

**Non-duality and Psychotherapeutic Practice:
A phenomenological study of psychotherapist
experiences of non-duality and implications for
psychotherapeutic practice.**

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ABSTRACT

NONDUALITY AND PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PRACTICE. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PSYCHOTHERAPIST EXPERIENCES OF NONDUALITY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PRACTICE.

The thesis in part describes a research journey of a psychotherapy practitioner engaging in research development. It details, narrates and values the synchronistic events that enabled the ‘story’ to emerge. The central enquiry draws on embodied phenomenological research methods and poetic experiencing to explore the experiences of psychotherapists who have an understanding of nonduality and the perceived impact of this on their psychotherapeutic work.

Nondual experiencing is also studied following a synchronistic research visit to Pakistan. Here, embodied spirituality is explored, using video and the concept of ‘Therao’ is studied and utilised as an aspect of skilful practice. These are drawn together and compiled as a summary of skilful means in psychotherapeutic practice.

Additionally, as a Doctorate in Professional Practice two studies are presented as part of the practice development component. Both used creative video and performance as part of research presentation. The first, a project based on the Mandala with people living with HIV. The second ‘Beyond Statistics’ is an

enquiry into the lifeworld experiences of gay men living with the co-infection of HIV and HCV.

The thesis strongly articulates the significance of practice based research as a basis for humanising practice and the development of tacit and pathic knowledge. It identifies 10 key qualities present in practitioners who have a spiritual understanding of nonduality and the positive impact of these on depth connection with client work. The thesis also acknowledges, in line with current developments, the importance of including the cultivation of these depth relational qualities within a psychotherapy training curriculum.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my parents, Violet and Jan Mojsa. Dad was a Polish survivor of the Siberian Gulag atrocities. Mam, a working class Yorkshire woman unconditionally loved him and made him feel safe during his life. To them both, I thank them for their simple being and human loving.

CHAPTER ONE

The Design

A Sufi in the order of the Naqshbandis was asked:

“Your Order’s name means literally, ‘The Designers’. What do you design, and what use is it?”

He said:

“We do a great deal of designing, and it is most useful. Here is a parable of one such form.

“Unjustly imprisoned, a tinsmith was allowed to receive a rug woven by his wife. He prostrated himself upon the rug day after day to say his prayers, and after some time he said to his jailers:

“I am but a poor man and without hope, and you are wretchedly paid. But I am a tinsmith. Bring my tin and tools and I shall make small artefacts which you can sell in the market, and we will both benefit”.

“The guards agreed to this, and presently the tinsmith and they were both making a profit, from which they bought food and comfort for themselves.

Then, one day, when the guards went to the cell the door was open and he was gone.

Many years later, when this mans innocence had been established, the man who had imprisoned him asked how he had escaped, what magic had he used. He said:

“It is a matter of design, and design within design. My wife is a weaver. She found the man who had made the locks of the cell door and got the design from

him. This she wove into the carpet, at the spot where my head touched in prayer five times a day. I am a metal worker, and this design looked to me like the inside of the lock. I designed the plan of the artefacts to obtain materials to make the key – and I escaped.”

That’, said the Naqshbandi Sufi, ‘is one of the ways man may make his escape from the tyranny of his captivity’.

(Shah, 1972, p.176)

The Design, a Nasqbandi Sufi story was a story I heard many years ago. At the time I became enthralled by teaching stories whose wisdom and relevancy lay not in the cognitive realm but in the field of understanding mediated through intuition, the body or heart. I also loved hearing the stories spoken as opposed to just reading them. It is the quality of ‘something else’ that is communicated when the words come alive through the breath of another. There is something in the space between the words leaving the mouth of the speaker and the imagination of the one who is listening. A story could never be a collection of facts reiterated without the animation of the teller. One of my favourite haunts at the Glastonbury festival, in Somerset, England, is not the big stages hosting the big name bands, but the small tent on the Green Field, where cushions are arranged in a circle and storytellers gather to bring to life stories told many times over, in the manner familiar to all traditions. Like poetry, stories evoke the senses and enable the listener to open to new depths of understanding, imagination and knowledge. As Halifax (1993) notes, they also vibrate the echoes of our relatedness.

The 'Design tells (perhaps) of the wisdom of lowering ones head below the heart, as in the act of prostration. With such faith, devotion and humility, escape from the tyranny of unjust imprisonment and entrapment is possible. This image is one that I am drawing on in relation to the current debates within the psychotherapy profession, in the UK, at the moment. In the pursuit of 'professionalism' and 'measurability' and 'effectiveness' I argue that there is a de-humanising process, an imprisoning, if you like, of significant aspects of the heart of practice. I am beginning my thesis with this story because for the past 6 years I have been required to bide my time in study. It has felt like a waiting as opposed to imprisonment. Quietly, the process of unfolding has emerged. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) offer two metaphors for the researcher. The first metaphor is the interviewer as miner. The second is interviewer as traveller. Each produces their findings depending on their epistemological stances. The miner unearths valuable material, digging deep to bring to the surface the looked for 'treasure', sometimes from the many depths of consciousness. It is presented then as a unique find. The traveller explores new places with a tale to tell at the end after many explorations and wanderings with others. The metaphor I work with is that of the traveller. This thesis then, acknowledges the potency of narrative, story and understanding beyond language and words. It is a journey of the dance between spirituality, philosophy, psychotherapy practice and skilful action. The focus of the main study explored the experiences and understandings that psychotherapists had of non-duality, and its implications for psychotherapeutic practice. As a doctorate in professional practice I also focus on two other research areas as part of a practice development requirement. As The Design describes the richness found in what is woven into the rug, so this

thesis has pulled together many threads, which I trust give a sense of the journey throughout these doctoral years. Completing it gives me great pleasure, for sure. Yet, as Cavafy (1976, p.36) in his poem 'Ithaca' reminds us, the destination was never the aim. In the journey to Ithaca if we are not open to the journey and the enthralling experiences (both terrifying and blissful) then we miss so much. And yet, a thesis requires some 'completion'. It was always hard to determine when to stop recording new experiences, end the process of reading, and begin the weaving of the thesis into some meaningful piece of work. And, as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note, the story has to come home and be told.

As such, the work draws together several key chapters. These chapters give an outline of the relevant developments throughout the 6 years of study and research. It has been, as I often discussed with my supervisors Les Todres and Kate Galvin, a time of serendipitous moments of meeting, chance opportunities, which I gratefully took, and stayed open to the relevancy of various experiences. There is an art to good supervision and I am grateful to Les and Kate who have sat with me and shared their wisdom. More than this, they had a trust in the process that kept giving birth to new ideas. At times I felt like a fisher person, constantly throwing out my net wide and deep and exploring what was to be found. Les and Kate happily let me get on with it. I am already making a point that developing a spiritually orientated, embodied and reflexive research requires a way of supervision that can bear the uncertainty of outcome, that can trust in serendipity, that can sit with the reality of not knowing with the vulnerable awareness that this is of great significance. Whilst this may not always fit into a traditional academy, on a personal level I bear testimony to the richness of

learning that indeed enables the process to be truly one of nourished scholarship (Pelias, 2004). Hunter and Lees (2008) similarly describe their learning journey, as tutor-student narrating the journey as one between the Fisherman and the Gentle Warrior.

Rather than offer a specific chapter on my personal narrative, I have included in all the chapters a narrative that gives a sense of my process and development. To offer it as a distinctive and separate chapter did not fit the layout of the work. Given the organic and interweaving nature of my research, the DProf framework of four distinct pieces of work was less easy to structure. Evidence of the intended learning outcomes is present in the chapters and will be indicated.

In the years of developing my work, I was diagnosed and treated for cancer and I lost both my parents. These events were significant in the forming, development and execution of my research. Vulnerability and the journey into profound areas of not knowing accompanied me throughout the process. Unsurprisingly perhaps, my areas of reading and exploration were attempts to meet those inner questions. Romanyshyn (2007) speaks wisely of the wounded researcher and the idea that the research already has us. So, the journey, as in the *The Design*, was one of faith and a compelling urge to allow the unfolding of ‘that which seeks expression’.

The ideas that have emerged are, what Bernie Glassman (2012) would refer to, as ‘opinions’. They are my opinions forged from the journey. They are examples of subjectivity and subjective experiencing of the lifeworld that form ideas about, in the case of this thesis, significant components in psychotherapeutic practice.

They are drawn from the process of becoming, from ‘thinking at the edge’ (Gendlin, 1996); they are, in essence derived from practice-based evidence and as such born from the inter-relational.

Background

My original thesis plan was to explore essential components of transpersonal psychotherapy. At the time I was pondering a question about the place of spiritual practice, psychotherapeutic work and competencies, particularly at a time when counselling and psychotherapy were moving towards regulation. I sensed a space to explore it at the university, within the DProf programme. It was important that the research was located in practice, for this was my starting point.

Three major threads initially sparked my interest. Firstly, I was interested in exploring the work as part of my own on going development as a transpersonal psychotherapist with a private psychotherapy practice in Bath, Wiltshire and at that time, London.

Secondly, I had been involved in the curriculum development at the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology (CTP) developing the new training and progression route. In developing the programme I was aware of the need to listen to a range of stakeholders to ensure that trainees would meet all the requisite requirements for potential registration. As an accrediting organisation of UKCP (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy), I also sat on the accreditation board. My observations on the papers presented occasionally drew out the question 'what makes this piece of work transpersonal?' I was struck by the lack of clarity in terms of criteria, which evidenced competency. What was clear however was the fact that the experienced panel did draw on a shared understanding and no doubt

made wise decisions. The sense for me was that it simply was implicit and not explicit.

Thirdly, my interest was inspired through my work as Principal Verifier for an Awarding Body. This role was concerned with the external verification of centre programmes in the UK and Europe and was primarily focused on standardising assessment and training. Here, the training programme of a centre had to fit a model of criteria led competencies. The student's work was moulded to meet the range of criteria and checked off once completed. Only then was the student declared 'competent'.

With each of these roles I had come to constantly question the outcomes of training, practitioner development, and reflect on what works in therapeutic practice. Transformation is clearly at the heart of therapeutic work, whether located in shifts in perception, consciousness, behaviour etc. Traditionally, these shifts are mainly (and almost exclusively) concerned with (and evaluated and measured against) changes in the client / patient. This model, in essence defines the client as 'other'. I also wanted to hear the words of practitioners – what was helpful in training? How does this come into practice? It became clear that my research study would be primarily concerned with the narratives of the psychotherapist/practitioner.

The process appeared to be set up but in February 2006 a cancer diagnosis opened up another possibility that compelled something more. I captured part of it in my journal writings of the time.

February 8th 2006. Journal.

Suddenly time lacks any relevance. Yesterday, the finality of diagnosis was given.

I have breast cancer.

I cried. My body in shock and I shook for hours.

I was sat on a chair with a polite doctor in attendance. He asked if I had thought what it might be. I replied quite calmly that I had thought it to be either fibrous tissue, or cancer. I said the word first, 'cancer'.

In a shy way, he nodded, 'it's cancer'.

The lump that I had discovered over the Christmas period needed checking. Fortuitously, I already had an appointment booked for a 5 yearly check up and used this occasion to have it checked. In bargain mode I treated it as a 2 for 1 test – the medical version of buy one get one free.

The significance is simply that the journey of my DProf studies was about to change. My attitude to myself, self-awareness and view of others and the world was shifted. The lens I saw through as researcher was refocusing and my own journey was to be inextricably linked to that which I wished to investigate.

Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,

You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.

In order to arrive at what you do not know

You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.

In order to possess what you do not possess

You must go by the way of dispossession.

*In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not.*

(TS Eliot, 2001)

The poem by TS Eliot featured in my early training as a psychotherapist. The words embody the experience and reflect back to me an understanding of the process I was now engaging with.

Journal entry. Feb 27th 2006.

Tillie had left for work at the university and I was on my own. I was fine downstairs lying on the sofa like some lady who lunches. Three times I got up to go to the bathroom upstairs. On the third visit, stepping down the stairs, I felt a pain in my chest, and my body shut down into paralysis. I crumpled on the stairs, unable to move. My heartbeat raced and I imagined this was a heart attack. I was dying and I couldn't move. Fear gripped me and then...I remembered. This would be an important moment. I must stay conscious. I simply breathed. Each moment arose perfectly. I was unsure as to how long I stayed in that moment. Pure love, pure interconnection. Dare I really say that I understood? This moment of nonduality in which my Vajrayana practice of the past 10 years had, I now realised eluded me.

During the following months I was to engage in my spiritual practice in a far more engaged way. The moment on the stairs was pivotal in a very simple yet

paradoxically complex way. This moment suddenly had real resonance and awakened my interest to explore the place of nonduality in my psychotherapeutic work. I instinctively knew that my work not only as a psychotherapist would change but my sense of being in the world.

Another profound moment arose as I gained a different relationship to my body and healing process when a GP, based at a Cancer Help Centre I attended, invited me to notice that lymphocytes, the white blood cells charged with 'killing' and 'eliminating' cancer cells did in fact have heart shaped nuclei. In stark contrast to the medical narratives of warfare, good and bad dualism, the view of myself could soften. I could receive chemotherapy and sit with a different approach. Krycka (2012) offers the phrase "Peace building from the Inside" as an embodied model for peace making. Centred in a heart process I had a holistic model and one that knew this from my nondual experience on the stairs. Little surprise that my research was gaining focus on heart based methods and also one that was concerned with cross cultural and wider challenging scenarios within the psychotherapy, counselling and healing professions.

The literature review (Chapter 2) focuses on and draws on research from Transpersonal Psychology. The literature on nonduality is also reviewed. It is important to note that this thesis is not specifically about the depth understanding of non-duality (which would be several doctorates in the making). I try to keep the focus on aspects of significance for psychotherapeutic practitioners and some of the dilemmas within the literature. It is these very dilemmas that are part of the milieu in which practitioners make sense of their work and understandings.

Context

Inescapably, the background and context to my proposed study rested in the current trend within the counselling and psychotherapy profession to become more evidence based in both its training (through prescribed learning outcomes) and in practice (through clinical audit). Chapter 3 expands on this. The context of my research work is significant, as a theme of 'humanising' practice became an emergent both in terms of psychotherapy research and ideas of well being. Interestingly, my work at that time saw my increased involvement at a national level with the Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy College (a significant section of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy) where I took on the role of Honorary Secretary and latterly Vice Chair.

Chapter 3, then, focuses on research methodology. The thesis is, in part, the story of a psychotherapist in search of methodology. I have taken time to lay out an epistemological framework for the research perspective, which encompasses the context of psychotherapy and counselling in the UK at this time. I argue the case for practitioner-based research as a practice development opportunity both as a reflexive learning activity and also a statement for humanising practice. This particular chapter then, also attempts to meet some of the criteria around the development of practice. Given the nature of the research, I also draw on my developing understanding of embodied research. It is this, which helped develop my research methodology drawing on embodied research. I developed this further in experimenting with communicating textured experiences in both video, performance as well as written.

In the practice development chapter (Chapter 4), I highlight the opportunities I had to develop those research strategies in my work with a group of people living with HIV in Manchester UK. It was here that I cut my teeth in working on themes of embodied research, poetic enquiry and ways of communicating the voices of participants. This chapter highlights and describes the project's work. Here, I explore the use of video and textured dialogue to communicate the lived experiences. There are two project pieces described (as examples of textured research).

The first focuses on the use of the Mandala as a tool for expressing healing potential and spiritual development. This work resulted in a brief video that the project used (and is included in the appendix, as well as being accessed via YouTube). The second was a small piece of research on the lived experience of having the dual diagnosis of HIV and HCV (Hepatitis C). The organisation wanted to present the findings at a conference and I worked with the team to construct a way of communicating these findings. This resulted in 'Beyond Statistics' and is described in the chapter. It also includes video work as another method of communicating the felt experiences. This work was fundamental in enabling me to pull together a number of ideas and philosophies on research methodology. Part of my work was to experiment with listening to the stories of people, engaging with the phenomena and seeking ways to communicate as dynamically and meaningfully as possible.

I was also able to utilise this in Chapter 5, which describes the serendipitous opportunity I had in my travels to Pakistan. This was significant in the context of nondual understanding. In this chapter, I describe the lived experiences of embodied spirituality. This arose following my work with Sufi practitioners

where I discovered an Urdu word – ‘Therao’ – which describes a way of being that is marked by an understanding of nondual experiencing. The qualities that I discovered here, were, in many ways, also qualities that the practitioners in my research demonstrated. The significance of these qualities can be drawn together in the context of Islamic philosophy that has a different perspective on human experiencing. This can be captured, in part, by Ibn Arabi’s notion of the Eye of Reason and the Eye of Imagination (Chittick 2003). In a number of ways, I argue that the dilemma faced in psychotherapy research can be related to this dualism.

The major research is in Chapter 6. Here, I draw on the findings from my work with nine psychotherapists based in the UK. Following a thematic analysis, I draw on the themes, which emerged, from my encounters. I also include some preparatory research I undertook with staff teams in the UK (Centre for Transpersonal Psychology) and US (Institute of Transpersonal Psychology – now Sofia University). These findings helped to create an understanding of the potential ground on which my work might springboard from. Importantly, the work is practitioner focused and reflexive and my findings emerge from their voices alone. It was an important part of the research to engage in the voices of practitioners. There are many understandings of nonduality, and this research was concerned with how psychotherapists worked with that in day-to-day practice, i.e. their phenomenological experiencing. The basis of the research was fundamentally a co-operative and dialectical discussion and although not strictly speaking set up as a co-operative enquiry piece of research (Heron 1996), it was a shared enterprise, a relationally orientated activity *with* colleagues and not *on* them or *about* them. I struggled with many ways of attempting to place the

themes in some meaningful way. In the end I did place them in a thematic way, despite at at one point, simply wanting to tell each of my co-researchers stories.

Chapter 7 provides a summary and offers several practice development areas.

There are many intertwining themes, which arose from my many encounters.

These relate to several key aspects of practice including not knowing, deep empathy and deep listening. Each of these relate to psychotherapy research as well as practice.

The journey of this research has appeared at times apparently random and created through a process of not knowing. Yet, it clearly has a structure and it always has.

I completed much of the process of writing at a Zen Retreat Centre in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in Santa Fe. My companions here were the noisy clicking sounds of the crickets, the occasional watched from the corner of an eye garden snake, the breath of my fellow meditators in the Zendo (meditation hall) and compassionate dialogue. It was here that I metaphorically brought my co-researchers and spent time with them in a final immersion in the 'data', which was our shared experiencing.

The Zen Retreat Centre is called Upaya – which means, in Mahayana Buddhism, Skilful Means (Pye, 2003). In my musings, I realised that much of my work has been engaged in exploring the skilful means of therapeutic practice. The final chapter seemed appropriate to be titled the 'Upayas of Practice'. Each of the practitioners (my co-researchers) described their own developing understanding of skilful means, as indeed did the Fakirs and Sufi practitioners who I visited in

Pakistan. The focus is on the phenomenological experiencing of nondual understanding and the ways in which this contributes to psychotherapeutic practice. The on-going chapters attempt to capture this journey of research, in ways that are inclusive, practice focused and point to the development within training, which ensures effective therapeutic working.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review in this section is primarily focused on the Nonduality research project. I am aware, that the DProf is an interwoven piece of work, spanning several research and practice areas, therefore literature that has especial importance to the Practice Development Chapter has been located there. Similarly, the Research Methodology Chapter contains a review of literature that focuses on practice based issues that are relevant in the context of practice development.

INTRODUCTION

Transpersonal psychology and therapy have been particularly concerned with spiritual experiencing, studies in consciousness and mental health (Walsh and Vaughan 1993; Boorstein 1996). The following chapter lays out some of the literature, which is pertinent to my research. I will contextualise the work by drawing together the brief historical roots of transpersonal psychology, the relationship to spiritual traditions and explorations in nonduality. I will also set it in the context of emerging cross cultural and feminist/womanist accounts and the development of the field to embrace wider concerns and experiences. This was a significant focus given both the client group I worked with on the practice development chapter and also the research work I participated in Pakistan.

Firstly, a brief focus on spirituality and well being. This element is of importance in the context of one of the practice development projects – the Mandala Project, which utilised meditation, ritual and creative art for people living with HIV.

SPIRITUALITY, MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING.

In a major review of the UK literature on the impact of spirituality on mental health, Cornah (2006) explores the positive outcomes of creating space for spiritually orientated activities. Her review showed the significance of spirituality to well being, healing and in the engagement with a quality sense of self. The review explored the outcomes and consequences of spiritual belief on mental health and in the process of meaning creation at times of crisis. It affirmed spirituality as a vehicle through which meaning is sought, varying according to age, gender, culture, political ideology, and physical and mental health (p.6). The report, in particular, included recommendations for a greater awareness on the part of health workers to the significance of spirituality in a client's life. This awareness and the relevancy of spirituality are at the heart of transpersonal psychology. Cortright (1997) for example, asserts that in the view of transpersonal psychology 'a complete concept of mental health must include both psychological and spiritual dimensions. It must consist of the psychological integration of the surface self, plus some degree of connection to its deeper, unconditioned spiritual source (p.48). Louchakova (2004a) also notes that spiritual awakening is a lifelong process of psychospiritual transformation and therefore the need (or requests for) spiritually competent therapy is much more than we may think.

Pargament (2007) points out that outside the institutionalised structures of religion, clients may seek spiritual resources in the therapy room in the form of activities such as spiritual imagery, visualisation and ritual. Further examples are provided, for example, by West (2011) and Fontana (2003), who explore the significance of spirituality and the distress created by denying spiritual experiencing.

In terms of psychotherapeutic practice, Pargament utilises numerous case studies to describe the place of spirituality within the therapy room. In particular, he draws on a client's relationship to the divine and the struggles of spiritual integration. He argues that a spiritually integrated psychotherapy is multimodal and therefore draws on numerous mechanisms and understandings of change. Importantly he describes it as:

“Not simply one more set of techniques that can be piggybacked onto other therapies. It grows out of a different way of thinking about problems, solutions and human nature more generally’ (p.199-210).

What emerges is a practice that is less technical and more about the ways in which the therapist experiences and creates meaning and understanding. It is less about ‘how’ to ‘do’ it and more on what the therapist brings to the practice. This emerging practice sets the framework for part of the focus on the thesis.

Sperry and Shafranske (2005) draw together a number of spiritual perspectives and therapeutic interventions to explore the place of spirituality in the process of healing. Their edited work focuses on a range of both spiritual traditions and also psychotherapeutic practices. The distinction between religion and

spirituality is not always easy to define (West 2011), however, Cornah (2006) drew out some of the themes in the literature related to spirituality. The perceptions included ideas such as: a sense of purpose, a sense of connectedness – to self, others, nature, God or Other; a quest for wholeness; a search for hope and harmony; a belief in a higher being or beings; some level of transcendence, or the sense that there is more to life than the material and practical; and finally, activities that give meaning and value to people's lives. Each of these does not equate or make reference to a particular religious group. In that sense, the ideas have a quality of universality to them. Utilising the work of Swinton (2001), Cornah draws on the view that spirituality has broadened in meaning to 'a more diffuse human need that can be met quite apart from institutionalised religious structure' or as she puts it 'the outward expression of the inner workings of the human spirit' (p.6). The search for spiritual experiencing may be met in places outside of the religious institutions and therefore potentially within the psychotherapy space. Kaschak (2001) has edited a selection of therapeutic pieces of work, which give testimony to the potency of spirituality within the therapeutic space. The selection includes prayer and contemplation, wilderness therapy and the use of particular spiritual traditions as a 'sacred psychology' dependent on what the therapist brings to the space (Frankel 2001).

I have briefly set out some of the literature, for the spiritual search is a significant component in practice development. As we see in the Practice Development section, the participants in the Mandala project held a spiritually orientated need for well being. It also invites the practitioner to see beyond singular diagnosis to the wider life of meanings within client's lives. Later, we witness a shift into

nondual spiritual teachings that are not part of a traditional path of spiritual practice.

Cortright (1997) describes eight principles of a transpersonal approach to psychotherapy, which are a useful starting point for contextualising a psychotherapy which begins to address concerns beyond ego and some of the ideas that Cornah elucidates above. The eight principles are:

1. Our essential nature is spiritual
2. Consciousness is multidimensional
3. Human beings have valid urges towards spiritual seeking, expressed as a search for wholeness through deepening individual, social and transcendent awareness
4. Contacting a deeper source of wisdom and guidance within is both possible and helpful to growth
5. Utilising a persons conscious will and aspiration with the spiritual impulse is a superordinate health value
6. Altered states of consciousness are one way of accessing transpersonal experiences and can be an aid in healing and growth
7. Our life and actions are meaningful
8. The transpersonal context shapes how the person/client is viewed.

What we see, is the shift into viewing the person as a spiritual being and not just an isolated ego. It is here that transpersonal psychology has developed its ideas, resources and widened understanding to see the person beyond the personal or ego (Walsh and Vaughan 1993). This explicit acknowledgement of the spiritual nature in human consciousness and the recognition of the importance of studying

people's experiences of spiritual awakenings is at the heart of transpersonal work and extends knowledge of the lived world beyond ordinary states of consciousness (Mack 1993). Welwood (2000), Preece (2006), Claxton (1996) and Epstein (2001) each draw together thoughts on the meeting places between spiritual practice, daily living and psychotherapy.

As such, spiritual practices have impacted on the nature of psychotherapy trainings. Daniels (2011) explores the 'ideological infiltration', that is, the ways in which some psychotherapy training organisations have developed a specific spiritual bias, based, in particular, on the founder's orientations. This is evident in the UK where, for example, the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology through its work of Ian Gordon Brown and Barbara Somers drew on the work of Alice Bailey and Tibetan Buddhism. At CCPE (Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education) the founder's interest lay in the Sufi tradition. The Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (now Sofia University) original founders were also Sufi. In the UK a number of training organisations work from specific spiritual psychological teachings, e.g. Karuna, whose Core Process psychotherapy draws on Buddhist Psychology (Sills, F. 2009). Both Amida (Brazier, 1995) and Tara Rokpa (Akong Tulku Rinpoche; Irwin, 1999) also draw on Buddhist psychology ideas. Assagioli, of course, also drew on the principles of Kabbalah and the map of the psyche he gave mirrored some of the key esoteric teachings of the Torah (Lancaster, 2006). Each has a clear acknowledgement of the transpersonal. Despite different psychotherapy modalities (person centred, psychodrama, Jungian etc) transpersonal development is located in the core teachings.

TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

The field of Transpersonal Psychology has developed over the past 50 years (Caplan et al 2003). Much of the literature that has been written witnesses its development within America, in particular with the works of Roberto Assagioli, Stanislow Grof, Anthony Sutich, Abraham Maslow and Ira Progoff (Wellings and McCormick 2000). I won't address them individually here, as my intention is simply to contextualise the field, except where it is specifically relevant in the study of nonduality.

Transpersonal psychology, as has been noted, acknowledges the spiritual nature in human consciousness. Within Britain, the field began to develop through the work of Barbara Somers and Ian Gordon Brown at the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology in the 1970's. Contemporaries included Joan Evans and Diana Whitmore who had worked with Roberto Assagioli and both set up their schools of Psychosynthesis (the Institute of Psychosynthesis and the Psychosynthesis Education Trust respectively). Other key luminaries were John Heron, John Rowan and Maura and Franklyn Sills and Nigel Hamilton. Within Europe there has been an increasing gathering of European voices at Eurotas (the European Transpersonal Association) that was set up in 1984 and now has a total of 29 member countries, where its annual conferences cover a range of transpersonal areas of study including societal concerns, community and indigenous practices, and so on. The inclusion of these is important, for Daniels (2005) has criticised some of the transpersonal literature for its 'America Centric' perspective and the potential for aspects of experiencing to be marginalised.

Hartelius , Caplan and Rardin (2007) distilled the literature on definitions of transpersonal psychology through a thematic analysis of a range of writings by transpersonal theorists. Their summary definition of transpersonal psychology reads as:

‘An approach to psychology that (a) studies phenomena beyond the ego as context for (b) an integrative/holistic psychology; this provides a framework for (c) understanding and cultivating human transformation’ (p. 11).

Daniels (2002; 2005) offers an overview of key transpersonal theories ranging from Abraham Maslow (considered to be at the forefront of the development of transpersonal psychology) with other key individuals including Jung (analytical psychology), Assagioli (psychosynthesis); Washburn (Analytic); Wilber (structural); Wright (feminist) and so on. We can witness commonalities and differences emerging from the perspectives. The key shared components about transpersonal identity are 1/ that there is developmental achievement; 2/ that this achievement means going beyond an egoic identity and 3/ that the qualities associated with that understanding are distinctly ‘spiritual’. Disagreements within the literature tend to relate to how development is structured, the conceptual understandings of a transpersonal self and how that identity might be achieved. This is significant, especially in relation to both the experiencing of nonduality and the ways in which it is ‘achieved’. I will write more on this later, particularly with regard to the practice and existence of nondual therapy.

TENSIONS AND LEARNING EDGES.

The field has thus developed and not without some criticism. Brooks (2010) for example, outlines the broad lack of inclusiveness within transpersonal psychology, focusing on the absence of women’s voices in the literature. This was also confirmed by Hartelius et al (2007) who found, when they did their meta analysis that only 25% of all articles published in the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology were contributions by women. They rightly conclude that there is ‘no lasting human transformation without inclusiveness, nor holism without diversity’ (p.17).

Daniels (2005) offers an important critique of the development of Transpersonal Psychology, in particular noting the emergent ‘shadow’ in the field, which, he argues, means that certain aspects of self (and the social and political) are rejected. It is probably helpful including his critique here:

Dominant Zeitgeist	Neglected Shadow
Transcendence	Immanence
Masculine experience of the spiritual	Feminine experience of the spiritual
Perennial philosophy	Non perennial philosophy
Cartesian dualism/Idealism	Fully embodied spirituality
American optimism	European realism
Mysticism	Magic
Eastern metaphysics and spiritual practice (especially that of Buddhism and Vedanta)	Non metaphysical approaches to the transpersonal; Western theology and religious practice; indigenous religions

Belief in individual salvation	Commitment to collective salvation
Individual interior quadrant	All quadrant knowledge and practice
Primacy of consciousness	Integrated participation in the world and with the Mystery of Being
Unmediated (pure) experience	Mediated (contextualised) experience
Achievement of Causal States (transcendent witnessing)	Psychic and subtle experiences
Ecstasy	Suffering
Spiritual tradition	Spiritual innovation
Absolutist (often dogmatic) spiritual perspective	A more pluralistic conception of spirituality

Daniels (2005, p.78)

In this critique, aspects that are counterpointed include, the masculine / feminine; Ladder / Circle and Spiral; Ego / Eco; Patriarchal / Matriarchal; Wings / Root. He is clear that the map is not so delineated but his analysis enables a space for other perspectives to emerge and for the shadow, to be voiced. According to Brooks (2010) and Daniels (2000; 2005) two elements emerge - the privileging of transcendence and higher states of consciousness (as opposed to depths of lived experience) and the exclusive focus of a decontextualized individual. My own interest in the area of nonduality, as I articulated in the first chapter, followed an embodied nondual experience which deeply impacted my sense of self and being in the world. Certainly not transcendent but located deep in the body and encompassing a depth experiencing of love and connectedness. I explore in greater detail elements of embodiment in Chapter Five through my

work in Pakistan where the understanding of spirituality is especially embodied. Equally, in that particular culture, the notion of a decontextualised individual does not make sense, particularly in relation to both family and community engagement. The danger is that this depth of embodied lived experience, especially from a nondual perspective, runs the risk of being sidelined from both mainstream and transpersonal psychology scholarship.

Holiday (2010) specifically describes a 'womanist'¹ scholarship, which potentially shares a transpersonal vision of expanding notions of that, which constitutes legitimate sources of knowledge. She refers to the tacit knowledge found in research perspectives that value lived experience as a valid source data and which also challenge paradigms that privilege mainstream assumptions. Much of this was formed from feminist research in both the UK and US and the early consciousness raising groups that contributed to feminist scholarship. The oft quoted 'the personal is political'² was part of my own heritage. As a woman who had engaged with the feminist movement in the UK in the late 70's and 80's, my own spiritual journey was one that moved through Quakerism, women's spirituality, and finally Buddhism. The socially engaged quality of those movements was central, at that time, to my own practice and way of life. It was ultimately what would become significant to my own practice as a psychotherapist. Comas-Dias and Weiner (2011) offer a selection of stories in the journeys of women becoming psychotherapists. In it, they describe various

¹ Womanist' is the word coined by Alice Walker and refers to the perspectives and experiences of women of colour.

² The term has been attributed to Carol Hanisch from her paper "The Personal Is Political," originally published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* in 1970

stories of healing marked by socially engaged activism as a key component in their developing psychotherapeutic work. It is here that a possibility emerges, at the intersection of transpersonal and feminist thought with its potential for creating social change (Brooks 2010). As noted earlier, the transpersonal field remains an area that is skewed towards male authorship. Wright (1998) famously criticises Wilber for devaluing women's experience of spirituality in his hierarchical model of spiritual development. Her argument locates the differences in the perceptions of the self. Wright determines, as Gilligan (1990) did earlier, that women's relating was through the self-in-relation as opposed to individualistic. Holiday (2010) notes that 'while transpersonalists and womanists might differ in areas of focus and content, both work to redeem sacred human experience from narrow paradigms that cut off valuable opportunities for expanding human knowledge' (p.105). She describes three key components to a more radical engagement and approach to new understandings: critical consciousness (stories of healing, shared new understanding); redemptive subjectivity; and engaged spirituality (social and political awareness action). Redemptive subjectivity refers to the potent re questioning of dominant ideologies and the reclamation of voices and experiences hitherto on the margins of traditional scholarship. In a rejection of oppressive ideologies different understandings emerge, for example, Wilcox (2009) details the intersectioning of religious and sexual identities for queer women and the complexities of religious experiences in Los Angeles. In a journey of engaging stories within a wide range of spiritual groups, she gives voice to diversity. Similarly, Aburrow (2009) explores the lived meaning of queer spirituality through art within Christianity and Paganism. She also identifies 'coming out' as an essentially powerful

spiritual experience, not usually acknowledged. Both writers invite a deeper understanding of the lived experience of spiritual living, both immanent and transcendent. Placing the transpersonal in a socially engaged and transformative model was an essential element in the practice development projects.

NONDUALITY AND NONDUAL THERAPY

It is not my intention to offer an indepth discussion or analysis of the literature on nonduality. Not only would this be complex, it would potentially divert attention to more cognitive spheres. The expressed focus of my work is in phenomenological experiencing and embodied understanding. However, I would like to set the ground by exploring a range of perspectives offered. In addition to this, I shall be exploring some of the difficulties ascribed to the place of fusion with spiritual practice, in particular the interplay of Eastern practices with Western Psychology, and also note the development of ‘non path’ nondual awareness groups who are newly emerging.

Loy (1998) reminds us that despite the importance of the concept of nonduality in Asian philosophical and religious thought, it is also ambiguous. A few attempts of description are offered below:

The Sufi teacher, Shaikh Kabir Helminski (2009), describes it as:

‘The way we see it in the Sufi tradition is that — particularly for mystic consciousness — we understand that everything is rooted in the divine. Everything is unified in a field of oneness. Practically speaking what that means is that my consciousness, my love, my will, my generosity if I have any, my capacity for forgiveness, all of these have their attributes in the source of the divine. ... This nonduality has a kind of quality to it ... that is deeply personal as well as cosmic and impersonal because we realize the human being is the ripened fruit of that nonduality. The nonduality doesn’t cancel our human individuality. ... We don’t make a big deal about nonduality because we know and trust that everything comes from God. The God that we’re talking about is

subtle and integral to this whole creation. ... Poetry suggests it. We communicate more through poetry than through abstract theory.'

Helmsinki begins to describe the subtlety that words spoken in poetry are often the only way in which the ineffable quality can be expressed and understood. This is familiar with many traditions where the lived embodied understanding is more easily described in poetry or koans (Ronci, 2009, Kunisue and Schavrien 2011). Everything, according to Helmsinki, is rooted in the divine, in the unified field of oneness, a field that doesn't cancel out individual experiencing.

Louchakova (2009), describes something of how it is experienced:

'Nonduality is the certain perspective on self and consciousness which makes one to experience being and consciousness as undivided and nonseparate from every other consciousness which can be perceived initially as different. It's the experience of consciousness as being undivided, experience of your own being as being connected with the rest of the universe, and being one with the rest of the universe even though you may not have the perception of the whole universe at the moment. Most importantly, the experience of nonduality is the experience of authenticity, of authentic, unlimited, nonconstricted being, experience of being yourself, experience of living life with no fear.'

Key words are the experiencing of being as undivided consciousness with a connectedness to the universe. It is experienced with a quality of authenticity with an experiential feel of no fear.

Davis (2011) endeavours to bring together ecopsychology, transpersonal psychology and nonduality. He suggests that a meeting place is through nonduality. His definition of nonduality is this:

'In transcending a sense of separate self, one realizes a nondual relationship with Being. It is not awareness or consciousness which is transcended, only the sense of self which is grounded in separation, narcissism, and defences (the so-called ego in many spiritual traditions). Nonduality does not mean a loss of consciousness but rather a heightened consciousness in which particulars (objects, persons and relationships) can be perceived with greater clarity as the conditioning and cognitive limitations of the ego based separate self are dissolved, integrated and transcended.' (p.140). In the context of ecopsychology he goes on to say, *"Ecopsychology is based on the recognition of a fundamental nonduality between humans and nature and on the insight that the failure to experience, value and act from this nonduality creates suffering for both humans and the environment."* (ibid p.140).

Davis speaks of heightened consciousness, a transcendent self (from its grounding in narcissism, etc). He also explicitly extends the connection to nature and that the split creates suffering to both.

Each of the perspectives were chosen as they fit some of the backgrounds of my co-researchers.

Yet, the concept does not have universal acceptance. Heron (1998) challenges both the focus on Eastern ideas and nonduality as a descriptor, he says, 'There is indeed a deep anomaly in the term 'nondual'. To say something is 'not two' is to affirm the duality while ostensibly rejecting it. The term is attached to a denied

two at the same time as claiming it has been transcended. So I prefer to use 'diunity' to affirm the distinctiveness of the inseparable two – Many and One, manifestation and spirit, subject and object – within the one'. (p 14). Heron begins to allude to the difficulties in the arena – that of languaging and also the focus and prioritising of particular ideas of nondualism. We can see the conceptual splits arising and Loy (1998) has defined or distinguished 3 different meanings of nondualist systems: the negation of dualistic thinking; the non plurality of the world and the non difference of subject and object. The ground for intellectualising on the experience becomes evident and Daniels' (2000) critique of transpersonal psychology's need to engage with the shadow, i.e. it's lack of engagement with the body and experiential understanding is apposite. Blackstone (2007) makes a distinction between nondual experience and nondual realisation. Nondual experiences are typically an isolated peak experience and nondual realisation as a more stable and lasting transformation.

This is also described by Forman (1998) where he posits two types of mystical experiences – pure consciousness event (a transient experience) and a more permanent, or semi-permanent state (the dualistic mystical state) which is described as an experiencing of permanent inner stillness whilst staying aware of thoughts and actions – being cognisant of awareness plus thoughts and objects. Forman's work is based on an examination of texts and interviews with mystics.

Wilber (1995) describes nondual realisation as a developmental model. His sequential, linear stage model is set out as the way in which individuals pass through stages towards nondual or unity consciousness in a linear process.

Welwood (2000) speaks of the Ground of Being as that place which can be accessed when spiritual and psychological aspects are attended to.

One of the difficulties about defining nondual experience is, as Fire (2010) points out, that the teachings are ‘so steeped in each particular spiritual tradition, and often so deeply delves into the realm of analytic debate about the nature of nonduality, that it can be difficult to identify the specific experience to which they actually refer’ (p.72). Forman (2011) describes this beautifully when he finally has confirmation of an experience of nondual expansiveness, which occurred two decades earlier. In a conversation with Ram Dass (the American spiritual teacher) he asks whether his experience, based on both mental and physical sensations demonstrated his ‘achievement’. Four words confirm it for him. Forman recalls the conversation, ‘And looking deep into my eyes with his bottomless gaze and a kindly smile of recognition, he said simply, “Yeah, This is that”’.

One simple sentence, “Yeah, This is that”. And all my self-doubts, all my wonderings and confusions and disillusionments simply vanished. “Yeah”, he said again, “this is that” (p.72-73). I find this moving from a scholar who had spent so many years researching nondual consciousness and comparative religion. I have detailed the descriptors above as they are models which have been utilised within much of the transpersonal literature and again are in the field of awareness of my co-researchers.

NEW DISCOURSES IN WESTERN NONDUALISM

Lumiere and Lumiere-Wins (2000) detail the increasing number of Westerners who purport to have nondual consciousness – one might see them as the new nondualists. Like Marvally (2002) and Robinson (2007) they have gathered

stories through interviews with Westerners who describe their journeys of enlightenment. Robinson (2007) has a different focus in that she focuses on women and what she terms the 'feminine face of awakening'. Her work is significant inasmuch as a lot of material presented previously has been very male focused.

There have also been a large number of books produced in the past decade publishing personal enlightenment stories and 'guides' (Foster, 2006; Spira, 2008; Goode, 2009). Similarly, we can note an emergence of publishing houses specifically geared to the work from this wide range of westerners who also do not follow a specific 'tradition' of spiritual practice (see for example, Non Duality Press and The Science and Non Duality Conference)³. Similarly, online groups are emerging with specific nonduality titles (e.g. nonduality north; nonduality dorset etc) all offering satsangs and links to nationwide groups and access to some of the 'new' nondual teachers. If there is a sense of a shifting paradigm in how westerners are living and understanding spiritual experiencing then this is clearly of interest to psychotherapy, particularly in relation to presenting issues in the therapy room. The term nondual, has entered language in a significant way during the past decade, and it comes without the additional 'tags' of a particular spiritual tradition, e.g. Zen. A colleague for example, who, having spent many years in Buddhist groups made a decision to join a 'non path' group. The 'liberation' for him was focused on not having to get caught up in a map, or rules and so on. All of these had the impact of consistently holding 'achievement' or feeling like he had to 'get somewhere'. One of the new teachers

³ The first Science and Non Duality Conference occurred on October 2009 at San Rafael, California. The UK based Non Duality Press was founded in 2004.

Richard Sylvester (2012) says, 'Teachings about nonduality frequently present the seductive idea that liberation can be realised through an evolutionary spiritual path. This has no actual connection with nonduality but it can offer us a convincing, although meaningless, story about it. From this story arise the many paths, doctrines, techniques, gurus, teachers, mantra-salesmen, workshops and groups which make up the spiritual bazaar.' The 'non path' groups are increasing in the UK and potentially mark a shift in ways of approaching nondual awareness.

I am also making a distinction in the literature of westerners whose work is focused on the translation and popularising of eastern traditions e.g. Preece (2006); Salzburg (2002); Surya Das (2012); Goldstein (1987) Chodron (2001); Kornfield 1994); Amidon (2012); Helminski (1992). The work here is written by practitioners and teachers who hold a lineage of practice, having travelled East or received transmission of teachings from Easterners in the West. Unlike the non-path groups, the teachings presented do offer a pathway that has doctrines, practices and often rely on oral transmission and an unbroken lineage of knowledge holders.

This is clearly shifting with time, and many teachers are westerners who have received transmission and teachings from other westerners. What can be witnessed now, is that Buddhism (and many of the Eastern teachings) has changed over the past 50 years (Uno 2006). In the early interactions between Buddhism and psychotherapy, for example, the early teachers were Eastern and the majority of psychotherapists European or North American. According to

Uno, Japan and America now have the largest groups of both Buddhist practitioners and psychotherapists. East meets West, and West meets East. This, however, has not been without its difficulties.

SPIRITUAL WOUNDING AND BYPASSING

The term spiritual pathology is used by Preece (2010) to describe the interplay of neurosis and spiritual practice. In particular, the interaction of East and West can be complex. Welwood (2000) used the phrase ‘spiritual bypassing’ meaning the ways in which individuals bypass the work that needs attending to. Engler (2006) points to the many ways that Westerners can use spiritual practices as a potent tool to hold as defences. He gives the example of the Western narcissistic ideal in the search for perfection and invulnerability and how enlightenment promises a state of perfection where defilements can be expelled. The wish to be ‘special’, a fear of intimacy and avoidance of feelings may be motivators for practice. He impresses the ongoing need to reflect and stay reflexive of motivation to practice and not escape into the exotic. The potential for psychotherapists to fall into the trap of inflation was certainly one of the issues that my co-researchers dialogued with.

Engler’s point is certainly not new. Boss (1979), in reflecting on the meeting place of Eastern and Western ideas points to the potential difficulties of mixing ideas. He describes, by way of example, the story of an Indian friend, who returned to India after spending time in the West. On his return he found managing suffering difficult. He had become alienated from his ways of dealing with being in the world. Roland (1998) also describes the differences in contextual cross cultural world views in India and Japan, in constructs such as

individualism, extended family, hierarchical relationships, motherhood and so on which means that certain ideas may not be fully accessible. This was an important reflection in my work in Pakistan.

Cox (1977) noted in the 70's the difficulties with wholesale 'orientalism': 'From the earliest decades of the nineteenth century, whenever Western intellectuals begin to feel disillusioned with the limits of science or the Enlightenment, they have almost always looked to the Orient for a fresh transfusion of magic or mysticism'. He goes on to point out some of the difficulties with this, 'The danger lies in the enormous power psychological ways of thinking now wield in our culture, a power so vast that the current psychologising of Eastern contemplative disciplines- unless it is preceded by a thorough revolution in western psychology itself – could rob these disciplines of their spiritual substance. It could pervert them into Western mental health gimmicks and thereby prevent them from introducing the sharply alternative vision of life they are capable of bringing to us' (p.75). Heron (1998) also offers similar concerns with the interest in Eastern approaches, reflecting on a postmodern crisis in the West with its uncertainties, means that a kind of spiritual projection is placed on to the imagined certainties of Eastern sages. He says, 'So, we must honour them, exercise massive discrimination in dealing with them, and rearrange, reconstrue and add to them in the light of contemporary experience and practice, our deepest philosophies and the spirit of our times' (p.74).

Given the differences between psychotherapy and spiritual practices Welwood also points to the pitfalls of prematurely and unwisely trying to mix the two approaches. Trungpa (1987) coined the phrase 'spiritual materialism' pointing to the ways in which deception occurs. An ongoing 'shopping' for spiritual

experiences, deceives us into thinking we are developing spiritually, when in fact we are simply strengthening our egocentricity. Louchokova (2004) relates this to a secularised society where ‘the soteriological meanings are alienated from life making and are segregated into the special reservations nicely called “spiritual retreats” (p.7).

However, Loy (2011) also points to the significance of the differences in Eastern and Western approaches, which, if combined, may contribute to the global difficulties at this time. Drawing on the early work of Gary Snyder, he claims the ‘mercy’ of the West can be loosely defined as those ideas that have contributed to social revolution and the ‘mercy’ of the East is the revolution of inner awakening. This combination of social transformation and inner awakening, he asserts, potentially works to engage in some of the worlds difficulties, i.e. peace making. In this way, rather than having a univocal approach, both can be utilised. Krycka (2012) explores this in the context of peace making, inviting a focus on ‘peacemaking from within’. This is the point made earlier by Holiday (2010) in the assertion of a liberating scholarship that included engaged spirituality.

Bankart (2002) addresses the place of Buddhism and its engagement with cross cultural and ecological concerns. Noting the work of those ‘Socially Engaged’ groups whose ideas of spiritual and psychotherapeutic practice is one that equates with the role of the Bodhisattva, (Senaulke 2010; Preece (2009). In terms of my work in Pakistan, this was a crucial element of spiritual practice for a number of Sufi practitioners where straightforwardly, social engagement was spiritual practice.

The shadow present in religions is widely articulated e.g. Murcott, 2006; Gross, 1999; Schireson, 2009; Schimmell, 2003) and feminists have consistently presented alternative views and also exposed the patriarchal understandings that place the body, sexuality, sensuality and Gaia as both problematic and inferior. Caplan (2007) also points that these areas can also be the place of shadow where spiritual aspirants can meet their blind spots. She argues for a passionate engagement and collective curious enquiry into them – a turning towards everything, dark as well as light, in a shift to immanence. Daniels (2005), Brooks (2010) and Holiday (2010) as noted earlier, have similarly called for such engagement.

As much as transpersonal psychology has its criticisms for its male centricism (Hartelius et al 2007), the nondual literature is also populated extensively by male authorship. Using a quick head count of presenters at the relatively new annual Science and Nonduality Conference (based in San Raphael, California) in 2010, showed a similar figure of only 25% representation by women speakers.

NONDUALITY, PRESENCE, PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PRACTICE AND PRACTITIONER ATTRIBUTES

According to Fenner (2011), psychotherapists who immerse themselves in nondual teachings create an opportunity for their practice to be enriched and enhanced by the experience. This fusion of nondual experience and psychotherapy training is producing the emergence of a new modality called ‘Nondual Psychotherapy’ (Prendergast, Fenner and Krystal 2003; Prendergast and Bradford 2007; Fenner 2003). The work produced in the area for psychotherapy has mainly centred on the edited collection of these authors.

Judith Blackstone (2006; 2007) offers a framework of placing nondual understanding within the model of Stolorow and Atwood's Intersubjectivity theory in psychotherapy (1992) – and more latterly Intersubjective Systems Theory (2002). The careful study shows the dance in the intersubjective field. Bringing in nondual awareness, she describes the possibility of a trans-subjective space. Essentially, Blackstone explores how nondual realisation can facilitate the psychotherapeutic process by deepening the practitioner's ability for empathy and attention and awareness to the arising specificities of each moment, thus, nondual realisation deepens a capacity for contact. This includes a connection and contact to the environment. According to Blackstone, 'this means we are able to encounter people not just on their surfaces but also within the internal depths of their being. This gives us a qualitative, felt sense of the other person' (2006, p.34). Stolorow and Atwood (1992) describe 'the 'sustained empathic enquiry' (p. 93) as the capacity on the part of the therapist to consistently commit to comprehend the meaning of a client's expressions, from the perspective of within (rather than outside) the clients subjective frame of reference. One of the many discussions, which arise from this, is the question surrounding whether the practitioner is working at a nondual level. Whether that question is relevant in the context of simple good therapy is open. However, the case scenario she offers in the chapter, i.e. as a nondual engagement, is hard to discern from what might be seen as good psychotherapeutic practice. The case study she provides is a lovely vignette of depth engagement with her client. This prompts Rowan (2011), who is a firm Wilberian, to argue that those claiming to work from a nondual level, e.g Loy (1988), Fenner (2007) and Prendergast (2007) are, in fact

not. His arguments centre on the fact that the model they use does not fit into the developmental model, which he works from. What appears to happen in these discourses is that the discussion moves away from an embodied experience to an intellectual discourse level. It is this same argument that Peggy Wright engages Wilber with. This point is interesting from both a feminist perspective and also a relational and practice orientated perspective. We will see it addressed in the co-researchers experiences. What is open to useful debate from a psychotherapeutic perspective, are the possibilities that practitioners who have a nondual awareness may bring to their work with clients.

COMPARISON OF RELEVANT STUDIES

A study by Butlein (2005) made several important statements with regard to 'purportedly awake' psychotherapists. Purportedly awake, refers to practitioners who were deemed to have understood enlightenment experiences. Working with the non dual teacher, Adyashanti, Butlein drew up a list of individuals who achieved the criteria for the description of being 'awake'.

Six qualities or themes were identified from the purportedly awake group:

Mental clarity; energetic transmission; nondual abiding; spacious presence; heartful/mindful contact and deep empathy.

In comparison to transpersonal therapists there were key similarities located, for example, in things like 1/ the belief that the client has the answers within and 2/ that the personal development of the therapist is more important than skills development.

Butlein (2005) also refers to the ‘bidirectional psychic resonance’, a term he gives for the ability of the therapist to tune deeply into the images, thoughts and sensations that he or she has when sitting with a client (p.159). This again, points to one of the difficulties of the blurred edges of understanding. What Butlein expresses here, could equally be discerned in terms of ‘attunement’ and depth empathy. This quality of attunement is familiar to many practitioners in the work of Winnicott (1990) – the attuned resonant mother; Stern (2004) - moments of meeting; Gendlin (1996) -felt sense. However, he does extend its meaning to include the attunement within the wider field and environment. I was especially interested in this with regard to my own co-researchers and their capacity for a wider field of experiencing.

Stern (2004), describes ‘moments of meeting’ as significant ‘now moments’ in the work with clients. These are flashes of interactions between therapist and client, which are rich in potential for change, growth and healing for the client, therapist and the relationship. Stern describes this as the process of therapy, which moves along in a somewhat spontaneous and sometimes random manner - until these moments occur. This, he says, is when a now moment is turned into a ‘moment of meeting.’ In that moment there is a deep sense of connection and intimacy. When these moments are recognised in the context of the psychotherapy, there is the potential for a deep connection between client and therapist. As most research studies point to this as a necessary ingredient for positive therapeutic outcome (e.g. Cooper, 2008) this is of great interest. In order to create the possibility of this, Stern indicates the importance of ‘letting go’, describing a sense of ‘sloppiness’ which is ‘not only a necessary but potentially creative, and not only psychodynamically determined but inherent in

the moving along process.’ (2004, p. 225). He is inviting the therapist to hold a particular strength and quality in the ‘not knowing’. It is precisely this ability, i.e. to not respond to the anxiety by potentially hiding into technique, which allows the moment to bear fruit. Additionally, the learning for the therapist is an increased threshold tolerance to the anxiety and a greater ease in being authentic. Bollas (1987) describes this subtlety of practice as ‘receiving news from within the self’ (p. 236). Acceptance of oneself, is the recognition ‘that being and experiencing are prior to the knowing of that which is there to be understood’ (p. 237). In a similar vein, Spinelli (2006) utilises the term, the ‘idiot’ psychotherapist, a phrase describing the practitioner who dares to not know, but stays open to whatever arises.

Granick’s study (2011) considers the presence of the psychotherapist from the perspective of the client. His definition is a straightforward one: ‘the therapists ability to be fully, attentively available and responsive to the client, in the moment.’(p.1). Whilst this does not specifically address nonduality, Granick focused on the transpersonal aspect of the experience. The significance of presence and its correlation to the therapeutic alliance has been demonstrated (Welwood 2000; Geller, Greenberg and Watson, 2010). Granick’s work is interesting in that rather than relying on the therapist’s own perceptions, his study focuses on the client’s experience of therapist’s presence. He also offers an excellent overview of the studies focused on presence, identifying four key themes in terms of therapist’s attributes or qualities which are helpful to point out as reference will be made to them later in the study:

Being -This relates to the therapist's internal attributes and relationship to themselves, a capacity to attend to themselves and clients fully. He includes in this theme qualities exerted in terms of congruency.

Receiving - Refers to the degree of receptivity, both in general and also to the client's experience. He makes the distinction between the intrapersonal characteristic of Being and a more Interpersonal and outward focus of receiving.

Influencing -This refers to the effects of the therapist's attention on the client (beyond the direct result on intervention). He refers to the implicit effects of the therapist's being that are perceived as healing by the client.

Participating - Refers to the therapist's experience of involvement with the client in the therapeutic relationship that has both interpersonal and transpersonal aspects. It includes the perceived sense of resonance between the therapist and client that transcends the ordinary boundaries of the self object relationship.

We are now entering into the psychotherapeutic field of subtle working and one that has profound impact for client and therapist. This was also an area that interested me in relation to the co-researchers experiences as practitioners working on that edge.

Sills, F. (2009) describes Presence as 'not as an attribute of a particular person but as a wider universal expression of interconnection and interbeing. Thus, as the therapist's presence resonates with the client, it is not so much about *his* presence or *her* presence, as it is about presence itself. The translation of this into psychotherapeutic practice is given by Sills, M. (2009) who describes therapeutic practice as 'the ability of therapists to hold and transform their own arising process while maintaining a spacious awareness of their own thoughts, feelings,

body states, and subtle energetic experiences, as well as the clients.’ (p. ix).

Therapy then is ‘a joint practice between client and therapist in the context of the present moment’s experience. It is based on a deep experiential understanding of emptiness in the Buddhist tradition. Emptiness or shunyata, is the basic ground underlying all forms and from which all forms manifest. This it points to the process of selfhood, and to the inherent spaciousness and openness of the human condition’ (p.ix). This is an explicit opening into a work that goes beyond ‘ordinary therapy’ and attempts to achieve liberation in a way not normally addressed within most western psychotherapy models (and certainly not in the context of current mental health models in the UK). Sills, like Blackstone (2006) begin to draw on the ways in which practitioners may enter or rest in the therapeutic encounter.

Macecevic (2008) presents a phenomenological study based on psychotherapist’s transpersonal embodied experiences in the therapeutic relationship. She develops a schema she names ‘Embodied Transcendental Empathy’ based on her observations. In her thesis she explores the ways in which practitioners experience qualities of presence in an embodied way. Her work also grapples with the inherent difficulty of finding words for that which can be ineffable.

Glaser (2005) explicitly invites a heart based approach to psychotherapy practice by exploring Buddhist practices in the development of compassionate awareness bringing together a ‘psychology of soul with the psychology of heart’. Glaser draws on a number of practices (mainly Tibetan Buddhist) as a model of deepening presence and developing the central components of love and compassion in practice. The practices are central to all Buddhist practices and are often part of a systematic and ongoing ‘training’ in awareness. This ‘rawness of

being' and sitting with the other at times of difficulty has been variously described, e.g. bearing witness, (Glassman 1998).

Phelon (2004) presents an intuitive inquiry study, which begins with the researcher's own search (inspired by a practitioner who evoked great personal transformation in her). Her research stemmed from her curiosity as to what the significant factors were in the effectiveness of a therapist. Her work narrowed down to 'healing presence'.

Cooper's (2005) study describes therapist's experiences of meeting clients at 'relational depth'. His cohort of chiefly person centred therapists found that they experienced moments of relational depth with their clients. Descriptions of their experience included empathy, acceptance and genuineness towards clients and their own feelings included aliveness, receptivity, satisfaction and immersion. At these times, therapists also experienced their clients as very real, in touch with core aspects of themselves, and acknowledging the therapist's acknowledgement in a reciprocal, bi-directional encounter. He uses the term 'co-presence' or 'co-flow' to describe the dance of engagement.

Finally, Welwood (1996; 2000) offers a significant contribution and input into the field of spirituality and psychotherapy. Standing on the interface of spiritual practice and psychotherapy, he offers a map of reflection on experience and presence, describing 3 aspects: Conceptual Reflection; Phenomenological Reflection and Reflective Witnessing. Phenomenological reflection is equated with the felt sense of Gendlin's work (1996) but the key aspect in relation to nondual experiencing is summed up in unconditional presence, which, when utilised in therapeutic practice is the potent agent of change.

What each of these studies highlights is the quality of subtle experiencing by both therapist and client, particularly brought about by the therapist's presence. The cultivation of presence is a key element of exploration in this thesis. Thorne (2012) addresses this aspect through the 'discipline' of the therapist. As a proponent of Person Centred Therapy, Thorne draws on the spiritual discipline of the therapist, potentially forming a deeper and subtler shift of Rogers' (2003) own core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence. Rogers (1980) seminal book, *A Way of Being*, captures the essence of presence when he says, 'I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then simply my *presence* is releasing and helpful to the other' (p. 129). Hycner (1991) similarly draws the focus of dialogical psychotherapy grounding it in a broadly spiritual perspective – drawing on Buber's idea of I-Thou relating, i.e. that those moments of deep interpersonal meeting take us to the edge of the sacred.

Drawing together the various studies was a helpful pointer to the research, in particular the relationship between nondual experience and qualities of therapeutic presence. Equally, an important aspect was to 'open up' the field to include a research perspective that engaged in more embodied ways and was therefore more inclusive of a wider range of experiences. The literature review has attempted to contextualise the thesis within these wider debates in transpersonal psychology. As was noted in the review of transpersonal psychology literature, the 'shadow' (Daniels, 2005) includes a range of 'rejected'

aspects, which was important to include. All of this helped to contextualise the research methodology, which I utilised and developed.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are two aspects in this chapter. Firstly I am locating the work as a Practitioner Based Research project and secondly set within a Phenomenological Embodied Enquiry framework. It feels important, in the context of the DProf to elucidate the background for doing this, particularly in relation to practice development.

PRACTICE BASED RESEARCH.

In this section, I am attempting to explore research developed through the work of practitioners. The significance of this is primarily located in the development of knowledge and understanding that emerges through experiential engagement in the practice room. Through this experiential engagement, an inner tacit knowledge is uncovered (Schon, 1991). I will also draw on Van Manen's Phenomenology of Practice (2007) and the development of Pathic understanding and knowledge.

As practitioners, the ways in which practice is often developed is through several major sources – through the supervision of clinical work with an experienced colleague or peer group and Continuing Professional Development (a requirement of professional registration). For others this might also be present in peer study groups, personal reading and occasionally re-training. For most practitioners, the learning that is gained from client work is acknowledged as a key source (Casement, 1991; Lapworth, 2011; Breger, 2012). There is an enormous amount of literature published in professional journals of on going

research in relation to practice (BPS; BACP; UKCP⁴). Indeed, this has increased enormously over the years as member organisations have responded to the training standards placed on the profession. How any of this relates to, or impacts on practice is of significant interest to professional member organisations - particularly as these organisations are called upon to monitor on going practice with members.

CONTEXT

The context for many of the discussions around research and practice has emerged from decisions around regulation of the profession and funding of modalities of practice within the National Health Service. For a period of time, the profession was drawn into heated debates about the future of therapeutic work (e.g. Postle 2007; House 2010; Haney, 2012). Many of the diverse viewpoints are not essentially new, but are part of the profession's differing epistemological frameworks, values and possibly pragmatism (Wilkinson 2009). Haney (2012), particularly highlights the many agendas in the process of setting up regulatory structures (and its impact on the profession), for example, the focus on audit culture where 'we see the bizarre consequence of people spending valuable time proving to their managers and auditors that they are running a quality service, rather than actually running a quality service' (p. 6). Following a change in UK Government, a new Command Paper in 2011 pointed to a new direction away from statutory regulation to voluntary register. However, engagement with discussions around research and effectiveness is still part of the professional debate.

⁴ British Psychological Society; British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy; United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy)

The relationship that practitioners have to the field of research (either as readers, participants, researchers or policy makers) is clearly evolving. In a recent survey amongst its members, the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP 2011) produced several interesting emergent findings. In the survey, the majority of respondents who engaged in their own research did so through reading (35%) and discussions with colleagues (28%). Others were engaged in research study either through work based initiatives or post-graduate study. The factors that could positively influence engagement with research issues included, working collaboratively with other colleagues (26%); having more time (24%); having user-friendly research resources and updates (21%). A strong motivating factor appeared to be the need to ensure that the work was 'effective' and done right. This arguably is seen in the research finding that the biggest area of interest (35%) was in the category of effectiveness/ outcomes/ impact/ evaluation of psychotherapy (effectiveness etc.). Other areas focused on client-based issues e.g. diagnosis; therapeutic process and issues around research methodologies. How this might impact on practice remains debatable. The number of respondents in the survey was less than 10% of the membership and it is difficult to ascertain how representative they are of the profession. However, it is interesting that a major motivation seems to fit in with the current discourse of 'what works?' and the effectiveness debates around evidence based practice (Roth and Fonagy, 1996; Castonguay and Beutler 2006; Cooper 2008; Hubble, Duncan and Miller 2006). The debates are also present in terms of the funding of psychotherapeutic services within the National Health Service (Guy et al 2011; Davenhill and Patrick 1998). The outcome of these, in many ways, places the focus on translating research into practice as opposed to translating practice into

research. In a sobering comment Van Manen (2007) notes that despite the increase in qualitative research, professional practice has become ‘cemented ever more firmly into preoccupations and calculative policies and technological solutions to standards of practice, codes of ethics, and perceived problems.’ (p.19)

Polkinghorne (2004) explores how psychotherapists have responded to research in the past 20 years. He broadly draws on 3 perspectives or attitudes to engaging with research, in relation to ‘in situation judgements’, that is, the ways in which a practitioner carries out work in the workplace:

No Utilisation

Conceptual Utilisation

Utilisation

In no utilisation, in-situation judgement is determined by the psychotherapist’s own practice. Here, the sense is that general research literature has limited effect on professional practice. The general view is that this is not a prevalent stance. In conceptual utilisation, a practitioner engages with research literature with a sense that it can provide helpful information to draw on, particularly when making in-situation judgements. Therefore, dismissing academic research outright would reduce the fund of knowledge available and impact on one’s improving practice, and engagement with the stimulating philosophical aspects of both theory and practice. However, dismissing our own experientially developed store of knowledge reduces our capacity to adjust our responses in a particular clinical situation. Conceptual utilisation, therefore, acknowledges the significance of in-situation judgement for making appropriate decisions, but it also recognises

academic research (when it is integrated into a practitioners own background knowledge). Thus, it becomes a useful and essential addition to making in situation, in the moment judgements in practice.

In Utilisation research, the belief is that the practitioner's in-situation judgement is erroneous. So, for a particular client group, a research-validated technique is the one that is utilised. This is witnessed in protocols around psychotherapy practice; for example, this was seen in the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme, which was rolled out in the UK (Clark 2011).

One of the significant aspects of engaging in a doctorate in professional practice (as opposed to straightforward PhD) was the attraction of bringing research from the ground up, i.e. to develop from day to day practice, ideas, understandings and meanings as a way to contribute to the knowledge of the profession. This wasn't simply about locating it in a methodology (e.g. Grounded Theory) but mainly from a philosophical perspective. Lees and Freshwater (2008) articulate this clearly within the model of Practitioner Based Research. Their work explores the kinds of research undertaken with and by health care practitioners and also, importantly, the opportunities this created to develop research outside of the academy. Due to the externality of the research, questions of validity are raised and the extent to which current academia limits its ontological and epistemological frameworks and perspectives around validity. In this framework, the hegemony of academic discourse becomes challenged. This has consequences in relation to cross-cultural and gender issues as I also explored in relation to transpersonal psychology. Importantly too, the place of practice-based evidence is significant regardless of the therapeutic approach. The accumulated

evidence from practice can be both central to understanding the nature of therapeutic working and also add to improving practice on the ground (Wampold, 2009). Psychotherapists are, by the very nature of their work continually engaged in reflexive research (Finlay and Evans 2009). An epistemology that is developed through experientially grounded practice has, arguably, a greater relevance than that handed down devoid of real connection (Schon, 1991; Kinsella 2010).

HUMANISING RESEARCH

Polkinghorne (2004) and Todres (2007) speak of a 'humanising health care practice'. They call for a more humanising research perspective and therapeutic working that emerges from a 'judgement based' practice. By 'judgement based' practice, Polkinghorne is meaning a practice that is based on the inner knowledge of the practitioner and not merely technique or protocol. He refers to an activity of caring that does not require abstract evidence, or the application of technique and standardised behaviours, but judgement and a quality of wisdom. Much of this has been addressed in the work of the reflective practitioner (Etherington, 2004; Finlay and Evans, 2009; Stedman and Dalos, 2009) where it is clear that a lot of the on going knowledge is less about informational and technical knowledge and more about the situational, corporeal and relational understanding of practice.

Lees (2008) examines the ways in which academia influences practice. Those who are 'fund chasing' research, he says, also determine the 'knowledge' and ideas of practice that are researched and studied. Equally interesting are the research findings at UKCP where practitioners appear to ask for findings on what

works. It seems that the confidence in the practitioner’s own practice is somehow dented in favour of an external expert. Having worked for a counselling awarding body I am aware of the ways in which clinical practice was packaged into a range of criteria that had to be checked off throughout the year. In my own experience as therapist to a handful of trainee counsellors I became aware of the occasional concern on the part of trainees to complete the hours (a minimum of 10 personal therapy hours throughout the training) than engage in deep reflective processes. The pedagogical concern is more focused on what can be measured in terms of outcomes, observables and standards (Van Manen 2007).

Westwood (2008) also critiques the ways in which abstract methodologies can be used to disengage from real connection with clients. As Harper (2009) notes, psychotherapy theories are simply hypothesized constructs, which may or may not be helpful for clients. Hillman (1996) reminds us that ‘there is more in a human life than our theories of it will allow’ (p.3). What potentially begins to become structured is the setting up of the ‘expert’ practitioner administering to the patient.

Denham (2008) follows this with the ways in which practice, in this paradigm, then develops a reliance on diagnostics. Psychotherapeutic treatment delivered within a biomedical behaviourist model, as discussed by Guy et al, (2011) is then reduced to an interventional procedure, much like any other ‘drug’ prescribed for a ‘condition’ as opposed to a co-created dialogue taking place in the context of an interpersonal relationship. They succinctly describe the two paradigms below:

Therapy as ‘Drug’	Therapy as ‘Dialogue’
Simple system (the universe as a giant	Complex adaptive system (Quantum

clock made up out of discrete parts)	theory view – interconnectedness, holism)
General to all individuals	Responsive to the individual
Therapist Skills / Operations	Therapist Presence
Standard manualised approach	Unique professional judgement used, based on broad relational principles
Universal truth	Local truth
Intervention	Conversation and self healing
Therapist led	Client led
Treatment (originates outside the relationship)	Practice (originates from within the relationship)

(Guy et al 2011, p.14)

It is clear that the framework holds a specific epistemological stance in its understanding of humanity. The opposition to the bio-medical position is strong. Grant, Biley and Walker (2011) describe the lived experiences of service users within the mental health system. In their edited collection of accounts they give voice to the narratives of survivors, users and carers of the system. Expertise of mental health is seen through experience, that is, the lived body of experience. Rapley, Moncrief and Dillon (2011) succinctly explore the failings within a bio-medically defined mental health system, in particular drawing on its failings in relation to multiculturalism, over/misuse of medication and a failure to address the impact of people’s environments and life experiences as major causes of emotional distress (see also Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Moore (2004) poignantly asserts, ‘Modern medicine is rooted in the values of modernism, an unspoken but powerful philosophy that values speed, cost efficiency, technical

methods, expertise, evidence-based research and medications' (p.274). Totton (2010) explores this and assesses the impact of external pressures from the NHS and insurance companies on the funding and provision of therapeutic help with its medical emphasis on cure (as opposed to growth). This emphasis automatically ensures that humanistically orientated approaches are disadvantaged in the procurement and provision of therapy within the voluntary and health sectors. Leader (2012) also invites a re-questioning of ideas about mental health and taking a human approach in the perception and experiencing of suffering. Each of these discourses clearly influences a practitioners approach to the research agendas. Arguably, this also means that there is a shift into a model of 'generic' competency approach to the training of practitioners, meaning that the subtlety and philosophy of modalities is submerged into criteria of technique and skills (Totton, 2010).

The 'science' is also questioned by Schmitt Freire (2006) who argues that the use of randomised controlled clinical trials is an epistemologically controversial choice of method in that it is not a theory neutral evaluative method with assumptions that are located in a behaviourist method. Therefore it cannot be used across modalities, as there is no shared language that would enable any comparison to be made. Elliot (1998) offers key criticism of empirically supported 'treatments', focusing on the limited range of outcome measures and the absence of long term follow up data etc. Spinelli (2006) locates the same epistemological difficulties in taking profound issues and transforming them into something else, which conforms to the dictates of the natural science paradigm. Bradford (2009) describes a more contemplative approach and invites a different perspective on diagnosis, away from the medical model and empiricism.

Exploring the roots of the word dia-gnosis, he reminds us that ‘dia’ means ‘thorough’ and ‘gnosis’ is ‘to know’. The word becomes alive with a different meaning in relation to client work if we move into our work with an intention ‘to be thoroughly knowing’ of our clients (and ourselves).

Stolorow and Atwood (2002) have called these underpinning values, the ‘Myth of the Isolated Mind’. This myth attributes a mode of being to persons whereby each individual exists as a totally separate entity, which, in turn reifies autonomy and independence and disavows (and is fearful of) vulnerability and interdependence. In contrast their concept of an intersubjective system theory brings to focus both the individual’s world of inner experience and it’s embeddedness with other such worlds in a continual flow of reciprocal mutual influence.

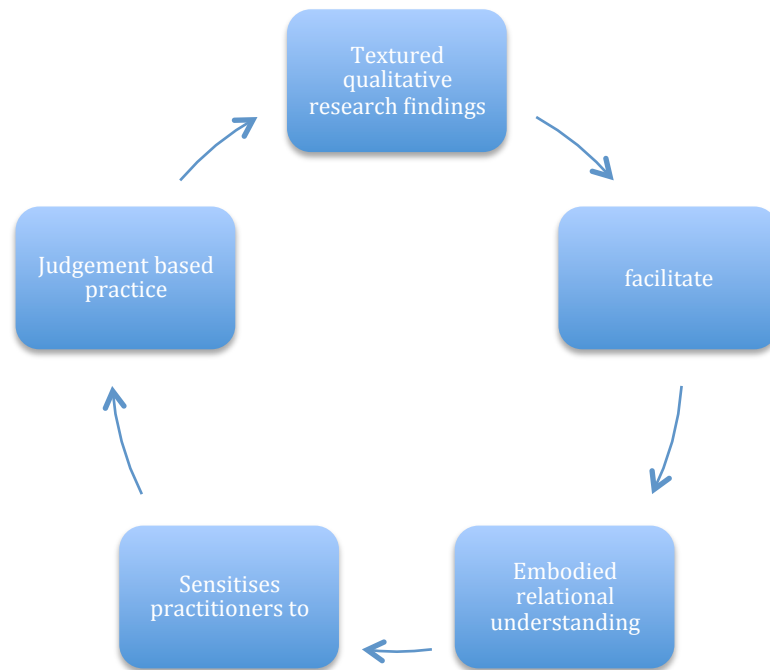
WHAT KIND OF RESEARCH?

In line with all of the debates, the practitioner’s relationship to choice of research methodology opens up to the differing epistemological framework and philosophic understandings of humanity, well being and mental health. The field has opened yet another range of debates in terms of which research methodology? The striving for evidence based practice and empirically supported treatments has seen the push for a certain kind of research and particular kinds of discourse to dominate. Cooper (2011) has advocated the use of RCT (randomised controlled trials) as a significant tool to support evidence for the efficacy of counselling and psychotherapy. Rogers, Maidman and House (2011), outline not only the methodological and philosophical limitations of the approach but also of the severe consequences of prioritising the medical model

on innovation within the profession. In response to this, (McLeod, 2011) advocates the promotion of more good quality non-RCT evidence. These aspects of debate are within the milieu of professional working and therefore have an impact in how practitioners begin to engage with research.

GOODNESS OF FIT AND PRACTICE ENHANCING RESEARCH

Todres (2008) puts forward the idea of 'Goodness of Fit'. This refers to research approaches that fit the epistemological framework and mean something in the practice of a relationally orientated psychotherapy. He invites research that enlivens and facilitates 'something' thus creating meaning to the recipients. Processes or words that are alien to the practitioner are unlikely to create sensitivity to practice. Todres describes textured research findings as those with a quality to facilitate 'something'. Textured qualitative research findings facilitate what he terms 'Being with That'. Being with That is the response to research findings that create a relationship, a textured understanding, an 'inner taste' for the material presented which can be savoured, felt and understood. It is this quality of embodied understanding that enables a depth connection and understanding to the research being presented.



Todres (2008) amended by JM to reflect on going practitioner based practice.

It is this that in turn sensitises practitioners for a judgement-based care. I have slightly amended his original diagram to one that is circular and ongoing. This model ensures that there is the potential for continual practice development based on the engagement of practitioners acknowledging a place in the learning circle. As practitioners this may require a different way of being and relating in the workplace - it is, according to Todres (2008), one that both embraces diversity and a sense of cooperation, cooperative care and a more heart based motivation for achieving quality practice. The emphasis on the client is not one of 'done to' but perhaps in the spirit of Bradford (2009) as one to 'thoroughly know'.

EMBODIED RESEARCH.

Therapist as listener

As practitioner, a significant element in this research journey was the development of a research methodology that would be consistent with, as Todres (2008) terms, a ‘goodness of fit’ to my practice and values.

Finlay and Evans (2009) describe a relational centred model of phenomenological research, one that is particularly helpful and ‘knowable’ to psychotherapists. Many of its components, for example, reflexivity and being relationally centred are skilful ways that in theory are already within a practitioner’s known framework of working. The theoretical and philosophical ideas it embraces are also familiar to psychotherapists in the form of gestalt, intersubjective systems theory, relational psychoanalysis and transpersonal theories. The approach parallels that of psychotherapy inasmuch as the ‘data’ gathered is not a thing in itself but is something co-created between the researcher and co-researcher. Like co-operative enquiry (Heron 1998), the value ascribed to the co-researchers is paramount, for participation is seen as evolving, negotiated, dialogical and real as opposed to an activity administered and formulated by an ‘expert’.

LISTENING TO THE HEART BUTTERFLIES

Before exploring research methodology more fully, I’d like to introduce a piece of work with a client. I call it ‘Listening to the Heart Butterflies’. For me it demonstrated a moment when I didn’t ‘hear’ my client and serves to example ways of listening (beyond technique and skills). The following is an extract from

a series of communications with Esme. Esme and I have worked together for a number of years. She described to me, in a letter, the moments when I didn't meet her, in other words when I failed to listen in a deep and subtle way to what she so vividly paints as the 'heart butterflies'. I am using this extract to point to the important aspect of listening, not only within therapy, but also to the researcher as listener.

once upon a time, there was a woman who felt like a very small girl. she went to a talk-to-lady for a very long time. she thought the talk-to-lady was very nice. the small girl had lots of bad things happen and the talk-to-lady was very kind and helped her. then one day, many years later, the small girl was very brave and told the talk-to-lady that she wanted her to be her mum. lots of heart butterflies flew out through the air as she spoke. the talk-to-lady was very polite but she didn't see the heart butterflies flying around or didn't want to see them, instead she made it very clever and bricks came out of her mouth instead. this made the little girl sad as she just wanted the talk-to-lady to hear the butterfly words and see their simplicity. the little girl was braver still, put this to one side and asked again for how she wanted her words to be heard. she asked the talk-to-lady if she thought she would like a little girl like her were she to have a daughter. this time the nice lady saw the heart-butterflies and thought they were pretty and said she would feel very proud to have a little person with so much creativity. she said lots of other things but all the girl remembered was that her heart filled with big amounts of joy and happiness filled with spice and all things nice for a whole week and the butterflies were free to fly around as much as they

liked. she dreamt about all kinds of things that would happen if the wish actually came true and it made her smile a lot of smiles.

the next week, she went to see her again and it was very soft and full of niceness and loveliness and the talk-to-lady was very kind and soft and the room felt like a place with lots of flowers and smiling sunshine in it.

the following week, the small girl thought lots about her life and the small 'ouch' place inside and thought how nice it would be if that could be gone. she thought and thought and thought and came up with a jumbly plan.

the next time she went to see the talk-to-lady she thought the flowers and sunshine would still be there. she opened her mouth and tried to explain her plan but the words became tangled up in a tavern of tumbleweed made of scaredness. the talk-to-lady suggested some words that made up the sentence:

you

want

MORE.

those words painted the picture in some way but not exactly right but then the sunshine disappeared and the clouds came and a big storm filled the room and the nice talk-to-lady became a horrible giant and said unkind words and said terrible things with big teeth and terrible claws.

There is

JUST

THIS.....

.....

.....*blah*.....
.....
.....*blah*.....
.....*blah*.....*bla*
h.....*blah*.....*blah-de-*
blah.....

.....*the talk-to-lady made these angry noises and the small girl felt VERY small indeed. she shrunk to a size of a pea and disappeared until you could hardly see her at all. the talk-to-lady became very big and scary, the small girl's feelings blew up to be very, very, big indeed and they started to eat her up and she could not say*

Another

Word.

I am tempted to invite the reader to pause a little and fully take in Esme's writing. She describes the excruciating experience of my lack of attunement. How evocatively she writes – I find the image of the bricks tumbling out of the talk-to-lady's mouth as the antithesis of deep empathic hearing. Esme and I worked through these 'ruptures' and, as is familiar in therapy, our work (and myself) became challenged, changed and deepened as a result of it.⁵ 'Listening to

⁵ My mis-attunement could be framed therapeutically as a healthy protest from Esme. Kohut, describes the 'idealising transference' as a significant part of the relationship between client and therapist. Here the client identifies with the therapist in a positive merger e.g. "you are loving and I am part of you". This is a significant process in the building of a sense of self. However, in order to

the heart butterflies' is an evocative term for those ways of being, in the moment, attuned with others and ourselves whether as clients, therapists, researchers and co-researchers. In offering this example, I am advocating the significance of a subtle and engaged listening as an important component of a relationally orientated and embodied research. In psychotherapeutic practice, this depth of engagement also requires a subtlety and skilfulness of holding in supervision. Finlay (2012) reminds us of the potency of supervision in research. She describes the importance of her role as a research supervisor, in a moving piece of work on traumatic abortion with a researcher, Barbara, and their co-researcher Mia, a woman who had undergone a termination. The richness of the supervisory relationship enabled a host of subtle relational details to unfold. Together they were able to stay in a place of not knowing and also be transformed by the process, in a parallel process with Mia. Not only does this hold the work in an ethical way, it enabled a wider experiencing and view to be seen.

I want to expand and dwell a little on the role of listening in the research relationship. In doing so I am drawing on the work of Fiumara (1990) and Wilberg (2004) where attentiveness to the 'phenomena' focuses more on being. Both Fiumara and Wilberg invite the noticing of listening as a way of responding to suffering and its meeting of philosophy and spiritual practice (as opposed to a skills and technique based activity). Wilkinson (2008) describes this quality of attention when the researcher is open 'to notice the very difficult to notice, AND, that which will not be noticed without the humility to be open to the unexpected'

separate out, the therapist needs to 'fall from the pedestal' and the client's healthy protest needs to be heard as a validating action (see for example Banai et al. (2005).

(p. 234). Wilkinson hints at the possibility of staying in a place of not knowing, of being open to a field of possibilities in encountering the stories and experiences of others. Frank (1995; 2004, 2010) provides many rich narratives of people living with illness and the ways in which those stories might be heard: 'One of our most difficult duties as human beings is to listen to the voices of those who suffer. The voices of the ill are easy to ignore, because these voices are often faltering in tone and mixed in message, particularly in their spoken form before some editor has rendered them fit for reading by the healthy. These voices bespeak conditions of embodiment that most of us would rather forget our vulnerability to. Listening is hard, but it is also a fundamental moral act; to realise the best potential in post modern times requires an ethics of listening for the other.' (1995, p.25)

Frank's statement offers a powerful question to researchers and practitioners. What is it that we dare listen to in those who are suffering or who we are hearing? He relates this as an ethical duty (like Levinas – see for example Hand 1989) to respond to the other. Holiday (2010) speaks of a 'redemptive subjectivity', that is, the way in which we both hear and give voice to those who are not traditionally heard. It thus becomes a re-questioning of dominant ideologies that reclaims the psyche or life that is described and interpreted by an academic community or political elite until it becomes bent out of shape. This process of rejecting oppressive ideologies thus potentially enables a move into healing and reclamation of person's individual and collective foundations. Anderson and Braud (2011) present this as valid research on the basis of its transformative capacity – the transformation of the researcher, the 'audience' and the research participants.

For Fiumara (1999), listening is also the act of respect for the other. It is the 'other side of language'. Accordingly, the quality of listening we bring is crucial for the way in which the speech of the other evolves. The narrative, she says, can be understood in relation to the listening that conditions their receptivity. Firstly, how I as listener enter into the others speech is significant '...a listener can only 'enter' in a way which is at once paradoxical and committing: 'by taking leave', by standing aside and making room' (p.144). The paradox is being there but also getting out of the way. For Esme, my getting in the way was my failure to see the 'heart butterflies'. Fiumara goes on to invite the possibility of being open to being and staying selfless to facilitate a listening environment conducive to attending to the other: 'The point at issue is whether it is possible to suspend or surpass the most surreptitious or deep seated automatic responses of approval or recrimination' (p.152). For Esme, I imagine that this was the moment that 'bricks' came out of my mouth. For Fiumara, listening also invites a deep trust. A trust in the uncertainty of communication, 'A trust that our interlocutor may convey what is yet unknown, unexpected, or even what might actually be necessary for our own constant renovation' (p.162). The listener is potentially opened to new possibilities if she hangs on despite any difficulties that the speaker's words impose. How I re-heard Esme was important. How we stayed and trusted in the possibility of relationship following the opening of a rupture allowed a re-hearing, a re-knowing, and for both of us the possibility of new and interesting things to emerge.

Listening, then, is not only about attention to speech but also to the other who speaks. We can, as Prendergast and Bradford (2007) note, listen from the eyebrows up, particularly when it becomes filtered through conceptual

psychotherapy models. Wilberg (2004) explores in depth the qualities of listening. Like Fiurmara he describes it as act of midwifery, the ‘maieutics of listening’. Drawing on Heidegger and Buber, he develops a *philosophy* of listening as opposed to the *skills* of listening of which, he says, simply give the impression of being listened to. He makes the distinction between trainings that give knowledge and skills for the practical relation with a client: ‘We would be better off speaking not of some ‘thing’ called the therapeutic *relationship* but rather asking ourselves what constitutes therapeutic *relating*?’ He goes on to emphasise listening ‘understood as a relational practice and not merely as the application of a body of theoretical knowledge and professional ‘skills’ to the therapeutic relationship’ (p.1). Like Finlay and Evans (2009), this subtle shift opens up different qualities and experiences for the researcher. Rather than the gatherer of ‘facts’ and phenomena, I become engaged in a real meeting where a wide range of experiencing’s come into view.

The qualities of ‘presence’ are touched on here. The degree to which I can be still and ‘allow’ things to unfold seems to touch into this quality. I recall in my early training, as I journeyed to London every week, I would stand at the underground station and await the scuppering mice, which ran on the railway track. I wrote this piece called ‘Presence and the Art of Mice Watching’:

‘My weekly trip to CTP involved a regular routine of catching the underground. One of my little pleasures was the trip home, which involved a change at Green Park Station. It was usually quite late - about 10.30pm - and whilst waiting for the train I began to play a little game. It was mice watching. I came to realise that there were mice on the tracks. At first it was hard to see them, especially if I was frantically looking out for them. However, I learned that if I waited quietly

and still and gently lowered my gaze, one or several would invariably come into my field of vision. At the end of a hectic day, Green Park Station became a place of meditation - of sorts. A space for open friendliness with two minutes or so to be present to the little creatures who filled me with a smiley warmth as I headed back to collect my car at Acton Town, in West London and then drove home to the West Country. There were occasions of course when I didn't see them. I imagine they were there, but my head was probably full of other things and I didn't create space to allow their presence to be felt.' (Mojsa, 2002)

The story of the mice watching is a simple reflection on a quality of openness to seeing and feeling what is there without force. The mice, it seems, would only emerge in my consciousness if I patiently waited. Wilberg captures these qualities of the maieutic approach. He lists several aspects, which I think are helpful. They are less a table of 'skills' and more a way of being. As I read them there is nothing to 'check off' as an achievable action but more an enquiry into noticing the quality of relational dynamics both internally, with myself and externally to whom I am listening:

Withholding

The capacity to restrain immediate verbal response and extend the interval of silence between speaking 'turns'.

Hearkening

Focusing on the still-point of silence within ourselves, connecting with the space in the belly

Homing in

The capacity to establish a precise listening tone and ‘wavelength’ of attunement as one listens, from which impressions and images can surface.

Harbouring

The capacity to withhold from verbal questioning of the speaker and instead to hold and heed our own questions silently within ourselves.

Holding open

The capacity to hold questions open within ourselves and allow answers time to incubate, rather than need to come to conclusions.

Hallowing

Withholding after someone has finished speaking, thus letting their words linger in the air and sink into us in silence. In this way we can heed a persons choice of words and language as well as attuning to their inner being.

Heeding

Letting the speakers words sink in and penetrate us so that we take them to heart. This can take moments, hours or years. It implies that we are able to hear another person’s words as the echo of a part of oneself, irrespective of whether we agree or disagree with them.

Hypnosis

The Greek word for sleep. Listening understood as a ‘hypnotic’ state in which we allow ourselves to ‘sleep into’ the speech of another.

Hara

Listening from the belly rather than from the head or heart. Embodying the words spoken.

Holding

Just as one can hold someone in one’s visual gaze. So one can hold them in the inner gaze of one’s listening intent.

Handling

Silently messaging the speaker by modulating the inner ‘tone’ of one’s listening and the inner ‘touch’ of one’s listening intent.

Beholding

The capacity to turn one’s gaze inward as one listens and ‘hold’ the inner impressions that gather and come into view.

Hosting

The altered quality of self experience that comes about through suspending the ordinary speaking self and becoming host to one’s own ‘listening self’.

(Wilberg, 2004).

I have found Wilberg's thoughts incredibly helpful in the reflective listening process. Together with Gendlin (1996), the inner space created for the implicit unfolding allows 'more' to be heard, sensed and experienced. Set in a model of Van Manen's model of Phenomenology of Practice and Pathic understanding the focus of listening homes into an attunement to other qualities beyond calculative thinking (Van Manen 2007).

I also want to touch in briefly on the work of Levinas in the context of research that sets it out in a more ethical way, a more relational one, i.e. where an 'other' is revealed beyond the comprehension of the words themselves. Here we are looking at the alterity of the other. Here, we are seeing a shift from not just paying attention to, but attending to the other. This means that a sense of responsibility comes into being when we welcome the other and attend to them. We receive, if you like, the alterity of the other and in our listening we are able to have meaning beyond the words being spoken. Our response is to more than speech. It is not through 'getting', grasping or taking on board what the other says but attending to the difference of the other- that which I cannot make my own. There is a sense here then, where we must listen to that which is hard to hear. This is the sweet responsibility that Levinas elucidates I believe. It is the ethical condition of language. It is also the place that Todres (2008) speaks of when he says 'more than words can say'. The attention of listening becomes a drawing near to another person, which signifies a welcoming of the other person (Gibbs 2000).

For Levinas, hope resides in the possibility of a suffering that is opened up not through cruelty or hatred, but through a profound exposure to the other that

constantly risks the rupture of ones being. For it is only through this rupture that the listener - at this very moment - can give of herself fully. The work with Esme allowed me to fully embody this knowledge, as she pointed to the oh-so-subtle defensiveness that my 'expert' within felt at its least comfortable.

KNOWLEDGE ENGENDERED THROUGH RESEARCH

Transpersonally orientated research is concerned with exploring dimensions of human experience ordinarily thought of as spiritual and therefore at times ineffable (Anderson 1998a). From a transpersonal perspective, one way of viewing research is to see it from a Gnostic perspective, that is, where knowledge and learning are moved away from a 'scientific' or 'calculative' perspective into an endeavor known in some traditions as 'knowledge through presence' (Yadze, 1992), or 'knowledge from the heart of self enquiry' (Louchakova, 2004)). In this paradigm, research can be viewed and concerned with a 'knowledge that changes and transforms the knowing subject ' (Cheetham, 2003, p.47).

Accordingly, knowledge that doesn't change the thinker remains abstract in this paradigm, precisely because it doesn't transform the knower and the world. For Ibn' Arabi (the 14th century Islamic philosopher), knowledge cannot be spoken of without investigating the nature of the self that knows (Whittick, 2003), it is 'the rational articulation of human awareness and consciousness. Everything we know is ourself, because awareness and knowledge are situated inside the self, not outside of it.an internal image of an external image' (p.33).

This notion of inner tacit knowledge is at the heart of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990), the 'felt sense' (Gendlin, 1996) and Embodied Enquiry

(Todres 2007). Moustakas (1990) describes tacit capacity as a sensing of ‘the unity or wholeness of something from an understanding of the individual qualities or parts’ (p. 20). The tacit dimension of personal knowledge is described by Sela-Smith (2002) as ‘the internal place where experience, feeling and meaning join together to form both a picture of the world and a way to navigate the world’ (p.60). Tacit knowledge is always under construction, creating building blocks of our individual personal knowledge. There are significant ponderings here for professional development and practice issues and the degrees to which psychotherapy research engages with this depth enquiry. It is in the interior referencing that Gendlin (1962, 1996) describes as the ‘felt sense’ and the unfolding dance of ‘thinking at the edge’ (Krycka, 2007). Sela Smith (2002) draws attention to the difficulties of a preoccupation with ‘linguaging’ experiences. On the one hand this enhances interpersonal awareness and awareness of self (i.e. I can share it with others and step back and potentially self evaluate). She describes this as the ‘thinking observing self’. However, if the experience cannot be verbalised it can be sent underground. She goes on, ‘I speculate that it is not the thinking-observing-self but rather the I-who-feels who is experiencing the feeling that provides access to the tacit dimension of non verbal thought’ (p. 62). Gendlin (1962) provides a helpful process for research methodology, suggesting that the preconceptual nature of experiencing requires more than what scientific concepts can grasp or describe. This was a key aspect in my work with the co-researchers on the nonduality project and examples are offered later.

As Sela Smith points out, the conceptual mind cannot fully be with an experience because it stands separate with a role to judge, compare, contrast, analyse and so on. It can never fully be with the experience.

Petitmingen (2006) argues that a major task of research is to improve methods to capture and give words to subjective experiencing. This becomes especially significant when the experiences we are trying to articulate are both subtle and ineffable (as in nondual experiencing). Gendlin (1996) in particular has pioneered this, arguing that the focus of enquiry needs to move from content to process. How we are is informed by bodily awareness - experienced as the felt sense that can be contacted if attended to. If contacted and approached in careful, mindful ways then change is initiated. It is this implicit enquiry that shifts awareness from the conceptual mind to the feeling and experiential self.

Focusing utilises six processes:

Clearing a space - Taking time to focus inwards, to be still and notice.

Felt Sense - Allowing it to emerge, paying attention, stepping back and lightly noticing it.

Handle - Getting a handle on it, allowing a phrase or quality to fit it. right.

Resonating - Going back and forth between the felt sense and the word (phrase, or image). Checking the resonance for its fit, capturing the quality.

Asking - asking: what is it? Being with it till something comes along with a shift, a slight "give" or release.

Receiving - Receive whatever comes in a friendly way. (Gendlin 1996).

It is this method that Todres (2007) has developed most clearly in embodied enquiry, which will be focused on further shortly. But first, a shift into exploring the poetic and aesthetic ways of engaging and experiencing the lived world.

POETIC AND AESTHETIC PHENOMENOLOGY

Heidegger (1971) explores his concern for the technological age in which humanity forgets its being. For him, art and poetry were significant and fundamental to the lived world. In this view, when scientific concern and a research and therapeutic engagement becomes based on technique, repeatability etc, we risk a major de-humanisation of practice (Todres et al 2009).

Pelias (2004) invites us to develop research work where the researcher, ‘instead of hiding behind the illusion of objectivity, brings himself (sic) forward in the belief that an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic voice can place us closer to the subjects we wish to study’ (p.1).

This theme of the vulnerable researcher is further explicated by Behar (1996), who describes the act of writing vulnerably is to ‘open a Pandoras’s box. Who can say what will come flying out?’ In this place of not knowing there is a sense of vulnerability and dynamism. Whilst reflecting on her work she tenderly asks, ‘Who is this woman who is writing of others? What do others want from her? The feminist in me wanted to know: What kind of fulfilment does she get – or not get – from the power she has? The novelist in me wanted to know: What, as she blithely goes about the privilege of doing research, is the story she isn’t willing to tell?’ (p.20). There is a compelling invitation from Behar to be

engaged in a process of self-enquiry AND to evocatively communicate the story of her research. Romanyshyn (2007) also speaks of the researcher as poet, but as a ‘failed poet’, who ‘stands in the gap between the fullness of experience and the ‘failure’ of language to command it, one who is able to bear the tension between knowing and not knowing.’

In hearing these ways of being, we can perhaps get a feel for the quality of presence and approach of the embodied researcher, where key aspects sit in the vulnerable place of not always knowing.

Traditional phenomenological research tries to be rigorous and precise in capturing phenomena. According to Husserl, our task in research is always to ‘keep returning to the things themselves’ (Langdrige, 2007). In many ways it is somewhat of a mantra to researchers; as Giorgi (2006) recounts, “‘Going back to the things themselves” means capturing things as they are lived and avoids this problem of lack of relevance and ecological validity. Collecting data from the lifeworld of the participants rather than attempting to “objectively measure’ or quantify the data is one important aspect of doing phenomenological research that insures the desired faithfulness to the phenomenon’ (p.75). Staying faithful to the phenomena is a crucial aspect according to Todres and Galvin (2008). Descriptive phenomenology is fine, however, there are risks in the attempt to ‘capture’ the essences using a language that tries to sum up experiences. A certain ‘something’ may be missed. This very issue is articulated by Burdge (2004), who recognises the limitations of the descriptive phenomenological method. Following her work on the spiritual experiences of peacemakers in Israel, she notes, ‘Because spiritually advanced individuals have struggled for

thousands of years to find ways to clearly articulate spiritual experiences that are not commonly experienced, it would be expected that a reliance on purely verbal data to provide an understanding of transpersonal phenomena may be limiting' (p.111).

Instead of using language that is 'summative' (which can 'sterilise' the gritty aliveness of the phenomena being explored) in embodied interpretation the tender intention is to try and find words that are faithful to the phenomena. This is described as a more 'aesthetic phenomenology' and whose values are more akin to poetry. It affirms and acknowledges that human life is embodied in a sensual world Anderson (2001).

EMBODIED INTERPRETATION

Embodied interpretation then, is a more poetic representation following phenomenological descriptive analysis. It is a body based hermeneutics that goes back and forth between language and the felt sense of the text carried in our bodies. Merleau Ponty (1995) saw the lived life as one that embodied feeling. 'When I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it is bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as a subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world. The ontological world and body which we find at the core of the subject are not the world or body as an idea, but on the one hand the world itself contracted into a comprehensive grasp, and on the other the body itself as a knowing –body' (p.408).

So, for Merleau Ponty, it is through the body and the bodily experiences that the surrounding world becomes meaningful for us (Dahlberg et al 2008). Toombs (1995) describes the significance of an embodied research paradigm through her work as someone living with multiple sclerosis, she says, ‘I am embodied not in the sense that I *have* a body – as I have an automobile, a house or a pet – but in the sense that I *exist* or *live* my body (p.10). She cogently describes her lived experience of disability and the ways in which the lifeworld comes to life through the body and how she engages with a re-interpretation and re-organisation of her space. To illustrate this, she gives the example of a bookcase, which sat outside her bedroom. She says of it, ‘...once intended by body “as a repository for books”, then “that which is to be grasped for support on the way to the bathroom” and is now intended as “an obstacle to get around the wheelchair” (p.16). The lived body manifests one’s being in the world.

As researchers using qualitative research methodology we are engaged in attempting to bring alive the experiences that people share (including, from a heuristic perspective, our own).

So, in his work on embodied research, Todres (2007) sums up embodied enquiry as

- A practice that attends to the relationship between language and the experiencing body
- A confluence of thought, feeling, head and heart
- In not relying on thoughts alone, it opens itself to what is creative and novel – the pre-patterned ‘more’ of the lifeworld

- The arising embodied understanding from embodied enquiry is HUMANISING in a world that easily objectifies self and other

Communicating experience is a key part of both therapy and research. From a phenomenological perspective there is an attempt to get close to the lifeworld experience, sit with it, with its texture, sounds, with the resonances and essences of that which is significant. We can witness in this, a key shift from ‘thinking about’ to ‘attending to’ the phenomena. The attention here is something like sitting with the whole body as a ‘poetic ear’ in order to be faithful to the subject. Todres (2007) describes an embodied approach as a process that gives attention to both ‘texture’ and ‘structure’. He highlights entering into the heart of the texture of language whilst also stepping back, creating some distance to pull out the threads of the themes (thematic analysis). This then, is a moving backwards and forwards to the descriptive layer of the phenomena (texture) with the structure (a rigorous scientific description).

We are left with the task of noting how to capture the essence of the lifeworld and Galvin and Todres (2006) invite us to explore the aesthetics of phenomenology. How do we capture the richness of experience and find words that are faithful to the phenomenon in its complexity and texture? How to ensure attention is given to the interaction between the felt sense of the ‘more’ given in interview texts AND...the kind of language that may evocatively represent the felt sense.

They see the task as two fold:

1. Engage or enter the others experiences in a way that we are touched and

2. To re-emerge into language from the touched understanding so that one can share the insights in a way that is alive and both resonates and has applicability to others.

So, we need to deeply engage with the alive essence of the experience and then re-emerge and find ways of engaging with others, our readers, our audience, to communicate that shared understanding.

However, the complexity of the lived experience says much more than can be verbalised. The short film, *Sounds and Senses of Pakistan*, (in the Pakistan Chapter) was an attempt to get a feel of the lived spiritual life for Sufi practitioners and the world of spiritual practice, devotion, poverty, and shared humanity. Together with words I was attempting to represent the essence of the experience through its many layered textures. In editing video images and sounds, my intention was to allow the viewer to sit back, receive and experience the lived world of embodied spirituality, recognising that it was from this place that people practiced and understood ‘Therao’ (the quality of compassionate and present beingness that I was exploring). Pink (2007) describes the use of sense ethnography via video as a methodology for exploring other people’s everyday realities. She says that our intention of presentation is informed by how we approach our research. In part, my work had a degree of naivety with regards to the presentation and I was more engaged with capturing the essence of the experience as best I could.

Working from the place of embodied interpretation.

The process of working, for Galvin and Todres (2006, 2008) then looks like this:

- Being present to the data

- Entry into the alive meanings
- Dwelling and holding so that meanings can form
- Finding words that work

Being present to the data means engaging with heeding, and attending to the others experiences. This requires a sensitivity to their voices, body language, energetic resonance and other ways they present themselves. It means imagining their world, staying close to what is...stepping back...coming up close, reading and rereading the transcript or data.

Entry into the alive meanings is about engaging with and entering into the felt senses, attending to them, breathing in the holistic, aesthetic qualities that are appearing. Being with the phenomenon now in the present as opposed to back then. The feature then is of receptivity.

Dwelling and Holding so that meanings can form invites a subtle shift into a quality of listening through dwelling and holding. In this place we hold delicately in order that the potentiality of the felt presence becomes tangible enough for meanings, messages and possible language to form.

This requires a certain kind of attentive stillness. The listening qualities of Wilberg (2006) spring to mind, in particular the philosophy of maiuetic listening with the processes of 'holding', beholding, hearkening etc. An image given by Todres and Galvin is that of a comforting mother holding an insecure infant until the infant can express herself more fully.

In each of my research endeavours on nonduality, I had thought that it would be possible to simply thematise my findings, however, as I processed the material it became clear to me that each of our meetings held something significant. It was therefore important to try and capture something of the whole experience with each of my co-researchers. The dilemma, of course, is the risk of producing too much 'data'. I took a long time to go 'back and forth' in order to distil the key aspects. I came back to the research material for a final time whilst on retreat at a Zen Centre. The silence and nourishing nature of the retreat centre gave me a place of spaciousness to refine, listen and distil the words of my co-researchers. Given the nature of the work it also felt important to me that I was able to 'sit' with this in the presence of stillness where the nature of the centre had an ambience of facilitating deep listening and presence. So, each of my co-researchers had time with me at the centre. Once again, I went back in to their words and tried to listen to the subtleties. I spoke with my supervisors and described what felt like, 'falling in love' with my co-researchers. What emerged was a different way of appreciating them, listening with a lighter, heart based touch (a little like 'mice watching'). I saw Henry in a much more fuller way. In my early notes I had found Henry a little restrictive as I had felt somewhat constrained by his thinking. I remembered afterwards feeling 'boxed in' by his strong Wilberian take on things. This seemed to mirror the room we met in which was quite small. However, on revisiting the interview, I was touched by the warmth of his smile and his engagement with me. It was a good example of my own inner frustration clouding the experience and I am aware that my notes could have reflected a different story had I not engaged in a process of dwelling and 'to-ing and fro-ing' with the research interview. As I sat with a more open

heart, I could receive fuller material. My frustration with him had as much to do with a long car journey in the rain on the day of the interview, I recalled.

What gets invited in then, is the possibility for transformation. Transformation on the part of the co-researcher, transformation on the part of the researcher and transformation on the part of the reader or recipient of research findings.

I am including an extract from the transcript with one of my practitioner co-researchers, Molly. More of her story is included in Chapter 6. In this extract Molly is describing working with a client, who is very depressed. She describes sitting with him in a place of spaciousness, holding him so lightly, held, barely touching like the cupped shape of a sliver of new moon. She ends up describing how she feels the client's experiencing in her own body. I try to stay with her unfolding description as she moves with her felt sense. What is striking in this extract (and much of our interview) is the engagement Molly has with the environment. We can note when the 'external' world seems to dance in harmony with Molly's inner exploration. As researcher, I simply tried to stay with whatever was arising, much as one would do in a focusing session.

Krycka (2006), drawing on the work of Gendlin, describes this as a process of 'thinking at the edge' and highlights the ways in which focusing can be utilised in phenomenological research. Focusing enables an engagement with subtle experience that hitherto may have been missed or possibly unable to be communicated.

Molly unfolds in her experiencing, much as Gendlin describes as 'carrying forward' (Kryka, 2011). I sat with Molly, unaware of what might emerge. Molly

was not aware of would emerge. The environment around was not aware of what would emerge.

The section began with an enquiry about holding a client in a moment of despair. As Molly describes the lightest of touches with her client, and a deep sense of 'being with' the energetic engagement seems to also be present as a parallel process in our conversation:

M: Yeah. And there's an image come to mind now from a client I saw on Friday about that intense blackness and despair ...you know the kind of dark night, early dawn....those frightening near death experiences that feel like an endless void or hellish possibility. That was my clients experience...and that description of an enclosed dark tunnel vortex, trapped, no escape, helpless, intense loneliness place. We were talking together in the context of that.....it's like the moon when its dark, a little tiny sliver ...you know when there's just that (makes an arc with her hand) ...thin holding at the side...its not holding like a bowl underneath...its like holding from the side.. tiny little sliver of awareness...

J: So something about the lightest of touches

M: Yeah

J: Not holding it up

M: No, that would feel like some kind of defensive illusion.

J: I wonder how it would be to stay with that (makes an arc movement with hand)...holding it with that light touch...that little sliver..

M: Little sliver.....silver.....shiny.. and a massive intense darkness....the moon...it's not seen...not able to be seen...it's on the left as I look at it....silver thin like that birds songs (sounds of a bird singing in the background). Not that

one (as a loud crow bursts out in a caw!)(we laugh together) ...That one's got the intense black degree of darkness.

J: Its interesting isn't it....its all there in that moment.....the intense black and the sliver

M: (smiles and nods)

J: How about if we just lightly hold on to that.....just that kind of.....how is it to hold that moment with a light touch...it sounds like that could be one of those moments where you either try to snatch it away, like the crow...make it ok..

M: Mmmm.... that would have been so disrespectful

J: ...how it is to hold that?

M: It feels like there's a lot of energy inside (points to the heart) in the central channel. (Moves hands in forward and back motion)...moving...all the time. Its not solid. Can't tell where its gonna go....feels really really alive..but not all solid...

J: Maybe we can just stay with that too...mmm I'm searching for words here but maybe they're not to be found.

M: (Long pause) (Bird tweet in the background.) Interesting...there's that pull to open my eyes and see what sort of bird that is.....And now its gone. To come out, you know being in this and then (makes a pulling out movement).. (Pause)

Molly was describing the subtle experience of energetic resonance. This wasn't just the attunement to her client but in the interview she demonstrated a profound awareness and connection to the environment. Indeed, the sounds weaving around her from the birds seemed to also work in rhythm with her description of the subtle experiences. The lightly chirping bird exemplified the light touch. The

blaring crow was an intruder who took away the subtlety of the light touch. As researcher, the communication of ‘this’ is important. To not describe or notice the profound connection of world, sounds, creatures, woman, embraced in a chaotic display of arising sounds and images, would fail to describe Molly’s relationship to the world and to her clients – and of her clients to her. Reducing Molly’s work to a simple set of transcribed words or a set of actions misses both the poetry of engagement (of which psychotherapy is about) and would miss what she was expressing. More importantly perhaps, I, as researcher would have dishonestly placed myself out of the experience. I felt her attunement and as a practitioner knew the potency of that alive connection to clients.

Finding words that work.

‘Finding words that work’ involves a toing and froing between the bodily felt sense and words that resonate with it. There is a sense of ‘feel right’ when the words resonate. The body feels a yes or no to different words...a bit like Goldilocks. This Goldilocks effect is a kind of subtle movement back and forth as a process of ‘living editing’.

Telling involves providing enough context and commentary so that something new is understood based on research findings. The showing is providing enough texture so that the reader has a sense of the aliveness of the phenomena or experience. The completed picture that Galvin and Todres give is that of the reader being able to make a temporary hospitality of their own dwellings or houses so that understanding emerges - a blend of the aesthetics of art with hermeneutics.

In the 'Beyond Statistics' project (Chapter 4) I did a small piece of research. After drawing together some general themes I then scripted the conversations for presentation at conference. One of the workers, who had a background in acting then worked with me to get into character in order to feel the aliveness of the words. We spent time working with a selected script from the transcript, embodying the feelings. He then presented the research findings in a twenty minute slot at conference, bringing the men's words to life through short vignettes (Pebody, 2009). Later, I also re worked the script as a video (Mojsa 2010)

Importantly, each of the creative pieces were not done purely as a creative act i.e. as in a piece of art, but were an attempt to communicate 'from there'. This is a significant point that Jones (2012) articulates. Narrating his experience following the screening of a film, he describes how an audience member bellowed:

“‘What about the scholarship? Where's the scholarship?’ I immediately replied, ‘It's in the footnotes!’” What I meant was that the scholarship had been backgrounded in order to foreground the more immediate experience of being a member of an audience, sitting in the dark without our usual critical academic hats on, and embracing suspended disbelief. I believe that this approach produces possibilities for the reduction of interpersonal distance by the development of a sensibility for the intuitive, emotive and associative aspects of communication. Those footnotes, nonetheless, contain gems of careful scholarship'. (p.15).

So, the interpersonal distance is potentially reduced and within that space a different relating to the research phenomena is evoked. Sandelowski, Trimble, Woodward and Barroso (2006) also describe the synthesising of research material into a script, which was then utilised as a DVD to enhance practice.

Their emphasis, as well as ensuring that it actively conveyed, the research synthesis focused on the social challenges rather than medical; they ensured that the women who took part were both represented and embraced creatively.

The ‘performance’ of the research material in the practice development project was an important component in bringing out the lived experience and giving voice to the co-participants. In the faith and belief that Jones (2012) espouses above, I hoped that it would indeed reduce interpersonal distance and the development of sensitivity to the aspects of what was being communicated.

Galvin and Todres (2006) sum up their vision for an aesthetic and embodied interpretation as that which involves, ‘play, embodied resonance, care for the phenomenon and its aliveness (rather than simply our own construction of it), care for the audience, a contemplative gesture of dwelling, an interest in a kind of human understanding where things come from and where things are going (narrative coherence) a hermeneutic scientific concern with how parts of wholes fit together and an existential concern for our uniqueness and commonality’ (p. 35).

It was in the spirit and practice of this, that the work with my co-researchers was conducted.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

At the time of transfer from MPhil to DProf, the formal Research Ethics protocol was not established. This meant that the current formal documentation protocol is not present in the appendix. Working with my supervisors, I ensured that the

process followed ethical practice and this was recorded via the annual monitoring with the school committee.

The current practice follows a clear process. This system is essential in relation to good practice and a requirement of most peer reviewed journals. As the project involved working with fellow practitioners and not clients or NHS patients, there was no need to do a separate NHS assessment.

Bournemouth University requires an application through the school where it is internally reviewed following a clear system. At the time of my transfer the ethical issues were addressed and worked through with my supervisors. I utilised a system, which ensured that co-researchers were aware of the research project and that they had a consent form (see Appendix 6 and 7). Transcription of the interviews, when not done by myself, were completed after signing a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix 8). As a registered member of UKCP (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy) I follow the principles and codes of ethics set by its Ethical Framework requirements. In line with my membership requirements I am insured and adhere to my Organisation Member Code of Ethics.

The current process follows a clear pathway and the documentation is uniform and is used by all researchers ensuring conformity of practice. The Information Leaflet and Consent Form, invites co-researchers to be aware of the purpose of a study, why they have been chosen, benefits and disadvantages of taking part, the scope of confidentiality and security of transcripts / audio visual material.

The General Risk Assessment Form enables the researcher to audit and assess activities associated with the research. Working through the proforma one describes the research activity; its location and potential hazards. These are assessed and any advice acted on.

The full protocol of the internal review, then, includes a participant information sheet; an interview schedule; consent form and risk assessment form. Once these have been fully discussed and checked the internal reviewer signs off the review and formal notification given to the researcher as evidence of ethical practice.

The work at Body Positive North West was conducted in accordance with the organisation's own codes of practice. Permission was sought from participants and confidentiality agreed appropriately and informed consent gained (see Appendix 2 and 3.)

The work in Pakistan was followed with awareness of ethical practice. Confidentiality and anonymity has been preserved. The video work was completed with mentoring from a photographer who worked as a 'street photographer'. I ensured, under his guidance, that permission was gained where possible for the street view filming. The final writing was also seen and approved by my chief co-researcher 'Aesha'.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT.

This chapter highlights work completed for the Practice development component for the Doctorate in Professional Practice. For this, I focused on work I had developed at a project in the North West of England. The project at Body Positive North West (a service user led organisation for people living with HIV) enabled me to develop two broad areas. The first focused on establishing a research and contemplative art project that would engage with members spiritual and well being needs. Secondly it was an opportunity to develop approaches to communicating research findings. It was on these projects that I began to develop alternative ways of capturing and presenting research findings using video. Both were intentioned from a desire to create research that touched on a ‘goodness of fit’ model, that is, research presentation that would enable it’s audience to resonate with and be sensitised to the material of the presented lifeworld. (Todres, 2008). Both were opportunities to develop researcher skills in practice.

THE MANDALA PROJECT

Background

In 2006, my year of treatment, one of the activities that helped me focus, contemplate and meditate on healing was the use of mandalas or healing circles. I spent time talking with a practitioner, Judith Cornell, by telephone in America. Judith, a woman who had also experienced cancer had developed a 'kit' to help people focus and draw mandalas (Cornell, 1994, 2004). Following a radical awakening in 1979, Judith began pioneering a method to help others to awaken spiritually and heal at the deepest levels. She saw her methods blending the sacred art and the spiritual science of the mandala with theories in quantum physics, Raja and Kundalini yoga, and transpersonal psychology. She was a classically trained yogini of the Hindu non-dual Saivite tradition and was also known as Rajita Sivananda. Sadly, she died in 2010.

In late 2007 I was fortunate to be awarded a grant from the Lloyd Symington Foundation⁶ to study with Judith Cornell as part of the newly established Mandala facilitation programme. Part of the grant funding agreement was that I would present the work to people living with cancer and life threatening illness and be mentored by Judith over the year. As I was already involved with the HIV project in Manchester I had planned on doing some of the work there. Because of the improvements in medication (in the West) many people living with HIV now have a good life expectancy. For a number of people, cancer had now become one of the major illnesses for people living with HIV.

⁶ The Lloyd Symington Foundation is an American trust that supports individuals and projects in the development of holistic approaches for people living with cancer.

The use of holistic approaches for people living with life threatening illness is well documented (e.g. de Visser and Grierson. 2002, Unaid, 2006). Krycka (2000), for example, describes the findings of a holistic healing research project utilising some of the systems of healing found in Shamanism. The methods he addressed provided an opportunity to promote wellbeing of body, mind and soul. ‘In times of serious illness, shamanic techniques provide a way through which we reach out to heal ourselves and find certain core feelings – volition, omniscience, and embodiment – in the process. These core feelings provide the added benefits of self direction, acceptance and flexibility’ (p.85).

The Mandala Project, based on the work of Cornell, equally drew on models of healing, in particular within the field of psychoneuroimmunology (Watkins 1997; Bloom, 2001; Bauer-Wu 2011). As Krycka (2000) points out, the interest in indigenous and ancient wisdom traditions has grown and members of the Mandala project wanted to engage with it. Ray, one of the regular participants on the project, reflected the feeling of many in the group as he commented at the start of our work:

“We’re all being looked after for our physical condition, but the spiritual side needs healing too”.

Cortright (1997) asserts that optimal health is not merely determined by physical and psychological health but that it is also inextricably linked to spiritual well being. In many ways, the mandala project became a testimony to this.

Frank (1997) speaks of the dyadic and monadic bodies and illness. In the context of HIV infection this is a significant idea. According to Frank, the medical model

perceives people as monadic bodies, marked by separateness – the ill body, the ‘different to me’ body. Yet, ‘Illness represents a particular opening to becoming a dyadic body, because the ill person is immersed in a suffering that is wholly individual – my pain is mine alone – but also shared: the ill person sees others around her, before and after her, who have gone through this same illness and suffered their own wholly particular pains. She sees others who are pained by her pain. Storytelling is one medium through which the dyadic body both offers its own pain and receives the assurance that others recognise what afflicts it. Thus storytelling is a privileged medium of the dyadic body’ (p.36). This potent embodied relationality speaks of the healing gained from both a deeper connection to oneself and also to others through a shared narrative and the telling of one’s stories. Frank also begins to situate this in the ethical domain. This deep connection to others is seen as an ethical response of placing oneself in the ‘community of pain’.

Working with people who are living with life threatening conditions invites a different way of being. As we see later, energy levels of participants impacted on the general rhythm for the project, particularly with starting and ending times. Factored in to the weekends was the need to ensure that a kitchen staff member was there to cook nutritious meals etc. With occasional needs to break for treatment, the group wasn’t always stable, in the sense of regularity and this had to be accounted for. The project also served a wide community, including those who were in the UK as Asylum seekers. It was important to become aware of this community’s needs, for example their lack of stability in terms of housing, finance, fear of deportation and death etc. Ryde (2009) indicates the need for

white workers to be aware of the system of privilege that being white gives within systems. The organisation related well to this and their magazine devoted a lot of time to writing about cross cultural issues. Its outreach team of social workers developed an expertise in addressing some the specific needs of each of the groups. One of the weekly groups met as a support environment for the asylum seekers who were chiefly people from Sub Sahara Africa.

THE PROJECT

Participants

Work began on the Mandala project in May 2008. It was advertised within the organisation and the whole service user group received invitations to come along. At the time, the project ran a wide range of groups, for example a Gay Men's Group, an Asylum Seeker's group and women's group. Our work was to run over 5 weekends and I anticipated negotiating the times with the group. In total, throughout the project, there were 5 regular participants with 12 others popping in when they were able. The participants varied inasmuch they were service users from across the spectrum of service users in the organisation.

The five regulars included Annie, who was the oldest member of the group. Now in her early sixties she was diagnosed 10 years ago. As an artist she helped to direct the work. Her creativity and compassionate way of being springs to life on first meeting. She runs a support group, a blog and has been a spokesperson for people living with HIV both nationally and locally. She is heterosexual.

Chloe now in her 40's was diagnosed in her late teens and also lives with HCV. She describes herself as bisexual. Together with her dog, Lizzie, she cuts a fine presence. Her Northern humour and feminist pagan understanding bring freshness to our discussions.

Rose, a Kenyan woman and nurse trained set up the group for Asylum Seekers from Sub-Sahara Africa. Her deep Christian faith is followed through with her work in various projects. She describes herself as heterosexual.

Ray, a gay man in his 40's holds a quiet presence. He is married to his wife and has a daughter. He also has a boyfriend. His devoted search for spiritual understanding marks his presence. He has a commitment to the group that is warm and nurturing.

Pete, a gay man in his forties, also lives with HCV. Diagnosed a number of years ago, he has been engaged in the field for much of that time, gaining a lot of expertise. He has been a figurehead in publishing work on HIV, HCV and living positively.

Programme Outline.

The workshops initially followed the guidelines of Cornell's work programme, which involved guided activities focusing on inner work, drawing, meditation, relaxation and self enquiry (2004). On the first weekend we took photographs of the work and the group thought it would be good to make a video. The use of video technology was deemed appropriate as a way of capturing some of the flavour of the work. As part of the research work, I wanted to capture something of the experiences AND also enable the organisation to demonstrate it's effectiveness (for any potential funders) if needed. After some discussion, the

group agreed to the limits of it (which primarily meant that those who did not want to be 'seen' would not be filmed). Although not set in the constructs of a co-operative enquiry (Heron 1996; Reason 2003) the work was co-constructed and the resultant mandalas and video were a joint venture. In many ways, the project displayed a journey of transformation with both participants and myself affirming the sense of community, shared creativity and spiritual engagement.

At the end of the first period of the project, the group were well established and it was decided to create a sand mandala. I had done some further research from a Tibetan perspective (many years earlier I had done a Thangka⁷ painting course with the European Thangka artist, Andy Weber) and then spent time in further research (e.g. Jackson and Jackson 2006). I began getting together the materials – which included hand dying tubs of children's play sand using a variety of colour experiments. In the end, I discovered powder paint and wet sand and slow drying with a hair dryer proved to be the most efficacious. This process of preparing the materials was a significant task. In many ways it was my personal meditation of patiently ensuring that the materials were right for the work. I also tracked down some Chakpurs (the brass funnels used for directing and pouring coloured sand to enable the sand 'painting'). Other members of the project created the wooden base in which the sand mandala would be made. In a lavish style and with a nod to camp culture, I imagine it was one of the few sand mandalas to be framed with diamante decorations!

⁷ Thangka's are Tibetan paintings of Buddhist 'deities' or mandalas, painting on silks and other materials. They are highly geometric and usually follow a prescribed pattern carefully arranged in terms of measurements etc.

Beginnings

At the start of the work I used a questionnaire, which Judith Cornell had sent me. Although I felt the framework of the questionnaire was a little unwieldy and not relational, she wanted to compile statistics for potential funding from a Foundation. The brief questions and answers were given early on during the first day of the first weekend and I invited group members to fill it in. The resulting written answers were below:

What are your greatest physical concerns or challenges right now? The participant's who chose to fill in the brief questionnaire wrote the following comments:

1. *Continuing, getting through each day, keeping hope alive....moving!*
2. *Getting body strength back to how it used to be*
3. *Energy levels, effects of medications, asthma*
4. *Stay healthy/happy and moving forward*
6. *Getting through the day*
7. *Liver disease as a result of long term co-infection with Hepatitis C*
8. *Fatigue, weight loss, headaches, diarrhoea*
9. *Coping with medication – depression*

It was evident from these brief comments that managing energy levels was of enormous concern. Several people had been living with HIV for a number of years and had experienced the debilitating and life threatening challenges (sometimes aided by the earlier treatments), and the ongoing difficulties of living

with an immune compromised body. Such day-to-day exhaustion impacted on emotional and mental levels.

What are your greatest emotional concerns or challenges right now?

- 1 *Fighting depression*
2. *None*
3. *Getting a level balance all round.*
4. *Depression, connection to others. Motivation. Socialising.*
5. *Finding out who the real me is*
6. *Not to take an overdose*
7. *I have lived longer than expected and have concerns about family health and my own ageing process too.*
8. *Forgetfulness, memory loss, confidence loss*
9. *Social stigma of HIV*

There were some powerful comments here. Depression and mental well being concerns were high. The containment of such painful suffering was held in the project and its many services. However, the comments on the questionnaires needed a much greater sense of involvement on my part and it felt difficult to relate to devoid of connection, in terms of dialoguing. The difficulties of gaining information from this method were evident.

What are your greatest spiritual concerns right now?

1. *Finding peace*
2. *For all to understand there is but one God, no matter what name you give God*
3. *Keeping and finding the strength within to stay strong to get to the next stage of my life*
4. *Balance, inner peace, meaning of life*
5. *Helping me to help others*
6. *Not believing that what I am doing is right*
7. *Learning to live with depression*
8. *Exhaustion, lack of time/opportunity to invest in spiritual development.
Lack of awareness of a range of spiritual development opportunities that appeal to me*
9. *Overcoming the challenges of a death sentence (terminal illness).*

Once again, the comments showed a degree of suffering. One of the participants worked as a chaplain – hence the comment about acknowledging one ‘God’.

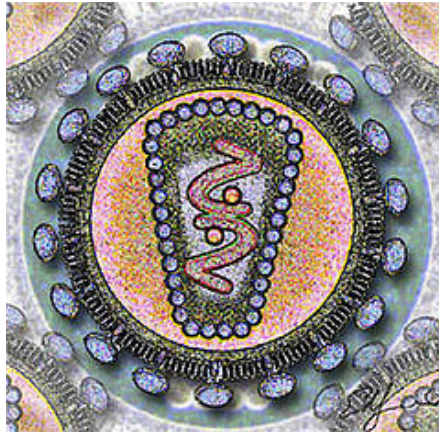
There were feelings of wishing to create space for beingness (balance and inner calm), working with suffering (depression and death) and interestingly the wish to be of benefit to others. A number of the comments reflect the concerns that Cornah (2006) outlined in terms of the themes of spiritual searching (referenced in the literature review). The organisation had capacity to work with complex emotional, spiritual and physical concerns in its range of help services, including pastoral care and the pain that was expressed in the questionnaires could be held.

I didn't follow through with any other paper-based questions. The limitations of engagement with such potent answers and comments were evident, and for me, I felt separated from the process, i.e. I was the one 'doing things' rather than engaged with. It also struck me that the activity encouraged the 'monadic body' and a sense of separation from community. This was not consistent with or in the spirit of my epistemological framework.

I was struck, on that first day of the openness of the participants to explore their 'spiritual selves'. One participant came to me and simply said 'I've been waiting for a space like this for a long time'. Ray, a gay man in his forties, came to each event as he valued the work and group members. I recall being very moved on one weekend when he apologised for being a bit dishevelled and not shaving. It had been too painful to shave, he said, as he'd just had a painful tumour removed from his thyroid. That degree of commitment to others in the group was evident too and a stalwart group of 5 remained regular throughout, supporting each other, in what Frank (1995) might describe as a 'community of pain'. The video captures something of the ways in which the group worked together as a community. One of the members also set up a website and blog, has written a book and now runs an active support group in her home town.

As well as filming the process, we gathered together afterwards and talked on camera. I transcribed some of our discussions and a selection is below. However, the ongoing commentary can be heard and witnessed in the video.

The HIV virus, as viewed under an electron microscope is seen as a mandala:



The HIV virus (image sourced online)

This image enabled us to play with a different sense of being. Annie said:

'When I first saw a section of the HIV virus itself, I was actually amazed. It was beautiful...it's part of everything, it's a part of nature....and that helped me to accept it.'

Rose who has a strong connection to her Christian faith, spoke about the development of compassion and gratitude:

'The experience is quite relaxing and has given the opportunity to really appreciate peace and understanding. For example, going to the state where I receive freely and so I give freely. It reaffirms what the apostle Paul says – that our bodies are the temples of God. They are special, so we can treat them in that special way. And because I'm that special, I'm a vessel that receives and a vessel that gives out. That makes me feel really appreciative. I am really grateful.'

I find Rose's experiencing of herself, as a dyadic body and engaged with others as a moving testimony to the space, which Frank describes as the 'community pain'. In this shared space of both giving and receiving.

Work on the sand mandala began with us all placing some of our medication at the centre of the board and contemplating, in silence, on the healing of all beings.

Annie, reflecting on this and the intention set in it at the start to be a symbol of healing for all said.

"I really like the idea of a working piece of art that will keep on working.....spreading its ripples of good thought and helping people to carry on healing themselves".

Similarly, Chloe described her process with the group in creating the sand mandala as:

'It's like some kind of ancient ritual we've just participated in. To know that it's not going to live forever, somehow makes it more poignant and magical'.

Chloe held a particular place in the group. She often brought her dog that would sit in the corner snoring loudly. She had, what might be described as a strong 'Northern humour', finding fun in absurdities:

'I've discovered that mandalas are a holy circle, a healing circle, a healing space.... there are no sharp corners...round is like the round of the earth, the round of a woman's belly when she's pregnant, the round of a flower, a dinner plate made with love and full of food...and the round of the arse hole (laughs).... Mine's heart shaped (laughs) and blows out kisses!' (Laughs).'

Together with Annie, they held a respectful, if amusing take on life and spirituality. Both of them had been close to death on a couple of occasions, yet were also now very engaged in setting up support environments for others.

Ray, quietly engaged in the project and gained a lot from the sense of shared community. Unsurprisingly his simple description of the mandala was:

'I love its texture because it's made out of the energy of us all'.

The work appeared to work on all levels, drawing on body, mind, spirit, and all senses. Anderson (2001) describes it perfectly, 'Writers attune to the movements of water, earth, air, and fire, which coax our bodily senses to explore. When embodied writing is attuned to the physical senses, it becomes not only a skill appropriate to research, but a path of transformation that nourishes an enlivened sense of presence in and of the world'. Although she is describing research writing, my understanding of the mandala work is the way that each participant tells their own story, expresses their own interiority and is their own inner researcher of experience.

The Mandala film was an attempt to capture something of the shared experiencing and stories through images and words and is hopefully a testimony to a groups community of pain and it's healing. It can be found in the Appendix or accessed on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/buhyfUpStss>

BEYOND STATISTICS – A RESEARCH PROJECT DESCRIBING THE
LIVED EXPERIENCE OF GAY MEN CO-INFECTED WITH HEPATITIS C AND
HIV INFECTION.

Having experimented with capturing the lived experience of participants on the mandala project I was invited to support the organisation in exploring the lived experiences of gay men co-infected with the Hepatitis C virus (HCV) and HIV. The findings were to be presented at conference, whose audience would be primarily gay men or health workers in the HIV field. The project was looking to two distinct areas of study. Firstly, there was the lived experience of the men themselves. How did they experience living with co-infection? And secondly, to highlight which streams of care might be focused on in the health and voluntary sectors. The challenge was to fit the results into a twenty-minute presentation schedule at conference. My focus turned to how to communicate and present the research work. How, for example could the stories of the participants be presented in ways that evoked a response and attitude from listeners? What began to emerge was an exercise in dancing with interpretation, narration and story.

Healing

*I am not a mechanism, an assembly of
various sections*

*And it is not because the mechanism is
working wrongly, that I am ill.*

*I am ill because of wounds to the soul, to the
deep emotional self*

*And the wounds to the soul take a long, long
time, only time can help*

And patience, and a certain repentance.

*Long difficult repentance, realisation of life's
mistake, and the freeing oneself*

*From the endless repetition of the mistake
Which mankind has chosen to sanctify.*

(D H Lawrence 1993)

Lawrence reminds us that healing and being a human being is not a simple mechanically driven imperative. Being human is to live with the mystery of life. This is a life filled with paradoxes and polarities, a life journey of dancing between meaning and despair, of loving and hating, of wellness and illness and of joy and sadness. For Marcum (2003) failure to see this lived experience, places the body (person) in a mechanical model where the professional sees only the disabled, labelled or diseased parts. Spinelli (2006a) quoting John Gaye, asserts that research 'cannot be accomplished by observing the individual as a complex mechanism geared up to respond to certain conditions in regular ways; rather we have to get inside the forms of life and the socially normative regularities in which the person's activities has taken shape. This requires an empathic and imaginative identification with the subject' (p.2).

Todres, et al (2007) note that whilst increased specialisation alongside technological advances have improved health and well being, qualitative research has shown that the human dimension and experience of care can be obscured. In a later paper Todres, Galvin and Holloway (2009) expand on this and posit 8 dimensions, which articulate the essential constituents of humanisation in relation to caring. Briefly, the framework looks at aspects of caring that have the possibility of dehumanising the person. They describe polarities such as Agency/Passivity, that is, the extent to which those cared for feel engaged with their care process versus the possibility of simply being told what will be given. They also include sense-making/loss of meaning, personal journey/loss of personal journey.

Their work is especially important when exploring nursing and caring in the dynamic ground of soulful human relationship and the everyday search for dignity, freedom and growth and the ways in which good caring practice can nourish these aspects.

The research study, then, was set in this context. Harris (2010) describes the plethora of clinical literature on Hepatitis C and the limited qualitative studies describing the lived experience of gay men who are co-infected with HIV & HCV. This also followed an awareness of the increase in prevalence nationally (and within BPNW itself) of co-infected gay men and the lack of qualitative data exploring the psycho-social needs of the group (Danta et al. 2007)

The key research objective for the project was to work with self-selected men attending Body Positive North West's Gay Men's Space (a group for gay men living with HIV who were also diagnosed with HCV). This was to be done by capturing the stories of the journey from diagnosis, through their treatment regime and experiencing of life.

The title of the research project 'Beyond Statistics' attempted to articulate the view of insiderness, i.e. that subjective experience is vital and central to how we create an understanding of ourselves, of illness and wellness (Toombs, 1995).

Objectification, on the other hand, refers to the ways in which people are made into objects and dealt with through labelling and fitting into a diagnostic system. My intention and wish was to firmly reside in the men's lived experiences and understanding of their journey with HIV and HCV infection, from diagnosis, through treatment regime and general experiencing of life. The lived experience

and narrative story was significant. As Frank (2010), so evocatively writes, it is through these narratives and stories that a sense of meaning and understanding can emerge.

Having put out invites to members in the group, 6 men agreed to participate. Letters and confidentiality agreements were given (see appendix) and a convenient time was arranged for each of them to come to the centre. One member was ill and wasn't able to complete the interview, so in the end I completed 5 interviews. Following the simple interview schedule, I worked with whatever material emerged for the participants and this was recorded and then transcribed. Any significant emerging themes were allowed to unfold, and thus I gained narrative material to explore and analyse. My approach of sitting alongside the men and working with felt experience enabled, for me, a deepening of understanding.

I used a selection of open questions, which in part were set by the project. The organisation was keen to get a sense of what provision the project needed to be vocalising for its service users. The areas that the men were invited to reflect on included:

- awareness of hepatitis C;
- sexual behaviour;
- drug use;
- hepatitis diagnosis;
- treatment offer and treatment uptake;
- treatment experience;
- responses from health care professionals and other gay men;

- self-perception;
- experiences of living with an additional chronic condition.

At the end of each individual interview, I took time to note initial responses using Focusing (Gendlin, 1996). Details of this are included in the research methodology chapter. This was helpful in simply locating the sense of my own feelings and the impact of the men's stories had on me. I used these reflections later in the analysis stage. I had in fact undergone a Focusing Certificate training in order to refresh and focus myself in the method. Had I not engaged in this embodied way, the subtleties of the men's experiencing may have been lost in a broad brushstroke thematic analysis. An example of this was Rob, who was discussing the lack of advice on managing dry skin whilst on the drug interferon. He then spoke about a friend who had then spent time talking with him about how to use skin moisturisers. As I focused on his words and on the experiencing of relief he expressed I began to see that encounter as hugely important. The warmth of touch, the being seen and the searching for compassionate intimacy were tenderly being expressed. During the analysis, once again, I listened to the tapes and read the transcripts and spent time going back and forth listening again and 'feeling' the words that were spoken. Taking time to dwell (Galvin and Todres, 2006) and hearken (Wilberg, 2004) to the words and voices was an important part of the process. The in depth interviews yielded rich material and several interesting themes emerged.

These were:

- Hepatitis C as a teacher
- Sex and sexuality

- Isolation
- Depression
- Work
- Experiences of treatment and services

There were two ‘gathered’ bits of data. On the word hand there were the emergent themes (listed above) but overlaid with them were the textured nuances of the words, the experiencing of difficult feelings all of which I found moving following the deeper engagement with the interviews. The process of entering into the interviews again allowed much more textured material to be revealed and was important for the presentation of the research at conference.

The stories and narratives described by the participants of course pointed to issues regarding the levels of support given to gay men. Primarily these stories also transformed them from a textbook body of bio medical words into a lived body (Marcum 2003). Participation in the research meant that the men were both valued and heard. It’s interesting to note that a couple of participants became quite actively engaged with BPNW (a phenomena that also occurred with the Mandala Project).

The research suggested, quite clearly, the importance of a wellbeing approach to health. In particular, a number of significant points were raised for service providers around service provision, particularly in the field of relational, emotional, mental and spiritual support.

PRESENTING RESEARCH

Finally, the first presentation style of the research was also important. Using a performative research style to both enhance and disseminate the research findings, Sam, (a colleague at BPNW) brought to life the voices of the participants (Vannini, 2012; Lester and Gabriel, 2012). Sam and I worked together to try and ensure that the core of the men's voices could be expressed. Sam was familiar with theatre work having done acting in the past. I had written the 'script' of a presentation that included a powerpoint presentation. We spent time together embodying the words. Based on my notes and experiences following the Focusing sessions after each interview, we worked on how to bring the words to life and communicate an experience to a 'readership' or audience. At the conference, the audience was drawn into hearing the men's words and voices, as represented through Sam and thus they were drawn into the world of the participants. As Finlay (2011) notes, 'through hearing individual voices we are reminded to honour and witness their experience – to truly listen' (p.238). This immediate engagement enabled the dance between the interpreter and the interpreted to be highlighted and engaged and as Romanyshyn (2009) notes, in this process meaning is always being reshaped and revealed.

The full transcript presentation can be found in the Appendix (Appendix 4).

Utilising the research material for the benefit of service provision.

The staff team and service users at BPNW were able to make their own interpretations in terms of service provision. Some of these included a selection of recommendations and ways forward both for the projects own service provision and also future potential campaign work. For BPNW, the research

project highlighted a number of areas of new thinking – and potentially new ways of working - with gay men who are both HIV positive and HCV positive. It highlighted that the current provision available to those co-infected was aimed primarily at the IV drug using community – and how much of that language did not necessarily translate to gay men’s lived experience.

Borne out of this research, BPNW began to focus on a number of practice recommendations including:

Pre HCV primary prevention

- Re evaluate the efficacy of current services and publications that depict positive images & role models of gay men, particularly older gay men. Enhanced well being and identify gay male culture
- Re evaluate the effectiveness of current HIV preventative messages in the light of rising HIV and HCV infections targeting the gay community.

Secondary prevention messages

- HIV+ men up-skilled in HCV knowledge plus that that HCV is an STI.
- Better information about the potential side effects of sero sorting – and likelihood of HCV and other STI’s.

Tertiary Support for co-infected gay men

- Signposting co-infected gay men into *specific* gay HIV/HCV+ peer support groups.
- Better advocacy for HCV+ at the acute stage to get into treatment options. Check clinical procedures for PLWHIV and routine blood tests for HVC - do they discuss with clients?

- The research indicates weekly counselling and complimentary therapies are critical.
- Increase knowledge about the adverse treatment effects of HIV/HCV co-infected.

Post Treatment

- Reassurance about post treatment side effects and routes of re-infection
- Identified peer support mechanisms

There were a couple of unintended outcomes following participation on the research project. Some of the men became more involved in BPNW with a number of them contributing to the centre's magazine with a special supplement on HCV and co-infection. Sam encountered a research participant at the conference after he had presented 'Beyond Statistics'. The participant was deeply moved at 'hearing' his voice together with the others in the presentation, telling Sam that the experience enabled him to feel part of an experience, where he felt he had contributed to something important and therefore did not feel quite so isolated.

VIDEO PROJECT.

The conference presentation brought the work together in an alive way and I wanted to experiment in finding other ways of using the material for presentation. I was keen to develop research presentation in ways that allowed a more aesthetic phenomenology (Wilkinson 2009, Galvin and Todres 2006). Utilising the fact that I had access to some video equipment and a willing colleague I set about working with the mens stories again. Together with a

colleague, Steve, I invited a process of engagement and embodiment with the words. Steve, like Sam previously, spent time reading the narratives and then took time to share my impressions gained through the felt experiencing of my work with the men. He then re-interpreted them and set about ‘feeling’ the experience with the aim of simple presentation. Steve was not an actor so the final activity was his subtle inner expression. What emerged was a presentation where Steve could subtly move in and out of the different ‘characters’. The juxtaposition of the characters clearly being him but different gave a sense of a generic experiencing of a particular community – in this case gay men, with the clear individual differences and nuances. The final project can be found on YouTube : <http://youtu.be/lh3w4aYnL4k> or in the DVD in the Appendix.

CHAPTER FIVE.

PAKISTAN. EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY AND ‘THERAO’

This chapter narrates my experiences in researching embodied spirituality and aspects of ordinary lived spiritual awakening and its qualities. In particular, this part of the research journey focused on an immanent spiritual understanding, discovered in my travels around Pakistan to a number of Sufi shrines. The significance of this chapter lay in the body-based approach and one that according to Daniels (2005) potentially sits in the Shadow of a transcendent orientated transpersonal psychology. It was during my research that I also discovered the Urdu word ‘Therao’, which demonstrates a non-calculative understanding of nondual beingness in the world. This quality of being, I will argue later, embodies qualities that have been explored in Western psychological literature as components of good psychotherapeutic practice.

BACKGROUND.

My research deepened as I had an opportunity to spend time in Pakistan working with a project that helps to develop counselling training for people. I had not anticipated this to be a part of my thesis; yet, I had also grown familiar with synchronous moments and cultivated an openness to work with such moments. It was another piece to The Design and something that I could not logically have known. It was this connection that took me into a deeper understanding of Islamic philosophy, tacit and embodied understanding.

Many of the people I met and worked with were ‘westernised’ having been partly educated in the UK, USA or South Africa. Yet, they also maintained a strong connection to their Pakistani and Islamic selves. The subtleties were present and at times I failed to connect or fully understand. As a visitor to another culture, Senaulke (2011) and Ryde (2009) remind us of the significance of ‘privilege’ and to resituate ourselves with a sense of awareness regarding this privilege, identity and world view. Watkins and Schulman (2008) invite a deep questioning of the state of ‘bystanding’ and discuss the shift to compassionate engaged witnessing. Glassman (1998) also evokes a potent awareness of ‘bearing witness’ to people, all inhabitants and the environment. Each of these involves a degree of reflexivity (and at times, if needed, skilful action) on the part of the researcher. For me, I recognised degrees of vulnerability living in an environment, which at times I didn’t fully understand. The ‘pull’ to be ok and not be frightened, to be right, or to slide into zones of safety within myself and switch off from unfamiliar surroundings was noted. I was aware of my naivety with regards to anthropological study but chose to consciously bear witness.

During the Summer of 2011 whilst in Karachi, I encountered a strange juxtaposition of cultural expectations. After an evening out, in relaxed comfort, to a restaurant in the city, I came back to my apartment and checked the BBC website for news. The image of London and main cities in the UK in riot⁸ was an unexpected phenomena and I reflected on the scenes, which were normally reserved for the city I was sitting very comfortably in. People showed me great concern that I might have loved ones involved and equally had wide ranging

⁸ The UK experienced a summer of city riots linked to the shooting of a suspected criminal in London by the police. It gave rise to nationwide disturbances during a two week period.

views of a failing government and society that had allowed the young people in Britain to commit such acts. Bearing witness to these views and experiences was helpful in gaining a sense of the engagement to others. A week later I was to experience the level of fear that this community were also constantly exposed to, as the city erupted into a spate of de-stabilising kidnappings and murders. Somewhere in the experiencing field, there seemed little division in the humanity of pain and suffering of both our worlds.

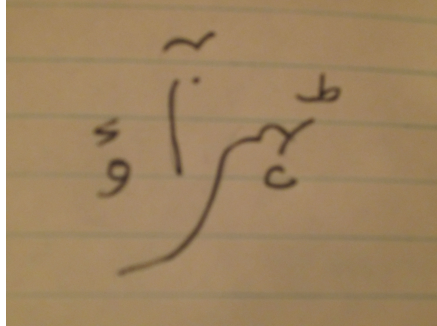
The Counselling Project

A Pakistani former businessman originally set up the counselling project I was working with. His own journey resulted in a moment of epiphany and the realisation of a different path. He trained as a counsellor and decided to set up his own centre which led to the formation of The Project which not only runs a training programme but also a clinic for people wishing to come off of addictions.

My original visit was as a Verifier for their training. During that first visit I was moved by the depth of spiritual engagement I witnessed in the people I worked with and I wanted to offer more if I could. I was glad to be invited back on two further occasions – the summer of 2011 and the winter of 2011/2012.

My first taste of the depth of spiritual experiencing came during my summer visit when I ran a workshop on relational depth. The teaching outline I had planned included introducing the work of Welwood (2000), Gendlin (1996), and Rogers (2003) as a way of exploring deep relating and embodied listening using the felt sense. As I introduced the topic I was suddenly aware that I was surrounded by a

group of people who were holding me with presence and in their hearts. "Ah" said one of the women, "You mean Therao".



Therao in Urdu

This was not a word familiar to me at all. It's subtle accenting took me time to fully nuance. The translation of Therao was less easy to understand as I began to find out. However, what was clear was the degree of presence and relationality I experienced on a feeling and energetic level face to face with those individuals. I asked many people what it meant. Interestingly, when I asked they would often look at me and not understand what I was saying. This was partly to do with my slightly nuanced accent but mainly because it was a word they didn't expect me to say. It's loose definition of 'patience', 'beingness' and 'mindfulness' didn't seem to fully capture how I energetically experienced people understanding and living it. The words seemed abstract and not fully connected to my felt sense of being with folk. I set out to explore how individuals did understand it as it seemed to me that there was a quality of ordinariness with it and certainly a less strong attachment to ego.

In order to understand how people worked with Therao it seemed to me that the engagement with day-to-day spirituality was important to understand and experience.

Trying to capture the lived experience of spiritual embodiment was a task I embraced. Searching for a way to capture my experiences of the sights and sounds, encounters with people at prayer, engagement with life and death, the meeting up front with the madness of insurgency and the insipid hum of the fear of kidnap, I simply sat with people and drank it in.

During the summer of 2011 I had an opportunity to visit a number of Sufi places and practitioners. This was certainly not on my planned research trajectory but in the spirit of much of my research journey I was compelled to follow it. What it demonstrated to me was the extent to which the embodiment of certain ideas are crucial in ‘thinking’, or the ways in which meaning is created.

I was in Karachi for much of Ramzan, the holiest month, in August 2011. During that time I participated in the day to day working of a community whose energy levels were lowered and whose rhythm fitted in with the requirement of prayers and ritual eating. I found myself incredibly drawn to how the community celebrated and managed life around the festival. I saw and experienced a greater engagement with spiritual concerns. I was also told that road traffic accident statistics rose during that month as blood sugars dropped. Karachi has a road system that was unintelligible to my western understanding of Highway Code and the crazy driving was very visible and frightening. And yet, the system worked, of sorts. The Indras web of moving cars seemed to work with relative harmony. It was a noisy harmony for sure, and my friend Anj reminded me that there were two things required for driving on the roads in Karachi – a horn and brakes. It struck me that even driving had an embodied existence as people flung

themselves into the starting, stopping and weaving of journeying across town – interspersed with the trotting of donkeys and noisy phut-phutting of the motorized rickshaws.

The breaking of fast in the evening became part of my shared experience with friends who I visited. It was also the engagement with spiritual practice that I found compelling too, with the ritual foods, the opening of the fast with dates, the prayers and bodily engagement with the dishes. I came to understand the significance of eating with one's hands, as a source of instruction from the Koran that offered a healthy way to digest food. As one touches and senses the food, so the body starts its process of salivation and engagement with digestion. I imagined a picture of myself as a westerner keeping a metallic fork length distance from sustenance, and the clinical engagement seemed suitably psychologically relevant to the lack of embodied awareness to something so basic.

The local Sufi poets Bulleh Shah, Shah Abdul Latif and Lal Shabaz were well loved and regularly recited. One evening, I visited a friend and her retired Government Minister husband, Nano, who had taken to reading throughout the holy month. He said that his eyes watered when he read the poetry as it touched his soul deeply, and did I think he should see a physician or psychotherapist? We smiled. Anderson (1996) describes 'sacred weeping' as a transformative weeping. One of the nine commonly shared characteristics of spontaneous and involuntary weeping is a sense of the re-integration of 'lost aspects of the self' (p.169). She perceives these as signs of an expanded awareness of the deeper and universal realities of human existence. It seemed to me that Nano, like many

others, immersed himself in ordinary practice during Ramzan. Louchakova (2004a) has noted the alienation of soteriological meanings in western society, however, the lived experience here, was embodied in daily activities. Nano's wry comment about whether he should see a psychotherapist, points to the ways in which his tears and embodied expressions could indeed be perceived as an emotional problem in the western bio-medical model. I wrote in my journal later, comparing some psychological diagnostics being akin to metallic fork length engagements to human experiencing.

In Winter 2011 I was able to engage with visits to shrines in Northern Pakistan. It was during this trip that I wanted to try and experience the depth of embodied spirituality. I hooked up with a Karachi street photographer, Arif, who was the husband of a Sufi friend, Aesha. For part of the trip I nestled in with him and watched the ease with which he engaged with local people or Sufi shrine worshippers and photographed them. He was a great teacher and together with Aesha I was able to gain permission to film and photograph people. Capturing an experience of another culture is always marked with some difficulties. For me I was completely aware of my Britishness and the historical connections of that with Partition. There is also the difficulty of potentially engaging with the 'exotic' other. Yet, there is also the wonderment of being in a culture, which works with basic ways of being in a different way. I was trying to capture that Lifeworld experience which seemed so different to my own and yet also engaged with spirituality in such a profound way. On one occasion, my best ever cup of tea was made by two young teamakers, two boys who were running a tea stall in the Muree mountains in the Rawalpindi district. What struck me was the

simplicity of being. As we pulled up, their stall seemed to consist of virtually nothing, save for a wood burning stove, a few cups, tea, sugar and dried milk. We made our order and they disappeared into the wood and quickly came back with bits of wood and lit the stove. The whole process began from scratch. I watched them simply prepare the toffee coloured mixture. Water, tea and dried milk put together in the pan nestled on the smoking stove. It was ladled so that air and bubbles infused it again and again. It seemed like all action was focused on this one task until it was deemed ready. The point of this story was that the tea making happened in the moment. There wasn't a pile of wood in readiness for the next possible customer. Their footprint on the mountain was light. Taking all they needed in the moment. As I drank the sweet mixture and gazed out across the valley, I wondered who had taught them this simple, engaged and embodied way of being, living in harmony with the environment. Using all they needed in the moment, I reflected afterwards on the propensity I have sometimes had in my work of metaphorically having a pile of ideas littering the therapeutic room in readiness for the moment they are needed, so much so that the space was full and my relationship crowded out with 'stuff'. The boys had faith that they could get what was required, it was all there and generously provided, and for me it was an excellent, embodied and visual learning opportunity.

Compassionate Being

I noted the warmth of the humility I felt at spending time with folk who had a simple approach to caring for others. Driving out through the Sindh region to the town of Sehwan was a road journey that took us on the Indus Highway. This particular area had twice been severely impacted by the floods of 2010 and

earlier in 2011. We stopped the car by the side of the road where a small brick built house was situated. An old woman emerged, bent backed and she kissed the hands of my friend Apa - who is a well respected teacher in the Sufi town of Sehwan. All three (Apa, Arif and Aesha) had spent time last year working with the disasters that emerged from the floods. Comprehending the destruction post flooding made me gasp in a startled silence as I looked out on to the delta. The vastness of the space that once held villages and communities created emptiness inside me. I felt internally desolate, mirroring the land before me. This old woman had played a significant role in the disaster relief. Her house was slightly above the flood line and she had cooked and cooked for those people who had survived and managed to get to the higher land where she was located. Out of her house walked a number of children, varying in ages from about 4 to teenagers. They were orphans from the flood. They had lost their parents and families and she had straightforwardly taken them in and was looking after them. It seemed to me to be an act of simple care, straight from the spiritual heart. This is not to idealise the people, yet spirituality did seem to equate not only with community but also to an engagement with the world. Culturally, spiritual awakening is not perceived as an individualistic pursuit but one of shared responsibility (Louchakova 2004a). This quality of shared responsibility was evident in Apa, Arif and Aesha, not only in their work with the flood disaster. I was curious as to how they had responded post 9/11 and with the current (public) poor relationship that Pakistan had with some of the Western governments. Aesha told me a story of her friend's 84 year old grandmother who had a dreadful experience with Homeland Security in a visit to the States. The forced removal of her clothing was humiliating and meant to be punishing. I asked her how she felt about this.

She said, touching her heart, “Oh, I feel for her pain and I feel for my Nation’s pain. I feel angry too, but I cannot hold on to that anger for long. You see, this is only a small part of the story on a bigger painting (with her hands she drew a small square in the air). I cannot know what is unfolding on the bigger picture so how can I judge this small piece? Only God knows the bigger picture.” I was struck by her very real capacity to feel, to be with arising feelings and yet to not hold on to them. She demonstrated to me, a way of being that lived with a quality of moral conscience. These qualities, and their resultant impacts were also shared by Burdge (2006) in her study of peaceworkers. She describes the moral conscience of her co-researchers and their attributes that related to the development of compassion with a strong intentionality to working towards the attainment of happiness for others. In Buddhism this quality is often associated with the Bodhisattva⁹ ideal.

I was in the land where the poetry of the Sufi saints evoked powerful understandings of the spiritual life. As I sat with these experiences I pondered how to capture the essence of my experiencing. I had taken my video camera with me and decided to work with that. My offering of re-presenting the richness of the depth spirituality is captured in the edited film I made. Its purpose was to create a dance of experiencing for the viewer. The feast of sounds and images of devotion to be tasted and taken in as 'evidence' of a lived, embodied spirituality. Yet, as Todres (2008) reminds us, our work 'includes a concern to care for our informants voices, to care for the human phenomena that are being expressed, to

⁹ The Bodhisattva is a Buddhist term for a person who is motivated by love and compassion to be there for others.

care for how our own voice as writer reveals, conceals, and co-creates, and to care for our readers as part of our ongoing conversation' (p.44).

The film begins with the sound of an 8-year-old boy singing a Sufi song, possibly the poetry of Bulleh Shah. His voice was filled with simple yet earnest devotion. He was sat in the shrine at Masjid Wazir Khan Mosque in Lahore, famous for its decorated tile work. The rest of the video unfolds with images of people at prayer, in the market place and dancing in devotion at the shrine. There is music and songs, all devotional. One of them is a traditional Qalander song, sung by the Fakir, Lal Peri. It ends on a modern version of the same song. I was struck by how there is now an emerging fusion of Qawalli singers and songs reaching a younger audience with a techno beat. Same words, same notes with a different presentation.

http://youtu.be/nCfYzVi_K4

The video can be accessed via you tube on the above link or in the appendix DVD pocket.

THERAO

Attempting to both experience and capture embodied spirituality was significant for it helped me to understand the way in which Therao is lived. The dance between body, mind, heart and soul somehow is more instinctively felt. In order to partly understand this it is important to draw on the philosophical underpinnings of Islamic 'thought'. This is key as it holds an important aspect of the way in which traditional western psychological thought misses key aspects of the lived world.

Louchakova (2011) outlines the development of Islamic Science from such scholars as Jabir ibn Hayyan (c 721-c 815) to Baha al-Din al- Amili (1546 – 1621). Based on the work of Nasr (1968) she notes ‘we are not only looking at a form of medieval science, but we are looking at a situation where the philosophical and spiritual principles of gnosis are incarnated in actual observation, research, and implemented in a set of conclusions, which lead to a creation of sciences. It is a different kind of science, a different kind of research and different kind of knowledge than is typical for occidental science. Reflective analysis and eidetic intuition are two major means to formulation of this kind of science.’ The very essence of how the lived world is both seen and experienced creates a world in which Cheetham (2003) in the title of his book ‘The World turned Upside Down’ sums up neatly. It was important to hold aspects of this thought as these very insights co-existed with their western psychological thinking.

As well as my visit to the Sufi shrines and witnessing the relationship between spiritual practice and daily living I made 3 further visits to explore the understandings and practice of Therao. Firstly, I spoke to a Fakir at the Lal Shabaz Shrine (in the Sindh region) and secondly, a group of women who sat with Apa, the spiritual teacher. Finally I worked with a group of students capturing their understanding on video as a vox pop. I was not able to film the Fakir, but I recorded a conversation afterwards, with Aesha, who helped to translate his words. I was able to record the meeting at the women’s group. This was a helpful way of keeping ‘field notes’ and also to help me transcribe later. The conversations with the group of students was set up as a creative project, a

vox pop on their understandings of Therao. I edited it together and included as a background sound track, a spontaneous Sufi song that one of the students sang (complete with spontaneous percussion from her friend and colleague). The students are disguised, partly to offer anonymity but also as a way of inviting the viewer to become more engaged in listening to their words. This can be accessed on youtube and also in the appendix dvd.

THE FAKIRS AT LAL SHABAZ – ROOLY BABA AND LAL PERI (THE RED FAIRY).

I had an opportunity to sit with two Fakirs (Sufi ascetic teachers) at the Sufi shrine of Lal Shabaz in Sehwen. What I gained from our brief meetings was a sense of the simple wisdom espoused by the Fakirs. Neither Rooly Baba or Lal Peri were religious scholars in the academic sense. Their understanding came from a place of devotion and deep knowing. Both came to Lal Shabaz because of an inner calling. Lal Peri's story is chronicled by Dalrymple (2009). She came to Sehwan following a dream. In the dream, a Fakir had told her to "just go". Without money, she took a train and arrived in Hyderabad in Sindh. Here she met a Fakir who gave her a Sufi Saint amulet for protection. She asked him who the figure was as it was the figure she had seen in her dream. It was the Sufi Saint Lal Shabaz, and the travellers were heading to Sehwan, the home of his shrine. She joined them on the journey and has lived in and around the shrine ever since. She is now a Fakir herself. The journey was a remarkable one for a woman on her own, without money or food. The time that Aesha and I spent with Rooly Baba was essentially a Sohbat – a teaching session.

I spoke with Aesha after our conversation with Rooly Baba. Although she tried to help me understand and translate at the time of our conversation with him, I wasn't focused well enough to fully take in what he had to say. So, we gathered at the end of the day to tune into and reflect on his contemplations. Ayesha narrated his response from memory. He is an important figure for her and as she recounted his responses there was a sense of joviality as we remembered this large figure that sat in the shrine, with a blue anorak, occasionally wiping pigeon poop from his shoulders, dropped by the many pigeons that roosted in the rafters of the shrine. He kept a supply of small envelope sized torn pieces of newspaper for the purpose of removing the daily droppings and a piece of credit card sized thin metal for the final scraped removal. There were no shaking of fists or remonstrating at the feathered bombers. The pigeons pooped and he removed it. Such was this unjudged circle of daily life. I had wanted to capture an image of him by taking his photograph, but this was not allowed. It was, Ayesha told me, one of the few 'rules' he had. I had asked him 'What does Therao mean?' Aesha translated:

A: Basically he spoke about asking questions and he said that questions shouldn't be asked. There are 3 kinds of questions: Questions of the heart, a question in the mind, and a question on your lips. So...he says that the questions should be left in your heart.

Like a Koan, his answers need time to make sense. I took it to be the need to avoid calculative thinking. He offered it with such simply clarity. I also pondered on its usefulness for the researcher, i.e. placing the questions in one's heart, and staying mindful to the kinds of information we might be seeking.

Aesha went on:

A: About Therao he says that it comes from within you there's no applied science there's no nothing. It's inside a person. The more a person looks inside...into the point is where you will discover it.

Again, at the heart of his answer is a familiar way of learning knowledge - discovery through reflexivity. This quality of being is one that focuses on depth enquiry – the heuristic search, in other words, the development of tacit understanding, i.e. it is not to be found outside.

He went on and described a deeply meaningful way of expressing depth empathy, through story. As Abrams (1997) puts it, oral cultures ‘preserve active participation of the objects in the subjective consciousness’ (p. 162), in the form of language. Rooly Baba was grounded in the story and its imagery that flowed with ease in his connectedness. Once again, his answer was short and as Aesha noted:

A: And then of course, the way that Baba's speak...in those stories and riddles...he was like telling something about empathy...he said that in Islam we keep a fast and in Christianity we keep a fast and in other religions also...and he basically said that when we fast, the idea is not to become hungry, the idea is to empathise. The idea is to know how does it feel for a person to be really hungry?.....you had to really feel it in the tummy....he spoke about the gut...so...if that person is really hungry you should really feel it in the gut and in the heart..... so you literally have to be him.’

He describes a depth sense of being with another through gut feeling, through the heart. This sounded like embodied empathy, entering into suffering fearlessly. I noted his vision that included other spiritual traditions. Burdge (2006), in her study of spiritually awakened peace workers in Israel noted that aspects of their being was a deep connection to their personal, cultural and religious histories and also their inability to disassociate from the experiences of witnessing suffering, much as Rooly Baba describes.

He did, however, bring the practice to a 'human' level, implying that this was also an aspect of 'aspirational' practice:

A. And when he was talking about Therao,he said the real Fakirs are intoxicated in the love of God and it is a very difficult task...we cannot do it...Lal Shabaz did it and there were these big saints who did it...but we can do it in a smaller level (she makes a little space between her finger and thumb)...so we can try and empathise and put ourselves in the persons shoes....so he was saying its not a easy task.

I told him when he asked what you are doing....he said that there is no quick answer to it. There is no quick answer to Therao either. It comes within a person but it involves all of this that he spoke about. Leaving the question in the heart, empathising by suffering for the person who suffers. He said that if we started suffering to that extent non stop...we will either die....or our hearts will burst. We don't have the capacity to do it continuously like these Fakirs did. Like these Saints did. So we can only do it in small bits. That's what he said.

The practice is heart based, non-calculative in thinking and based on depth empathy of the other. He acknowledges individual humanity, and the significance to take care of ourselves in the process.

A:yes he also talked about a woman where the bad times had fallen on her....he said that the times are neither good nor bad. Time is time. It's just that you are going through a period, which will end also. He said that whatever problems fall upon a human being it is his own doing. He doesn't realise it but it is. He spoke about,.. that every bad thing that happens is not the fault of others...if you really look deep inside you...it has arisen from yourself. Whatever feelings you are going to put forward it must come from deepest love - he told the story of the woman who gave her hair for a lamp of oil to put in front of the Buddha....so it has to come from the deepest, truest form....and then that light cannot be extinguished. All the lights will be extinguished but that one. He spoke about how we should not concern ourselves about the future...he said you shouldn't get your hand read or go to a fortune teller because people who do that end up in a lot of trouble....they'll start believing in it and get caught up in it.....and even if there is a little bit of truth and the rest is false....you make the false the truth...that is how it is...so he said that all your answers are within yourself, inside you. If you just resist to ask what is going to happen, then leave it. He meant that we should just...free float...just leave it....move on. What is going to happen in the future should not be our concern. It's going to happen. There are good things that are going to come your way...so why do you want to know? He said that all our sufferings are because we desire.....if we desire for a relationship...the relationship goes bad...desire for money...the money's not

good...he said its not that you shouldn't have those things....if they come your way - good! And if they're not....don't desire for it. Don't reject it but don't want it. It's difficult isn't it? It's like leaving your fate to the bigger being. Because he has already written your fate. He will do what he has to do...your beginning and end has been written....so your desire is a waste of time.

Again, utilising the stories of other traditions, in a very simple way he describes developing equanimity and a state of neither wanting or rejecting, but allowing things to be as they are. There were several themes of being in the present, of compassionate love, and taking personal responsibility. The ethics of empathy and compassion were also present.

Aesha also offered her own reflections and experiences of sitting with Baba, in particular a sense that he had a knack of relating to peoples stories:

A: Usually when I've sat with Baba, I've noticed what is happening to the people around....I know that things have been going on in my head or happening in my life and then he starts talking about it. I know others have felt the same thing. They were shocked when they were going through something and he started talking about it....so whatever was happening...something was happening to some of the people there.

It seems that she is describing a quality of deep listening, a capacity to attune to the other and deeply empathise, to understand and know from a place deep within, to trust that intuitive, bodily felt response. It also gives the other a sense

of feeling known, understood. Louchakova (2004) discusses the significance of Sohbet or Sohbat, The literal meaning of the ‘Sohbet’ is conversation. It is a spiritual transaction between the Murshid (teacher) and Murid (student), which relies on ancient oral storytelling traditions and practices. Mystical knowledge and devotional love is transmitted during Sohbet in such a way that it attempts to go beyond the rational mind and connect to the hearts of the seekers. According to Louchakova (2004), ‘Sohbet has to come from a place of ‘egolessness’, receptivity, loving friendliness and the conformity with the sense of the whole called the etiquette, ‘Adab’ (Arabic). Successful Sohbet actualizes ones sense of self. It can also bring out the shared group experience of the Universal Self’.

(p.43).

A final image for Rooly Baba, whose relationship with the pigeons seemed to sum up his capacity to be in the world without judging it, changing it or being out of relation with it:

Pigeons poop

Scrape it clean

Pigeons poop

THE WOMEN'S SPIRITUAL GATHERING.

I was invited to meet with Sufi teacher, Apa, and a group of women Sufi students. Apa had studied under another well-loved local woman Sufi teacher AmiJan. We gathered at Apa's apartment and AmiJan's photograph was pointed out to me as we entered. AmiJan, according to my friend Aesha followed the teachings of Rabia, a famed female Sufi saint (Smith, 1994). I was intrigued at the presence of women in the Sufi tradition. Although at times apparently invisible in the public arena, Sufism has a discreet but important place for female practitioners (Schimmel, 2003; Abbas, 2002), which includes Qawalli singers and teachers (e.g. Abida Parveen). AmiJan, accordingly, had a great following of both men and women. As a westerner, the complexities of women's position in Pakistani society are evident. Afiya Zia (1994) is an active feminist, publishing and teaching on feminism and Islamic principles and attempts to set out some of the complexities in relation to Zina (the illegitimate sex laws). I discovered many NGO's who were working with women in the tribal regions and several of the students were engaged in work, which supported women. The Counselling training at the project also delivered a programme that included feminist accounts in therapy and counseling. As a western woman with my own story of feminist beliefs, the issue of women in Pakistani society was an area that I struggled with at times. For me, the interesting aspect was to try and allow the focus of study without allowing discursive thoughts to sabotage what was in front of me. The evening I visited, several women had gathered for tea to share their thoughts on Therao.

When I asked Apa, “What does it mean to come from the heart?” she simply replied,

A: “This is from God.”

I paused before asking, ‘How would you describe being in a place of Therao?’

A: “When the inner peace is transmuted from inside to outside,...it comes within the circle of your body, .your face, so it is apparent. Inner peace - it comes from inside and then comes outside. And I think that when people meet somebody with Therao ...they find peace themselves. AmiJan had that. It is a very light feeling. As if I am air”.

Apa describes Therao as something quite unconnected to ego concerns. It is not ‘owned’ but comes from God. It is deep inside, within the circle of the body and communicated through the gaze in the face. She had described her daily practice of Dhikr (a form of prayer where one remembers God), which supported her generating the ground for Therao. The practice is embodied and heart focused and involves the bringing of light into the heart whilst remembering and speaking the holy names. Louchakova (2004b) gives a full account of the transformatory heart practice of Prayer of the Heart in a number of spiritual traditions. It is process orientated and a practice that features in day to day life. Rita, one of the women told me her story of coming to study with AmiJan and Apa. I was struck by the sense of patience and a willingness to wait and not have it all right now. The recognition of God means that the ego is less attached to the practice in a ‘striving’ sense – “It comes from God”, Apa said. Rooly Baba’s words “Time is time” allows an approach that is less grasping. Rita’s own family story locates her with a strong connection to Sufism:

R: "I was born to a family of people who use to follow Qalander. I was born in Hyderabad but my family belonged to Sehwan....so I have deep roots there. I met AmiJan when I was very young. I had just got married. I was expecting a baby when I met AmiJan. From then I got the inspiration. I was not fortunate to meet her again and yet I started reading. I read Shah Abdul Latif, which I gave you¹⁰. That poetry and reading about Qalander. and obviously our own Holy Book. All the teachings drove me to one thing....Negate yourself.you have to drop the ego....and then you can reach that place where Therao comes. First you have to be at peace with yourself. First I have to be pure.....within my thoughts and within my heart.....and then I can trust myself enough to be a person who can give others Therao also. I met Apa lots and lots of times because she is my relative....and she is my mothers friend....and we have many relationships .But now this association which I've started 4 or 5 years back. And instantly, you know, I thought Id call up Apa and talk to her. Apa said no.....not yet....you have your family to raise, you have young kids...there will be a time when you will start this Sufism and this journey. Wait. Wait for the time. I'm waiting for the time to dive into that Therao. First and foremost you have to cleanse yourself from the outside. You have to be pure. The Sufi teachers say you have to be pure, you have to clean your heart first."

Here Rita begins to witness Therao as a state to aspire to, i.e. a place to rest in. It shifts slightly from a quality of being to a state to enter. This feels like a subtle

¹⁰ Rita had given me a copy of the local Sufi Poets book, The Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif., edited by Elsa Kazi (1996). Latif was a well-travelled Sufi Mystic and had close contact with both Buddhist and Vedanta teachings. His work is grounded in the belief that 'All deeper truths can only be adequately communicated not so much by means of discursive statement as by means of symbols, myths, stories' (p.12).

shift and is one that requires preparation - a preparation involving 'cleansing the heart'. I asked. 'What does it mean to clean the heart?.....to drop ego?'

Aesha picked up the conversation and made reference to her mother in law who was also an engaged Sufi practitioner and teacher who followed AmiJan:

A: "My mother in law used to say that I wish there was a washing detergent for which I could wash my heart...every time. And she was the woman who had the most Therao I've ever ever seen! I use to wonder, what does she mean by that? She used to say, don't keep keena. Keena means, if somebody has done you wrong...so you forgive, you do not keep a grudge for that creates blackness in your heart. So, if you don't let go of that thing it will keep your heart black. So, to keep your heart clean is to be free of hatred and grudges and ...forgiveness it will come and wash it away. And then a point will come when it won't come anymore.....then you are in Therao....it just can't enter."

Once again, the idea of nonattachment is evident here. One of the things I enjoyed in the evening was the use of story and imagery that the women used.

The idea of washing a blackened heart is an interesting image and to the women who practiced Dhikr this was an important embodied activity.

UNDERSTANDINGS AND EXPERIENCES OF THERAO.

I worked with a group of students in exploring thoughts on Therao. Prior to a Sufi music evening, members of the group took time to share their reflections on how they understood or experienced Therao. We captured the comments on film

as a vox pop. What emerged were understandings expressed through 3 major lenses:

1. Therao as an experiencing of the self;
2. Therao as experienced as a received state in the presence of others;
3. Therao as an aspirational state or quality of being.

The video was edited together and utilised a Sufi song sung by one of the students. The background rhythm was spontaneously supplied by another who, sitting next to her began tapping in harmony. I deliberately created anonymous images, partly for confidentiality, but also to bring the focus on to listening to the thoughts and words of the individuals. It can be viewed on the following YouTube link: <http://youtu.be/jMyWAILEU4s> or from the DVD in the appendix.

In the first extract, we see how Therao can be perceived as a quality in others. Those qualities include wisdom, a capacity to be non-judgmental, to hold one's own perspective, to be non-directive, neutral and have deep empathy.

1. *“Therao for me would be somebody who is not only wise, who understands where I'm coming from...and not be judgemental about it....and have empathy also and not impose their viewpoint on me. That would be Therao for me. Accept me for the way I am...and if there is anything to be said it should be said in a ...neutral.....not like you're picking on someone - "you do this or you do that". For me it's something neutral...that would go down very well with me.”*

In this second extract, we can see how Therao might be experienced – as a deep sense of stillness within; an aesthetic experience; resting in being and each arising moment and a quality of deep engagement and presence with those arising moments.

2. *“The word Therao, as I perceive it.....as.... stillness within. Very deep inside you..... a calmness, gentleness...and it's very aesthetic. It's a place where often I've heard the nothingness....the nothingness of being.....everything shall pass...this moment is all that I have and I'm going to make the best execution of that contact if it's possible...at every moment.. That's how I see Therao.”*

The third extract speaks of a deep quality of authenticity of being; a sense where all aspects of self are welcomed with equanimity; a place where social constructions have little meaning; a place of inner serenity and peace.

3. *“For me, Therao means to be grounded and...to be really me....where there's no confusion...there's 'at home'.....and I can express my faults, as well as my qualities, whatever I am. If I like certain things I will tell you that. Basically it's the inner serenity...the peace....tranquility of just being me as a human. Nothing fake about it. I don't have to pretend. If I want to act like a man and arm wrestle..I can do that. I don't have to pretend and put on this disguise and not be me....that is Therao for me”*

The following extract gives a description of Therao as the integrating place of soul and body, the place of known and unknown, seen and unseen.

4. *“I believe Therao is....that integration of your soul and the body. Till the time that integration is not there between this body of mine.....because Ai believe I'm two... 'Rana'me...which you are seeing...and there is another Rana which you can't see but I can see. So...this Rana and that Rana when they integrate together..then Therao comes....especially for me.”*

Again, in the next extract, the felt sense of Therao is deep within and experienced as a stabilised place of non-agitation. There is a quality of non attachment to all that is perceived unfolding.

5. *“Therao is a sense of deep serenity....extreme peace....the goal is never unhappy, it's always serene. It's never agitated...and whatever happens its as if you can see it all happening....but the inner being is always at peace. That's what Therao means to me.”*

The following describes Therao as experienced in the heart in the process of meditation. It is a state of being, a state of grace, a unique arising of moments.

6. *“Therao is my heart....when you just go deep.....meditation.....you are with being.....with yourself....your own person.....so that Therao.....so those*

moments....those moments when they come....they are very unique. They come but they are not all the time. I love it. Thank you.”

In the brief reflection following, Therao is perceived as and hoped for as a stabilised state of being; a state of harmony between body, mind and spirit.

7. *“Therao for me means inner stability. Harmony between body, mind and spirit. I hope I get it one day”.*

Similarly, in this final extract, Therao is seen as a (hoped for) capacity to be with things as they are – just staying with the disturbance.

8. *Therao makes me feel annoyed! And a little bit angry because I know I don't have Therao. Therao is something that I try but often don't succeed at. The best way I can describe it isjust staying with the disturbance.*

THERAO – A SUMMARY OF MEANINGS.

According to Rooly Baba, Therao is not based on calculative or discursive thinking but a heart based understanding. His words of placing the question in the heart, means that what is being sought is less about information and more about the wish to know. The journey to knowing is a heuristic one based on reflexivity and tacit understanding. The development of Therao is through a morally conscious, engaged depth empathy with others. It is a practice that is not based on individual pursuit but one with a concern for the collective. It is

developed through a process of devotion to attaining deep empathic engagement with others and also to oneself from a place of deepest love. Skillful action is seen in the practice and cultivation of equanimity and non-attachment to outcome. The non-attachment is also to ego, to the sense of self that imagines it is in control and so by definition, Therao is to be in a place of not knowing.

The other co-researchers helped me to understanding something of the way that Therao is experienced, in the self, in the presence of others and as an aspiration. In particular they described how it is experienced in an embodied way. As an aesthetic state that came from God, it is felt as an inner calm, stillness within, the place of an evocative 'nothingness of being'. Clarity, non-agitation and a sense of integration of mind, body, soul and spirit are experienced.

Being in the presence of a person who embodies Therao was described as experiencing them as possessing a wisdom, deep empathy, neutrality and equanimity. The person engenders calm and peacefulness in the other. They are perceived as non-judgmental and non-directive. The person also gives a sense that they 'know you'. In a group, they may be talking to many people but it feels as if their words are offered to you alone.

Therao was also seen as an aspirational state or quality of being to work towards in terms of aspirations to purity (cleansing the heart); to be able to give to others; to let go of attachment (not hold grudges) and work towards a sense of equanimity.

The key aspect of each of the qualities is that they are developed from within and in relation to others. Paradoxically, as I understood it, there is nothing to learn.

The enquiry is within and its inspiration is in the poetry and teaching through stories and simple being with others. This clearly has challenges for psychotherapy trainings, particularly with a focus on 'doing'.

CHAPTER SIX

NONDUALITY AND PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PRACTICE

This part of the thesis focuses on the key area of research. The research methodology section has attempted to locate the epistemological framework for the study. The key criteria was that it be focused on practice based evidence (Van Manen 2007, Lees and Freshwater 2008), utilising an embodied approach (Todres 2008).

The first part looks at an early piece of research, which in many ways formed a pilot study of practitioner's ideas on transpersonal practitioner qualities. Here I worked with a number of practitioners in the UK and US using a questionnaire as a focus for eliciting ideas.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH STUDY.

Prior to working with the major research on nonduality I engaged in a small piece of research work, initially aimed at looking at key components and qualities in the practice of transpersonal psychotherapy. The work arose in 2008 when I was developing the curriculum at the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology in London. I set about working with practitioners to explore our understandings of practice in the field of transpersonal psychotherapy in order to identify key areas for the new curriculum. Essentially, at the heart of my proposed study was the question - 'What are the components of effective transpersonal psychotherapy?' I intended to review aspects of the curriculum and look at 'essential' elements in training. This question clearly has a wider application across other modalities. From a transpersonal perspective, Lukoff

(2005) tentatively set out a brief list of attributes of a transpersonal psychotherapist. Included in the attributes are qualities such as: an openness to the transpersonal dimension; knowledge of a variety of spiritual paths; active pursuit of one's own spiritual development and an ability to facilitate spiritual and non ordinary state experiences. I was interested in exploring these from a practitioner's perspective – what did this mean in their work with clients? How do we support the development of such qualities? I spent time contemplating areas for reflection where I could invite a wider range of colleagues to ponder with me.

What would you say are the key qualities of a good transpersonal psychotherapist?

Which therapeutic skills/approaches would you expect people to understand and demonstrate in their training?

What significant aspects of spiritual practice would you expect to be explicit in transpersonal psychotherapy training?

There were 6 questions in the original questionnaire but I homed in on these three to explore the qualities of spiritual engagement and also qualities of the practitioner. The questionnaires were delivered within 2 environments. Firstly, I posted them to accredited members of the Centre for Transpersonal Psychology (CTP) who had expressed an interest in being part of a curriculum development group. I received 3 responses. Secondly, during a visit to the Institute of

Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto in February 2008 (now Sofia University), I had an opportunity to work with 30 participants in a workshop titled 'What makes a good transpersonal psychotherapist?' The questions formed part of a focus group activity. Each group pooled their thoughts and shared with the whole group. The group members included academic staff (both clinical and non clinical) and a range of PhD and MA students (drawn from the spiritual guidance programme, women's spirituality programme and the clinical transpersonal psychology programme).

Full details of all the six question responses are found in the Appendix (9).

The statements formed part of another reflective process for me. In many respects some of the answers reflected approaches and skills that are generic to psychotherapists, for example, humour, authenticity, honesty, relational. However, other qualities included aspects that might arguably be traditionally associated with spiritual and transpersonal practice. The general themes appeared as:

Bearing witness

E.g. 'to be a true witness to the journey of the soul'

Not knowing

E.g. 'confidence to sit without knowing and with silence.'

Holism (body, mind, spirit)

E.g. 'respect for client body, mind, spirit, connection'

Compassionate awareness

E.g. equanimity and

Heart focused

E.g. 'To live and speak from the heart whilst keeping a clear head';

'Listen to the voice of heart as well as head'

Seeing beyond the story

E.g. 'Help client to see souls purpose beyond life experiences'

The results from the questionnaire remained 'dry' due to the lack of any real engagement as to how the work is understood in practice. It was clear that I needed to fully engage with practitioners and try and get a sense of their real world as psychotherapists. What did it mean, for example, to work from a place of spaciousness? How is it experienced in the body? How does this impact on work with clients? It seemed to me that the work needed 'texture' in order to communicate something of the experience, 'an in-seeing into the heart of things', as Van Manen (2007) describes it. The significance of this project, then, was that the research focus I chose would need to capture the essence of experience in order to gain a sense of how any of this came to life in the world of the therapist. We can gain conceptual ideas of relatedness but the reality of the healing relationship with a client is precisely in the moments of meeting, the dialogical encounter in the experiencing field (e.g. Bacal 1998; Jacobs, 1998; Hycner and Jacobs, 1985). I wanted to 'feel' the therapists themselves.

It was at this point that I spent the following couple of years working on the practice development projects, honing my research ideas. Following this, I returned with an amended research question that focused on nondual awareness and psychotherapeutic practice. Equally significant, was that the approach would be located in a practice based, practitioner focused model of research that could

begin to communicate practitioner experience and tacit knowledge (Polkinghorne 2006, Van Manen 2007).

The mode of analysis section gives an overview of the process of the research and the contribution that it makes to current findings.

INTRODUCTION

Following the work on transpersonal qualities I chose to explore the experiences of psychotherapists in practice who had an understanding of nonduality.

The work, that follows, is a journey of exploring qualities and understandings that practitioners demonstrate in their work. The practitioners are all very experienced. Though the study may well be a reflection of senior practitioners at work, it is fundamentally concerned with how their psychotherapy work is enhanced by an understanding of nondual awareness and the qualities inherent in that.

The co-researchers.

My co-researchers resided in the UK, in both England and Scotland where I travelled to meet them. The meetings, essentially, were conversations with ordinary practitioners and their day to day experiencing of their spiritual practice and understanding of nonduality on their therapy work.

They were individuals who I either knew of in person or whose work I was familiar with. I had two main 'criteria' for selecting people: Firstly that they were experienced psychotherapists and secondly, who also had a spiritual or meditation practice that invited the understanding of nonduality. I was not focusing on their conceptual understanding of nonduality. The principle area of focus was on how this might impact on their practice as psychotherapists and the kinds of qualities they developed as practitioners.

They drew on several modalities from their core training. This was a clear decision on my part to ensure that there were a variety of core modalities

represented, although each did hold a transpersonal perspective. The modality backgrounds were:

TA (Transactional Analysis)

Psychoanalytic / contemplative

Transpersonal

Psychosynthesis

CAT/Mindfulness/Transpersonal

Transpersonal/Eco psychotherapy/CBT

Islamic/Humanistic/Person Centred

Core Process

The practitioner's spiritual practice were drawn from a number of spiritual paths:

Dzogchen

Mahamudra

Islam/Sufi

Kabbalah

Advaita Vedanta

'Eclectic'

Zen

They varied in age from their late 40's to late 80's. There were 5 men and 4 women. Each was very experienced in their particular field and some were

trainers who have also written in their own specialised areas. Several of the co-researchers were mindfulness teachers – 3 women and 2 of the men.

Process of the research

Having contacted people by email and outlined my research (see Appendix 6 and 7) I arranged to meet them. They were aware that I would be setting up a video camera and recording them (for my own reflections). I visited them in their homes or in a place of work. I had a set of loose questions, which in the main became subsumed in the dialogical nature of the interview, and our conversations gave way to real inter-viewing, i.e. the sharing of views. The relationally orientated nature meant that we sat with and followed whatever unfolded. Consequently, what emerged was a selection of broad areas of enquiry:

Personal understandings of nonduality

Perceptions of nonduality in practice

Examples of nondual moments in practice

Training issues in relation to nonduality

Supportive practice, i.e. what supports them (spiritual, shared etc.)

My personal, felt sense experiencing of the interviews

A key criterion was that they were psychotherapists who were working in the field, as my literature review revealed very little about psychotherapists understandings of nonduality in their day-to-day practice. As pointed out, much of the evidence on nondual experiencing has emerged from the spiritual literature.

MODE OF ANALYSIS

There was one other factor that my work was offering. Other research studies, e.g. Buttlein (2005) and Fire (2010) offer extremely rich material on the descriptive experiences of others with regard to nondual experiencing. Butlein, for example, found several characteristics expressed by ‘purportedly awake’ therapists. These included mental clarity; energetic transmission; nondual abiding; spacious presence; heartfelt/mindful contact and deep empathy. These qualities, he says, contributed to several things in relation to the practitioners practice, including awareness of defensiveness, countertransference, increased openness, empathic attunement and client-therapist connection.

Utilising embodied research, I was able to get a sense of the practitioners ‘skilfulness’ in these areas, that is, to experience them and reflect on my own felt sense in the moment. It is often the case that practitioner generated ideas, e.g. what therapists think they do and what clients say they do may vary and is held as somehow demonstrating the therapists narcissism (Cooper 2008). There may be some truth in it (and a couple of my co-researchers expressed thoughts about inflation etc. and therapists who would ‘sign up’ to ‘good’ qualities.) Daniels (2000) as noted earlier, explores transpersonal psychology’s potential for flight into healing and reluctance to look at the more problematical areas.

A significant contribution of this research then, is that the information I encountered was both ‘data’ from my co-researchers AND material from my own felt sense and reflections of my experiencing of them. The realisation of this became clear as I engaged with the video material afterwards, as part of my thematic analysis. The interviews were videoed so that I could both transcribe

our work and also revisit our interactions. The re-visitation was a key part of the research. It allowed me to re-search and re-experience the phenomena of our meeting. This meant that the work opened out and rather than being solely about the content of the conversation it became more about the meeting in the environment and field of experiencing. This was an important part of the witnessing process for me as I was able to include in my field of vision so much more textured material. The co-researcher's quality of 'ease of being' was such an example. When I reflected on the videos and wrote down my experiences, for each individual, I noted the word 'ease' kept emerging. This was marked by the co-researcher's attitude of openness, non-judgement and a willingness to be with the unknown. There was a sense of ease in relation to themselves (the way they spoke, held themselves, presented their understandings). This would not have emerged directly from their individual accounts. I could only access this from my own felt experiencing. I felt able, therefore, to name 'ease of being' as an emergent quality in my co-researchers.

The process of thematic analysis, in this research, was a bricolage. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) put it, 'The qualitative researcher as bricoleur or makers of quilts uses the aesthetic and materials tools of his craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand' (p.6). The stitching together of stories and the weaving of experiences became a long activity of arranging themes, re-listening to descriptions and so on and so a patchwork of fluorescent highlighted transcripts with numbered texts grew. As I processed the material I was aware that each of our meetings held something significant and there was a possibility of losing the individual in the data collection. It was

therefore important to try and capture an essence of the whole experience with each of my co-researchers. The dilemma, of course, is the risk of producing too much 'data'. I took a long time to go 'back and forth' in order to distil the key aspects, as a phenomenological reduction (Galvin and Todres 2006) and I came back to the research material for a final time whilst on retreat at a Zen centre in Santa Fe. The silence and nourishing nature of the retreat centre gave me a place of spaciousness to refine, listen and distil the words of my co-researchers. Given the nature of the work, it also felt important to me that I was able to 'sit' with this in the presence of stillness. Fortunately the centre had an ambience of facilitating deep listening and presence. So, each of my co-researchers had time to metaphorically be with me at the centre. Once again, I went back in to their words and tried to listen to the subtleties.

Presence as a research 'tool'

Molly, a co-researcher, helped me to see the place of unconditional presence in the research process for me. Much of our research conversation was conducted with Molly using the focusing method (Gendlin 1996). Here she brought her awareness to her unfolding inner experiencing as she attempted to express her understanding. What became clear, as I watched the video was the degree to which she and I were deeply interconnected, both with each other and the environment. I was surprised at how 'in tune' I was with her process and I realised that holding unconditional presence offered a profound way of expressing embodied research. According to Welwood (2000), there is a subtle difference between focusing and unconditional presence inasmuch that in focusing there is a possible bias toward unfolding meaning from a felt sense

toward resolution. As he puts it, ‘Wanting our experience to change usually contains a subtle resistance to what is, to newness, to what I call *unconditional presence* – the capacity to meet experience fully and directly, without filtering it through any conceptual or strategic agenda.’ (p. 116).

My reflections on this arose, because as I watched, I had absolutely no idea what was going to happen next and yet, in the interview I had glimpses of myself simply staying with what was emerging. In transcribing the interview onto paper, it meant that the ‘data’ was difficult to follow in a logical sense. I discovered that the way to bring it to life was to write it with my own embodied reflections on the encounter. This required a secondary process of re-engagement with the interview film in order to ‘find the words that work’ (Galvin and Todres 2006). This was not the case for the interviews with all the co-researchers. With David, for example, I found myself contributing enormously to the interview as he invited me in by saying ‘What do you think?’ or “do you agree?” In keeping with a dialogical approach I offered my reflections too. Finlay and Evans (2009) acknowledge that the relationally orientated researcher cannot be viewed as a neutral presence; instead they bring to the encounter their own uniqueness (history personality, age, gender, story etc.) and will, therefore, influence the relational encounter. I was reflexive and appreciated the ways in which this might have impacted on the research and trust that the degree of awareness I consistently gave attention to, ensured that the research wasn’t pulled into the direction of my needs or focus unduly.

As I worked with the transcripts and videos and re-engaged with my research material (and therefore metaphorically with each of the co-researchers) I tried to find words that offered a brief summary of each individual for me. The best way

of doing this emerged in the form of a haiku poem for each of my co-researchers and these are offered overleaf. They were not traditional haikus, with a line pattern of 5 syllables, 7 syllables and a last line of 5 syllables. They were simply an attempt to catch the pithy qualities of 9 extraordinary ordinary practitioners. Attempting to distil over 12 hours of video recordings was not an easy task. I'm mindful that I have ended up with what we have. I am responsible for those choices and trust that they hold significance for those who receive them.

What we have then is a series of stories of meeting. As Finlay (2011) has noted, there is always more to be said from the interviews of co-researchers and no doubt there are other themes that I could equally have spent more time distilling and focusing on. Each of these will be expanded on shortly. Before doing that, by way of beginning to hear the stories of my co-researchers, I include a short introduction to them, by way of capturing their energetic engagement as practitioners. These thumbnail sketches include a short extract from our meeting or conversation, which I hope, when listened carefully to, may resonate.

THE CO-RESEARCHERS

Lydia

Breath and movement.

Everything in

One single step

I met Lydia at her small country cottage. Her simple house reflected her ease in the world, which was met with a quality of generosity in an invitation to join her for a shared lunch. Lydia has a real quality of congruency about her. Her words are both sparky and gentle and she sat in a comfy chair, blanket wrapped round her shoulders, like a wise silver haired teacher.

Lydia is a Dzogchen practitioner. She has spent many years working in a spiritually orientated training organisation. In introducing the topic, Lydia spoke with tenderness of her first experience of oneness and separation through the experience of being an identical twin. She runs, and is very much present to the elements and her engagement with the environment. She described one such moment of connection to 'beingness' whilst running. Gently stroking her cheek, she described the following experience of oneness:

L:it was a beautiful spring day and at some point I had just stopped and felt the breeze on my cheek.... and I suddenly got it! That sense of connection, interconnectedness.... and I also realised that it was just not the breeze.... it was the breeze AND the openness of my experience to the breeze. It was like a coming together and that sense of 'ash that is how it is'. It was really quite transformative and I realised 'yes I do have a connection with the Divine!'

Pete

The reed pipe

Carries the breath

And student's clap!

Pete is a psychotherapist who works in the National Health Service, unlike a number of my co-researchers whose major work occurs within private practice. His spiritual work arose from working with an Australian meditation teacher of the Vedic tradition. The French psychiatrist and meditation teacher Jean Marc Mantel now inspires Pete's work. That shift created something of an epistemic dichotomy for Pete as he moved from one focus of understanding to another. His engagement in working with Jean Marc was palpable in the sense of the calm, ease and joy in which he spoke. It was almost as if he had the best big brother in the world.

Pete also runs a project that develops and skills health workers to spend a year working with one patient therapeutically. His 'good fortune' to have met Jean Marc leaves him open to 'whatever'...

P: It is very much work in progress and I think I'm really sort of, just open to where that might evolve ... and there's a nice image in a book by David Carse, a non-duality teacher, and he says that we're like a bamboo flute. The music plays through us, and we tend to think of ourselves as the music but actually we're just the flute. And I don't know what the next music will be, really, but I feel really sort of open and ... excited about whatever that might be. And much more willing now just to go with that and wherever that might take me.'

David

Embracing Dharma

Wisdom chasing tail

Funny Funny Man!

I met David at his home. He and his wife Theresa invited me to supper. Earlier in the day we had shared part of a practitioners day working with Jean Marc Mantel, psychiatrist and Vedanta practitioner. The day was engaging and inevitably the aliveness of it filled our conversation. This felt very serendipitous given that we were exploring David's thoughts on nonduality and psychotherapeutic practice. David is a Dzogchen practitioner and has worked as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and mindfulness teacher. He has also been engaged in the training of psychotherapists.

The video revealed an intensely funny introduction. The chaotic and ridiculously funny start of the interview included their dog (Tillie) jumping on the bed upstairs and charging around indicated something of the quality of this larger than life character. David's analytic mind and uproarious sense of fun pervaded our interview making it playful, challenging and fun.

There were several 'false starts', mainly created through imp-like intrusions (like the dog) but our time was also marked by low flying aeroplanes, the ringing of phones, the bringing of wine and olives etc. David's capacity to stay with the ensuing chaos with cheeky laughter and warmth demonstrated his innate capacity to sit with ease and definite presence.

Ralph

The three jewels

Held in a gaze

Everything here!

I met Ralph at a retreat centre before he was due to run a weekend retreat. Ralph is a psychotherapist and long term Buddhist practitioner who I have known for many years. Ralph's ease of speech, his deep voice and enunciated words, resonate and captivate. He holds an embodied presence during the interview, sitting contentedly in the garden with the sounds of early evening birdsong. He describes trying to ground his spiritual practice both in psychology and also in the earth and in the body. He also has a vast knowledge of Shamanism. Ralph's long-term practice ensures that he has a great deal of experiential and conceptual understanding within Tibetan Buddhism. His sense of nonduality in the therapeutic encounter was simply put as:

R - If I come back to where my Buddhist sense of what non-duality means for me, it isn't about losing a sense of self. It's about recognising that self is there, as the play of this manifestation of these bits and pieces, and that its underlying nature is that of spacious and empty - and that's the nonduality. It's the non-contradictory nature of those two levels of truth.

Shasta

Prostration now

Head below heart

Perfect wisdom!

I met Shasta at her home. I arrived to a warm welcome and tea and snacks. I am struck by Shasta's warmth of presence. A Sufi practitioner and Muslim who holds faith in day to life. Her work is also her practice – a calling that appears to be lovingly delivered. She is sharp and bright and wonderfully human. A deep sense of contentment fills her, and much like Ralph, her words are spoken carefully and given joyfully. She shares her life work with her partner Mohammed where they engage with work within the Muslim populations in various areas of the UK. The counselling training they deliver is based on Islamic principles and philosophies. One of the stories she shared was her relationship with Mohammed:

S: I feel very blessed in having a relationship where we are so obviously able to be so much of ourselves. There is so much we can challenge each other on lovingly and laugh about. (Laughs) The other day I was in this room next door and I was praying and Mohammed said to me 'Shasta!' In my prayers I was thinking, why is he calling my name? It's obvious I'm praying. He was like 'Shasta!' (Laughs) 'What is he on?' I said, 'I can't concentrate, leave me alone!' Obviously you are on the road to nowhere when you do that, but anyway, I still continued to try. So anyway, I carried on, battled on to the end and I said to him, 'What are you doing?' and he said 'I hope you realise you are praying 180 degrees in the wrong direction!' (Laughs). He said 'I don't know how you can do that in your own home, unaware!!'

Wallis

The bowl shatters

Yet everything

Is together

I met Wallis at his home and we sat together in a room, which overlooked magnificent countryside. As a psychotherapist he works from a psychosynthesis model and has a spiritual practice that he describes as eclectic but that essentially draws heavily on the Kabbalah – these two aspects are passionately woven together to form a model of being that draws on techniques ‘*but isn’t about the application of them*’. What struck me about Wallis was that his modality fitted himself so well. When he describes things, he dances poetically and conceptually with an ease of understanding – more pilgrim than missionary on the journey. On training practitioners he says:

W: I sometimes say to people and trainees that the getting of your Diploma at the end isn’t the end of the training.... it’s obvious anyway but you know you are moving onto another level when.... you are back to where you started.... beginners minds as such. You have to let go of all the ideas and then one finds ones own particular way of being with people and style of therapy. You know I don’t do ‘Psychosynthesis’ I do ‘Wallisian’ therapy or something.

Helen

Where the moon

Meets the dawn

Bright woman!

Helen and I met at her home in the room where she meets with her Sangha (spiritual community). Helen's teacher is Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist teacher and she has developed trainings in transpersonal psychotherapy and Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT). I was struck by her gentleness and generosity – both of which were not new to me. I have known Helen for many years. She had arranged a walk by the sea before our interview – and supper for after. Helen's being in the world invites a quality of relatedness and the interview mirrored that quality of being.

In the spaciousness of her room, our interview began with a few minutes of silence. We ponder whether it makes a difference to choose a transpersonal therapist or someone with an understanding of nondual awareness:

H: I'm thinking about my own practice now, you know, understanding a lot more about the dharma and the gift of that. Well for me, I think it helps ones' practice with fear..... That's a very important practice. I don't know the answer to the question, but I do know for myself as I have more and more philosophical understanding about the value of non dual conscious awareness, neither are right or wrong or good or bad - they are both in their moment for me. It is very freeing and healing and that's a crucial thing.'

Henry

Wise Patriarch

Structured knowledge

Softened in smile

I met Henry at his home. I had had a long tiring car journey drive from the South West taking me around the M25. The day was a little overcast and I noted that I probably felt that upon arrival. I walked up the stairs to a small room, which felt a little cramped. I had met Henry at several conferences. He has written a lot in the psychotherapy and counselling field since the 60's really. So, he is a grand old patriarch of the tradition. He has a strong affinity to Ken Wilber and initially, rather like the cramped room I felt a little constrained with the strong view. And yet, close to, his warmth and gentle way of being offers a kind of spaciousness. He has a passion for Transpersonal Psychology and has ensured, over the years, that the modality stays firmly within view. He tells me one of his favourite stories....

H: There was a country where there's a big Sufi tradition where a Sufi teacher in the north and one in the west, another one in the east, and they had never met andso they decided they should meet. Each thought it would be a good idea, after all they were all famous in their ways but never met each other. So they agreed to meet in the centre of this capitol city and one came from the north, one came from the east, one came from the west. They came, sat at a table at an inn in this capitol city and they started laughing and looked at each other and carried on laughing. They went on laughing for three days and then they went home. (He laughs uproariously)

Molly

Ladybird smile

Crow calling 'Crow'!

Ah...it is you!

The interview took place at Molly's home. She chose to be interviewed outdoors. Like Ralph, this very much reflected her engagement with the environment. She is a psychotherapist and Buddhist practitioner who also spent her early years engaged with esoteric Christianity. Molly is also a medical doctor, researcher and mindfulness teacher who has also trained as a CBT practitioner. She is experienced in Focusing and for some of our interview, she paused to check out and ensure the accuracy of her response in each moment. As a woman involved with an ecopsychology project, her attunement to nature was evident. Molly and I walked in her garden prior to our interview. She showed me a toad pond that she had constructed which had some new toad spawn in it. A black and red spotted ladybird caught our attention as it struggled on the surface of the water. We both instantly leant forward and Molly managed to pick it up with blade of grass. A short while into our interview, as Molly was deep in focusing, I noticed a ladybird land near her shoulder. It flew off and later landed by her feet. I came to name this the 'ladybird moment' in the research encounter. Who can say that it was the same ladybird? In many ways that doesn't matter. As was true in much of Molly's interview, her openness to the environment was exemplified in the interplay of the environment during our conversation.

ANALYSIS

Several key themes emerged from my meetings with the co-researchers. Having worked with hours of material, several areas seemed to have significance.

These broad themes are listed below.

Congruency

This particularly was seen in how the co-researchers presented themselves. This primarily was my felt sense and experiencing of them and the ways in which their work and practice was consistent with their words.

Preparation for practice – the significance of personal spiritual practice.

Each had a specific spiritual practice that supported their work. A key aspect was the importance they placed on shared practice with either a partner or Sangha (spiritual community or group).

Confidence in knowledge

Each was experienced in their particular modality and the confidence in their modality theory was marked equally by a capacity to be able to give it up – which is perhaps the confidence in knowledge.

Confidence in experience

Linked to the above, this was also marked by a capacity to not know and rely on ‘in practice judgement’.

Openness to the spectrum of experiencing

This refers to the co-researchers capacity to open beyond ordinary experiencing and open to other levels of consciousness, time, bodily experiencing and time and space.

Capacity to stay in the ground of being

Their ability to experience a subtlety of arising phenomena.

Awareness of inflation

Given the nature of spiritual work the potential to move into a transcendent place is appealing. The co-researchers held a quality of immanence, often grounded in the body and in day to day living.

Compassionate / empathic awareness

This refers to the degrees in which the co-researchers sat with others suffering, without impinging on the other.

Listening to being

Manifested in an ease in being and a capacity to ‘fully hear’ with the body and heart and mind.

Tacit knowledge

This was expressed in their openness to self- experience/enquiry and to go beyond conceptual thinking. This meant it was possible to rest in a place of not knowing, to ‘think at the edge’.

Before highlighting each of the qualities, I will begin with one of the key debates on nonduality in practice – Is it possible to have Nondual Therapy? This was an interesting part of the work and I believe marks a division between the focus on conceptual theorising and experiential therapeutic practice. I will then go on to elucidate further, offering examples and commentary from the interviews on each of the themes, to bring to life the material. In keeping with the spirit of the research methodology I am prioritising the voices of my co-researchers, presenting them in ways that I trust will bring to life their world as practitioners.

‘NOT TALKING ABOUT IT. TALKING FROM IT’ - Is it nondual or isn’t it?

Can we define such a practice as Nondual therapy?

One of the key issues, that some of the literature (and also my co-researchers) outlined is the simple question – ‘Is it or isn’t nondual?’ Fenner (2003) sets this out coherently noticing the overlaps within psychotherapeutic practice. There was a gender divide amongst the co-researchers with the women practitioners not getting caught up in conceptual debates as to whether the practice was nondual - either being happy to assume it was or simply stating “I’m not sure if that’s nondual”. And yet, when speaking from an experiential perspective no one seemed to get particularly caught up in the theoretical debates.

In this section are a selection of the discussions and descriptions by the co-researchers. I will highlight, as we go, some of my reflections on their words and my naming of the qualities I felt both in their presence and also afterwards when engaged in the thematic analysis. Some of the emergent qualities include compassionate and empathic awareness and deep listening to being, i.e. that quality of being able to listen with the body, mind and heart and of being able to stay in that place without ‘leaking’ or impinging on the client. All of these enable the practitioner to confidently rely on ‘judgement based practice’ (Polkinghorne 2004) based on their inner authority.

What becomes clear is that how a practitioner viewed or experienced nonduality had an impact in terms of how it was drawn into their work, as a conceptual idea. Our discussions raised many philosophical issues for the work, with diverse opinions in terms of how it was included or understood in their practice. ‘Is

nondual practice a thing?’ mused Ralph, ‘If it turns into an object, or something one has to try and achieve, I think that’s not actually where I go with it’.

I was curious as to how it might be incorporated into his work:

R: I don’t have a lot of preconceptions about how the principle of nonduality is being incorporated into psychotherapy. So I guess I can only speak about it from some sense of where it might be kind of related to my own experience – where I don’t think I’ve ever used that term. So the term doesn’t actually mean a lot to me, as a psychotherapeutic term, but ... you know... I understand the principle within Buddhism and the practices define nonduality in a number of different ways. I suppose one thing that immediately comes to my mind in terms of the philosophical background of it, is it depends a little bit on how one defines this notion. And that in itself points to a lot of possible confusion. That’s one thing, and the other thing, as I start to read a little bit about it, is whether it’s a theoretical notion that people are beginning to apply, but is it an experiential thing? ... because there’s lots of very intelligent people starting to write around it, obviously.

Ralph makes the distinction between conceptual knowing and experiential understanding. Experientially, he can begin to define his work but implying a philosophy or theory around his psychotherapeutic work and it starts a process of moving away from the aliveness of the field of experiencing. The knowledge is located in the corporeal, relational, temporal and situational. Suddenly there is a dance happening where the flow of practice potentially gets stopped and jammed, like a computer printer that’s just questioned itself how it works.

R: *SoI suppose ... coming back to how that is for me, I guess ... it feels as though we're moving into the territory of how my relationship to the field of an experience opens up or deepens, without really putting that philosophical frame around it. But it could be that – even as I start to think about the philosophical frame – they actually get in the way. You know ... because then I start to think 'am I actually doing this? You know?*

Ralph's earlier comment about 'is it a thing?' draws on one of the dilemmas that the practitioners had, particularly when attempting to position their work into a framework. My discussion with David fell into the same tongue twirling encounter as he plays with how getting caught up in the narrative of nonduality immediately takes him away from it:

D: *Well it is a narrative. When we talk about it we are in the narrative. When we are in it we are not, but the second we put it into words and communicate it into language we are out of it and into the narrative.*

So, when I asked how that might work in psychotherapy, if, indeed it did, he pondered on several things, including inflation and romanticising ideas of mystic enlightenment.

D: *I was just thinking, my god that's rare but it is very easy to romanticise and I think part of our narrative is that we get caught up in the narrative of meditative state or contemplative psychotherapy or non-dual experiences in psychotherapy. We don't just do that off our own backs, we do that in the context of our own*

subjectivity, which means that we have a vested interest in this idea, either against it, or for it. So having a vested interest in it means we are quite likely to egg it more than it actually deserves. With that in mind, I would tend to be quite careful about people's descriptions of nonduality and I know I'm kind of pushing myself towards quite a narrow definition.

When I ask what the definition would be, he says:

'It would truly have to be a state where there was no subject, object or experience, but how rare is that.'

So David has determined the definition in a Dzogchen understanding. For David, there is a dilemma in holding the possibility, whilst also being accused of holding limited definitions in terms of what is happening. He focuses on the definitions and narratives surrounding the experiences. This is interesting, for it is a dilemma in the field and one where there are major divides about both the significance of nonduality in practice but also of what it is. The potential for inflation on the part of the therapist (or practitioner) is described by the phrase 'egging it up' and is an aspect of practice that could be part of the therapeutic shadow of both fearfulness (of going into the difficult places) and inflation.

For Helen, the work is very much centred in a framework of mindfulness practice and her own experience of glimpses of nondual awareness. She describes, a heart based piece of work:

H: Well, when I first got your email, I thought "Oh well I don't experience that because that's the big thing! I perhaps have micro moments of that. I think that the only way I can speak to it is in the practice of mindfulness and compassion, because I call on mindfulness to allow the work to deepen if it can. So those

moments for me would be probably after the first ten, fifteen minutes of a session when you had got a sense of lots of strands and possibilities where things could go and lots of ideas and lots of energy..... so you are already using what's aware in your body, in your thoughts. You know, everything is rising and falling and there's a moment..... increasingly as my practice has got deeper.... where the resonance of what somebody has been saying or experiencing.... the way they have been sitting that becomes more palpable in the space shared. When I'm experiencing it, it's almost a moment when there's a sense of deep listening and connection.... you know maybe in the heart. I would say that's the beginning of where one isn't trying to go anywhere or repress anything. One is just being present with the arising of that moment.

I momentarily pause to take in Helen's words. Like Ralph her understanding is present in the body, in her thoughts in the arising and falling of everything palpable in the shared space. 'One is just being present with the arising of that moment', she says. In that moment she drops into a visceral heart based connection. Several of the co-researchers demonstrated these qualities that we traditionally see as compassionate awareness and depth empathy. It reminds me of Glassman's (2012) idea of simply 'plunging' into fearless connection with another and arriving in a deeper place of attunement.

She continues:

The most moving thing I find is that the person's exploration is picking up the golden thread to connect with what's always been there and that's the greatest treat about being a therapist. That's what one's trying to facilitate - the ground

of awareness and mindful listening. And so the person says “Ooh, I just realised or I just rememberedso then everything shifts, the tone of voice, the body position the energy and so the curiosity is invited. Is that nondual? I don’t know but I know that in the context of psychotherapy it is not using traditional theory and in a cognitive sense it’s not working with a goal, it’s becoming more aware of learned procedures that have so many layers underneath them and not just behaviour or thoughts. It’s like when peeling an onion I think.

Helen asks the key question – is it nondual? She works with embodied feeling resonating with her client and poetically references the ‘golden thread’ to what is in the stillness. What she demonstrates is the capacity to stay within the intersubjective space with openness and allow the potential of the individual to deepen within the qualitative experience of their own being (Blackstone 2008).

Wallis, who has an acutely reflective and conceptually sharp mind (he likes diagrams!) reflected on the model of psychosynthesis in terms of how he conceptually addresses nonduality issues in his psychotherapeutic work.

W: I think in every day practice, I can’t say that when I’m sitting with my clients I’m necessarily reflecting on nonduality with the presence of oneness, because I’m in the relationship with the client and what is happening. But when, in moments of the sessions my inner supervisor pops up and says, “what’s going on here?” I find what Assagioli called the higher resolving factor helpful. A basic model of that is a triangle. On the base of the triangle there is duality, whatever duality it is ‘plus or minus’, ‘good or bad’, ‘me or you’. The difference between

staying in that dual place and being able to move to a new place or a third place, the higher resolving factor, what I call the witness or the observer maybe. If you stay on the same dynamic between the two things, the best you can achieve is a place that is neither one or the other. Rather than going to the place that is neither one or the other in duality, it's going to a place of 'both' rather than either or.

Wallis describes what may well be good 'ordinary' psychotherapy, utilising the maps of psychosynthesis to good effect. But is it nondual? Wallis, like Helen, holds the ground for a bigger picture to emerge beyond the duality of 'either or'. He suggests that there is another space, a place which can be 'and and', i.e. a place of nonduality. In many ways this is conceptual, yet Wallis' presence shifts the theory or the idea into a warm, dynamic, eye twinkling exchange, completely engaged in the 'That' of practice (Van Manen 2007; Todres 2008).

David, as we know, is keen to not 'overegg' an experience. He shared a moment in therapy which, in his framework of understanding, he would describe as a moment of nondual awareness arising in session for both his client and himself :

D: I have actually experienced it a couple of times in therapy and I couldn't tell you how it's happened although I might be able to say a little bit about how we may have contributed to it but it felt like it was an event which has occurred in which both myself and the other person are contained and...it's difficult to talk about isn't it...and then an enormous sense of awareness, spaciousness, clarity, a sense of pervading benevolence but not in the sense of, I am having that

experience, and not in the sense that we are having that experience together. In a sense I want to use a word like grace actually or something with grace has descended into the event and that we have been touched by it and almost by magic by looking at each other, containing this experience, kind of grinning and laughing and then of course it dissolves, but a most enormously transformative moment. So your question, what place does it have, well, if I buy into all this stuff, the place it has is the moment of the greatest healing. There is nothing more sublime than that and the therapy in which can create a space for that to occur in is a good therapy because it is facilitating that experience and the transformative quality it has.

‘Pervading benevolence’, ‘grace descending’, ‘spaciousness’. David begins to wrap words around the experience. As he sounds them, I feel myself slowly unwrapping them, imagining the taste they hold for him.

He goes on to contemplate the impact of a therapist who has nondual awareness and how this might play in the therapeutic field:

D: But the key is, if you have a therapist who has had an experience with intrinsic awareness which they know how to re-enter because they have been taught how to do it and inasmuch as that person can find that place in themselves and rest in it, I'm in no doubt that that is transferred into the field of therapeutic exchange and that will facilitate the other person experiencing it, this transmission, and I think that is absolutely right, you know, a person who is good with the vulnerability of their emotions will transmit that in the therapeutic

environment won't they and it will enable someone else to be with their emotions, somebody who is good at finding meaning perhaps or cognitive.

Blackstone (2006) makes exactly this point, she says, 'As non dual consciousness, two people can connect with each other from within the internal space of their separate bodies. This produces a vibrational resonance between their essential qualities.' She goes, 'Wherever one person is more open in their own being than the other, it will help dissolve the rigid organisations of the other person' (p.36). In many ways, this would also describe what happened for Helen. The ability to create enough space so that the client can shift without feeling impinged or abandoned. This is one of the significant elements for the therapist who has the awareness to land in that place.

This feeling is also shared by Shasta, who ponders the quality of spaciousness that the practitioner inhabits and how that impacts on the client, describing the 'osmotic' effect of the therapists presence:

S: I think the other thing as well is about what the practitioner is conveying....without words necessarily, just transmitting qualities of peace and love and of courage and fearlessness.

She goes on to see this in the context of not knowing, of allowing oneself to rest in what is arising, no matter what the experiencing field holds.

S: It is a space that both the practitioner and the client can trust, because it goes back to that thing about confidence about feeling. Inevitably one is up and down

in oneself, or incompetent, not skilled, not trained, not knowing. We're not ignoring these things but working with these things and also knowing its ok. And that's a very genuine place to come from.

Shasta addresses the humanity of practice, and that it is this space that the real engagement with whatever is arising comes into being, the not knowing, the shabbiness of being a precious human being.

Nondual realisation according to Blackstone (2006) deepens a capacity for contact, 'This means we are able to encounter people not just on their surfaces but also within the internal depths of their being. This gives us a qualitative, felt sense of the other person'. (p.34).

However, Henry, like David, holds a particular model and feels that the kind of practice that Blackstone outlines may not necessarily be about nondual realisation:

Henry: People who say they are doing nondual psychotherapy...it seems what they are actually doing is perfectly ordinary psychotherapy and talking a bit about non-dual to the clients as well. If you come to think of it there is no possibility of doing nondual therapy because there are two people in the room, so there has to be a duality if you are going to talk, to converse, to interact in anyway you can't do it in a nondual way, you have two people or more straight away. So I'm a bit critical about the idea that there is such a thing as nondual psychotherapy.

Henry's guillotine drops with the sharpness of his view.

Ralph makes some sense of this in a different way. Although he has misgivings about naming it as a 'thing', his understanding of nondual experiencing in the therapeutic space clearly allows him to be there in the presence of another, engaging in nondual awareness (and here my own words trip me up!). He makes reference to ultimate and relative truth, which cuts through, like a sword into Henry's perspective.

*R: you know ... it comes back to the thing we were talking about before ... the subjective sense of me is there. So if it means 'oh God, there's no-one really sensing' ... yeah, I can talk about that ultimate truth level ... there's no-one sensing ... there's no-one ... but actually **it is me** that's sensing. And it would be nonsense ... to say I'm not . Because it's ... you know, this person sitting here has some sensing process going on. I may at the same time know that actually that has no ultimate ... you know, existence to it. You know, it is a process. It has ... you know, substantiality to it. But it's still me that's sensing.*

This may well be semantics but in many ways it also points to an area where 'linguaging' potentially gets in the way. The difficulties emerging that Henry describes, focus on the conceptual understanding of nonduality and how linguaging becomes caught up in hierarchical thinking. He does acknowledge this and points to the potential for a more poetic approach:

H: Now the nondual level, or approach, or space, or whatever you may call it, there isn't any of that, there's nothing about achievement or getting there or...wow! Or anything else. There's just this kind of total spaciousness that

doesn't require any description or any explanation or any words of any kind to go with it. So it's obviously very difficult to talk about and I think one of the problems in all the spiritual levels, subtle, causal, nondual, whatever, is that language belongs to the mental ego and the centaur. As soon as you get beyond that level or even into the subtle, language becomes useless or not much use, or a bit of use, but you have to be careful with it and the subtle level of course. Poetry is terribly important because it is a kind of subversion of language. So causal and nondual are difficult to talk about.

As a practitioner it is often inspiring to see others at work. Having witnessed Jean Marc Mantel (the French Psychiatrist and Nondual teacher) working with a woman who had incredible discomfort on her right shoulder, David and I discuss and share our reflections on the evening after the event. David gives a phrase that sums up a way of being therapeutically – ‘not talking about it, but talking from it’. On Jean Marc he says:

D: ...he's fascinating, he never talks about it, he talks from it. 'So when he is resting in that state of silence and he said the nature of silence is to find expression...so when people were asking questions he didn't do what I do which is kind of think about it, he was resting back into the silence...and then the silence would speak and the silence was his own expression. It was beautiful'.

He goes on to name more specifically the aspects of the encounter that moved him:

D: It was the silence that responded to her question, not Jean Marc and it was a unique response to her problem, including the song. And he sang in a way that was deeper than the instruction because the song was really spontaneous – ‘Don’t worry, Be happy’, and I’m sure he picked up on not only her symptom with that, but also her relationship to her symptom and the symptoms causing her anxiety that it didn’t fit with the narrative of who she was. I thought that was beautiful’.

My own sense was that it indeed was a unique moment and the response that arose (the little song ‘Don’t worry, be happy’) seemed to cut through the narrative of the pain. The description that David gave of the responses emerging from silence were apt. Jean-Marc himself describes listening in this way, ‘Listening includes both information coming in and going out. If there is no straining to listen to the information content, it completely leaves the space free for the answer to emerge. The emerging answer is like a gushing fountain. It flows without hesitation, free from the thinking mind. It is not impulsive but spontaneous. Thus the expression is not blocked by fear: fear of judgement, of not being loved, of loneliness etc.’ (McNab and Mantel 2003, p. 99-100).

As I reflect on this, there is a pleasure in noticing the congruency of a practitioner. His writing is exactly how he presented in practice.

Emergent qualities

So, to re-emphasise the qualities of compassionate and empathic awareness and deep listening to being are present. These are fundamental qualities of working at subtle levels with clients, particular ‘on the edge’ without impinging on the

client. It is this that I propose is the most interesting aspect of nondual therapy, i.e the depth in which practitioners are able to work. Rather than getting caught up in discussions of whether it is nondual (by whichever spiritual model) the most important focus is the way in which practitioners are able to be in their work, in the intersubjective field, with a capacity to stay at relational depth with their client. What I see here, is the potential repetition of the debate between Peggy Wright and Ken Wilber and the transpersonal dualities which Daniels (2005) points out.

For the Sufi practitioners in Pakistan, Dhikr and the remembering of Holy Names was an essential part of their practice in order to stay in contact with the Divine. I was curious as to how the practitioners engaged with a practice, acknowledging that the work requires a degree of contemplation and self enquiry. My next key question that arose focused on the ways, if any, that the practitioners supported their practice. The next part looks at this.

PRACTICE PREPARATION AND SUPPORT.

One of the important aspects that everyone expressed was their own preparation for practice. These were the activities that supported their work and varied from daily meditation to engagement with nature. Many noted the significance of others in the sharing of their spiritual work, e.g. partners and Sangha (spiritual community). The 'rewards' of practice are seen as manifold.

Helen describes how, when she feels ‘thin on the ground’ she draws on holding an image of her teacher, Thich Nhat Hahn and also draws onto a collective source through her Sangha who meet for meditation and occasional rituals:

H: Thich Nhat Hahn says that when you notice that you are a bit thin on the ground you can borrow from other people. I was on retreat with him a short while ago and so when I am feeling thin on the ground, I just see him sitting there in the lotus position with his brown eyes. I just experience and feel that he is coming from non duality all the time. I think he lives in it. So..... that’s certainly how it supports me and reminds me of the connection so I feel that I’m connected to these amazing traditions through my work.

Helen also described how she has a Buddha in her practice room, which at eye level means that she can gaze at the image and carry it as a reminder. The thread of connection to others and tradition is seen as important for Helen. She is not located in an isolated role as therapist but part of a wider interconnection, much as Thich Nhat Hahn speaks of in interbeing (2003). The notion of being a self-in-relation strikes as an important aspect of Helen’s practice.

For David and partner Theresa, shared practice with each other is important including preparatory mindfulness practice (which they also teach). He makes the point about not striving to ‘do it’ or to look for results, but to allow the process to infuse:

D: That’s really, really important if we start to practise even simple mindfulness of our breathing with an intentionality, we are back into doing again, aren’t we? And so it is not only important not to practise the simple mindfulness without intentionality because the intentionality gets in the way of the mindfulness itself

but if you see the mindfulness as a preparation, as I would, for moving towards practices which teach you how to rest in nondual consciousness , then you really have got to have it bred in the bone, deep, deep, deep, it's about not doing anything and that 'not doing' starts right from the beginning which is about not having an intention. And it's got to be so deep hasn't it, because we are so driven by results, so it just needs a mountain of conditioning to constantly reaffirm....just let go, just let it happen.

His words speak of his practice in an embodied way... 'bred in the bone, deep, deep, deep'. The volition for practice is not calculated intention.

Shasta utilises her practices as a way of preparing a space for therapy. It helps her to focus and symbolically set the therapeutic space. One of the things she emphasises more is preparation through prostrating before a session. I gained so much in the visual image she presented, particularly the symbolism of placing the heart above the head, during prostration, as a way of relinquishing egoic thoughts. It is a process I've taken to doing myself. Shasta says:

S: if one can metaphorically put ones face in the dust, as one does in prostration, you allow that your head is lower than your heart and then your identities are faced in the dust of your being there. Which really is what prostration is.

In the embodied action of prostration she is reminded of the notion of duality, of ego and identity and its separation from the Divine.

She goes on:

S: It's at that point that you become qualified in prayer to say 'I glory in God' this means 'I'm swimming in a state of glorification' and then what happens usually, is that you sit up and come back to the world, the duality. Then the statement is 'I seek forgiveness from God' but that forgiveness means really, I ask God to cover my faults, in that state. So then you are coming back to the state of yearning and longing so it's the duality that is yearning and longing, which is a very important development of consciousness..... and then you dive back in again and come up. So what happens is that the space between duality and non-duality, you're trying to train yourself to do that quickly, to shift awareness quickly so that it becomes, the space. The time is very short, almost touching, so that you can move between this world and the next, or however you want to put that.

Here, her practice beautifully describes the dance of moving between states of being and that the practice itself, enables a more free flowing state, of the movement from oneness to duality. I'm not sure that Shasta would describe this in the language of form and emptiness but I had a deep sense that this was part of the experiencing. In many ways, that free flowing quality was expressed by Ralph who describes his own practice within Mahamudra as

R –... I think, for me, one of the key elements of that, is just the degree to which I'm able to be present in my ...space. And to really settle into that ... in the sense of being able to really notice internal processes and to be really able to stay in this place, as opposed to losing myself, or moving out of that place into the relationship. The more I can stay present in THIS space, the more I'm able to receive a broader space, so, in terms of 'What helps it for me?' I think my meditation practice, particularly around being ... a receptor to what's going on

there, but particularly to notice my internal states ... and I think, in terms of mahamudra, the more I rest in the unconditional area of mind, it feels as though that enables me to just rest authentically somewhere without getting caught up in some of the ego stuff that can obviously happen.... Or without getting caught up in too many preconceptions about what's going to happen in the space. And also ... to be really grounded in myself, rather than pulled into a relationship where I lose that sense of self.

What is clear from Ralph's practice is the way it nurtures the capacity to rest authentically without getting too disturbed by influences.

Wallis has a daily morning sitting meditation, which use to be happily done in the company of his cat. He is recharged through the practice of Tikkun (the shattering and bringing together of the vessels. An important practice for the Kabbalist – see for example, Parfitt, 2010).

W: When one is being aware of the fragmentation happening and then coming back to a sense of oneness, I know from my experience..... its like putting petrol in a tank, my car. I'm going to go further then in my deeper practices. I also see all of this in my work with clients, or my meditation practices or whatever as part of my personal spiritual development.

Henry also has a daily morning sitting meditation, which enables him to stay grounded in his practice, he draws on levels of consciousness understanding drawn from Wilber:

H: I've been meditating in the morning since 1982 and I spent ten years on the subtle with the help of a very interesting group. I spent ten years on the causal

and just spent ten years on the non-dual. So I have good experience of these different states.

Molly describes her practice at the moment, which currently is part of a Vajrayana practice, utilising visualisation and energetically working with subtle body energies.

She also describes, perhaps unsurprisingly given her deep energetic connection to the land, that part of her spiritual practice is engaged in both wood carving and rock climbing. For her, it is a way of surrendering and allowing any ‘contraction’ to soften. She tells me that it is not possible to climb freely in a contracted state.

Lydia also has a meditation practice. She has a relaxed way of being nowadays, less inclined to be placed in a ‘must do’ position with her spiritual practice. Less inclined to be bothered about counting prostrations. To borrow a phrase from David, it seemed to be ‘bone deep’.

Embodied spirituality was a cornerstone in the development of Therao and the practitioners equally saw it as a vital part of their work. In the following section where the practitioners talk about training, what arises again is the development of both tacit understanding and pathic knowledge (Sela Smith 2002; Van Manen 2007).

TACIT UNDERSTANDING

On training and development of practice.

One of the areas that each of the co-researchers reflected on was the ways in which training could support the development of utilising the subtleties of

nondual ideas. I was curious as to what they felt were significant aspects in developing deeper awareness in the work.

Pete was especially interesting to talk to about the training of practitioners given the fact that he ran a programme for health care workers to engage in one to one work with patients. It is a one year programme where basic theoretical concepts are taught but the key learning occurs simply with the patients, in relationship, where their work is well supervised. Pete describes his astonishment at the work that the students were doing.

P: What we noticed was increasingly that these people, regardless of how 'trained' they were, they were doing some amazing work with the people that they were seeing. It seemed to us, because of their availability and openness and ... curiosity and natural empathy – rather than any range of skills that they'd learned, or practices or theory or anything like that, really. I've been involved in other things as well, like training people for exams in psychotherapy, you know, the sort of four/five/six years of training that goes with that as well ... It's challenged a lot of my notions of what training is ...you know, how to be a therapist ...

Pete is challenged as to what the components of a good training might be. The trainees focused not on technique orientated but relationship orientated practice. The openness, availability and curiosity were the key areas. Pete described his amazement that it always seemed to be that the 'right' trainee got the 'right' patient when it came to matching. In his openness he referred to this as 'oneness expressing itself, by like attracting like'.

What Pete raises is the whole arena of what is important in training. Butlein (2005) found that his co-researchers saw that the most important aspect in training was not skills or technique training, but the personal development of the therapist. Shainberg (1983) equally prioritises the development of relationships in her work with supervisees, a focus that is about and requires deeper self enquiry.

I invited others to say more about how the subtlety of practice might be supported in training. Ralph begins to explore the place of body awareness and meditation as a way of engaging:

R: I suppose the basic ground feels to me to be so much about relationship to the body and felt experience and the energetic process ... because that feels to me to be the ground that we would probably traditionally call 'the unconscious'. We're talking about a much more subtle process ... and I don't think that's an easy thing to learn, actually, and I could well imagine that there could be some therapists that could end up feeling 'but I can't do that!' I can't get down into that subtle place ...' and I think there are different degrees of it ... I don't think I'm the most subtle in terms of my capacity for sensitivity ... but there's no doubt that meditation, and particularly awareness of body sensation and feeling and energy, that sort of thing ... any practices that help to deal with that are going to be beneficial.

The extent to which opportunities are given to work with the body in subtle ways was articulated by Lydia as an important area of depth working. Given Lydia's embodied awareness, this is not surprising. What both she and Ralph touch in on

is an awareness of the subtle energetic field. Again, this was articulated by other co-researchers:

L: I do a lot of work with Kum Nye which are slow movement forms. It is a form of practice that helps bring awareness into your body. The basic sitting posture which starts with you sitting on your cushion and you feel from the ground, and you feel the energy moving through your spine, and you remind yourself to breathe and let the eyes soften. But for me, being present is very much resting your body, resting in the sense of the arising of the sensation and your breath is very useful and that is the foundation of life. So it is taking it off the object, including concept and thought and coming back to keeping it very simple in a much embodied way. So it is an energetic shift. And to simply rest in that.

Henry sees the focus on personal development through therapy, through an experiential understanding, in particular with someone from a transpersonal orientation who is open to a more spacious way of being. Additionally, he perceives an on going meditation practice as a significant requisite:

H: One of the main things in training is your own therapy. There are very, very few therapists who are offering a transpersonal experience in therapy. You can teach about it, there's plenty of literature about it, no shortage, you know. Book after book after book! But actually getting it, actually having a transpersonal inside experience and so forth, I think that can be achieved through personal therapy, but I would still think that personal commitment to meditation would also be necessary as well. And of course

most people aren't willing to do that. Most people are willing to do a weekend course, or even a three year course, some people a five year course but the amount of transpersonal input or experiencing again in that period is limited and the idea that you would spend the first years doing your own meditation for the entire five years in addition to all the other things you got to do would be a lot to ask.

David picks up on this in relation to mindfulness training and the potential to 'medicalise' it, i.e. to take it out of context and place it as a technique

D: (It's important) *Not to separate mindfulness from the body and the Dharma but to teach the Dharma, because it's meaningless without it's proper context.*

If there is no view of emptiness, the stuff is just a self-fixing calming exercise, its bollocks! It has to be done in the context of emptiness. It has to be done in the context of Metta and Karuna. It has to be done in the connectivity, it has to be inter-subjective.....doesn't it?

He also believes that a therapist who has 'done the work himself or herself' can do it.

I absolutely believe it is only a therapist who has some sense of it themselves who can transmit it to someone else but whether you can actually capture that context of the psychotherapeutic training, facilitate it, accredit it, CPD it, I don't know...

(Looking to Theresa his wife and mindfulness teaching partner)

T: I think so. I personally also think that it is quite important sometimes that it is not Buddhist because there are so many people who wouldn't be interested in coming on the course if it were purely Buddhist. So if there is a way of acknowledging the Buddhist routes and the broader context of it, which we generally do, but also you can bring in these very important aspects without saying you have to become a Buddhist in order to practise any of this, because it can arise naturally out of the experience of mindfulness itself.

Both David and his partner Theresa pick up on the concerns of Trungpa (1973), Welwood (2000) and Cox (1977) that the teachings become something of a 'trick' or 'technique' that gets imported in but disconnected to a deeper inner understanding. Yet Theresa also suggests that there is a way of utilising the essence of mindfulness without placing it in a single construct, in this case the label 'Buddhist'. Both clearly demonstrate a confident understanding of their practice

Henry also picked up on the calculative rationality currently within the profession and the difficulties of being with the subtleties of the ineffable nature of practice:

H: And so I think all these realms escape from the trammels of normal science...normal ways we understand science as a rational, concrete pursuit, which is fully checkable at all points. So I think there's a huge difficulty in doing research in this area because you keep on finding that the words that you use sometimes slip and slide and don't quite do a job and are very, very open to the

objection. This is not objective science, it is not... and you answer back of course, how could you be.....but that may not be a sufficient answer for the examiner, critic or the organisation.

In his warm way, Henry offered a collegiate smile saying ‘*I don’t envy your job*’. Van Manen’s Phenomenology of Practice offers a methodology, which embraces the ineffable quality, which Henry refers to. Indeed, set in the framework of Pathic Knowledge where personal presence, relational perceptiveness, sense and sensuality of the body and so on are key to the act of practice as opposed to intellectual knowledge - which may hamper one’s ability to the work (Van Manen 2007).

One of the things that were certainly talked about was the need to have others (whether in a collegiate or supervisory role to share practice with). Henry’s ‘*I don’t envy your job*’ felt like a supportive nod to the struggle we have in the current paradigm of evidence based practice. Many of the practitioners agreed that the discussion was a welcome occasion to share thoughts. For me, this was an important part of a collegiate led research project.

OPENNESS TO THE SPECTRUM OF EXPERIENCING

On embodied connection to body and environment – beyond conceptual mind.

Lydia, Ralph and Molly describe a sense of embodied, experiential awareness and connectedness to the environment both in their practice and day to day lives. The images they conjure are archetypal and potent. Their reflections speak of an awareness and capacity to recognise beyond conceptual thinking. This openness

to the full spectrum of experiencing offers each of the practitioners a way of engaging on both a subtle and interconnected level. Lydia, for example, tells the story of one of her excursions out on the moors whilst running, at one with the environment:

L: I tripped on a tusset of grass and I went absolutely flying on my knees and grazed my knees..... and I just found myself lying flat out on my back, looking up at the sky. That beautiful blue sky and thought 'ahh yes, this is what it is like to die.' I did feel like I had been shot like a deer or something, shot and suddenly I was there floored! And I just relaxed and watched the sky and thought again this is what it is like to die.... and just surrendered to that. So..... I was laughing about that, blood dripping down off my knees grinning all over my face.

I find the image of her identified with the deer startlingly powerful. Weighted on the ground, her knee streaming with blood, connected to all the elements under the beautiful blue sky, dissolving and surrendering in a state of joy in that moment.

Molly also described a connection to the environment, an attunement that went beyond ordinary time as she spent time on retreat on a Scottish Isle. Caught deep in contemplation on 'otherness' and the environment. She describes her process of developing understanding. The contemplation was not one of intellectualising, but one where the very environment presented itself to her through the creatures around her in form of wild ponies and birds. Searching for the meaning of

'otherness', the environment presents itself as her teacher. She describes the openness and willingness to communicate with 'other'.

M: What was really going on for me in a big way, was this question while I was there...I was trying to work out this question about 'other', in an ecological sense.... because when I was meditating on the seashore all these animals and birds came up and at one point I was sitting there and this herd of wild ponies all came and grazed around and about me. One of them came up and started nuzzling me and I was looking in my bag for food...and there was just incense in there...and then I so wanted to see a friendly connection and I couldn't tell, because I don't know the languages that horses speak as I've not really been around horses very much. He just seemed so 'other' and I didn't know what he was doing - whether he was saying 'get off my grass!' or if he was saying 'hello' or anything in between that.....so there was this feeling of other. And then something to do with the ecological self about being part of everything, so these two bits of not wanting to assimilate this horse but, also wanting to say that horse is just like me and... that then led me to thinking about the symbolic realm.... and that direct presence with other. And 'suchness' really ultimately. And, you know I was thinking what respects the other more? You know, that 'suchness' way or anything up like mythic and the collective unconscious.

As she continues her ponderings (which were complex and symbolic, and of clear meaning to Molly, yet less so for me in the arising conversation) she tells me of a powerful experience whilst walking on a ridge in the Cairngorms.

Attuned to the land, she sensed powerful emotions of death through burning, a plane, an airman, and began experiencing strong feelings of fear (she had encountered the place, unbeknown to her at the time, where many years ago an

RAF plane had crashed and burst into flames). In her meandering focused way, she contemplates times on wilderness retreats and vision quests where local archetypes and river Gods are met on dry river beds.....

M: And... I was sitting there and sort of mulling this over in between meditation sessions and I leaned over and saw this limpet shell on the shore.... and so if you imagine the limpet shell's like a cone that opens out... and in the here and now ... in the present moment was the point of that limpet shell opening out to the collective unconscious... And all of it was there. In nature, whatever, the biggest nature with a big N. Connected....it all comes to this point in the present moment.

What occurs at these times is the immense difficulty in articulating such experiences. Molly finds the ineffable quality of meaning when suddenly the limpet comes into view. It is the symbol. It is the conduit for the directly understood experience. For Molly, the instant recognition of all that she was processing was captured in that simple limpet. All time and space, past, present, future all came together in that moment. This is not a calculative cognitive act but a sensory, embodied experiential understanding. I totally understood in that moment when she arrived. The total knowledge in a limpet. Of course!

Ralph also spoke about engagement with the environment, the collective and spirits and shamanism. In particular he explores the openings that it brings to therapy, and the ways in which he brings in a wider field of experiencing:

R: *I'm becoming increasingly aware in the environment of my work ...there is a broader field of 'stuff' going on energetically that could be described in lots of different ways but it is to do with the environment....the natural environment and the entities that inhabit that space and that effect us in ways that we are not particularly conscious of. ...an elemental level of something. The shamanic work that I'm involved in with the weather ...is also part of that bigger field.of a sort of increasingly tangible sense that I'm living in an environment that's alive...and that's influencing energetically the people that I'm working with.....How do I respond to that?...include that as part of the field of my experience?. Somewhere in that, there's the bringing together of Jung's archetypal work and a much more Shamanic sense of its not just psychological, it is an energetic process that's going on. So that there isn't just a process of projective animation, we're actually living in it as a field of experience. I don't know how or what the implications of that are going to be when we start to work that way but there's no doubt for me that, starting to work energetically with some of that with certain people becomes more and more apparent and the need for it. Even in terms of clearing energy and freeing people from potential contamination of spirits and stuff. It's in the field.*

Heron (1998) and Abram (1996) both attend to these realms and invite reciprocal communication, 'Opening to nonverbal, inter-being exchange with the presences that are here, which we name trees and roads, rocks and stars. Fish and fowl; and with the sheer presence of the whole' (Heron, 1998, p. 55). Certainly indigenous traditions such as the Maori world-view perceive this in an interconnected way. Marsden (2003) writes 'Like the New Physicists, the Maori perceived the

universe as a 'process'. But they went beyond the New Physicists idea of the Real world as simply 'pure energy' to postulate a world comprised of a series of interconnected realms separated by aeons of time from which there eventually emerged the Natural World. This cosmic process is unified and bound together by spirit' (p33).

Lydia, Ralph and Molly engage in an embodied way to the work. It is their spiritual work, which invites them into such a deep embodied and woven connection to their psychotherapeutic practice.

Pete also gave a striking example of how following treatment for kidney stones he made a shift from conceptual into a real embodied experience. He describes the treatment, which became increasingly more painful:

P: And I was sitting there – or lying there – thinking I wish this would end, I wish this would end ... maybe I should ask the technician to take a break, because this is really intense ... and then I thought well, you've been teaching other people all about acceptance, and I think ... I really truly welcome this pain into my body. And I realised that it had to be a full welcome ... you know, it had to be openhearted and genuine and 100% in the sense of it. And the pain continued but I had a very different sense of it. For a while there was pain, but no pain – then there was pain and bliss at the same time. So I was really and truly lying there in a state of bliss and yet the pain was exactly the same. And that just taught me so much about ... you know, not just physical pain but also mental pain ... and life ... and how I might not want 'that' in my life but maybe want

'that' in my life – I want this comfort, but not that comfort – and of course the suffering that goes with that is immense, isn't it?

If I'd needed any reminder, it was there! And Jean Marc talks a great deal about welcoming – as did Jean Klein actually, in his teachings – and I think I understood it intellectually and hadn't really until that moment.

CONGRUENCY

The practitioners displayed a sense of congruency – a sense of an authentic 'knowing and living who you really are' (Butlein 2005). In a small but potent way, I tried to convey this in their short introductions and through the haiku poem. This was my felt sense of them - the general feeling of ease of being, each uniquely different sitting comfortably with their approaches. Wallis is very much a 'map maker', describing things in images and diagrams. Henry has a conceptually orientated mind and thinks in structures and can build big models from them. Molly is attuned to the environment and the 'ladybird moment' and the dance with the environment of cars and animals animating our interview, confirmed the place of inner and outer harmony. For David, his booming laughter and cheeky fun interspersed by a razor sharp wisdom of insight seemed to be encapsulated in their dog, playfully charging around the house, eventually resting in ease and comfort.

CONFIDENCE IN KNOWLEDGE

Congruency was displayed also because of the confidence in knowledge (both inner and outer). This was witnessed by the capacity to let it go and not know. Both of these aspects I saw in their understanding of theoretical constructs and also in their experience. In that sense, to use David's phrase, there was a 'bone deep' trust in their experience and also in their theoretical models. Although each had different views on therapeutic engagement and models of healing, they had confidence in the theoretical model they used.

So, one of the features of the co-researchers was the extent to which they were well engaged in their particular modality. Not only had they lectured or ran training groups, they had been in the field for a number of years.

Henry, as we have seen had a carefully laid out model, which he could work with coherently and creatively. Ralph had the capacity to say that at times he would find it hard to put a label on his modality, yet his work on the intersection of Buddhist thinking and western psychology had clarity. Similarly, Wallis spoke about engaging with Wallisian therapy. The training and concepts having been swept to a place of practice he calls his own.

Psychotherapists are concerned with stories, the stories of clients and the ways in which they become lived out in family myths. Analysing them, listening to them, interpreting them, witnessing them is one of the crucial aspects of the 'trade'. Yet most nondual teachings reflect that the stories are simply stories and that it is the identification with them that creates suffering (Welwood, 2000). It is interesting to note when practitioners let that idea go:

H: *I mean on a sort of crass level what I have discovered is that I get very tired or rather bored with the 'story'. Having been fascinated all my life with peoples stories, that whole repetition, and the patterns and the stories and the whole thing... I find it...I get a bit of a headache in fact, so if that's happening I know that's a clue that something is stuck there and something else is needed. I do sometimes suggest that we sit and have a pause from talking about and see what happens in just sitting together with what they just said and sometimes I might repeat it.*

We met Helen's capacity earlier to stay with both process and her 'body knowledge' for sensing what might be happening. Despite a lifetime of listening to stories, she senses the stuckness in her client.

Pete describes discussions with peers in the training he runs, about dropping the story. In a questioning of the work, he speaks of the confidence in letting go of theory:

P: *And I was talking to another colleague about this recently, who's also been exposed to Jean Marc's teaching, and he was saying something that I was finding in myself as well ... he said 'I'm talking a lot to people about their story and using that word quite deliberately, so that they can appreciate that the patterns they're living are very real to them ... and not to be diminished in the sense of how important they are to them ... but to invite a recognition of the story BEING a story. The illusory nature of the life story people are telling.' And he was saying that he was finding that a really helpful form of communication with patients. I've had a similar experience myself with a number of people ... which has seemingly helped them come out of a cul de sac they seem to have been in,*

really. In a way that allows you to both observe it and ... allow it to be what it is. Simply a story, not a guiding fiction as Adler called it, just an attempt to drive our lives in a certain direction. And of course then we're talking about liberation from the story, not changing the story. And a lot of therapy I think is in the area of changing the story ... I suppose that's how I see the ... sort of ... non-dual psychotherapy working, is that I would have in my mind that the person might be telling me their story, but that that's not who they are.

Henry describes the story of a woman he worked with. It was the first session:

H: She spent the first half hour talking about her mother and how ill she was and so forth, and how she had been miserable ever since. Suddenly she stopped and she looked at me and she said 'Do you know, I have been carrying this stuff around for 45 years and it hasn't done me a bit of good. Why don't I just drop it'? She started laughing. I started laughing and we kept on laughing until the end of the session. That was it! And it does strike me that this is what therapy is about really. It's about dropping assumptions of one kind or another....whether it's.... 'therapy is this', 'this is what I'm like', or 'this is very important', or 'don't forget this' or whatever. If you can drop those assumptions then that's it really, that's the work. And so sometimes it just happens, just like that, but that's rare.....

In many ways this is quite radical. As Helen confirms, she has spent much of her therapeutic life working with stories.

Each of them are potentially expressing a congruency that emerges from being an experienced practitioner – where ‘breaking the rules’ is a sign of deeper knowing and creativity. This potentially also leads to a shadow aspect of the work and that is the sense of being caught up in a sense of superiority and losing connection to groundedness.

INFLATION

There are plenty of reasons to become seduced into spiritual practices and ‘achieving’ higher states. This was where David spoke of the dangers of ‘egging it up’. I have located these points in many writers in the literature review e.g. Cox (1977) and Engler (2006). Holding an awareness of this was recognised in the practitioners. Lydia and Ralph hold a strong therapeutic sense with regard to managing it.

Lydia identified this and located it as a form of spiritual bypassing on the part of a both therapist and client and therefore the significance of not getting caught up in the seduction or merger:

L: I think that there are always all sorts of traps in spiritual ways of working which we can talk about as spiritual bypass. And yet, sometimes when you are in contact, in, as it were, nondual way, or whatever you like to call it, it can be a form of merger, which has its own real traps. I think that there can be a collusive aspect to that and it's self gratifying which can be a part of form of bypassing, which really needs to be confronted in a relationship. So I think that you can get to the genuine interconnectedness through confronting the bypass because there

is something there distorting or being denied or demanded which really needs to be known about. Until you have done that it can be very destructive.

Ralph picks this up too as he reflects on the quality of holding difficult transferential and energetic material in the relationship. He touches on issues around merger and the need to be a stable 'vehicle' thus finding a way of seeing this in relation to nonduality.

R: One of the things that feels quite necessary sometimes in the therapeutic space, is clarifying whose stuff is whose, as it were ... and yes, we know it arises as nondual ... you know, arising interdependently in the space ... but it is, nevertheless, useful for me to have some sense of 'Is this my material? Or is this the other person's material?' And even if it is my material, it has some relevance to the context. I can't exclude myself in that. But it's helpful to know that there is a self here, and that there is a self over there ... I don't think that gets lost in the nondual.

These thoughts were offered by the other co-researchers, for example, Pete, gave an image of therapist being the flute and allowing the music to come through and Wallis gave the image of the conductor in communication with the composer. The general sense is of being a strong enough vehicle and that this is strengthened by a spiritual practice. This then follows on to another identified aspect of being, that of being able to stay in the ground of being, of being with arising material without shifting from authentic relating.

CAPACITY TO STAY IN THE GROUND OF BEING

Ralph gives an example of powerful erotic transference by way of describing being with powerful feelings whilst holding the spaciousness of a nondual perspective:

R: I think the place where I find that especially important is working with sexuality or in the relationship. I can think of an example with a client I'm seeing and the moment. Whenever I see her there's a huge sexual charge in the space ... and what's needed, is for there to be a kind of authentic response to that, that really allows it to be what it is and where I can honestly bring my own experiences of that into the relationship. And that, in itself, has a sort of healing process. So, someone who can flip between very positive transference parent stuff ... where she kind of 'loves me to bits' ... and just wants to be with me all the time ... to being potentially withdrawn and incredibly angry ... the tension in the space is massive. But to actually be able to hold an authentic relationship ... that isn't afraid about being honest about who I am in it.

He went on to describe how it becomes less sticky the more he can just stay in a more spacious sense. In that space it is emptier and he doesn't have to get into a contracted place of worrying about it, or become afraid of his own responses. He can be present, clear and open to authentically respond as a person rather than in some neutral space that doesn't respond.

He draws on his own Mahamudra practice and sums it up as

R: I mean, you're actually playing in the same energetic field ... but there's a difference, isn't there? Because one could swim in that energetic field and be

kind of lost and drowning in it ... caught up in the particular issue of sexual energy. One could get into it and then it becomes ... overwhelmingly strong and you lose some quality of awareness ... but to actually hold that ... that body awareness within the energy, is where the Mahamudra thing is not just about witnessing ... it's about actually having that awareness.'

Ralph articulates a potent energetic way of being that is both present to the arising phenomena without getting drawn out of oneself into a defensive position of separation. There is a sense of agency within it. Shasta also brings her awareness into her work. Earlier she spoke about the significance of prayer and prostrations prior to her client work beginning. Through this practice she is able to know the place of oneness and also be with her client in all that is arising. There is an 'osmotic' effect in that there is also the possibility for the client to be able to rest in that place too.

S: In therapy that's really important to be able to be able to create the relational space. I like to be able to see it as really asking for that oneness to evolve you. How I see myself as a practitioner is someone who's trusting and believing and knowing that that state is possible. So when I start my preparation for the session, when I start saying 'In the name of God' that means I remind myself this place exists, this is real, this is a certainty and to me that is really different. It makes a massive difference to the therapeutic process because it's like the other person hears the message that actually all is well. You know, it may be crap but actually all is well. It's not just that it's safe it's actually well. This is not ignoring or not working through those things, in the same way any therapeutic

intervention for you are still using listening skills, doing all that work that need to be done because those levels of consciousness have to meet together. The person still needs to be able to work through what's happening in their own selves - husbands, children or whatever the external locations of that energy are. But it just begins to feel to them that actually there is nothing to be frightened off, there is nothing that can't be healed and that there is a place of contentment here and eventually to begin to feel more and more for themselves, you know, that it's not coming from you. To me that is something very, very powerful. It does allow people to begin to see that the universe is something that is very beautiful, very precious and challenging and all of those qualities, all of the reflections of the different names of Gods, different energies, different dualities, but it's ok to actually see them and look them in the eye. So there is a prayer about the Prophet which says ' Oh God show me things as they truly are '. You are able to see that the most devastating situations and those painful places of oneself....and be able to just sometimes simply acknowledge them and let them go.

Blackstone (2006) and Fenner (2011) have articulated how nondual awareness created the potential for the enrichment of psychotherapeutic practice. The practitioners demonstrated a range of therapeutic qualities that are enhanced by their spiritual practice and understanding of nonduality. Their work goes beyond the surface level and enables the potential for sustained empathic enquiry (Stolorow and Atwood 1992). The work is embodied and marked by high degrees of 'presence'. They have a capacity to experience a subtlety of arising phenomena and it is this that is significant, across all modalities for working with clients on a relational edge. This depth of awareness gives a 'knowing' in terms

of arising phenomena and enables the potential for deep healing, for both client and therapist.

Of course, as experienced practitioners one might imagine a high degree of confidence and integration of both knowledge and experience – all of which is evident. Similarly, because of their experience, one might also expect them to work from a place of inner authority and utilise tacit knowledge as a way of understanding process. What the work has demonstrated is the significance of their spiritual practice and nondual understanding and what this brings to their work.

CHAPTER SEVEN

UPAYAS OF PRACTICE

Upaya, translated means expedient and skilful means (Pye, 2003). I imagined that this would be a good title for the chapter to end the thesis. It is pointing to qualities or actions that promote a goodness of practice. Arriving here involved talking with practitioners, in the UK, the US and in Pakistan whose spiritual practice was a significant part of their work in helping to experience subtle relating to clients and others. Therefore, the thesis has taken an enormous journey, covering many areas and individuals, which have ultimately made sense to me, in the end, as the researcher on the journey. Having engaged in a project that was allowed to 'go where it will', I can offer the Upaya of 'Being with not Knowing'. This is a truism for myself but was also a significant part of what became clear in the work of my co-researchers. It is also at the heart of Therao. Yet, it is also a truism that this creates a problem within the field. Bankart (1997) points to one of the dilemmas in terms of where Eastern practices meet Western psychotherapy. One of the difficult interfacings is how to reconcile trainings that are 'focused on technique, metatheory and objective assessment with practice that is founded on discipline, character, mystery and faith' (p 488). The work that has emerged from my co-researchers also points to this dilemma. In many ways, their own work (perhaps like my own) has been a developmental personal journey, in most cases being a paradoxical one marked by a learning of theory and skills and then letting them go.

Nondual experiencing, rather than a thing to ‘do’ in therapy, has been something that has been brought into their work. In other words, the qualities that emerge from their practice – ease, presence, openness etc exist as an unfolding dimension and not a ‘thing’ to apply. The debate as to whether one can ‘do’ nondual therapy remains open to the practitioners. In the same way that ‘Therao’ is a term given to a recognised, yet often ineffable way of being. The name serves the purpose of being the finger which points to the moon. My sense is that ‘Nondual therapy’ may serve the same purpose of ‘linguaging’ a way of being as a practitioner. We may ‘know’ it on some level but its cultivation, its development, is not easily found ‘out there’. As tacit and pathic knowledge, it is, as Rooly Baba said, ‘inside a person’. The more we look inside, that is the place where one discovers it. This of course does raise questions in terms of developing psychotherapy curricula. The emphasis is focused on the inner development of the practitioner and not solely a selection of skills and theoretical constructs that can be checked off in some completed way. All of this is set in a context. Therao clearly emerges from a deep experiential way of being, marked by an engagement with others, the environment and a spiritual practice.

The co-researchers were clear that some of the qualities are hard to ‘teach’. This certainly was what Rooly Baba offered. Therao is not science – it is to be found through a deep inner search. Granick (2011) also notes this and queries the route of professional education of therapists – how does an internal state, such as presence correlate with a skills based training? The co-researchers certainly perceived a personal and shared spiritual practice as a way of deepening their own understanding and awareness of being. How this might fit into a conventional training was less easy to understand and the concerted effort of all

the co-researchers found it difficult to see where it might fit. Making it into a ‘thing’ serves to reduce it to something that it isn’t.

There are several qualities and ways of being that emerged from this research, which is also indicated in other research from the literature review. The general skilful means are entirely consistent with the research that Butlein (2005) and Granick (2011) explored. To sum up, these 10 qualities included:

- Congruency of being
- Engagement in and valuing of a personal spiritual practice
- Confidence in own experience (with a capacity to rely on in practice judgement)
- Confidence in modality knowledge (principally the philosophical understanding of humanity).
- An openness to a full spectrum of experiencing (including environmental and other levels of consciousness)
- A capacity to stay in the ground of being (presence) and experience a subtlety of arising phenomena.
- Deep compassionate and empathic awareness.
- Listening to being (including whole body listening)
- Utilising tacit knowledge (knowledge within)
- Awareness of inflation (awareness of egoic grandiosity)

Yet, as qualities, they are derived not from ‘doing’ or through calculative thinking and therefore this raises questions in relation to training. A new student was concerned about her ‘role’ as therapist and what she needed looked like. She

asked me the question ‘what does a good therapist look like? I told her the story of Rooly Baba and how this man of great wisdom sat with a poo stained anorak. “Did we”, I said, “have to wear a dirty anorak in order to develop the qualities of Therao?” We laughed. It reminded me of the story of Achaan Chah (a renowned Thai Buddhist teacher) as told by Jack Kornfield (1985). The story concerns a woman scholar who had spent many years studying the complex cybernetics of the mind according to the eighty-nine classes of consciousness in the Buddhist Abhidharma. She asks Achaan Chah if he will explain the more complex areas of psychology so that she might continue her studies. Sensing that she was caught up in concepts rather than benefitting from practice in her heart, he says, ““You Madam, are like the one who keeps hens in her yard...and goes around picking the chicken droppings instead of the eggs”” (p. 20.). The story is an excellent example of how to develop pathic knowledge and the ways in which it becomes supported in practice. One of these is through supervision (both clinical and academic). For me, the academic supervisory process was one that nourished understanding.

Maieutic Supervision.

Supervising a research project that has an organic and intuitive approach held at its heart is a tough proposition for a supervisor, who has an eye on criteria for achievement. My experience of Professors Kate Galvin and Les Todres was an instructive and creative relationship. Walking their talk, they trusted a process of unfolding and equally held the ‘goodness’ that was inherent in the work. We reflected at one point on the process we had been party to. From my side, this was a nourished scholarship, marked by the synchronicity of meeting. The heart

of our work was marked by mutuality. It was instructional and guiding at times, but essentially maieutic. The work was all there it needed the space and encouragement and faith to allow it to come out. Like most pregnancies, there was a concentrated push at the end. I knew what to do.

This feels important to record. The Upayas of scholarship suggest that Maieutic Supervision is a singularly important part of a nourished scholarship. In some ways, this would be another excellent place of study, i.e. a phenomenological enquiry based on the maieutic supervision.

TOWARDS A CURRENT ZEITGEIST OF HUMANISING PRACTICE

Whilst it was not the aim of the thesis to offer thoughts on specific aspects of a psychotherapy curriculum, there are broad areas, which have emerged. As a practitioner and teacher, the journey of completing the DProf has invariably impacted on my teaching and ideas of good practice, particularly in relation to a more nourished scholarship and maieutic supervision.

The thesis also appears to have been in tune with current thinking. As I close the writing, the current edition of ‘Psychotherapy’ (the American Psychological Association, Division 29’s Journal) points to a re-questioning of focus in training and research. Division 29 is particularly concerned with teaching and research in psychotherapy. In many ways, it marks a shared remembering of humanistic psychology’s philosophical roots. Wampold (2012), for example, asserts that the many ‘common factors’ that make therapy effective are the human factors, essentially alluding to the fact that at its heart, psychotherapy is humanistic. Similarly, the Winter edition (and 40th Anniversary) of ‘Self and Society’ (the UK’s Association of Humanistic Psychology Journal) offers a review of

Humanistic psychology's work and its place in the current debates of practice (Totton, 2012). Wilkinson (2012) also proposes a stronger alliance to the term Humanistic Psychotherapy as the public face of the Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy College of UKCP (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy). What this signals, in many ways, is a reviewing and a recalling of the strengths of humanistic practice (wherein transpersonal psychotherapy and psychology is currently located) and the humanisation of practice.

Elkins (2012) invites a common focus in both research and training to the development of personal and interpersonal factors (as the primary determinants of effectiveness). He too extends this to claim that it is the humanistic elements, which are of significance (and not mechanistic models or sets of tools) in the effectiveness debates. In tune with my own findings he says, 'The aim of training would not be to produce trainees who have merely normative interpersonal skills. Instead the aim would be to cultivate the trainee's capacity to connect with clients at a profound level so that clients feel deeply accepted, supported and understood. This will require disciplined, in-depth training and will be more demanding of trainees than current training that tends to focus on learning modalities and techniques.' (p.453). Elkins looks to the inner articulation of values and understanding rather than the outer attainment of prescribed ideals, that remain so dominant in criteria led trainings (see for example CPCAB, 2012) where personal development work is minimised (e.g. limited personal therapy requirement and self care). A key aspect of the thesis has been to point to some of the subtle relational practices articulated by both the co-researchers and also the Sufi practitioners through an understanding of Therao. Arguably, in addressing these subtleties, we begin to find a meeting place between the meta

theory and technique of psychotherapy and the discipline, mystery and faith of spiritual practice which Bankart (1997) articulates. Essentially, this is the area that the thesis was addressing. Thorne (2012), articulates a number of ‘practices’ essential for depth working, for example, the importance of self acceptance as part of the spiritual discipline of a person-centred therapist. He locates the practices of self care, self love and compassionate engagement with one’s body as a loving connectedness with the self and a ‘prerequisite for the adventure of connecting with the other’ (p.214). This depth of inner work was a cornerstone of the co-researchers, who in their different ways created space through meditation, creativity, physical activities and shared practice to nurture themselves and therefore their work. Like Elkins (2012), it is suggested that these aspects are a fundamental concern within training. Privileging these aspects within a psychotherapy curriculum was certainly articulated by the co-researchers and the research of others (e.g. Butlein 2005, Granick 2011).

The Upayas of Practice also point to a development of understanding based on practitioner knowledge, that is, on the in-situation-judgement which Polkinghorne (2004) describes. This approach demonstrates that research developed through the work of practitioners adds to the body of research knowledge. When presented in ways that are textured and meaningful (Todres, 2008) it engages and speaks to practitioners, it inspires and creates deeper meaning in practice and becomes a ‘goodness of fit’. It enables (utilising the image I gained in Pakistan) direct experience as opposed to sitting a metallic fork length distance away. It ensures that the hens eggs are focused on and collected and not as Haney (2012) pointed out earlier, the loss of valuable work spent on

an audit culture. Similarly, Elkins (2012) bemoans the millions of research dollars that have been spent on specificity research, i.e. the focus on modality and techniques, which consistently show no scientific basis for privileging one modality or set of techniques above another - the so called 'Dodo effect' (see for example, Hubble, Duncan and Miller, 2006). Therefore, the development of practitioner and practice based research is, I would assert, an area that transpersonal psychotherapy would be enriched by.

Finally, the term 'nourished scholarship' has emerged in the writing. Most writers describe it as those learning moments that engage the heart, soul and mind (Pelias, 2004). I recall as I began my training as a transpersonal psychotherapist, in my puppy like enthusiasm to be a 'good' student, I asked Ian Gordon Brown (one of my first teachers) which books I should begin reading. His answer? "Why not just read the things that make your soul sing". It wasn't an invitation to not do the work. In inviting this, it enabled me to touch deeply into the source of inspiration for engaging with it. It was, as Hillman (1996) might say, a way of meeting one's daimon, one's inner calling. The co-researchers shared this quality of a deep engagement with their different modalities. Within them they found an ongoing source of inspiration and love of the work. Programmes that engender this depth of love and learning invite the potency of depth connection and presence recognised as the most healing aspect in therapeutic working.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS OF THE THESIS.

It is clear that the thesis covers a wide range of activities and areas of study. It tells the story of a research journey over 6 years. In many ways, as a DProf thesis, it demonstrates its practitioner based focus. It prioritises this and locates the experiences within practice. It has also personally enabled my own practice as a researcher, psychotherapist and teacher to flourish and deepen. In that sense, the research is valid (Anderson and Braud 2011). Certainly my work as a teacher to practitioners has widened. I have found it deeply helpful to return to the qualities and areas of skilfulness which are (hopefully) present in the field and also to offer them as exciting research processes to students, e.g. reflection, presence and tacit understanding (e.g. Louchakova 2005) .

The strength of the study has also been part of its weakness. A thesis that covers such a wide field runs the risk of being somewhat broad-brush stroke. I have tried to ensure that the work remained sufficiently detailed and critically analysed. However, I have danced with what to include and what not to include. The nonduality study was very large and less easy to package into a manageable piece of writing. The Upayas are a selection of what I have seen now. In truth there are possibly more and a deeper analysis might have uncovered more subtle ones. As a follow up piece I think I would more likely choose to focus on a more specific area. My sense is that the nonduality study could be deepened. It would be good to follow the vision of Granick's (2011) study and focus on client experiences.

The work on Therao was innovative and yet again a large area of study. On reflection it is an area, which again, I would have liked to cover in greater depth. However, as a totality, and to return to the story at the start, The Design, it was a

significant thread and has opened the door to a new place to stand on – even if paradoxically, it is where I started.

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Appendix 1.

Mandala Project

Images from the project.



The Mandala Workshop Poster developed by Adrienne.



HIV Mandala by Adrienne Seed. Downloaded from http://www.hivine.com/main/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62:hiv-mandala&catid=35:paintings&Itemid=59

Appendix 2

Body Positive North West

(insert of BPNW logo)

Gay Men, HIV and HepC Research project

Title of Study: An exploration of the experiences of a group of men attending Body Positive North West's Gay Men's Space, a group for gay men living with HIV. Participants will be living with HIV and who are also diagnosed of Hepatitis C Positive.

Principal Researcher : Jan Mojsa

Introduction

My name is Jan Mojsa and I'm researching the experiences of gay men living with with HIV who are also diagnosed Hepatitis C positive. The research is being supported by Body Positive North West. This is primarily a qualitative study which will hopefully give voice to participant's experiences.

Background Information

Body Positive North West was set up 22 years ago as a self help group for people living with HIV. BPNW is based in Manchester, providing a range of support

and information services to people living with and affected by HIV. BPNW is a user led organization for all people living with HIV in the North West.

Purpose of this research study

The purpose of the study is to record gay men's experiences of living with both HIV and HepC infection. Through this information, it is hoped that the experiences can be shared in the wider community, initially at the CHAPS conference and also to improve service provision at BPNW and other providers.

Procedures

In this study I will invite you to complete a written questionnaire about HIV and HepC infection. We will then have a conversation, which will be recorded on either video or audio digital recording. This conversation will be guided by semi structured questions. I will ensure that you receive a copy of the transcript of our conversation if you wish.

Possible risks or benefits.

There is no risk involved in this study except your valuable time. There is no direct benefit to you also. However, the results of the study may help us to formulate guidelines for supporting men with co-infection.

Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal

You are free to choose to participate in the study. You may also refuse to participate without any loss or benefit which you are otherwise entitled to. You

may also refuse to answer some or all the questions if you don't feel comfortable with those questions.

Confidentiality

The information provided by you will remain confidential. Nobody except the principal researcher will have access to it. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time. However, the data may be seen by an ethical review committee, it will be presented at conference and may be published in a journal and elsewhere without giving your name or disclosing your identity. A pseudonym can be used – of which you can choose.

Available sources of information

If you have any further questions, you may contact Jan Mojsa, on the following phone number: XXXXX XXXXXX

I can also be written to at:

XX XXXXXXXXX

Further information about Body Positive North West can be found on

www.XXXX.XXX.XX

1. AUTHORISATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand

that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal falt of anyone who is involved in this study.

Participant's Name (Printed or typed):

Date:

Participant's signature:

Date:

Principal Researcher Jan Mojsa signature:

Date

Appendix 3

Body Positive North West. Beyond Statistics.

Question Outline.

Awareness Of hepatitis C

e.g. What is your understanding? What does it mean to have HepC in your life?

Sexual Behaviour

e.g. Since diagnosis has your sexual life been impacted? How would you describe your sex life right now?

Drug Use

e.g. describe/ share your experience

Hepatitis C diagnosis

e.g. How/When did you receive it?

Treatment Offer

e.g. What were you offered?

Treatment uptake

e.g. Why did you choose?

Treatment experience

e.g. How was / is it?

Response from health care professionals

e.g. how did they react?

Response from other gay men

e.g. how did others react?

Self perception

e.g. How has this made you feel about yourself / see yourself?

Living with an additional chronic condition

e.g describe how this has been / continues to be.

Appendix 4

Beyond Statistics CHAPS Conference Script.

Hep C as a teacher:

Co-infection appears to have given an opportunity to reflect on life and also make significant changes. Given the right conditions, a process of acquiring meaning seems to occur. Everyone had their own stories of trying to both make sense of the diagnosis and also create new meaning or life changes. Participants could see HCV as a mirror to reflect on life thus far and observe and test out new ways of being. Each had their own issues to address. There was a sense of deep reflective enquiry in terms of ‘who am I really?’; ‘what, who or where is my spiritual self?’ For some it also meant looking back at life, at old patterns of behaviour, painful life events and the naming of low self esteem.

‘I mean, partly because in a sense Hep C has been like a mirror ... it’s really thrown a lot of that into relief. And because I have stopped doing a lot of the things I was doing, I’m now faced with having to deal with those feelings. You know, they haven’t gone away. They’ve just been sat there, stewing. And in many ways it feels worse now, you know, it feels like it’s a kind of a bog that I’m stuck in.

Maybe that, that's another thing that HIV and Hep C have sort of given me. It's a sort of, it's sort of like an impetus. It's sort of, like, like to be more social, more sociable, and to be sort of, to interact more with people. Whether it's with other fellow users or just in a support group or something. It's sort of opened my eyes that, right, I'm not the only one going through it

One participant when given space to sit with his feelings on what he sensed was being opened to him, described the opening of love, security and a deeper sense of identity.

Love, I think. More than anything. And security – feeling of not being afraid any more. And feeling valuable. I've managed to make myself feel valuable in what I do by making myself into this expert ... this person that is perceived as being very good at what they do. As I "perceived as" because my kind of sense is that that's a perception that's not accurate... and that's how I got my approval but it's all been very much ... it's kind of at a distance. It feels that it's not about me. It's about what I do and what I know, rather than who I am.

When invited to expand on the story of his life one participant likened it the great mythic stories of self destruction, Icarus and Daedalus. The story of Sisyphus, the mortal who was punished by the Gods and had to push a stone continually uphill was used as an analogy of the treatment process. Story and myth become powerful tools in helping to describe the journey of treatment, particularly when it is difficult to convey the depth of meaning and the struggle of life.

Sex and sexuality

Feelings about sex and real shifts in terms of sexuality occurred in all participants. For everyone this was partly located in the impact of medication and its side effects. For others, there was also a shift in terms of redefining what it meant to be in relationship. Everyone described their pre HCV sexual lives as full and many describing themselves as ‘promiscuous’. Everyone seemed to be shifting towards a search for relationships which were marked with ‘intimacy’ and companionship’. This shift was significant given that part of their self identity was located in being good sexual performers. Fear and simply feeling ill equipped to know how to move on to the next step was present. Tied into sexual anxiety was also the deep sense of responsibility in terms of not infecting others. Most participants had acquired their infection at a sex party.

Helping men in coming to terms with all of these areas and find a language to describe and express new ways of being is clearly a significant piece of support work which we need to address in our agencies.

. So it’s been difficult, in the sense that it’s made me realise that my relationship to sex has not been a healthy one, actually. And that in itself has been quite sort of ... depressing. Because it’s made me realise that there are things about me that I want to change, or that I have to change, simply for the sake of staying on

the planet. But also emotionally, because I'm not going to get what I want ... I mean, to me it seems that whatever it is I've been after in all this sexual crusading, I'm not going to get it. I know that I was using sex almost as a search for intimacy, and while you can have lots of sex and lots of physical intimacy, there was no emotional intimacy in it, really. And going to big sex clubs and big sex parties and being involved in that whole hard group sex scene was another way of being part of a little community. But it's not a community that really nurtures you.

But a lot of my teenage years were spent feeling very very bad about myself. I think that a lot of what happened around the sex thing was that initially I think I thought that, as a gay man, being gay, sex was the way to find a partner. You had to kind of be good at that because it seemed there was so much emphasis on that in the early 80s. I had a couple of experiences in my very late teens, early twenties ... with guys where I didn't enjoy the sex, where it was kind of made plain to me that I wasn't very good at it, and I think what I internalised from that was that I needed to get better at sex in order to find someone to love me. So I set about creating my own training programme! (Laughs) And I suppose I can now say, with a degree of pride, that I am now very good at it! But, you know ... look where that's got me! You know, I've actually given up a lot of my power, of my self-respect, by using that as a vehicle to find someone to love me.

And in terms of drug use and sex a participant describes the powerful link between the 2 and how sex couldn't be engaged with without the use of drugs. He highlighted his hopes for finding a sexual partner where intimacy

would take precedent over drug use. This points to creating a space where such intimate exploration be allowed to unfold and welcomed.

And I don't know if sex will take a different turn and it will become, you know, maybe in the future if I met someone, it will be more about intimacy and less about the, you know, the actual drugs. But I think what I've done was I'd got into a position where I couldn't do one without the other whereas I didn't enjoy it, or I mean I could, but I didn't enjoy one without the other, erm, which is, I'm aware isn't healthy, but was still fabulous, you know. ... So, therefore, you know, you need to find new ways of expressing yourself I guess and that's what the drugs did. It was a way of expression. It was a way of confidence. It was a way of meeting people. It was a way of sharing experience and, obviously, you know, that, at that point, particularly once your HIV, I think maybe it was on the way anyway, and the sad thing was that, the funny thing was that, erm, I actually caught it the last weekend I was living in London and I thought I'd have one last little bliss before I, you know, move to the quiet life.

Erm, yeah, it's very, very strange treatment. Erm, you know, I hope it hasn't left a permanent scar on the personality. The personality isn't the same. I mean I'm not as happy-go-lucky as I was. I don't feel as confident as I did.

Physically it altered. You know I was, I had, erm, yeah, I was a big clubber. I had a body to die for. [Laughter] I've a lot of good photographs. The negative side

was, was, was, I suppose, feeling dirty and feeling, erm, like erm, like, erm, fucked up [Laughter] you know, erm, erm. The other side was being more an advocate, it made me more, you know and I wanted, yeah, and I even wanted to change things, you know.

Isolation

There was a theme of feeling isolated or a predisposition to ‘getting on with things’ on one’s own. This often came due to a wish to not be a bother – and at other times was also symptomatic of depression. Occasionally this was lifted when people came to visit, i.e. they had to take care of others. The interesting thing was that most of the participants were, by nature, care givers. It was also noted that for some men it was hard to find the right kind of support group and also how to ask for appropriate help. The feelings of self recrimination also meant that some felt unable (or possibly unworthy) of receiving help.

I was scared of taking it (meds) because of the side effects ’cause I lived alone, ’cause I didn’t have the support networks and because I’d been so ill previously, pretty much all that year in and out of hospital, feeling absolutely dreadful and I don’t live near my family, so I’m heavily reliant on a handful of friends, really. And, it’s very hard to ask for help as well, you know. You’re feeling really crap and, down, you know, and to phone someone up and say “Look, I’m feeling really crap” when you’re down there it’s not easy, and, you’ve got no energy:

You can't get off the settee, you can't even take, you know, take the time of day to make a cup of coffee, you know, and, you're really, really struggling. The main reason why I didn't want to start it was me living at home alone and I was really scared and suicidal type of thing.

Yeah, you need company or something to distract you 'cause one thing I'd notice was I'd have my injection on Friday, Friday evening and I wouldn't be able to sleep and had absolute exhaustion to the point where you just couldn't get off the settee to make a cup of coffee and your mind is left to sink down further and further and further and this even on antidepressants, you know.

I've got good friends, etc, you know, but you would spiral, spiral, spiral down and down and down and, you know, just contemplating suicide, you know.

Mmmm ... I'm not good at asking for help. My friends who know me well enough now notice that when they don't hear from me for a while, something's up. And I'm not very good at keeping in contact with people, actually. The idea that they would want to sit in a room with me for the sake of sitting in a room with me somehow doesn't enter my head.

Depression

One of the key areas was the experience of depression. Generally this is exacerbated by treatment but in our study, every man had previous

experience of depression. The treatment seemed to put them in quite an acute place where the depression was also experienced, at times, with suicidal ideation. This clearly raises issues for the level of support and understanding given to men who are co-infected. The depth of despair, sometimes linked to the isolating feelings of depression weighed heavy on the participants. Helping men to ride this ‘dark night of the soul’ can be seen as a pressing issue. Similarly, the struggles of dealing with a marked sense of ‘personality change’, and of ‘not recognising oneself’ requires a lot of holding, particularly at the point of treatment.

Erm, yeah, it’s very, very strange treatment. Erm, you know, I hope it hasn’t left a permanent scar on the personality. The personality isn’t the same. I mean I’m not as happy-go-lucky as I was. I don’t feel as confident as I did.

Physically it altered. You know I was, I had, erm, yeah, I was a big clubber. I had a body to die for. [Laughter] I’ve a lot of good photographs. The negative side was, was, was, I suppose, feeling dirty and feeling, erm, like erm, like, erm, fucked up [Laughter] you know, erm, erm.

Work

All of the participants had a strong work ethic and a sense of who they are was located in their work and being successful’

‘I only ever put energy into two things and that was sex and work you know, and I thought there was a point when I was doing both things very well, and, and for a while very safely, you know, and, and enjoying them. And then you throw Hepatitis in and it has the ability to stop, it stops both of those things dead in their tracks, you know, ’cause you can’t work properly. You don’t feel like you want to have sex and shouldn’t put anyone else at risk and you physically you’re so, erm, erm, frail from the Interferon, you know, your body literally withers by...’

Preparing for treatment

Given the range of side effects, the preparation for treatment was seen as a significant time. Often, the decisions were set by the health care team who are less likely to support with the ‘psyching up’ and emotional preparation, in that sense the experience was one of relative passivity and a loss of agency (Todres et al 2009). There is a clear lack of understanding of the impact of HCV on life and work and there is no clear understanding of acute/chronic stages of HCV and the need for treatment in the acute stage. Sometimes there was no support from medics on this at all; they were either fobbed off or given no information. Importantly, apart from one, no-one was given information on long term effects of HCV and its treatment, Significantly, some did find support and practical advice and help through peers who had already been on the journey.

In about March I think I started antidepressants and they said that it would be beneficial to wait till I was more stable before they started. And then in October they said, "Right, we're going to start you on Hep C treatment, now." And so, erm, I was OK with it. It was like I was sort of prepared. I mean, erm...

... So I sort of prepared myself. And also, speaking to, erm, someone who had gone through it before, erm, and so he offered sort of, erm, preventative measures as it were, like things that I can do to make it more comfortable for myself. Say, in terms of, erm, having nausea and diarrhoea, medication ready, erm, Paracetamol seems to help, erm, with the Interferon injections. Erm, constant moisturising of the skin. So, yes, so, sort of doing what I can on a personal level to sort of, erm, make things easier for myself. And also acupuncture, which I didn't really consider or any form of alternative therapy.

Treatment itself can be an immense struggle. We noted earlier the experience being likened to the uphill struggle of Sisyphus. Whilst a couple of participants joked about the anger and rage they experienced, it was a difficult time and getting to grips with such difficult and often alien feelings was tough. Once again, the kind of therapeutic support offered is quite key in each of the participant's journeys.

The other side effects, I think I've got the rage and somebody's who's so laid back and horizontal. Erm, and incredibly placid. I don't really have a temper.

And, erm, I do have a temper but it takes a huge amount for me to abuse it. And some of the irrational behaviour certainly in the last few months, taking treatment was quite scary. I had an issue with my ex when I turned up on his doorstep absolutely ranting. Mad! [Laughter] You don't want me to describe it. Scary, man! Erm, you know, erm. Another occasion when I drove my car into someone because they, they, they cut me up. Erm, we had a car chase through Salford. Erm. Real temper. Real, real temper.

Erm, yeah, it's very, very strange treatment. Erm, you know, I hope it hasn't left a permanent scar on the personality. The personality isn't the same. I mean I'm not as happy-go-lucky as I was. I don't feel as confident as I did.

Appendix 5

Lal Peri Mastani – The Ecstatic Red Fairy at Sehwan

In his search for her, Dalrymple asked,

‘How will I find her among the crowds?’

‘Don’t worry’, replied the Fakir. ‘Everyone knows Lal Peri. And anyway, she is unmistakable’.

‘In what way?’ I asked

‘She is dressed in bright red, is very fat, and she carries a huge wooden club.’

(Dalrymple, 2009:116-117)





Appendix 6 Letter to participants

Jan Mojsa
UKCP registered psychotherapist
XX XXXXXXX XXXXXXX, XXXXXXX, XXXXXXXXX
janmojsa@xxxxxxxxxxxxxx.xx.xx

Dear

Thank you for your interest in my doctoral research on the experience of non duality and psychotherapeutic practitioners experiences in practice. I value the unique contribution you can make to my study, and am looking forward very much to your participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate some of the things that I have already described in my initial email and conversations and to secure your signature on the participation-release form, which you will find attached.

The research model I am using is a qualitative one through which I am seeking comprehensive depictions or descriptions of your experience. In this way, I hope to illuminate or answer my questions focusing on your understandings of non duality and experiences in practice.

Through your participation as a co-researcher, I hope to understand the essence of the phenomenon as it reveals itself in your experience. In particular, I am interested in gathering vivid and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you; your thoughts, feelings, behaviours and physical sensations, as well as perceptions of the environments connected with your experiences.

I value your participation, and thank you for committing your time and energy to helping me with my study. If you have any further questions before signing the release form, or if there is a problem with the date and time of our meeting, I can be reached at XXXXX XXXXXXXXX.

Kindest wishes

Jan Mojsa

Appendix 7

Research Agreement

I agree to participate in a research study of psychotherapeutic experiences of nonduality as described in the attached letter. I understand the purpose and nature of this study, and am participating voluntarily and can withdraw my participation at any time. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a Doctorate in professional Practice, including a dissertation and any other future publication. I understand that my name and other demographic information which might identify me will not be used.

I agree to meet at the following location _____, on the following date _____ for an initial interview of 1 to 1 ½ hours. I also grant permission for the audio/video recording of the interview.

_____ Research Participant
_____ Date

_____ Jan Mojsa Researcher
_____ Date

Appendix 8 Sample transcription document agreement

Jan Mojsa
UKCP registered psychotherapist
XX XXXXXXXXXXX XXXX, XXXXXXX, WXXXXX
janmojsa@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.xx.xx

Dear

Thank you for your help in transcribing the research material from the DVD's.

Please sign the confidentiality document.

I agree that the work I carry out in the transcription of the materials will be held
in strict confidence.

Signed.....

Jan Mojsa.....

Appendix 9 Initial Questions

Curriculum development group

This activity is intended to help us focus before we meet as a whole group. I'd like to invite you to take a few moments to go through the questions below and answer them in whichever way feels right. At this stage I'm trawling for your general thoughts.

The task at hand

The questions below are an attempt to help locate the values and scope of CTP's potential future training. The questions are wide (with the intention of allowing us to storm our thoughts of things which are perceived of significance). Clearly all of these must be seen in the context of UKCP requirements.

For now, I'd like to invite you to do some 'blue sky' thinking and simply include your thoughts in the sections. Please feel free to expand your ideas so that they can be shared when we next meet.

What would say are the key qualities of a good transpersonal psychotherapist?

Honesty, integrity, humility

Ability to relate authentically as well as hold and work with transference dynamics

Compassion and empathy

Aspiration to work from the ‘4 Immeasurables’ – Loving kindness, compassion, equanimity and (spiritual) joy

Groundedness and ability to resource self adequately

Self-reflexivity, and adequate awareness of own issues, woundings, personality dynamics etc.

part from thorough professional skills training

The ability to:

Be fully present in the room;

Listen to the voice of heart as well as head;

Work with the appropriate level with the client, according to need – body, emotions, mind, soul, spirit; and be able to manage the transition between these levels, both in response to the client, and to lead the client in order to help them see their situation from a different perspective.

Help the client to be able to see the soul’s purpose behind the life

events/challenges/illnesses/accidents etc which have brought the client into therapy.

A calm, composed manner which can inspire trust in the therapist and create a safe, allowing, respectful container.

The confidence to sit with not knowing and with silence.

To maintain presence and hold a clear focus.

Passion & compassion.

To live and speak from the heart whilst keeping a clear head.

Can place their trust in spirit.

Have respect for the other's wise psyche.

To be a true witness to the journey of the soul

Someone who is clear about their own inner journey and process

What key theoretical / philosophical ideas might be included in CTP training?

Wounded healer

Journey of the Soul: Cycles and transitions; Hero's Journey and the Journey of Descent – the Feminine

Developmental models and assessment of developmental woundings and needs

Myths and Archetypes

Mindell's Dreambody work

Shamanic model of 'possession and soul loss' related to psychological process

Buddhist psychology

Jungian depth psychology

Psychosynthesis

Ken Wilber

The Body – regression, the unconscious and the transpersonal

Creativity

transpersonal training should recognise the importance of a flexible, eclectic approach

– a co-ordinating perspective rather than a construct of specific applied methodologies.

It is therefore useful to give students as many ‘maps’ as possible, to equip them to work as broadly as possible. Western exoteric maps – Jung, Maslow etc, and esoteric maps – Alice Bailey (Ian Gordon Brown used a great many of her maps); Eastern maps from Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist thought; and middle eastern revealed religion maps – Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Sufi.

The transpersonal draws upon many approaches, bringing them together under its umbrella, with coherence and vision. Practitioners need to be flexible, and adaptable to move with fluency between various models and philosophies.

So trainees could be encouraged to explore comparative religions and spiritual traditions, to read the great esoteric writers and other holistic philosophies (e.g. Steiner).

The maps and models already present in previous trainings are key to supporting trainees developing awareness. Add to this an ability to place the personal within the context of the collective – historically, psychologically and culturally. Story, mythology and the dream also have a role in communicating this dimension.

Which therapeutic skills/approaches would you expect people to understand and demonstrate in their training?

Empathic listening – person- centred

Working with transference and countertransference, including somatic Tr and CTr,
and somatic resonance

Witnessing

Guided visualisation/image work

Inner dialogue – somatic dialogue

Cushion/chair work

Creative process eg. drawing, movement amplification, writing

Dream work

magery and visualisation

Relaxation and meditation

Sandplay

Art therapy techniques, such as working with drawings etc

Dreamwork

Gestalt

Inner child work

Holding a good container

Visualisation skills

Creative artwork as therapy – drawing & sculpting, sound & movement, journalwork,
dreamwork.

Confidence to move the work between body, mind, emotions, spirit as appropriate and
to move between levels of consciousness with ease

A working knowledge of myth & story

An ability to recognise sub-personalities and archetypes

To sit with the Shadow and remain centered

To recognise cues & clues for interactive imagery and to understand how to create guided imagery to suit the individual client at various key stages of their journey

Good spiritual hygiene; clearing themselves and the room before and after sessions/the working day.

What significant aspects of spiritual practice would you expect to be explicit in a CTP training?

Mindfulness of breath, body sensation and feelings - direct experience

Development of therapeutic presence

Development of compassion - heart

Self-reflection

Development of discipline of personal practice

an acceptance of the spiritual dimensions to life and an ease at working at these levels;

An understanding of, and sympathy with the different forms of spiritual practice, so that one can work with clients of many different cultures and backgrounds;

An ability to access one's own spiritual resources, and sit comfortably with that, without the need to disclose this to clients.

An active commitment to an inner life, and to personal growth.

An understanding that where the client has presented with a crisis which is part of the soul journey, then it is needed, and appropriate, to work with the client at this level.

Reflecting back on my training with Ian and Barbara, and with Joan and Reyn, this ability to access and work with the soul energy transfused every exercise that we did. This gave me the skills I need to work with life threatening, and life limiting illnesses.

An awareness of the reality of spirit, within the mundane as well as the exalted.

The flexibility to empathise with those of other faiths and cultures. To respect their practices and learn from them.

To stay mindful of the 'third presence' of spirit within sessions

To be at ease with their own spiritual experience and understanding

Meditation

What areas of study might be included in the independent study years?

Comparative religion/spiritual practice/culture

Relationship between bodily process and spiritual practice or experience

Group work

Areas of special interest, so as to start to form a personal style of working, for example PTSD, sexual and relationship work, couples work. This should lead to professional confidence, and help the newly qualified to find work.

Students will benefit from being encouraged to follow their own interests – that which speaks to their hearts.

Astrology, alchemy, art/music/drama therapies

Spiritual traditions of other cultures e.g. Amerindian, shamanism, the Mysteries

They might also be finding their way into more specific areas of the work, couples counselling, spiritual crisis management, illness, death & dying, addictions, compulsions etc.

What qualities would a transpersonal psychotherapy trainer possess?

As for psychotherapist, plus:

Ability to hold group process/dynamics

Leadership skills

Sensitivity to group process and the relationship between the individual and the group

Ability to communicate clearly and with passion

Ability to inspire interest and curiosity

Patience

Equanimity

Authority

Presence

Several years of clinical practice (I believe that 7-8 years minimum is commonly asked for) – so that one can refer to one's own clinical experience when training people.

Ability to be present, setting the 'transpersonal note' within the room. In my own

training, this element of ‘transmission’ was as valuable as any theoretical work I learned.

Life experience – ‘the wisdom of the broken heart’ – this is again part of the element of transmission.

A love and passion for the work!

A capacity to engage and inspire a group

Good communication and presentation skills

A passion for the work

Vision and the ability to manifest it

Awareness of group dynamics

The ability to stay centered when challenged

To hold the energy of a group and to change that energy to suit the topic

Flexibility to move with what comes as the group respond to the teaching

To keep a clear sense of direction so that the aims of the curriculum are achieved at a measured pace

To contain their own process at difficult times and still be present to the group

An ability to both transcend and actualise

Be willing to say “I don’t know”

A sense of humour

Any further ideas:



ITP – What makes a ‘good’ transpersonal psychotherapist?

Tuesday 12th Feb

I’d like to invite you to do some ‘blue sky’ thinking and simply include your thoughts in the sections. Please feel free to expand your ideas so that they can be shared when we next meet.

What would you say are the key qualities of a good transpersonal psychotherapist?

Open – in mind, heart, spirit – carefully permeable boundaries.

Relational

Mindful

Present

Consciously evolving their consciousness

Empathy to the higher self of the client

Willingness to go deeper

Honesty

Humility

Aspiration to work for equanimity, compassion, joy

Help client to see souls purpose behind life experiences

Calm, composed manner

Confidence to sit without knowing

Place trust in spirit

Be a true witness of journey of soul

Grounded; presence (in the moment); integrity;

Compassion; appreciation of difference; empathy; honesty;

Ability to be truly separate;

Respect for client; body, mind, spirit connection;

Humility; authenticity; congruence; capacity to see the whole;

Awareness of the divine; has own spiritual practice; openness;

Humour; multi tasking; discernment; wisdom; courage; passionate;

Self knowledge; sees higher self and deeper self in client; permeable boundaries;

Intuition ; Curiosity; spaciousness; bigger than the individual;

Sees the larger context; see the strengths;

What key theoretical / philosophical ideas might be included in TP training?

Transcendent self actualisation – Maslow

Gender and cultural sensitivity

Psychosynthesis

The mind, body, spirit

Evolution of consciousness

Rogers person centres

Wounded healer

Heros journey

Developmental

Shamanic – soul loss

Western esoteric maps

Eastern esoteric maps – Hindu, sufi, taoist

Love

Psychosynthesis; Taoism; Yoga; breathwork; aikido; depth psychology;

Psychological and spiritual development (and how they sit side by side);

Unconscious (Jung); Vedic studies; forgiveness; perennial philosophy; Alice

Bailey;

PSIT- Washburn, Wilber, Tart;

Native wisdom traditions; cross cultural, psych-ecology; feminist; post modern;

gender studies in general; psychodrama; modern psychotherapy; Rogerian;

Existential – Phenomenological; Forms of prayer – body postures, chants;

Somatic psychology; spiritual emergence; Maslow; evolutionary consciousness;

mind.body, spirit; womens spirituality; positive psychology; integrative models;

CBT;

History of ideas and philosophy

Which therapeutic skills/approaches would you expect people to understand and demonstrate in their training?

Active deep listening

Mind,body, focusing

Relational vs blank slate vs prescriptive cbt

Client led

Encourage encountering sacred in session

Recognition, encouragement experience of higher self

Open exploration of clients spiritual beliefs and experience

Counter transference inner dialogue

Dream creative art

Confidence to move between body, mind, spirit;

Understand; listen – empathic; explore; open questions; guided visualisation;

Gestalt;Open chair; meditation; encountering sacred;

countertransference/transference;

Cognitive restructuring; past life regression; dreamwork; active imagination;

sand play; play therapy; humour; group process; energetic body; relational psychotherapy;

Somatic resonance; discernment;

What significant aspects of spiritual practice would you expect to be explicit in a TP training?

Mindfulness

Channels to vitality

Compassion

Appreciation of difference

Contemplative practice

Body practice

Exposure of wide variety of practices

Awareness

Spiritual bypass – spiritual inflation

Spiritual emergence

Inclusivity

Respect

Grounded in your own practice

Mindfulness meditation

Generic way to support individual practice

What areas of study might be included in the independent study years?

Ongoing spiritual practice

Whats happening in science and psychology

Reflecting on transpersonal psychology

Mainstream psychology

Keeping updated on all of everything

Development in an undeveloped area

Deepening own spiritual practice

Specialise and deepen

Conducting clinical research and publishing

Gender diversity, e,g womens studies

Consulting TP community and practitioners

What qualities would a transpersonal psychotherapy trainer possess?

Compassion

Be relational

Open to self and others in diversity of ideals

Flexible and open on how to improve the teaching and learning process

Empassioned healer

Experience the joy, generativity of mentoring

Role model – whole, balanced, centred

Maintain boundaries

Model TP values

Congruence

Hold the shadow

Self awareness and self reflective

Inner work and spiritual work

Willingness to not know/not be expert

Open to being the student, learning from the student

Any further ideas: