cliquish – they could almost make friends and groups of friends a little bit more easier. With us guys it was a little more difficult, partially because there was so few of us so I certainly would have appreciated a few more male colleagues as I was training.”</p> |
| Relational | <p>Richard: As well as running huge projects, Richard was required to carry out softer personnel activities which brought him into more intimate relationship with the men that were otherwise seen as expensive resources. The loss of his father brought this close to his awareness and he began aligning with this more human and relational aspect of his work more than the technology based cost improvements.</p> | <p>“I mean in my ordinary work erm most of my working career I’d had people working for me and when I left I had about thirty odd people something like that so you know, so you’re always coming across people that had you know, difficulties at home, you know, wife’s having a baby and can I have time off, you know, this sort of thing, and you did your level best to fit them in like you know erm and I did a lot of interviewing for promotions and erm recruitment and stuff like that as well, Royal Mail encouraged us to do erm as much of that as you know, in a sense, to do something else as well as what you were doing you know, and I think it was a wise</p> |

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| | | <p>sort of thing.. So I had quite a lot of personnel sort of things and I did enjoy that and you know I could usually get you know, people do a lot for me and I knew other people weren't as good as that you know, so I thought to myself well if I wanted to do something different and get away from engineering, then my father passing on, then you know the person helping me, that sort of six week introduction, it felt rather nice, you know, some of the soft personnel things that I had done before , it seemed like a big extension of that and that's really how I got into it errm but was there a particular moment, I never thought of it like that."</p> |
| <p>Corporeal</p> | <p>Neil: Neil embodies a sense of urgency which is powerfully expressed through sensations in his head and his chest, inviting him to get on with it due to his age (overlap with temporal existential), He feels that there is limited time left to succeed in making his life more meaningful to him and others – something he has felt in a previous career and lost.</p> | <p>"...it's still there I can feel it in my head – feel it in my chest that sense of 'I am fifty six – I don't have long you know. I still want to succeed' there's still quite an ambitious part of me errm that actually wants to do something errm significant in one way or another and I think that's what took me to TV in the first place and strangely has resurfaced errm in a different way err as I've moved into counselling and therapy."</p> |

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| Corporeal | Jack: Being a therapist and connecting is very powerful and meaningful to Jack. He experiences it like a deep and transformative breath, as though he has never breathed that fully before – as though he is just starting to live. | “...and what does that feel like...{takes a deep breath) I am doing it now and it’s kind of a breathing in and expanding your chest like it didn’t expand before errm and a kind of drawing upright and a kind of ... I am not sure how else to describe it ...” |
| Corporeal | Jeff: Training was physically effortful. It was a grudge which, added to the strain of an already long working day, became an act of physical endurance that was generally met with a sense of reward at the end. Like completing a long race or going to the gym, the benefit is mainly felt on completion not during. | “I felt very tired when I was training, working full time as a teacher and I would go up feeling ‘oh God do I really want to do this?’ when I went up there but I would always come home very late at night – 11 o’clock at night feeling very wide awake so think that errm it’s a bit like when you go to the gym or something, you think I don’t want to do this but at the end of the exercise you suddenly feel, you feel very good. So I felt really alive, it made me feel alive and it made me feel in touch with my emotions...” |

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| Spatial | <p>Mike: Imagining private practice involves seeing yourself at work, probably in a house with brass plate. It seems inviting and cosy not like the reality of having to commute with the potential of seeing just one client that day.</p> | <p>“...just a couple of days ago I was at a job interview and someone said why don’t you set yourself up in private practice, so I can kind of see that that perception exists that you sort of put a brass plate on the door and away you go erm where the reality is, I am seeing you today, I am on my way up to London to see one client erm I would just about break even on the day erm and that will be it till next Friday. So actually one of the thoughts in my mind is should I reverse that transition and go back to the offshore industry where there’s now a massive skill shortage because all the people my age got made redundant fifteen years ago (laughs). “</p> |
| Spatiality | <p>Richard: The space was emotionally defined by an attunement (<i>befinlichkeit</i>) that saw others as resources which needed to be curtailed. Everyone had a value and a cost associated with them. The space held this attitude.</p> | <p>“The benefit was always about shedding staff at the end of the day and erm Royal Mail changed – reduced from about 40,000 you know in a period of about 20 years you know, not entirely through my efforts but needless to say but you know, so that was an environment where reduction in cost was a continuous sort of thing erm and those projects I was on was improvements in machines reducing</p> |

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| | | maintenance. “ |
| Spatial | <p>Neil: Work often dictates logistics around familial and domestic concerns. Working far away means not being available for school runs and so on but also means maintaining a reasonable income. Staying at home, Neil can elect to focus on a different project/career whilst still being of value to the family.</p> | <p>“I used to work in television erm I worked for (X) Television the (X)TV company based up in Birmingham and Nottingham erm and I was working there for 12 years initially as a researcher, then a producer, director and head of department erm I was made redundant in 1996 erm and my wife and I had just got together at that point – she’s my wife now, she wasn’t then and we’d had our first child and we’d decided that we’d swap roles so I became home parents err she was in the same business but the other side, not the creative side so the business side and she was to get a job at (X) in White City and then down here in Bristol erm so effectively I became the home parent to our two sons erm I was looking after them – what I was trying to do at the same time was to create a career as a writer so I did an MA in creative writing at Bath Spa University College so we came down here...”</p> |

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| <p>Temporality</p> | <p>Mike: Being 48 was meaningful. On one hand Mike felt like an experienced professional who had a great deal to offer, yet by changing careers he felt patronised by the more experienced staff who treated him like a graduate trainee – something he felt he left behind a long time ago. Mike was hurt that his many other skills/talents and particularly his age were not appreciate in this new environment. At the same time there was a pressure to get to that point of respect before retirement which now aged over 50 seems much closer than when he began training.</p> | <p>“...when I changed careers I was around about forty and retirement still seemed like a long way off err but now I am passed fifty and sixty’s not that far off so it’s kind of, different bits of the hat...err it was really odd as a trained, qualified psychotherapist aged forty eight to go into IAPT and have the job title trainee, and that hurt, that was peculiar, and to be treated like a new graduate really. But actual numerical age is not a key thing for me, I am glad to be able to draw on range of experience and I find increasingly if I say that in any work context people say there’s no focus, there’s no kind of specificity on what it is that you do. What I do is loads of different things erm...”</p> |
| <p>Temporality</p> | <p>Jack: Age holds contradictions for Jack. He grew up in the 60s and 70s which was an age of enlightenment, free love and experimentation. It is known as being an era for rebellion and challenging societal norms. At the same time, Jack feels that the first part of his life was emotionally stunted and required forms of expressive therapy to help him awaken to the messages he had managed to hide from and avoid until now. The second half of life involves a recognition of these unexpressed</p> | <p>“...I know I really can’t really recognise that person that I used to be. I can’t believe that, it was like, I feel as though I lived half my life only being half aware, certainly on an emotional level being less than half aware and then that kind of got switched on through a lot of thrashing pillows and swearing and cussing and since it got switched on, I liked it so much I bought the company, you know, I’d just gone more into that area and I think I was really in denial of it in the first part</p> |

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| | <p>aspects of the self – responding to a craving that hitherto had no name or voice.</p> | <p>of my life....I don't know...I really don't know why that is but you know, I grew up in the 60s and 70s so that maybe tells you a lot, you know, err I thought life was about rock and roll and err...you know my heroes were people like Keith Richards so anything faintly touchy feely was not even on the horizon, you know, on the radar. But actually I think there was always a craving for it but I just didn't know it, I just wasn't aware of it."</p> |
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APPENDIX H – DATABASES ACCESSED

Middlesex University Databases: <http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/your-study/library-and-it-support/study-and-research-resources/journals-and-e-resources/databases>

Middlesex University Research Repository: <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/>

OpenAthens: <http://www.openathens.net/>

BACP: <http://www.bacp.co.uk/research/resources/dissertations.php>

American Psychological Association: <http://www.apa.org/index.aspx>

Taylor Francis Online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/>

Wiley Online Library: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>

Oxford Scholarship Online: <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/>

Proquest: <http://www.proquest.com/products-services/dissertations/>

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE): <http://www.evidence.nhs.uk/>

Office for National Statistics: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/index.html>

Phenomenology Online: <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/>

Researchgate: <http://www.researchgate.net/>

Digital Scholarship at UNLV: <http://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/>

Innovations: <http://www.innovations.ac.uk/>

Phenomenology and Practice:

<https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/pandpr/index>

Biomedsearch: <http://www.biomedsearch.com/>

Cirp: <http://www.cirp.uqam.ca/>

The British Library: <http://www.bl.uk/>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.co.uk/>

University of Reading: <http://www.reading.ac.uk/library/>