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**THE EXPERIENCE OF LETTING GO:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

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*The Secret*

*No, it is not enough to despise  
the world*

*It is not enough to live one's life  
as though*

*Riches and power were nothings.  
They are not*

*But to grasp the world, to grasp  
and feel it grow*

**Great in one's grasp is likewise  
not enough**

*The secret is to grasp it, and let it  
go*

Wang Wei ( 699 AD)

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by

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to discover and describe the structure and essence of the phenomenon of letting go. The meaning of the experience had to be revealed, explored and understood. The emphasis in contemporary psychology is on separation, a word often used synonymously with letting go, and, while a plethora of studies have been conducted in the area of separation, with separation-individuation the prevailing paradigm for developmental psychology, the meaning and experience of letting go has remained unexplored.

The phenomenon of letting go was approached from a developmental perspective. Literature in the field regarding separation, separation-individuation and the related aspects of holding, attachment, transitional space and autonomy was reviewed. With the focus on an existential-phenomenological understanding of the lived meaning of the experience, a dialogue between the available psychological facts and the world of experience regarding letting go arises.

The phenomenon was explored in a qualitative manner employing the phenomenological research method articulated by Amedeo Giorgi. The qualitative research interview, proposed by Kvale, was the method used to collect the data where, five participants were asked to describe a significant letting-go experience.

The general psychological structure revealed that the experience of letting go cannot be contained in stasis. The experience is also relative to the contextual environment in which it occurs. Letting go is a transitional process of spiral mobility, as the past is returned to (and repeated), to meet with the challenge of change. In fear of entering the unknown, the familiar is held on to and as a façade evolves which conceals the truth, there is a deceptive belief regarding personal stability. In the push and pull experience of the polarised conflict, a struggle ensues, where unexpected outbursts can occur. Gradual awareness of the inevitability of change and the emerging negativity regarding the self gives rise to the threat of fragmentation, and there is a submission to the omnipotence of time and space. In an attempt to gain control, decisions are made, as the self partakes in the creative process. Successful resolution of the conflict gives rise to a sense of empowerment.

While memories fill the gap of the past and new meaning is created regarding the future, a sense of continuity arises that is held on to. To let go is to relinquish control, to submit to, and partake in the process of creation. The vacillation and oscillation between positive and negative forces is the rhythmic process of life. Letting go is characteristic of human development, which though cyclic, is not only phase-related but unpredictable and an integral part of life. The dialectic of holding on and letting go is the dialectic of life and death.

The implications of letting go are diverse in relation to microcosmic or macrocosmic change, whether personal, social, political or universal. The findings revealed can contribute to the fields of developmental psychology, social psychology, transpersonal psychology, psychotherapy, bereavement, forgiveness and other related fields. Letting go is the experience of the self in the process of change.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In this study, by focusing on the experience and lived meaning of letting go, I have made an attempt to contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon from an existential-phenomenological perspective. In being born and in dying we let go, and yet throughout the course of our lives, in living our development, it appears that we are in a continuous process of letting go. The present study attempts to explore and explicate the meaning of this process. The context of this study is developmental.

#### **1.1 Motivation for the study**

As a member of a close-knit family and culture, I became increasingly aware of a reassuring sense of belonging, yet also experienced a need to separate and define a personal sense of self. Living the paradox of oneness yet separateness, of sameness yet difference, appears essential to being human. As humans, in our relationship with others, we vacillate between poles of enmeshment and isolation. As we attach and let go, relatedness is integral to our lives. Beginnings and endings belong together, and it was into this paradoxical abyss that I wished to look.

In my work as a psychotherapist, I have been privileged to hear stories of lives lived and to listen to the meaningful moments experienced. Often the term to ‘let go’ or “letting go” has been used, but what the meaning of the experience is remains diffuse and unexplored. Throughout the thirty years in clinical practice, I have also become acutely aware that where the mobility of letting go is absent, a living pain exists. Immobility is a painful entrapment. Whether it is in the inability to make a decision, or the inability to leave an abusive relationship, being unable to let go reflects halted growth. I needed to explore the experience of letting go and identify its place in psychology.

## 1.2 Overview of the study

Pursuing the lexical definition of letting go revealed a multifaceted term, and while studies did make use of the term, no psychological research had been conducted regarding the phenomenon. I needed to move closer. I wanted to explore and understand the nature of the experience, what it is, and whether it was linked to separation, a term often used synonymously with letting go.

In the context of bonding, John Bowlby highlighted separation with its implications of anxiety and loss, while Donald Winnicott was the first to identify and attend to the potential space between the self and the other (object) in the process of separation, and recognise the significance of entering that space with the valued ‘transitional object’ (or phenomenon). However, regarding developmental psychology, the concept of separation and separation-individuation, as postulated by Margaret Mahler and her colleagues, is seminal and remains dominant in the field. The process of separation-individuation is described as ending at the age of three, though Mahler’s words enticingly propose that: “like any intrapsychic process, this one reverberates throughout the life cycle. It is never finished; it always remains active” (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975, p.3). Jung recognised individuation as crystallizing during adulthood. More recently, attention is being paid to the adult years of development, with the recognition that development continues through life. Letting go appears to be part of the process and needs to be explored.

By asking the question: “What is the meaning of letting go?”, the present thesis found that the developmental theories of Mahler, Bowlby, Winnicott and Erikson provided a natural weave of theoretical fibres that merged to create a meaningful tapestry in the unknown gap explored. The valuable contributions of these and other theorists provided a map to explore the space beyond the self. Nevertheless, every effort was made to remain open-ended and unbiased in my approach. I had to ‘let go’ of any preconceived concepts or theoretical beliefs, and be willing to enter the unknown space with a receptive attitude, hoping to facilitate new discoveries that could extend beyond the ego

definitions of existing psychoanalytic and object-relations theory. My intention was not to seek theoretical confirmation, but to allow the phenomenon to reveal itself.

Willingness to move beyond the defined limits of theory and enter the gap, or space, of the unknown or nothingness, was highlighted by the work of Jacques Lacan, a theorist whose vision extends beyond the predetermined paradigm of ego structure and its definitions. Focus on the phenomenon revealed that the study concurs with Lacan's acceptance of incompleteness, and the power of that which continues through time. In the abyss of the paradoxical space explored, employing an existential-phenomenological framework was helpful where, with the spirit and philosophy of Martin Heidegger, an attempt was made to explore and understand the lived experience of letting go.

Revealing the structure of letting go facilitates an understanding of Mahler's developmental contribution within a broader paradigm, and the value of her work is made even more valuable when taken beyond the object-relations framework on which it is based. Just as Mahler expanded the psychoanalytic perspective so, too, with the findings of this study, an attempt is made to move beyond predefined structures and include concepts and experiences usually excluded from the traditional framework.

While exploring the phenomenon, it was revealed that the very entrapment that was present in the polarised duality of letting go was also evident in the theories that attempted to understand separation with its conflict and entrapment, reflected in their quest for totality and closure. In addressing the phenomenon of letting go, the power of incompleteness became evident in the fact that the phenomenon of letting go is continuous and never static. The phenomenon is relative to the contextual environment in which it occurs and is constantly in motion.

The findings of this study reveal the omnipotence of time and space. To us as humans, the omnipotence and dominance of time is reflected in the continuity of our language and culture, where meaning fills the gap. In the sense of a dualistic wholeness and completion, language (and culture) holds us and we hold on to it; language (and culture) influences us, but is also influenced by us. However, in its continuity of being there

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before us, and there after we have left, language (and culture) is powerful in its incompleteness. As we let go, it is the third dimension of time and continuity that dissolves the entrapped duality of our polarised existence and quest for oneness in the tangible and illusive world to which we relate. Continuity is conveyed through meaning and, as a sense of continuity is held on to, we submit to time. Change is inevitable, and as we enter the unknown and create new meaning, we let go; we relinquish control and partake in the process of creation.

Development is a process of meeting with the challenge of change through time. Letting go is more than separation; it is the experience of separation. Letting go is the experience of self in the process of change. Though separation is accepted as part of the developmental process, development appears to be more than separation. Development is a process of letting go, which is cyclic and spiral in its mobility, rather than chronological in nature. The conflicting struggle of letting go is a challenge to meet with change and its successful resolution becomes a developmental achievement.

The present thesis comprises six chapters. Following Chapter One, with its introduction to the study, Chapter Two provides a theoretical base by looking at definitions of letting go that are foundational to the literature review that follows in Chapter Three. In Chapter Three, letting go is approached within a developmental perspective. Theories regarding development and its mobility, individuation and separation-individuation are reviewed, although, due to the breadth and depth of the topic, the literature review is contained and not exhaustive. In keeping with the structural framework and explication of the process of separation, the respective concepts of holding, attachment, transitional space and autonomy are then discussed.

Chapter Four deals with the methodological orientation and the rationale of phenomenological research, showing how the data is obtained and how the implicit structure is made explicit. The approach to the present study is qualitative, with no intention to determine causative information or make statistical deductions. The phenomenon of letting go was studied primarily from an existential perspective with the intention of revealing the meaning of the experience. Through the unique, lived

experience of the participants interviewed, descriptions were provided. In moving from personal descriptions to theory, the study had to be phenomenological, as the inductive method moves from the specific validity of the description, to universal validity.

Meaning reveals itself as a transitional phenomenon where the significance of memories is retained and new meaning created. The implicit manner of the experience of letting go is made explicit, facilitating an understanding of the dialectical process.

The final research question posed to the participants, and brief background information regarding the participants used, is provided in Chapter Five, where the data analysis of each of the Research Participants is presented respectively; viz. Marlene (M), Ben (B), Penny (P), John (J) and Karen (K). Chapter Five also includes the general psychological structure and the structural synthesis. Finally, Chapter Six attends to the discussion where literature, research, and the findings of the present study act in dialogue to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the explicit meaning of the experience of letting go.

Regarding writing style, in an attempt to remain gender sensitive throughout the study, the term (m)other is used to identify the primary caregiver or meaningful significant other in the infant's life. Though the concept of 'mother' and the value of the significant other to the infant and child is included in the term (m)other, it also satisfies the intention to be gender sensitive. Reference to the term, however, was awkward, and in an effort to be fair, the feminine context of the term (m)other is retained, while infant is referred to as masculine. Limitations of the English syntax rather than any unintended sexism must bear responsibility for any sensibilities that may be offended.

### **1.3 Aim of the study**

The aim of the present study was to understand the meaning of the experience, to discover and describe the structure and essence of the phenomenon of letting go, and to contribute to knowledge in the field of developmental psychology.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LETTING GO

To “let go”, is an expression often used in contemporary language, yet little is known about the experience and its true meaning. According to Ainsworth - Smith and Speck (1982): “ Letting go can imply being gently drawn into a new sort of existence; or being released or dragged into a void where nothing is safe or nothing consistent” (p.35).

Defined by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, letting go is to “release, set at liberty, lose hold of, relinquish hold of, dismiss from thought, or cease to restrain”. The term presents itself as a paradoxical and dialectical concept, where both a sense of liberation and a sense of loss are defined. The term implies change, through mobility, from one position to another.

To let go (αφήμι-aphimi) is multifaceted in its meaning of to send away, set free, dissolve, put away, give up, neglect, leave alone, cancel, allow, tolerate, forsake, dismiss and forgive (Lindell & Scott, 1968; Newman, 1971). Upon pursuit of the epistemological foundations of the term, we return to the early Greeks and find the derivative roots (χώρι-chori) of separate and apart, holding diverse meanings related to (i) empty space, place, land, country (χώρος-choros); (ii) to give place, hold, contain (χωρείν-chorin) and (iii) to separate (χωρίζειν-chorisin) (Klein, 1971). The term is paradoxically linked with concepts of separation, holding, containment and space.

A review of psychological literature reveals no significant theory regarding the concept of letting go, and a gap appears. The term is often used in self-help books. Various books have been published with the term in the title and deal with diverse themes that include amongst others, emotions and attitude change (Jampolsky, 1970); parenting (Bassoff, 1988; Krystal, 1993); loss and bereavement (Ainsworth-Smith & Speck, 1982); management (Payne & Payne, 1994); creativity (Mc Niff, 1998) and terminal illness (Urofsky, 1993; Schwartz, 1998). Nevertheless, the psychological meaning of the phenomenon remains unexplored. In pursuit of psychological literature regarding letting go, I was able to find twenty-five articles, published over the last twenty-three years, with ‘letting go’ in the title. The term makes its appearance in diverse fields of psychology



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and includes: disability (Grant, 1989); terminal illness (Cramond, Faenkel & Barratt, 1990); learning (Greenhalgh, 1987); transpersonal (O'Connell, 1984); psychotherapy (Lanyado, 1999; Orgel, 2000; Philip, 1994); forgiveness (Baures 1996); loss and bereavement (Walter, 1997); social theology (Neal, 1984); parenting (Lubbe, 1996; Perigo 1985; Rimmerman & Keren 1995) aging (Chevan, 1995) and relationships (Gwyther, 1990). The majority of the published articles deal with termination in psychotherapy. Use of the term appears to be on the increase, and yet, the psychological significance of the phenomenon remains unattended to. In an attempt to reveal the essence, structure and meaning of this phenomenon as it appears in the life-world of individuals, the present study will employ a phenomenological-psychological perspective.

In pursuit of psychological literature regarding the phenomenon of letting go, a plethora of studies, books and articles on separation became available. The term separation is often used synonymously with the term to let go, but what is letting go? What is the lived experience of this phenomenon? Is it synonymous with separation and what is its meaning?

In psychology, the concept of separation remains dominant in the field of development where, over the last twenty-eight years, Margaret Mahler's separation-individuation has become the prevailing paradigm. Psychoanalytic developmental psychology views human development as the mobility from a state of dependence to a position of autonomy, from a state of merger to differentiated selfhood. Development is essentially viewed as a process of separation. To separate is to grow and to grow is to separate. From being held, we become attached and then let go, only to find another attachment. In the psychological literature, separation is the focal point, particularly as it pertains to individuation. Whether it is in leaving home or a change in attitude, the essential developmental issue of closure and beginning is implied as a sense of separateness is defined. Psychoanalytic developmental history is a movement from oneness to separateness, from one developmental level to another (Josselson, 1988; Nemiroff & Colarusso, 1990).

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Margaret Mahler (1975; 1963) and her colleagues have made a major contribution to developmental psychology regarding separation and the concept of separation-individuation in particular. Mahler explicates separation as a lifelong process, where aspects of the initial symbiotic tie continue in adulthood. The implication is that letting go is an ontological and pivotal mode in our human development and existence. In our relationship with others, we connect and disconnect. At first, we are held, we attach, and we let go. We move from being one to being separate. As we move from one position to another, we let go, a mobility that implies development. Development is a term used by psychologists “to refer to a pattern of movement or change that begins at conception and continues through the entire life-span” (Santrock, 1986, p.14). We move on from one developmental level to another, continuously in a process of mobility. In the words of T.S. Eliot (1979):

What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.

Beginnings and endings belong together, and it is this paradoxical abyss that I wish to look in to – the paradox of “man’s eternal struggle against fusion and isolation” (Mahler et al., 1975, p.130). The implication is that letting go is the story of human relatedness and human development. Letting go implies a human developmental context and will be approached from this perspective.

In order to establish a context for the theme of the lived experience of letting go, I will first discuss development from the perspective of theorists that view human development within a framework of mobility from one level to another. The developmental theory of Erik Erikson will be dealt with, as his recognition of mobility within and between the phases is relevant to the mobility implied in letting go. Erikson’s acknowledgement, too, of selfhood in the process of development is also significant to letting go. The seminal work of Margaret Mahler and her colleagues regarding separation in the context of individuation has to be recognised. The concept of self and mobility are acknowledged as integral to the process of growth and development. Both theories are founded on the contextuality of our existence and together provide a significant framework for approaching the phenomenon of letting go. From attending to these and other relevant

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theories, an explication of the specific aspects regarding letting go, as identified in the defining terms and as expounded by the relevant theories, will follow. That is, after providing a contextual foundation of human development, the significant concepts of holding, attachment, transitional space and autonomy as identified in the process will be reviewed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3. Letting Go: A Human Developmental Perspective

Development, by definition, implies change, but how that change occurs needs to be explored and understood. The traditional approach to development has been to recognise great change from birth to adolescence, stability in adulthood, and deterioration within old age. Stated differently, development may be described as a gradual unfolding, a letting go, a movement of growth and change through time. While childhood is foundational to human development, the life-cycle or life-span perspective recognises the changes that occur during adulthood. Santrock's (1986) description of life-span development could have been written with the concept of letting go in mind. He writes:

It is about the life of every human being. It tells the story of human development from conception to death – from the point in time when life begins until the point in time when it ends, at least life as we know it (Preface, p.xxv).

In being born we let go, in dying we let go, and in the process between, we live the story of our human journey through life which we also eventually have to let go. Before we let go, we are first held and contained; we become attached and then dialectically move on from one level to another, throughout our development. From birth to death, we let go and move on, each on our own particular and personal path in life.

Understanding the psychological process of our human journey through life requires a developmental approach. Knowles (1986) propounds that: "Human psychology cannot be understood unless it is considered within the framework of developmental psychology. The human being always has some relationship to time – to his past, present, and future – and this relationship is central to his existence" (p.8).

Growth and development imply mobility from one level to another. To grow is to move, and to separate: "Individual developmental history is a movement from merger to separateness" (Josselson, 1988, p.91). Psychoanalytic development theory views growth

as a process of separation from dependence to autonomy, and in the mobility of separation through space and time, growth and development unfold. From a Heideggerian (1962) perspective, human development occurs in a spiral manner rather than in a chronological line. In the process of growth and development, as we define a sense of self, we let go, separate and move on.

### **3.1 Erikson and Development**

Recognising the pursuit of selfhood in moving from one level to another, Erik Erikson (1971; 1969) presents us with an inspiring description of human development and provides us with an understanding of man on his journey through life. With his “eight ages of man”, Erikson has modified psychoanalytic theory and shifted the purely biological picture of man to a comprehensive developmental paradigm, creating a valuable momentum for developmental psychology and human mobility. Erikson reframes and expands Freud’s first five stages of psychosexual development, but includes an additional three phases that extend into adulthood. Each phase presents with a central crisis or challenge that has to be mastered before moving on to the following phase. Successful completion of each phase and finding resolution to the challenge is significant, for in the process of moving on, a ‘sense’ of the phase is acquired, in preparation for the following phase. In moving on, the individual prepares for the new challenge of the subsequent phase and the mastery attained with each phase is placed at risk. To master the phase is a resolution of the phase. Erikson identifies the eight ages or phases of man, as follows:

- (1) Basic Trust vs Basic Mistrust
- (2) Autonomy vs Shame /Doubt
- (3) Initiative vs Guilt
- (4) Industry vs Inferiority
- (5) Identity vs Role Confusion
- (6) Intimacy vs Isolation
- (7) Generativity vs Stagnation
- (8) Ego Integrity vs Despair

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Erikson's (1969) use of the term *versus* (vs) reflects the conflict which arises and which is unique to each phase and challenge that has to be resolved. The motion within and between the developmental phases is constant, contributing to the developing and continuously evolving personality. Holding on and letting go are dialectical and consistently present. Human development is a continuous process, with each phase an integral part of the continuum. (Erikson, 1969; Knowles, 1986; Maier, 1969; Santrock, 1986).

Though holding on and letting go appear to be consistently present, only the first two phases appear significant to the present study. The first phase or phase of "Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust" is foundational to the subsequent phase of "Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt", with its developmentally specific dialectical experience of holding on and letting go, as it reveals the initial somatic, interpersonal and psychological experience of letting go. Although holding on and letting go continue to occur developmentally throughout the life cycle, only the first two phases, with their relevant dynamics regarding the phenomenon of letting go, will be discussed.

The first Eriksonian phase is the phase of "Basic Trust vs Basic Mistrust", where the blend of trust and mistrust becomes a critical theme, as the infant attempts to acquire a sense of basic trust, while overcoming a sense of basic mistrust. Meeting the challenge and resolving the conflict of this initial phase becomes a developmental achievement, and is foundational to subsequent phases of development. Physical and psychological experiences influence the nature of the trust or mistrust and determine the ensuing success or failure. As the infant relates (somatically, psychologically and socially) to the world, the relationship of receiving and giving, in relation to the (m)other, becomes pivotal. The challenge is to achieve a sense of basic trust with which to move forward. During the first year of life, where (m)other meets the needs of the infant and where outer predictability concurs with inner reality, the infant begins to trust his body, himself and his environment (Maier, 1969).

Basic trust is the essential link between the infant and the outside world, where holding-on and letting go become possible. Where trust has dominated the infant's early development, the child will willingly face new experiences and be ready to let go and move on. All subsequent development is located in this initial phase of Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust

(Erikson, 1971; 1969). Trust provides a foundational basis and climate in which to grow and form relationships.

### **3.1.1 Erikson and Letting go**

The second Eriksonian developmental phase, viz. that of “Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt” depends on the achievement of trust as challenged during the previous phase. The phase of Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt is specifically significant to the phenomenon of letting go Erikson (1971; 1969).

Erikson directly attends to the phenomenon of letting go and discusses it in the context of this phase, where the experience of the lived body gains significance. At this time the infant’s capacity to hold on and let go, with bowel and bladder movements, creates an awareness of a personal ability to control and release. The experience of “holding on” and “letting go” precedes the psychological aspects of development, where, with the rapid advance in muscular maturation and concurrent experience of his body, the child becomes aware of a personal will and ability to hold on and control, or let go and release. Experiencing the lived body makes it possible for the child to act, exist and perceive the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Significantly, the early muscular maturation during this phase introduces the experience of holding and letting go. Erikson (1969) describes these concepts as follows:

Muscular maturation sets the stage for experimentation with two simultaneous sets of social modalities: holding and letting go... . Thus, to hold can become a destructive and cruel restraining, and it can become a pattern of care, to have and to hold. To let go, too, can turn into an inimical letting loose of destructive forces, or it can be relaxed ‘ to let pass’ and ‘ to let be’ (p.243).

An intensely conflicting action is reflected in the patterns of “holding on” and “letting go” where the infant experiences a paradoxical ability and inability to co-ordinate. The required action pattern is rather complicated. The paradox for the young child extends in relation to his world and, although still highly dependent, the child existentially begins to experience a personal and autonomous will. The contradiction and ambiguity of this phase continues, but with it arrives the development of a personal will. The young child retains and discards

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things, becomes attached to, yet rejects, valued objects; may snuggle close to mother and suddenly attempt to push her away. These contradictory modes of behaviour are '*retentive – eliminative*' (Erikson, 1971; p.109).

Although holding on and letting go are paradoxical in meaning, a personal will unfolds. The basic trust in the world and faith in existence developed during the earlier (trust vs mistrust) phase, ideally continues to provide a foundational base. At this time, firmly reassuring parental (environmental/social) control facilitates trust as the young child is protected against his own diffuse understanding of whether to hold on or to let go. A protective environment promotes the trust and encourages autonomy, making it possible for the infant to literally and figuratively stand on his own feet.

### **3.1.2 Control and Letting go**

The dialectical significance of holding on and letting go is reflected in the child's experience of control (holding on) and submission (letting go), these being paradoxically juxtaposed. The lived body experience of holding on and letting go is extended in relation to the world of things and others. Developing a muscular capacity provides a greater ability and awareness of personal control, with an increased power over the environment. Control is a holding on, while letting go is a release or submission. The modalities of retention and elimination become evident in the capacity to extend, grasp, hold on to, discard, push aside, seize things or keep them at a distance. (Erikson, 1969; Knowles, 1986).

With the evolving will, a sense of personal control increases, and yet there is also an awareness of the interpersonal aspects of control regarding parents and their demand for conformity. The contradictory picture of parental (environmental/social) and personal control influences the child's evolving sense of autonomy. In the continued paradox of this period, the parents place limits on the child's behaviour, yet continue to provide his security and comfort. During this second phase, the mutual regulation between the parent and child is greatly challenged. If the child is usurped of all personal control and rendered powerless, then there is a regression to earlier levels of control (e.g. thumb sucking, being doubly demanding), or else a false progression appears. Erikson (1971) points out that: "a sense of self-control without loss of self-esteem is the ontogenetic source of a sense of free will.



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From an unavoidable sense of loss of self-control and of parental overcontrol comes a lasting propensity for doubt and shame” (pp. 109/110). The challenge during this phase is to resolve the conflicting polarity of control, whether to hold on or to let go. The extent to which the conflict is resolved and dealt with, determines the success or failure of this phase. Attaining success is a developmental achievement.

### **3.1.3 Developmental Achievement**

Meeting the challenge (biological, psychological and social) of moving from one developmental phase to another successfully is a developmental achievement that provides developmental continuity. While each developmental challenge may not always be successfully dealt with, adequate resolution of the crisis makes it possible for the individual to move on and retain a sense of continuity with which to move forward. Failure adequately to resolve a crisis during a developmental phase may lead to an attempt, at a later stage, for its resolution. Residual remains of the crisis could be challenged at a later stage and rekindled. The meaning attached to a particular crisis is significant and an essential part of its resolution. Citing an earlier work, Alapack & Alapack (1984, p.46) explicate as follows:

We face certain life issues repeatedly; rarely do we deal with them for once and for all. We return to certain meanings again and again in a spiral fashion. Optimistically we return with the experience under our belt, which we have parlayed into accumulated wisdom. Optimistically we come to a familiar situation with the liberating distance of a retrospective perspective. But often we stumble, as Freud’s concept of repetition compulsion indicates (Alapack, 1976).

If we do not resolve previous significant aspects of our life, we desperately hold on to their earlier meanings, destined to repeat them in order to find resolution and move on. Previously unresolved aspects of one’s life lie dormant, where their meanings can be reactivated later in life. This is Freud’s repetition compulsion, or stated differently, a tendency to repeat with an inability to let go. Similarly, Fairbairn (1943) describes a traumatic experience as the activation of a pre-existing, previously unresolved event in one’s life. Earlier experiences colour our perceptions, and the manner in which we perceive and experience our world creates the reality in which we live. Adequately mastering the challenge of each phase

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makes accessibility to the following phase possible. As we find solutions and move on, the developmental achievements acquired determine personal development and the quality of our lives.

### **3.2 Heidegger, Levinas, Mahler and Erikson**

Martin Heidegger (1962), the German philosopher, brings together existential concerns and the phenomenological method. His analysis of human existence deals with the ontological question of the meaning of Being (*Dasein*). To Heidegger, human existence is a contextual “being in the world”, a concept that undeniably acknowledges existence as relational, where the human individual shapes the world and others, but is in turn shaped by the world and others. Erikson’s (1969) developmental theory recognises man’s contextuality, but expands the psychoanalytic view from the biological and psychological to include social influences. In his work on human development, Richard Knowles (1986) reviews Erikson in the light of Heidegger and includes a comprehensive existential-phenomenological perspective.

Significant to understanding development is Heidegger’s view of existence as temporal and historical. Heidegger’s acceptance of transcendence reflects an openness to what has not occurred, to the unknownness of what one enters, as implied by letting go. In this study of letting go, while Heidegger’s ontology and temporality have to be acknowledged, the work of Levinas cannot be ignored. Emmanuel Levinas (1979) describes truth as moving beyond existence, beyond the ontology of Being, while his profound work *Totality and Infinity* reflects a transcending movement of thinking that moves beyond the realm of Being which is so central to Heidegger’s thought. While acknowledging the significance of Being, the present study also acknowledges an intentionality and willingness to move beyond the centralised paradigm of ontology. The contextuality of letting go has to be recognised.

By embracing the contextuality of human existence, both Erikson (1969) and Mahler (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975) substantially extend psychoanalytic theory into a general developmental psychology. Developmental crises are accepted as normative, and the resolution of a crisis is recognised as a developmental achievement. What Erikson describes as the Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt phase, Mahler identifies as Rapprochement or third subphase of Separation-Individuation. Both theorists describe the process of attaining

autonomy during early childhood as intensely paradoxical, recognising the contradictory nature of the infant's early development from infancy through toddlerhood. At this time, the infant's development is conflicting and paradoxical, for while the need for a oneness with (m)other continues, there is the demand to separate and attain autonomy. Erikson and Mahler acknowledge the impact of the somatic, intra-psychic and interpersonal worlds on the infant's life and the significance of experiencing a sense of continuity in defining the self. Mahler (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975) considers the process of continuity as integral to separation-individuation, where she concludes that: "Like any intrapsychic process, this one reverberates throughout the lifecycle. It is never finished; it remains always active; new phases of the life cycle see new derivatives of the earliest processes still at work" (p.3). The ambiguity of this phase continues through life.

### **3.3 Mahler and Separation-Individuation**

Margaret Mahler (1975) considers the "separation-individuation process" as the psychological birth of the individual, where there is

The establishment of a sense of separateness from, and relation to, a world of reality, particularly with regard to the experiences of one's own body and to the principal representative of the world as the infant experiences it, the primary love object (p.3).

The description lays emphasis on the concepts of separation and separateness, where separation occurs in the presence of the (m)other and her emotional availability. In the process of separating, the young child faces increasing physical maturity, with subtle accompanying threats of an expanding space between the self and (m)other. Mahler's developmental separation takes place in the presence of (m)other and contrasts with the traumatic separation of loss that Bowlby (1998) describes as occurring with the absence of the (m)other. Mahler's separation is a normal developmental separation that unfolds in the separation-individuation process towards autonomy. The concepts of 'separate' and 'separateness' indicate the developmental growth and maturity that unfolds as the child lets go of the (m)other in her presence. The concepts of separation and separateness will be discussed under the attachment section later.

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The process of separation is complementary to “the psychological birth of the human infant” or separation-individuation. Mahler’s theory (1975; 1979) remains the prevailing paradigm for developmental psychology today. On separation, Mahler (1975) writes:

Separation consists of the child’s emergence from a symbiotic fusion with the mother,... and individuation consists of those achievements marking the child’s assumption of his own individual characteristics. These are intertwined but not identical developmental processes; they may proceed divergently, with a developmental lag or precocity to one another (p.4).

In the process of growth development, the human infant develops through the phases of (A) “normal autism” (approximately 0-2 months) and (B) “normal symbiosis” (approximately 2-5 months), and enters the process of (C) “separation individuation”. As a foundational basis to separation-individuation, the forerunners (“normal autism” and “normal symbiosis”) of the separation-individuation process will first be discussed as a preliminary basis to the process of separation-individuation.

#### **3.3.1 Normal Autistic Phase**

This phase begins around birth and lasts until about the second month of extrauterine life. This is an undifferentiated phase, where for the infant there is no discernible difference between the self and the environment. Sleep is the neonate’s major activity, so that an active relationship with the world is absent and life is merely centred on continuous attempts to attain homeostasis. There is a lack of awareness of (m)other, for, as described by Mahler (1967), “the infant seems to be in a state of primitive hallucinatory disorientation, in which need satisfaction belongs to its own autistic orbit” (p.77). With no discernible differentiation between inner and outer realities, we find the phase of “absolute primary narcissism” extending to the beginning of the normal symbiotic phase.

#### **3.3.2 Normal Symbiotic Phase**

During this phase, the infant is *absolutely* dependent on the symbiotic (m)other, while the (m)other’s need for the infant is *relative*. This is the time of the delusional state of oneness with (m)other, with the experience of a common boundary or primary narcissistic oneness between the infant and (m)other. This is a normal state of emotional and psychic oneness

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with (m)other (Mahler, 1974; 1975). At this time, “the infant’s inner sensations form the core of the self. They seem to remain the central crystallization point of the ‘feeling self’ around which a sense of identity will become established” (Mahler et al., 1975, p.47).

Holding is a major facilitator and container to the symbiotic process and discussed in greater detail below under “Holding”.

### **3.3.3 Separation-Individuation**

Separation-individuation is comprised of four subphases pertinent to the phenomenon of letting go and described as follows:

#### **(1) The first subphase: Differentiation**

Growing up is a growing away from the state of symbiosis, where, through the relationship with the caring (m)other, the infant relates to the environment for the first time. At about 5 to 9 months, the (m)other is acutely explored in a tactile and visual manner, whereby the infant becomes aware of a separate other. What the (m)other looks like, feels like and even smells like becomes known to the infant. With early perceptions of the infant’s own body as having (skin) boundary, a sense of self emerges. At this time, the infant uses a “checking-back ” pattern, comparing the (m)other with others, noting her expression and affirming her presence before embarking on a specific action. During this phase, the (m)other gains prominence for the infant and, almost in preparation of her impending absence, she initiates peek-a-boo games. The infant becomes aware of the link with (m)other and, before further entering the environment, maintains and re-establishes that link, assuring the self of the connection (Mahler, 1965; 1975; 1979). A major ontological step is evident with the “hatching” process that occurs at this time, as the world is entered from a bipedal, relating perspective. From a perpendicular viewpoint, the life-world of the infant expands. Wakeful periods are longer, with an increasing awareness of the presence of other environmental aspects besides (m)other. In moving on into the new environment and letting go of the familiar, an awareness of difference (newness) is “checked” against the familiar (trusted) world. While the known and familiar provide comfort with a separation from (m)other, a sensitivity to the unfamiliar appears, together with discomfort. Stranger-anxiety also becomes evident. (Mahler et al., 1975).

**(2) The second subphase: The Practising Period**

The practising period that occurs at about 9 -16 months is divided into (a) an early period, and (b) a practising period proper.

(a) During the early practising period, the infant begins to crawl, climb and move away from (m)other, yet remains attached by still holding on and requiring support. As the infant's world expands, exploration increases, for there is more to hear, see and touch. Nevertheless, the attachment remains as the infant's world remains closely linked to (m)other. Sight and sound become a metaphorical umbilical cord that connects with (m)other who remains significant. At first, there is a pull away from mother and a push into the outside world. As the infant's relationship to the world expands, a brief period of separation anxiety is noted. (M)other continues to be the centre of the infant's world and only gradually does the infant move out into the expanding world, for fear of losing sight of (m)other. There is a strong need to retain the attachment, as (m)other is periodically returned to for "emotional refuelling" and for the stability of touching "home base". Physical contact rekindles the earlier experience and re-establishes their attachment. Josselson (1992) believes the "refuelling" to be a reminder of the infant's earlier sense of being held. Returning to the (m)other is an attempt to relive the earlier holding experience and sense of oneness with her. Through refuelling, the infant holds on to the earlier reality and oneness experienced with (m)other with fresh attempts to reconnect (Mahler, 1965; 1975). Holding on is an effort to protect the self against abandonment and the fear of isolation. A greater freedom in relation to the (m)other unfolds as the growing infant, now a toddler, plays a more active and determining role in the creation of distance and space between the self and (m)other.

(b) During the practising period proper, the infant's posture phenomenologically characterises the free locomotion. Bursting into his ontological world, the infant breaks through, from a position of 'horizontal' (Jager, 1971) to the vertical position of toddler. The new state of being provides a sense of omnipotence (secondary narcissism), and the toddler seems almost impervious to knocks and falls. There is a sense of empowerment, of being in control and discovering the world and reality as his personal will determines it. Individuality is asserted and the initial step towards identity formation is taken. The newly acquired ability of walking provides a different view and perspective to the world that has a

tremendous impact on emotional development and bears major symbolic significance for the individual. Mahler (1975) writes:

It is as if the walking toddler has proved by his attainment of independent upright locomotion that he has already graduated into the world of independent human beings. The expectation and confidence that the mother exudes when she feels that the child is able to 'make it' out there seems to be an important trigger for the child's safety and perhaps also the initial encouragement for his exchanging some of his magic omnipotence for pleasure in his own autonomy and his developing self-esteem (p.74).

During the time of mastery (of important ego functions) the young child becomes elated with his achievements and a sense of omnipotence unfolds. The delusion of omnipotence evident during the symbiotic phase is repeated on a different level. With the delusion of omnipotence, what was once invested in relation to the mother is now invested in relation to the self. This includes an investment in the body self, personal competencies, as well as in the objects and goals in the expanding horizons. A secondary narcissism emerges, where the infant becomes absorbed in personal pursuits, to the extent of often appearing oblivious of (m)other. This behaviour continues until there is a need to return for "refuelling" in the relationship with (m)other (Mahler,1965). As the child's "love affair with the world" wanes, it is once again refuelled by mother's proximity.

### **(3) The third subphase: Rapprochement**

Rapprochement occurs at about 16-24 months and is divided into three periods: (a) beginning rapprochement; (b) rapprochement crisis; (c) individual patterning of rapprochement. As the toddler's awareness of his separateness grows and the "first level of identity" is established, the elation of the previous subphase begins to subside. Following the absorption in the personal activities of the self, now the mother's every move is watched and followed in the polarised "shadowing" (pull) and "darting away" (push) behaviour, the letting go of, and holding on to (m)other. The push and pull experience of this phase is further evident in the games played. Peek-a-boo games are typical, as are imitational games concerned with relatedness. The (m)other's consistent emotional availability during this subphase is of

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paramount importance, and an awareness of this link facilitates the toddler's acceptance of his own ambivalence regarding the push (let go) and pull (hold) present. The toddler is conflicted, "faced by the necessity of emotional separation from his mother just at a time when he must cope with an expanding outside reality" (Mahler, 1965, p.38).

(a) During the beginning rapprochement period, the perceptive reality is that (m)other is a person in her own right, affirming their separateness. With awareness of the separateness, there is a strong need to share with (m)other and retain a connectedness with her. The toddler attempts to connect (m)other with the outside world and brings objects discovered in his expanding horizons to her. Awareness of this separateness gives rise to a sense of great loss for the toddler, who attempts to rekindle the fusion of earlier times with her through regressive behaviour, but recognition of their separateness remains profound. The otherness of father (or additional significant other) is also recognised at this time, and the presence of the third person facilitates resolution of the symbiotic pull of the dyad. Additional relationships with others besides the parents become possible as the world of relatedness expands (Mahler, 1965, 1975).

(b) During the crisis period of rapprochement, the ultimate realisation unfolds that there is no return to the earlier fusion with (m)other. Awareness of the increased ability to move away from (m)other, creates both pleasure and pain. In an attempt to deny the painful awareness of separateness, the (m)other is used as an extension of the self, with continued efforts to re-engage her in shared activities. In an attempt to relive the earlier experience of oneness, sharing is a significant aspect of the relationship with (m)other. The increasing physical and cognitive capacity of the toddler push toward autonomy and accelerate the opportunity to let go and move away from (m)other. Emotionally, however, there is a pull to enter the expanding environment and share the new horizons and experiences with (m)other. With the push towards autonomy and the pull to retain the relationship with (m)other, conflict arises and the process of letting go seems difficult. The rapprochement crisis challenges the toddler to resolve the push-pull conflict experience, posing a tremendous developmental task. The ambivalence of the push-pull conflict is the oscillation towards and away from (m)other, where the toddler is required to resolve accumulated conflicts, as well as deal with concurrent oral, anal and early genital pressures. On the one hand there is the desire to



remain one with (m)other and, on the other hand, to individuate from her. Pleasure and pain are juxtaposed in the experienced conflict.

Accepting the ambivalence of this critical period makes resolution of this phase possible. Paradoxically, though the toddler may wish to achieve autonomy from (m)other, there is the fear that she may leave him. The toddler's activities and restlessness increase during mother's absence, and separation anxiety is a characteristic fear of this period, but "this separation anxiety is not synonymous with the fear of annihilation through abandonment" (Mahler and Gosliner, 1955, p.196). In the overlap of inner world and outer reality or oneness and separateness, attachments to transitional objects and phenomena (Winnicott) facilitate the process of separation. During the crisis period, a wider and more differentiated range of emotional experiences appear, while a sense of separateness and vulnerability make an empathic capacity possible.

(c) The final or individual patterning period of rapprochement sees the toddler finding individual solutions to the crisis as personal patternings and personality traits emerge. In moving away, the toddler finds an "optimal distance" (Bouvet, 1958) from which to function best away from mother. The optimal distance is the balance of the two polarities and lies in the extent to which the toddler is able to deal with the demand for omnipotent control, separation anxiety and the capacity to tolerate the conflict regarding the desire for closeness (pull) yet need for autonomy (push). In the awareness of separateness, speech and language are important aspects in attaining optimal distance and retaining a connectedness. Significant words and gestures provide the toddler with adequate expression regarding early autonomy and relatedness. The increasing use of speech and language provides resolution for a sense of separateness, while retaining connectedness. The developing language facilitates the increasing individuation with individual differences (Mahler, Pine and Bergman, 1975).

#### **(4) The fourth subphase: Consolidation of individuality and the beginnings of emotional object constancy**

This phase occurs at about 24-36 months and differs from the first three phases, since it is open-ended, has no limit and develops through life. At this time, the child's cognitive capacity is established. Cognitive ability (Piaget's object permanence) increases, facilitating

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the process of separation. Mahler and her colleagues prefer using Hartmann's (1952) term of "object constancy" rather than Piaget's (1954) term of "object permanence", reasoning that, what is internalised is more than a mere representation of what is absent, as it incorporates both what is good and bad about the (m)other. A sense of permanence is, however, conveyed when Mahler (1975) declares that:

In the state of object constancy, the love object will not be rejected or exchanged for another if it can no longer provide satisfactions; and in that state, the object is still longed for, and not rejected (hated) as unsatisfactory simply because it is absent (p.110).

The image of (m)other includes emotional connotations or meaning and, in this manner, (m)other is readily available: in the absence of that which is transportable with the self, the image is evoked as memory. Establishing emotional object constancy depends on earlier experiences of trust, as well as on the cognitive capacity for inner representation of the permanent object. As the self finds cognitive links with the (m)other in her absence, a sense of attachment is retained. Complex cognitive functions unfold: verbal ability, fantasy and reality testing improve to provide the child with a greater capacity to move towards greater autonomy (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975; Kramer & Akhtar, 1992; Thunissen, 1998).

Schneider (1992) describes the process as follows:

The establishment of an affective object constancy patterning depends upon the gradual internalisation of a properly and positively cathected inner image of the mother by the child. This constant inner image will enable the child to function separately and independently despite some degree of tension and difficulty. (p.2)

Winnicott's (1951) explication of the transitional objects and phenomena illustrates how the child is able to resolve the polarised conflict of the need to be with (m)other and the accompanying demand to be without her. The value and purpose of transitional objects and phenomena will be discussed later under "Space and Transition".

Though the child may structure an evocative memory of (m)other, the compilation of

memories tends to continue through life. Regarding object constancy in adults, Fleming (1975) cautions us to recognise that established mental representations can be changed over time, as they “do not serve the same dynamic, economic and adaptive purposes when their images are evoked in memory” (p.750). The continuity of the ego’s adaptive capacity does not appear absolute.

### **3.4 Other Theorists**

#### **3.4.1. Infancy and Childhood**

Research conducted subsequent to Mahler’s findings challenges her deductions regarding the neonate’s inability to differentiate and define the self. Kroger (1998) points to the studies of Lyons-Ruth (1991) that recognise the neonate as possessing greater cognitive and perceptual capacities than Mahler’s observations imply. Similarly, Daniel Stern (1985) disagrees with Mahler’s view regarding early infant development, and believes that the infant seeks relatedness and desires an “intersubjective union” rather than pursuing intrapsychic autonomy. Stern considers the neonate as already having a sense of self. Stern’s developmental framework includes:

- (a) A sense of emergent self: 0-2 months: different scattered experiences of hearing, perception, smell, taste and an emerging feeling of a bodily wholeness are integrated and organised;
- (b) A sense of core self: 2-7 months: self-agency, self-affectivity, self-coherence and self-history develop;
- (c) A sense of subjective self: 7-15 months: awareness of self with own identity and viewpoint develops;
- (d) A sense of verbal self: 15-18 months: objective view of the self and symbolic representation by language develops.

Stern appears to reverse Mahler’s view of development, believing that a core sense of self must first be developed before the infant is able to connect with others. Though Mahler and Stern consider different viewpoints and aims for development, both theories bear merit and can be considered as contributing to the same continuum.

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Stern views the infant as moving towards connectedness. Mobility, for Stern, is to move from the initial stages (viz. emergent, core, subjective and verbal) of self, to connect with others. Stern's understanding of separation differs to that of Mahler's, reflected in the concepts of 'attunement' and 'mis-attunement' in relation to the other. In defining separateness, Stern believes that the correct amount of mis-attunement is required, whereby the otherness of the parent can be discerned, particularly evident during the first year of life, when a sense of self develops. Mahler (1975) and Stern (1985) employ diverse developmental frameworks with a different developmental aim. Developmentally, where Mahler's theory may consider the infant as moving away from, and letting go of, (m)other, Stern's view would accept the infant as moving away and letting go towards the (m)other. From the perspective of Mahler, letting go may be described as the separation - individuation of the human individual in the quest for autonomy, whereas for Stern letting go is suggested as being the need to relate in the desire for connectedness or core-relatedness.

Thunissen (1998) believes that both the theories of Mahler and Stern can be integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the "child ego state", which is summed up as follows:

- (a) From the beginning a sense of self emerges;
- (b) The infant has the capacity to process and discriminate between experiences;
- (c) Experiences with caretakers are internalised from birth;
- (d) In the interaction between infant and caretaker, development takes place through the clustering of similar experiences;
- (e) The internalised representations are structured into script decisions.

Different theorists view the concept of separation differently. While Mahler's concept of separation is recognised as a gradual developmental process regarding individuation and the intrapsychic process of our psychological birth as humans, attachment theorists (Bowlby and Ainsworth) place emphasis on the psychobiological aspects of separation. Though we find philosophical differences between the theory of separation-individuation and attachment theory, common connections are evident. Both theories accept (m)other as the secure base from which the infant can grow and develop and from which future stability will emerge. While attachment theory accepts (m)other's emotional availability as necessary for play,

exploration and entry into the expanding horizons, Mahler's theory accepts that (m)other's emotional availability and support must be internalised to make separation-individuation possible. Both theories bear merit.

### **3.4.2 Adolescence**

With its pertinence to development and growth, Peter Blos seems to identify similarities to Mahler's separation-individuation theory when identifying adolescence as the "second individuation process". Described by Blos (1967), "Adolescent individuation is the reflection of those structural changes that accompany the emotional disengagement from internalised infantile objects" (p.165). Blos purports that the adolescent attains autonomy and differentiation for those aspects of self that continue to be diffusely attached to the parents. The adolescent procures a distance and difference from the internalised parents as the infantile object ties are transcended. Identity formation assists the individuation process. The dependence-independence of adolescence is reminiscent of the push and pull movements of shadowing and darting away of the rapprochement subphase during early childhood. As described by Josselson (1980): "The adolescent, like the child in the rapprochement subphase, wants his parents there as a home base to return to in times of need" (p.195). Similar to the early rapprochement subphase, the push-pull process during adolescence is painful for both parent and adolescent. The ambivalence over autonomy creates much of the pain for both parent and adolescent, while the paradox and ambiguity of the early separation-individuation phase repeats itself during adolescence. Blos (1967) accepts regression as an essential part of progression and explicates that: "In paradoxical fashion ... progressive development is precluded if regression does take its proper course at the proper time within the sequential pattern of the adolescent process (p.185). According to Blos, regression facilitates maturation, ego differentiation and progressive development. In other words, going back precedes going forward.

### **3.4.3 Adulthood and the Later Years.**

Letting go appears inevitable to human development. Throughout the literature the implication is of a mobility that continues through life. Human development and, more recently, human adult development have received a great deal of attention. Erikson argues

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that development does not cease with childhood and adolescence, as Freud believed, but continues through the life of each individual. In 1978, Daniel Levinson presented his theory on the life cycle, while Edmund Sherman's (1987) work later focused on midlife transitions. Subsequently, Moody and Carroll (1999) describe the stages of spiritual awakening that arise in the quest for spiritual wholeness. Human development in adulthood is part of the journey of life. With his description of "the stages of life", Carl Jung (1972) pioneered the process of development and individuation of self during the adult years.

Prior to Mahler's theory of separation-individuation, Jung (1953; 1972) introduced the concept of individuation regarding adult development. While Mahler considers individuation to be significant to the process of separation during early childhood, Jung has used the term individuation to indicate the psychological developmental process that begins with childhood but gains significance during midlife, when the passion of the earlier years evolves into the call for duty. Jung recognises individuation as the process of self-realisation, an actualisation of the self whereby the individual moves on and develops to become the unique and definite being that he is. In Jung's (1953) own words: "Individuation means becoming a single, homogeneous being, and, in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last and incompatible uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self" (p.171). According to Jung (1972a), to realise a sense of separateness and self, we need to leave the "the magic circle of the mother and family" (p. 168). Individuation is a path rather than a goal, a process that continues, rather than a destination. Individuation is the unfolding of self through life.

Daniel Levinson (1978) and his colleagues employed a developmental approach to their study of adulthood. The study provides a conception of the human life cycle and portrays a more specific picture of early to middle adulthood, with an emphasis on the mid-life transition of males where ageing is substituted for growth. Levinson considers adult development as analogous to seasons or a sequence of alternating structure-building and transitional structure-changing periods within the life cycle. The concept of the individual life structure is foundational to the developmental, periods. Individuation is accepted as part of the process of transitional development, where changes arise in relation to the self and the external world. Attachment-Separateness is identified as a key polarity in the midlife development of men. The integration of polarities or opposing tendencies within the self

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provides for individuation, but while “separateness fosters individual growth and creative adaptation’, the challenge is to find the balance between isolation and attachment.

Mahler (1975; 1979) had indicated that although the separation-individuation phase comes to an end during the third year of life, the process “reverberates through the life cycle”. The concept of separation-individuation has prompted much interest, research and debate regarding the process in the adult years. More recently, terms such as the third, fourth and fifth separation-individuation phenomena of adulthood and ageing appear in the literature. Colarusso (1990) notes that John Oldham (1988) was the first to address the term third individuation, defined as occurring during midlife with the death of one’s parents. Colarusso differs from Oldham and believes that the third individuation arises with biological parenthood. Later, Salman Akhtar (1995) uses the term third individuation in the context of immigration and identity. Though not directly identified as letting go, all these theorists recognise the process of separation.

Colarusso (1997) agrees that separation–individuation resonates through life and agrees with Mahler that derivatives of the early processes continue. A point he does emphasise, however, is that adult separation-individuation processes are a continuation, rather than a replication, of the original experience. To support his viewpoint, Colarusso refers to the work of John Munder Ross who believes that the self in relation to the social environment rather than the “core self representation” of the early experience is formalised in adulthood with the attainment of one’s ego identity. As Akhtar and Kramer (1997) indicate, Akhtar (1992, 1995), Colarusso (1990; 1997), Oldham (1988) and Ross (1996) continue to explore separation as it appears in adulthood and the later years. Colarusso (1997) proposes that the fourth individuation occurs during middle adulthood and the fifth individuation with ageing.

Though the work of theorists and writers contribute to our understanding of the separation-individuation process through life, the significance of letting go as it occurs in our lives and its significance to the process of separation is not dealt with. While we separate and individuate through infancy to adulthood, human development is not merely a linear progression that occurs along the developmental continuum, but an emerging process with its own meaning. From being held by a significant (m)other in a blissful state of oneness, in rootedness and stability, we let go and individuate. Being held is a significant start to our lives as humans.

### 3.5 Holding

Holding precedes attachment and occurs within the context of relatedness. Holding provides us with a sense of relatedness and connectedness that roots us to our existence. Before we let go, we begin our lives in the arms of a caring significant (m)other that holds us. Holding is the first interpersonal experience that conveys the assurance of a basic security, trust and oneness. The consistent behaviour of the significant and caring (m)other ensures a relationship of “basic trust”. Erikson (1971) considers basic trust as “the first and basic wholeness, for it seems to imply that the inside and the outside can be experienced as an interrelated goodness” (p.82). The oneness of the experience reflects a sense of wholeness, centrality and rootedness, contained in being held.

Holding provides security. The infant is first held in the secure enclosures of the womb and, with the impact of birth, is released and moves on. From the secure containment and shelter of the womb, birth is an entry into the emptiness of space, where, in the undefined vacuum, being held restores the experience of containment, rootedness and protection. Holding conveys the presence of human warmth, of the “arms around” (Josselson, 1992) experience; the tending care that contributes to a sense of stability and “continuity of being”. Continued secure holding provides a sense of trust. Paul Greenhalgh (1987) views holding as a container, a mirror and a safety net. Being held provides a sense of togetherness and integration. If we are not held, we fragment. To hold is to “keep fast, grasp ... contain.... remain unbroken” (*Oxford Dictionary*). To hold is to keep whole.

#### 3.5.1 Environment and Containment

As humans, our existence is not separate from the world in which we live. From the outset, as our caring (m)other holds us, we are at one with the environment. Heidegger’s (1962) concept of the contextualised being-in-the-world is never more visibly evident as in the intimate relationship between the young infant and caring (m)other. Winnicott (1986) alerts us to the interrelatedness and indivisibility of the infant and environment, stating that: “In the beginning, the infant is the environment and the environment is the infant” (p.72). The infant is initially at-one with the environment, and at-one with the world. To the



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infant, the environment is the (m)other. Holding is synonymous with the presence of maternal care, provides protection, physical contact and a sense of continuity. While the psyche resides in the soma and is kept intact by the (m)other's holding, a sense of continuity and wholeness begins.

**Holding implies restraint, yet creates the environmental conditions necessary for human growth and development. The paradox of life begins as the stasis of holding (oneness) provides a secure base and anchorage that fosters the mobility of growth and development (separateness). Holding contains the paradox of oneness and separateness, a paradox which Kaplan (1979) recognises when she identifies holding as the constancy that “unites the serene harmonies of oneness with the vitality and rhythms of separateness” (p.31). In our dialogue with the world, through holding, the diversity of oneness (permanence) and separateness (change) can coexist, while the ensuing ‘continuity of being’ makes it possible for the infant to deal with the consistently changing demands of growth and development.**

A holding environment makes it possible for the infant's innate potential to unfold through time. The (m)other actively adapts, protects and cares for the infant's needs and sense of well being. Winnicott (1960) views holding as the (m)other's primary occupation with the infant's physical and psychological needs, where the infant is protected against unnecessary impingements or environmental disturbances. Winnicott speaks of the “good enough” (m)other who, through her primary preoccupation of holding, accommodates the infant's physical and psychological needs, protecting him against unnecessary “impingements” or environmental disturbances. The “good enough” (m)other provides a maternal environment that is consistently predictable, physical and human, rather than mechanically correct. The quality of holding must be of a relational and human nature rather than of a computerised accuracy, for the infant that is consistently held will begin to trust the world and sense a continuity of being. Human trustworthiness is first encountered in being held, and it is in such a holding and dependable environment that psychological growth can take place.

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The caring environment serves as a container. Holding is reflective of Bion's (1967) concept of "container". Holding as containment conveys a sense of wholeness, where the infant feels at one with the environment, experiencing a sense of continuity. Containment keeps the infant intact and protects what is inside, as the good enough mother provides a containing environment. In her description of the (m)other's holding, Kaplan (1979) writes: "In her ordinary way of holding him, a mother gives her baby the impression of a world that will hold him together and make sense of the unformed excitements and appetites raging inside him" (p.40). This description, much like Winnicott's "holding", is also reminiscent of Bion's concept of "container", with its concept of intactness. The (m)other and infant are the "thinking couple", the concept of container-contained, where projective identifications, aggressive and destructive impulses that threaten the young infant can be regulated (Ashbach & Schermer, 1994; Josselson, 1992). In being held the infant is able to experience a sense of being intact and whole.

#### **3.5.2 Oneness and Omnipotence**

Holding facilitates the blending of bodies and psyches, of (m)other and infant, into a blissful state of "oneness". Terms such as "mother-child dyad" (Spitz, 1965), "dual-unit" (Mahler, 1975), "oneness" (Kaplan, 1979) and "unit" (Winnicott, 1960), reflect the merging nature of the mother-infant relationship during the very early phase of the infant's development, where physiological and psychological processes are as yet undifferentiated. In the union, there is a mutual melting of intimacy between (m)other and infant. This is what Mahler views as "normal autism". It is the time of a diffuse inside and outside world, with a lack of awareness of the (m)other in the absence of boundaries. In the climate of intimacy, a reciprocity is created as (m)other and infant find mutual satisfaction in the oneness shared. Spitz (1965) regards this intimacy as a "unified situational experience" of "conesthetic receptivity", while Kaplan (1979) refers to the intimate relationship as "the basic dialogue of human love" that commences with the (m)other's unconditional love, but which is pursued forever after. The desire to regain the early experience of oneness shared with (m)other continues through life. Indeed, as Kaplan expresses it, "all later human love and dialogue is a striving to restore the lost bliss of oneness with our equally intense need for separateness and individual selfhood" (p.27). This is the period of primary narcissism and omnipotence, a time of blissful symbiosis with (m)other (Mahler, 1975).

Acknowledging the omnipotence of this early phase, Winnicott (1951) terms the sense of omnipotence as a normal “illusion”. He writes:

The mother’s adaptation to the infant’s needs when good enough gives the infant the *illusion* that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant’s own capacity to create. In other words, there is an overlap in what the mother supplies and what the child might conceive (p.239).

This illusion of omnipotence is essential for the child’s early sense of well-being and comprises the fundamental basis for the child’s developing self-esteem. The illusion is necessary for the infant to carry itself through, until there is adequate capacity to organise and consolidate feelings of self-worth. Significantly, the infant accepts the sense of well-being and omnipotence as his own creation (Mahler, 1967; Winnicott, 1951; Edward et al., 1992). Sandor Ferenczi (1956) regarded omnipotence as beginning in utero, in the prenatal state of blissful oneness with the holding of the foetus in the womb. The sense of omnipotence is a fulfilment and contentment that exists prior to the presence of any needs and wishes. Ironically, the first wish is to retrieve and return to this earlier state of contentment. The need to extend the experience of wholeness, oneness, rootedness and stability continues through life in the desire to relate and connect, as evidenced in holding.

### **3.5.3 Types of Holding**

#### **3.5.3.1 Symbiotic Holding**

Symbiotic holding promotes the illusion that the (m)other is incorporated and integrated with the self. Mahler (1975) describes the (m)other’s holding as “the symbiotic organizer – the midwife of individuation, of psychological birth” ( p.47). Winnicott accepts holding as the (m)other’s primary preoccupation in her caring and protection. Clearly, holding provides a significant foundation from which the process of letting go can evolve. Symbiotic holding is the point of anchorage, and from here the infant can grow and develop. It is through being symbiotically held that a sense of self evolves.

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In the context of human relatedness, the symbiotic relationship between the (m)other and infant is essentially asymmetrical: as “the infant’s need for the mother is absolute; the mother’s need for the infant is relative” (Mahler, 1967, p.78). The infant is entirely dependent on the (m)other and the nature of her care. Mahler’s symbiosis is a metaphorical expression of relatedness rather than a symbiosis of biological connotations. Tactile perception is significant, as physical contact is perceived over the entire body and is a binding experience for symbiosis, while symbiotic holding expresses a mutuality between the infant and (m)other (Mahler, 1975; Winnicott, 1990).

Symbiosis, to Mahler (1974), is the state of undifferentiation, a fusion of inner and outer worlds, where, as yet, there is no experience of the “me” and the “not me”. Later, with the early differentiation, the infant will begin to distinguish the “me” from the “not me”. The time of early differentiation, also known as the time of hatching, is where the symbiotic orbit gradually expands. The infant moves away, yet remains connected to (m)other by being aware of her presence through retaining a visual and auditory connection. Wolman’s (1991) description reflects the (m)other’s symbiotic holding with the words: “she holds the infant, not just in her arms, but also in her sight and with her voice and in her mind” (pp.40/41). Even from a distance, (m)other’s holding continues.

#### **3.5.3.2 Extended Holding**

As space and distance enter the child’s reality, the “symbiotic-orbit” gradually expands to accommodate the infant’s widening world. From a world of oneness and omnipotence the infant with time, becomes aware of mother as a separate individual (Mahler, 1975). The physical oneness in the womb has been replaced by the psychological oneness shared in the symbiosis, which gradually expands and extends. The infant moves from the stage of primary narcissism to secondary narcissism, shifting from an objectless (primary) omnipotence merger with (m)other to a self-mother (secondary) omnipotence. From the intimate dialogue of oneness, the infant gradually differentiates (Mahler’s “hatching”) and becomes aware of his mother’s presence out there in the world (Edward et al., 1992).

Holding does not remain physical in nature. The initial physical closeness extends to an emotional closeness, for it is rather the meaningful union of mother and infant that

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remains significant. Holding provides more than a physical containment and protection of the infant's body. It protects and contains the body and being of the infant, the psychosoma (Winnicott, 1949) of the infant. Kaplan (1979) succinctly writes: "Holding is everything that happens to an infant which sustains him and produces wholeness and integration. When the environment of the baby fits itself to the baby's inborn energies, gestures and movements, the environment holds the baby" (p.91). Similarly, Erikson (Maier, 1969) describes the mutual exchange between (m)other and infant as the "cradle of faith (which)...permits a mother to respond to the needs and demands of the baby's body and mind in such a way that (the infant) learns once and for all to trust her, to trust himself and to trust the world" (p.37). Holding goes beyond the somatic boundaries, extending into the infant's psyche, as the mother adapts to the subjective world of the infant by providing an adequate environment with a sense of trust, harmony and oneness. The infant has been at one with the various aspects of the (m)other, the movements and smell of her body, the throb of her heartbeat and the tone of her voice. The illusion of oneness is sustained in the (m)other's satisfying presence, as the internalised feeling of oneness goes beyond that of being held and becomes emotional rather than physical in nature. The extended holding provides the 'tether' (Akhtar, 1992), a sense of connection that the infant feels in the meaningful relation with (m)other. As the pain of separateness threatens, the blissful state of oneness continues.

With the unfolding differentiation (Mahler's hatching) and subsequent individuation, the importance of the (m)other's presence and availability during the Rapprochement sub-phase, cannot be underestimated. The (m)other's presence becomes a holding presence that is internalised, making it possible for the infant to move away, often returning to "refuel" (Mahler, 1975). Holding is sustaining, as the infant returns to the (m)other only to move away again. Josselson (1992) believes that in the process of separation-individuation, the infant's refuelling behaviour reflects the infant's attempts to hold itself and reconnect with the "arms-around" experience it had previously enjoyed with (m)other. Though there is the desire to individuate, the need for human connectedness and relatedness continues, as "the child comes to see that the world is bounded rather than infinite: the strong arms make safe limits in space" (p.30). While the sense of being adequately held is internalised, mobility increases, and the infant is able to explore the environment and allow growth and

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development to continue. The good enough (m)other continues to adapt to the child's new levels of maturity, and the experience of holding provides the core framework for psychological growth. The concept of holding extends.

Being adequately held in a blissful state of oneness has to be internalised before a sense of self and a sense of separateness can unfold. Paradoxically, with the powerful desire for oneness, there is an equally powerful force that lures us to move away, to seek distance so that we are able to explore the world beyond the union of the mother-infant relationship: in other words, to become a self (Kaplan, 1979).

### **3.5.3.3 Mirroring and Holding**

Mirroring is another form of holding, comprising the framework for psychological growth. With the mutual intimate moulding between (m)other and infant, mirroring is an essential aspect of symbiosis. Josselson (1992) aptly describes the process when she writes: "In mirroring, someone is so much with us that he or she is practically in us" (p.104). The experience of (m)other inside the infant makes differentiation of the "me" from the "not me" possible. As the (m)other enters the infant's emotional state and makes it her own, mirroring reflects the affinity between the (m)other and infant. Mirroring contains and provides a sense of oneness and wholeness,

The emotional development of the infant begins in the relationship with (m)other. Winnicott (1967) points out that "the precursor of the mirror is the mother's face" (p.26). These words are reminiscent of Lacan's conviction that the "mirror stage" (6-18 months) represents a basic aspect of subjectivity (Evans, 1996). Lacan's mirror stage concurs with Mahler's early (practising) rapprochement subphase (6-18 months). Whether in the eyes of the (m)other, or the initial image viewed in the mirror, a sense of subjectivity emerges. According to Lacan (1988a), the infant guilelessly submits to the image imposed. Rather than acknowledge the authentic self with its sense of fragmentation, the infant submits to and is captured by the image perceived regarding the self. To Lacan (1978; 1988), such perceptions are part of the "imaginary order" and a misunderstanding (*méconnaissance*) of the self. The infant mistakenly assumes the unified image of wholeness to be who he is in reality. Such identification alienates the infant from the truth and from his authenticity. Through holding

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and mirroring, the mother contains, protects and provides the infant with a sense of wholeness, but from a Lacanian perspective, the image reflected lures and traps the infant into a deceptive belief of wholeness. The (visual) image of oneself is particularly significant to each individual's ego-development.

The work of Barclay (1993) appears to fill a gap in the literature regarding the impact of sound and the process of the infant's development during the early rapprochement (Mahler) and mirror phase (Lacan). Barclay focuses on the significance of acoustic phenomena regarding development and the acquisition of language. What he entitles the Echo Phase adds a further dimension to Lacan's theory by acknowledging the impact of language on intersubjective development. Stated briefly, "The echo is a mirror in sound" (p.26). Development of the Echo Phase begins with the breakdown of the infant's symbiotic relationship with (m)other and the loss of the psychological symbiosis. In Lacanian terms, we speak of the individual's submission to the "symbolic order" of language and culture. Barclay postulates that the Echo Phase begins after the third month of life, when "to some extent development depends upon intersubjectivity and concomitant auditory and linguistic phenomena" (p.17). Barclay recognises the significance of acoustic phenomena in development and weaves the visual image with the impact of sound, while acknowledging the centrality of mirroring. Barclay contributes the Echo Phase as an adjunct to Lacan's Mirror Stage. It was Spitz (1965) who briefly noted that at about three months, the infant listens to the production of his own sounds, different to the sounds of his environment. During Mahler's "early practising phase", the infant develops a relationship to auditory (oral and aural) phenomena. To Barclay, this is the beginning of the Echo Phase, which to some extent is indicative of the infant's future subjectivity. Barclay's contribution concurs with Lacan's concept of subjectivity as the infant becomes subject to the already existing "symbolic order" of language. As the child assumes the image as his own, the deception and captation of the mirror image accompanies an emphasis on acoustic phenomena.

Like Lacan, Kohut centres his developmental system on mirroring but, unlike Lacan, who views mirroring as entrapment, Kohut (1971) identifies mirroring as the empathic resonance for survival reflected in the (m)other's validation. Mirroring provides the necessary cohesion for the infant to exist as a self. Adequate holding by the (m)other's empathic response to the

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infant's psychological needs is critical to survival. Kohut considers empathy as akin to the presence of oxygen in the atmosphere, providing "emotional nutrients" in the interpersonal and responsive relationship of the human environment.

When we speak of mirroring, we have to acknowledge its significance to narcissism. Kohut (1988) postulates that narcissism is not necessarily pathological (as perceived by Kernberg and earlier psychoanalytic thinking), but able to follow an independent and potentially healthy line of development. Kohut believes that "defects of the self occur mainly as a result of empathy failures from the side of the self-object – due to narcissistic disturbances of the self-object" (p.87). He coins the term "self-object" to describe the significant (m)other, who is experienced as part of the self and necessary for survival. The self-object is crucial for stability and a healthy sense of self. Indeed, to survive psychologically, the infant has to be born in an empathic-responsive environment. Mirroring (or empathy) is essential to the development of self. Empathic mirroring facilitates the cohesion and development of the self through time and space. As humans we need to be accepted, acknowledged, confirmed and validated.

Mirroring confirms us as humans, acknowledging our personal perceptions and emotions as our inner reality and sense of self is validated. In this confirmation, the presence of the other is imperative, as an empathic response makes it possible for one to feel real and integrated. Buber (1957) accepts such confirmation as human, for "man wishes to be confirmed in his being a man, and wishes to have a presence in the being of the other. The human person needs confirmation, because man as man needs it" (p.104). Josselson (1992) appears to concur regarding the need for human affirmation, described as "the realm of emotional exchange across space, of validation and empathy, of finding ourselves reflected in others and anchoring ourselves in our effects on them" (p.98). The (m)other's reflective response to her infant's needs confirms her acknowledgement, and affirms that the infant's experience has an impact on the outside world as well. The infant's experienced reality is acknowledged, and the emerging self is recognised as having a place in the outside as well.

Mirroring is also the eye-to-eye contact that visually validates the developing self of the infant. Empathy and eye-to-eye contact become the connecting "tether" (Akhtar, 1992) that



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bridges and reduces the increasing space and distance. Visual contact is reciprocal for, as the infant gazes into the mother's eyes, there is the experience of also being looked at, a visual validation and an awareness of having an effect on the other. Similarly, as we look into the eyes of the other, we find who we are and learn about ourselves. How we view and accept ourselves depends largely on how others view and accept us. Throughout our growth and development, we need to feel valued and accepted in the eyes of the other. Between mother and infant there is a visual language. In the words of Levinas (1979), "The eyes do not shine, they speak". The eyes bear meaning, where "meaning is the face of the Other, and all recourse to words takes place already within the primordial face-to-face of language" (p.206). Meaning something to the other is an aspect of our sense of self and our relation to the world.

#### **3.5.3.4 Metaphorical Holding**

Physical holding precedes metaphorical holding. As holding extends and development continues, our experience of being empathically held is transferred from the intensely personal and physical to the emotional sphere, to the experience that someone is there. Josselson (1992) speaks of the "thereness", or the awareness of the holding of supportive others in our lives. By acknowledging that someone is there for us, we return to our original holding experience. As the years move on beyond infancy, we continue to need the "thereness" of others who can support us emotionally and prevent us from falling. Our need to be held never ceases, and continues with us through life.

Like the good-enough mother who is there and sustains the infant, the quest is to find and feel comfortable in a "good-enough" environment that will be there for us and will facilitate us through life (Winnicott, 1990). The circle of holding that begins during infancy in the relationship with the (m)other extends and continues to gradually expand and include the function of the family, school, work, institutions, social groups, cultural context and meaning systems. As we continue in our daily lives, we need to feel held and to experience this in the values and beliefs pertaining to the meaning systems that contain us. We may continue to exercise cultural practices passed on to us by significant others and, in repeating the traditions, feel held in the wider pattern created. Our meaning systems make us feel validated and acknowledged, providing us with a sense of self and of affirmation. Our

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beliefs and values as in the institution of marriage, religious and other beliefs, create a safety net that holds and support us.

The holding that begins in the arms of the caring, good enough (m)other, gradually expands to include a “good-enough” environment, family, community and society at large. Indeed, “the family continues this holding and society holds the family” (Winnicott, 1986, p.107). While holding bears an ever-widening interpretation, it can only be done by the right people. Before we can let go, we need to feel held. As we embark on life’s developmental journey, the physical and literal holding is metaphorically transferred to the emotional, social and cultural realm, where “the ‘holding’ of infancy becomes the ‘support’ of later years” (Josselson, 1992, p.31). In the awareness of our separateness as humans, we continue in our desire to restore and revive the blissful state of the oneness experienced in the holding relationship with (m)other, as we seek to attach ourselves to others.

### **3.6 Attachment / Holding on**

Holding precedes holding on, otherwise known as attachment. From being attached we can let go. Holding stabilises and anchors us in the belief that we are not alone, while attachment reassures us of our relationship to others. Though holding is not holding on, both experiences are essential to our humanity. If we are not held, we fragment and fall; if we are not attached, we are lost and alone. Josselson (1992) differentiates the concepts of holding and attachment as follows:

Being held is passive (but) attachment is an active process of clinging to someone (either actually or symbolically) in order to reduce our anxiety. Attachment and the affection that accompanies it is one of the most profound of human experiences...attachment is our sense of emotional belongingness (p.45).

Holding and attachment are closely linked experiences that occur early in our lives. While being held contains us and makes us feel whole, attachment fulfils our emotional need to belong. From the initial oneness experienced in mother’s holding, threads emerge, providing the fundamental fibres for our sense of self and continuity of being. From initially being held

by, and attached to, (m)other we gradually let go, diverge and attach ourselves to others, as we weave our relatedness and interconnectedness to the world.

### **3.6.1 What is Attachment?**

In our daily lives, attachment tends to refer to interpersonal relationships. In developmental psychology, however, attachment pertains to specific relationships that reflect unique characteristics like the “bonding” that develops between infant and (m)other. According to Bowlby (1979; 1997; 1998), the infant and (m)other instinctively prompt each other’s behaviour to form an attachment bond. Attachments are our emotional links to others and evolve into affectional bonds (Ainsworth, 1989).

Bowlby (1979), the pioneer of attachment theory, views attachment as “the propensity of human beings to make affection bonds to particular others...” (p.127). Maintaining a relationship to an accessible and responsive (m)other is essential to survival. The availability of, or proximity to, the significant other has to be attained and retained. Throughout one’s life, in times of pain, illness and distress, this need for proximity increases. Attachment is a means of reducing anxiety (Bowlby, 1998). Attachment is a sense of proximity.

Attachment behaviour is the means of attaining and retaining attachment or connectedness. Early components of attachment behaviour are sucking, clinging and following, and these are considered “executor” behaviour. The “signal” behaviours of crying, calling and smiling elicit care and are extended means of attachments. Both executor and signal behaviours bring the infant and (m)other together in forming their “bond”. Various means, modes and actions maintain contact with the (m)other and are accepted as attachment behaviours (Bowlby, 1979). In our need to retain the attachment, we continue to connect with others in various forms that symbolise contact. In contemporary society, via the telephone, letters, SMS or emails, we keep “in touch”.

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Bowlby (1998) identifies representational models or mental states of mind that each individual creates regarding his world and himself in it. Included in the representational model are the (m)other and other significant attachment figures – who they are, where they may be, and the significance of their expected response. Just as the developing infant and child needs to know of the presence of the (m)other, so, too, as adults we need to know that there is someone “there” for us. Personal experience significantly influences the representational models as relevant meaning is attached to them.

In his work on adult development, Levinson (1978) tends to view attachment as synonymous with attachment behaviour, where attachment is being “engaged, involved, needy, plugged in, seeking and rooted” (p.239). Sherman (1987), however, considers such a description as more relevant to attachment behaviour, where visible methods and modes are used to maintain contact with the attachment figure. Attachment includes its own experiential dimension and interconnected meanings. In his study on midlife transitions, Sherman believes in both cognitive and emotional aspects of the attachment relationship, where the representational model as well as the affective bond is included. Guidano and Liotti’s (1983) definition of attachment is used for its recognition of attachment as “a cognitive structure that is constructed during the course of development, starting from inborn dispositions shaped by experiential data and directing the child’s search for proximity and affective contact” (Sherman, 1987, p.132). The definition aptly acknowledges the experiential aspects regarding attachment.

Bowlby (1979) explicates that attachment behaviour continues throughout one’s life. As he expresses it, attachment behaviour “characterize(s) human beings from the cradle to the grave” (p.129). Similarly, Mahler attests that separation-individuation is a process that continues through life. However, although recognising diverse behaviours along life’s continuum, both theorists concur regarding the initial significant anchorage provided by the caring (m)other – the secure base from which the child can grow, develop and explore his world. Accepting the one theory does not imply a rejection of the other, but is accepted rather as a multifaceted approach to the study of letting go. Both theories can facilitate greater insight into the paradoxical “push-pull” process of life, as we move away, yet move towards others.

Attachment, in its connectedness appears to be an attempt to rekindle the holding experience, an effort to revive the early state of oneness enjoyed with (m)other. Like the toddler who returns during Mahler's practising subphase, to "refuel" only to be off again, we continue to attach and separate in our relatedness. We continue to exercise the "push and pull" of the rapprochement subphase. Mahler (1975) points out that it is during the rapprochement subphase that "we feel the mainspring of man's eternal struggle against both fusion and isolation" (p.130). In our attempt to deal with the ambiguity, we attach yet move on, as we seek to individuate, yet desire to belong. We need the emotional connectedness that attachment brings; we hold on.

### **3.6.2 Attachment and Development**

#### **3.6.2.1 Infancy and Childhood**

The physical oneness or "physiological attachment" of the foetus in the womb is replaced by the symbiotic bond with the (m)other. Attachment is rooted in the biological need for protection as proximity and closeness continue through life. Bowlby (1979) proposes that during the first twelve months, the infant builds up the attachment components that are required for bonding. The signal behaviours (smiling, crying) and component responses (clinging, following) create a mutual attachment system to which both infant and mother contribute. Attachment is at its strongest during the child's second and third year.

Expanding on Bowlby's theory, Mary Ainsworth (1973) uses the terms "secure" and "insecure" regarding attachment behaviour. In her studies on children, Ainsworth illustrated that securely attached infants use (m)other as a secure base from which to explore the environment. While maintaining contact (e.g. an occasional glance) with (m)other, her reassuring presence made it possible for the children to move away. On the other hand, infants who were not securely attached, displayed behaviours of avoidance and resistance, with signs of ambivalence and uncertainty. Though the insecurely attached infants did attempt to do without the (m)other in her absence, separation anxiety appeared to increase in unfamiliar situations.

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Santrock (1986) refers to Schaffer and Emerson's longitudinal study that was conducted on infants in 1964. The study revealed that the attachment to (m)other became more focused from six months and remained profoundly so between the ten and eighteen month period. At about seven months, a specific and intense attachment was noted, with a fear of strangers unfolding soon (one-two months) thereafter. The researchers also found that over this period attachments to other significant caregivers appeared to be as intense as the attachment to (m)other.

#### **3.6.2.2 Adolescence**

With its apparent emphasis on separation and autonomy, general developmental theory appears to have overlooked the significance of attachments during adolescence. Josselson (1992) argues that from adolescence onwards, individuals become attached interpersonally to other people, as well as to parents. The attachment is usually to people of the same age and of the opposite sex. Kroger (1983) cites the studies of Cooper, Grotevan and Condon (1985) who indicate that adolescent development can incorporate connectedness and individuality. The adolescent will attempt to discover the significance of relationships beyond the family, finding out who is "there" for him and on whom he can rely. Through the attachments formed, peers gain significance, providing the adolescent with a secure base from which to explore the world. While new relationships develop, they do not dissolve earlier ones. As new connections are formed, older and familiar attachments are extended rather than rejected. With the diverse relationships encountered and dealt with, there is an internalised continuity of being. Josselson (1988) maintains that the investment of attachments during adolescence is primarily a concern with experiencing a continuity of self, rather than whether parents approve or disapprove. Much of the pain of adolescents pertains to the unreliability of attachments at this time. Josselson refutes the concept of autonomy and the absence of attachment relationships. Though adolescents may seek new attachments, there needs to be a continued sense of being held by the parents or caring significant others.

According to Josselson (1988), research findings (Frankel & Dullaert, 1977; Hamid & Wylie, 1980; Offer & Offer, 1975) attest that competent, mature and well-adjusted adolescents enjoy a strong attachment and close and loving relationships with their parents. Limited in their understanding of the true reality of the adolescent experience, predetermined questionnaires appear responsible for the oversight of the significance that attachment and connectedness

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hold in the life of the adolescent. Regarding the attachment of adolescents to the people they talk and think about, Josselson refers to the phenomenological study that she conducted in 1977 with Greenberger and Mc Conochie, on boys and girls, that reveals the significance of attachments to adolescents. As Josselson (1988) describes it: “even if it is only to complain about them, the adolescent has her parents with her at all times” (p.95).

In a comprehensive review, Kroger (1998) refers to the findings of other extensive studies (Quintana and Kerr, 1993; Grotevant & Cooper 1985; Papini, Micka & Barnett, 1989; Weinmann & Newcombe, 1990) on adolescents that acknowledge separateness and connectedness as interrelated. Though separate in the quest for autonomy, the adolescent appears to remain connected.

Contemporary writers (Josselson, 1988; Quintana & Kerr, 1993) recognise the biased tendency of present theory regarding adolescent development. The process of separation-individuation is viewed as a linear movement from merger to separateness, where aspects of connectedness are denied. In a critical review of an object relations approach to adolescence Kroger (1998) refers to the research of Grotevant and Cooper (1985, 1986), Papini et al., (1989) and Weinmann and Newcombe (1990) affirming that the studies “have consistently shown adolescents’ needs for both autonomy and connectedness in the changing dynamics of relationships with parents” (p.187). There is an increasing tendency for research to recognise the significant presence of attachment in the life of the adolescent. The observations of Grotevant and Cooper regarding adolescents’ decision-making tasks, and the interaction with parents, reveal that adolescents whose parents acknowledged their individuality and connectedness were more able to resolve their identity crisis. In their study on adolescence, Quintana and Kerr (1993) found depression to be absent in those adolescents whose parents supported their need for mirroring, nurturance and autonomy. However, where such connectedness or attachment was denied, the adolescents were found to be depressed and anxious. Attachment or human connectedness needs to be recognised as integral to development.

**3.6.2.3 Adulthood**

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The adult, like the child, requires a secure base from which to develop and explore. The secure base provided by a sense of consistency, familiarity, continuity and reliability makes self-development and exploration possible. Being afraid, tired or ill, elicits attempts to regain attachment figures. The secure attachment of adulthood appears to differ to the physical or behavioural attachment of childhood, but is nevertheless present. In the discontinuity and unpredictability of contemporary living, our attachments form continuity. Retaining an inner sense of connectedness is significant. We learn from childhood what procures relationships, and from the secure base provided by our early relationships with (m)other, we continue to seek secure attachments in a human world (Josselson, 1988; 1992).

Personal attachment history influences parenting styles and has significant effects on the following generation. Early attachment experiences influence the later attachments made. Early secure attachment styles tend to continue through adolescence, revealing a positive influence on adjustment and personal autonomy. The framework for our relatedness to others occurs early. Through the representational models of attachment, as described by Bowlby, we attempt to predict and anticipate how others will relate to us. If early attachment experience was secure, we tend to expect consistent, predictable and responsive relationships in our lives. The “representational models” are not internalised, but acquired through interpersonal patterns, and depend on actual experience. Where the representational models respect the child’s need for exploration, the child tends to develop an internal representational model of self as valued and self-reliant (Bowlby, 1979; Goldberg, Muir & Kerr, 1995).

In the process of individual development, attachment is maintained through distant forms of communication. Attachments endure and do not require continued physical interaction, but a mere “keeping in touch”, whether it be through letters, emails or phone calls, as the link through space, by whatever means, is maintained. Though recognising the significance of attachment during infancy and childhood, Bowlby (1979; 1997) considers attachment as neither infantile nor immature, but integral to humanity. The attachment relationship provides a sense of well-being, a feeling that someone is there for us and that we are not alone.



### 3.6.3 Separation and Separateness

In the context of Mahler's developmental theory, separateness pertains to individuation, but in the context of Bowlby's attachment theory, separation relates to anxiety and loss. While Mahler recognises the concept of gain through the process of separation, Bowlby acknowledges the experience of loss. Both theorists firmly accept the value of the (m)other as a significant foundational basis for development. However, while Mahler views separation as the process of gradually moving away, in the presence of (m)other, Bowlby accepts separation in the context of the (m)other's absence or inaccessibility. Whilst the process of separation-individuation includes the concept of gain in the presence of the (m)other, separation with the absence of the (m)other bears implications of anxiety and danger. Furthermore, with each theory, separation entails a different intentionality. While there is a willingness to separate and individuate, separation anxiety and loss is an unwilling separation. Nevertheless, the different viewpoints of these theories are considered valuable and complementary rather than oppositional. Together, both theories provide a broad perspective to understanding the meaning of separation. A concurring conviction is the value and significance attributed to the (m)other's presence, which cannot be underestimated. It is from the firm base of the (m)other-infant relationship that stable development can unfold.

Undoubtedly the presence or absence of the (m)other remains significant. Winnicott's (1958) paper on "The capacity to be alone" acknowledges the value of mother's presence in the paradox of separateness and aloneness. The awareness of (m)other as an external secure base facilitates the infant's capacity to experience being alone. It is the awareness of the presence of (m)other that makes exploration possible. Winnicott concludes that "the capacity to be alone is a highly sophisticated phenomenon. It is closely related to emotional maturity. Paradoxically, the capacity to be alone is the experience of being alone in the presence of someone" (p. 36). The presence and accessibility of (m)other provides a secure base for the individual. Similarly, Bowlby (1979) describes the child's exploratory behaviour as emerging at a time when the early attachment behaviour to (m)other's ceases, but exploration occurs in her presence nevertheless. Self-reliance develops in the awareness of a "reliance on a parent, who provides the child with a secure base from which to explore" (p.114). (M)other provides a secure base from which exploration can take place, but to which the child can return in moments of fear and tiredness.

Similarly, the same pattern of behaviour is reflected throughout one's life as we move away, create a distance and allow space to come between our loved ones and us. Over time and throughout one's life as distances increase, contact is maintained and we seek, once again, to return to our attachment figures. At first it is (m)other, then one's family of origin, then peers. Later, as adults, the base is the newly created family, friendship and social circle. Attachment continues to provide stability and a foundation from which to grow and develop, even as an adult. Bowlby (1979) affirms this by stating that "anyone who has no such base is rootless and intensely lonely" (p.132).

Holding and attachment are in themselves paradoxical, for we are bound to leave that which holds us and we are destined to lose that to which we are attached. Attachment implies the threat of loss, and though we need to be in touch emotionally, we find strength in our togetherness with others. Loss is an unwilling separation, whereas individuation incorporates the willingness to separate and differentiate, but as the growing toddler becomes aware of his separateness, there is the fear of losing (m)other. During Mahler's (1979) rapprochement period, the toddler is aware that he is destined to move away from (m)other, and this awareness creates a sense of ambiguity with the "pleasure of mastery" and separation anxiety. In order to explore and move into his expanding environment, the toddler needs to know that (m)other is there for him. Similarly, as life progresses, we need to know that we are not alone. Where our attachment ceases to be, we feel lost and experience loss. Though separateness implies a sense of individuation in the presence of (m)other, separation with the absence of (m)other is loss.

#### **3.6.4 Loss**

Bowlby (1998, 1979) identifies loss as the unwilling separation from the attachment figure. The desired closeness and accessibility of the attachment figures are primary in the need for protection, and the threat of unwilling separation and loss is potentially traumatic. Following a reasonably stable relationship with (m)other, an unwilling separation bears the sequential phases of protest, despair and denial. While the phase of protest is related to separation anxiety, the phase of despair is related to grief and mourning, and the phase of denial

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(detachment) is related to defence mechanisms, particularly repression. With the trauma of loss that results from separation, attempts are made to restore the earlier state of stability and equilibrium with (m)other. In the words of Bowlby (1979) the “loss of a parent gives rise not only to primary separation anxiety and grief but to processes of mourning in which aggression, the function of which is to achieve reunion, plays a major part” (p.63).

Loss during the early years of life can be catastrophic. In the desire to restore the state of oneness and stability with (m)other, mourning is an appropriate manner of best coping with loss. During 1961, in his initial paper on the “Processes of Mourning”, Bowlby described loss (or sudden separation) as comprising three phases: protest, despair and emotional detachment. About eight years later, however, he acknowledged the mourning process as also including the significant initial phases of numbness and yearning. In a later publication, Bowlby’s (1979) description of the phases of mourning following unexpected loss is as follows:

- (1) Phase of numbness: This phase may last anything from a few hours to a few weeks. There may be outbursts of extreme anger and/or intense distress.
- (2) Phase of yearning and searching: This phase may last for months, even years, and is initially referred to as the “protest phase”. The bereaved individual attempts as far as possible to retrieve the lost person, either through action, thought or feeling, with features of weeping and anger. There may be reproach for desertion, coupled with feelings of ambivalence.
- (3) Phase of despair and disorganisation: Feelings of ambivalence from the previous phase may continue and there is vacillation in action and mood, described as moving “from an immediate expectancy expressed in an angry demand for the person’s return to a despair expressed in subdued pining – or even not expressed at all” (p.49). Hope and despair alternate and continue for an indefinite period.
- (4) Phase of reorganisation and emotional detachment from the lost person: In the awareness of the person’s permanent absence or repeated separations, there is an attempt to reorganise

behaviour.

Bowlby advanced the thesis that separation anxiety, grief and mourning and defence are responses of a single process, and include protest, despair and detachment reflective of that process. Where the period of separation does not continue, attachment is resumed, and once the child is reunited with (m)other, the attachment reveals fresh growth in the form of the child's

insistence on remaining close to her. However, the awareness of a potential repeated loss of the (m)other gives rise to acute anxiety (Bowlby, 1998).

### **3.6.5 Separation Anxiety**

Freud (1968) was the first to recognise separation anxiety and believed in the strong suggestion that “the first anxiety state arose on the occasion of the separation from the mother” (p.331) as part of the birth process. Freud (1971) describes anxiety as “a particular state of expecting danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one” (p.6) and regards it as an instinctual expression of the ego's instinct for self-preservation. Later, Melanie Klein (1946) held that “anxiety arises from the operation of the death instinct within the organism, is felt as fear of annihilation (death) and takes the form of fear of persecution” (p.4). Klein considers the trauma of birth as specific to separation anxiety.

Bowlby's (1979) convictions differ to previous assumptions. He convincingly found abundant evidence to indicate that children, when accompanied by an adult, showed less fear than when on their own. Bowlby revealed that separation anxiety arises in a situation where an attachment figure is absent, and where the situation requires both attachment behaviour and the need to escape. Humans seek to maintain balance and equilibrium between preserving the familiar and reducing stress, in opposition to exploring and reaching out to the new. Unlike Mahler's separation regarding separation-individuation, the unwilling separation from the attachment figure gives rise to separation anxiety. Anxiety erupts as the link with the security base of the attachment figure is threatened, although attempts are made

to reduce the experience of anxiety. The phase of protest is also known as the phase of yearning and searching.

Negative family experiences such as those of parental rejection or repeated threats of abandonment can give rise to excessive separation anxiety. However, where separation anxiety is considerably low or absent, a false impression of maturity can be created. Inge Bretherton (1995) believes that even though a securely attached child protests separation, greater self-reliance is eventually evidenced in the child. This conviction concurs with the findings of Ainsworth (1973) regarding secure and insecure patterns of attachment discussed earlier.

Bowlby (1979) notes that the strangeness of a situation naturally arouses fear and the need for protection. Protection is a significant aspect of the attachment relationship. Following infancy, the initial attachment extends beyond the biological connectedness as a psychological proximity for protection and emotional survival is pursued. The availability of emotional strength and support, rather than a physical capability for protection, is favoured. Anxiety arises in being separate from (m)other. States of discomfort or well-being are experienced in relation to the absence or presence of the (m)other. In unfamiliar situations, the mere presence of a trusted companion with whom there is a secure attachment, greatly reduces fear and anxiety. Bowlby reveals that: “the accessibility of parents and their willingness to respond provides an infant, a child, an adolescent and a young adult with conditions in which he feels secure and with a base from which he feels confident to explore” (p.124). With reference to the availability and reliability of attachment figures, Josselson (1992) speaks of their “thereness” as providing us with strength, and explicates that by their very existence, “attachment figures become wellsprings of confidence” (p.58).

Pine (1971) considers an “anticipatory discomfort” as unfolding during the earlier part of the separation-individuation phase, when and a specific attachment to the (m)other has developed and she begins to leave. As her absence is associated with affective distress, the infant attempts to maintain proximity and keep her close,. While the young child enters his expanding world, a “checking-back” pattern becomes evident, which is a means of retaining

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and reassuring the self of the initial attachment. The “checking-back” pattern is a protection against separation anxiety and reflects normal cognitive and emotional development. Gradually, towards the end of the first year, awareness of a sense of separateness from (m)other gives rise to feelings of anxiety. In Pine’s own words, “stranger anxiety and separation anxiety at this period indicate that the child has developed some concept of a differentiated self, (m)other and ‘other’” (p.117).

A colleague of Mahler’s, Fred Pine (1971), describes the infant’s developmental progression from the initial diffuse unity with (m)other to a differentiated separateness and then to an integrated psychic sense of self. Awareness of a differentiated self gives rise to specific separation anxiety, with the concurrent desire for gratification from (m)other. Though the move, in differentiating the self, is away from (m)other, the need to retain the attachment to (m)other continues. The infant experiences a polarity, for there is neither the capacity actively to avoid the one, nor the capacity to ensure the other. The affect is intense, as the infant can neither guarantee that the longed-for gratification will be met, nor that the separations can be avoided. The point of focal separation and focal gratification is precarious, and the period of separation is inherently unstable. However, as cognitive maturity increases, stability improves, making it possible for pleasant and unpleasant affects to be differentiated and focalised. When the child is able to find a means of attachment, stability ensues and this is an achievement. To quote Pine (1971): “Stability is the achievement ... when a reliable and remembered object relationship serves to replace the earlier symbiosis and to fill the gap of the separateness felt by the child between himself and his mother” (p.122).

Bowlby (1979) always accepted attachment behaviour to be a part of healthy and acceptable aspects of human relatedness, incorporating a natural dependence, and not by any means to be considered regressive or pathological. In this theorist’s own words: “Attachment behaviour (is) a normal and healthy component of man’s instinctive equipment (which) leads us also to regard separation anxiety as the natural and inevitable response whenever an attachment figure is unaccountably missing” (p.87). Similarly, separation anxiety is an instinctive, normal and healthy experience in relation to the environment that contains threatening connotations and meaning. Other researchers and writers (Josselson, 1988;

Quintana & Kerr, 1993; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994) also recognise the significance of interpersonal attachments.

A precarious balance exists between the emotional bond or affective experience of attachment and a sense of separateness, for, although polarised, the experiences are dynamically dialectical. Before attaching ourselves to others, we need to feel held, and through attaching ourselves to others, we seek to retain and relive the experience. With the intrusion of space, we seek to attach ourselves and bridge the gap of isolation as we move through transitional space.

### **3.7 Transitional Space**

In moving on, we enter the space between. From our sense of oneness, we move to separateness. We leave an old familiar world behind and enter an unknown new one. We enter a transition.

#### **3.7.1 Transition**

Transition is derived from two Latin words meaning “to go across” or “to pass through”. This includes the concepts of space and time. In his work on transitions, Naomi Golan (1981) defines transition as “a period of moving from one state to another, with an interval of uncertainty and change in between” (p.12). Golan’s definition recognises transition as a time period, a role shift and a turning point that includes aspects of uncertainty and change. Daniel Levinson’s (1978) description of a developmental transition as that which “creates a boundary zone in which a man terminates the outgoing era and initiates the incoming one” (p.19) is spatial. Levinson conceives a transition as a bridge or passage between two stages, involving a change or a shift from one life structure to another. The notion of a boundary is reminiscent of Winnicott’s concept of potential space, the space where internal and external world blend and find meaning.

#### **3.7.2 Space**

Donald Winnicott (1951) took a major step in identifying the concept of a boundary, where both reality and illusion coexist, creating the notion of potential space, the point of separation and union that occurs between the self and the object. Winnicott discovered the intermediate area of experience, the space between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived. Winnicott paid attention to the transitional space between external and internal reality, and noted the dynamics of this space. His description of the infant's creation of the transitional object managed to fill the "gap" for psychology and the self in relation to the world.

In letting go, we move from oneness to separateness, as space (and distance) enters the process of separation. According to Ashbach and Shermer (1994): "Separation has to do with the boundary and space between mother and infant. It is a process of mutual distancing and of engagement from symbiotic and transformed psychic reality dependence" (p.96). Though psychologically separate, we reach out and relate to others. We attach ourselves to others, and create an interpersonal network that we believe can hold us as we attempt to overcome the physical and psychological space. In her book on the "Space between", Josselson (1992) writes: "Different ways of interrelating are different methods of transcending the chasm that parts us. The 'between' – the way the space is filled or reverberates – becomes all important" (p.5).

### **3.7.2.1 Creation of Space**

During the early months, with the undifferentiated experience of oneness in the holding of the neonate, the "facilitating environment" contextually and actively accommodates the infant's needs. At first, there is no outside world, for in the vacuum the infant is one with the world. Gradually, as space is created, the infant begins to 'hatch' (Mahler et al., 1975) and differentiate in the break-through. In the process of differentiation, the infant creates the initial hatching or pushing away, and believes that he has created the space between himself and (m)other.

### **3.7.2.2 Space and Differentiation**



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At the peak of the symbiotic relationship with (m)other, the process of differentiation unfolds as the infant begins to differentiate his own body from his (m)other's body. Winnicott (1960) views the initial differentiation experience as commencing where the merging of (m)other and child terminates, and there is a delay in the anticipation of (m)other. When the infant finds that the (m)other's attitude has changed, the process of separation begins. From the initial holding experience with (m)other, the infant moves to the "living with" experience. Nevertheless, the environmental mother continues to be there for him, constantly adapting and readapting to the infant's new level of development. As differentiation increases, the infant no longer appears to expect (m)other's magical omnipotence. Similarly, as space and distance increase, (m)other becomes aware of the infant's new capacity to provide signals that guide her to meet his needs.

#### 3.7.2.3 Space and Distance

At first, with the initial subphase of differentiation (5-9 months) a bodily distance is created. During differentiation, the infant's newly acquired autonomous locomotor achievements, as well as the new relationship to mother, allow for an expansion of space and exploration. The infant breaks away, yet continues to retain a connectedness to (m)other. Mahler (1975) describes this behaviour as follows:

All infants like to venture and stay just a bit of a distance away from the enveloping arms of the mother; as soon as they are motorically able to, they like to slide down from mother's lap, but tend to remain or to crawl back and play as close as possible to mother's feet (p.55).

Later, with the practising phase, the infant's increasing locomotor capacity increases his space and widens his world. The infant more actively determines his closeness or distance to mother, but is also now more equipped and able to explore further. As the infant is suddenly exposed to an extended reality, the initial relatively familiar environment presents new horizons, where

“ there is more to see, more to hear, more to touch” (Mahler et al., 1975, p.66).

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The infant's world expands and the manner in which he experiences this world is subtly coloured by the relationship to (m) other, who nevertheless remains pivotal. A new view of the world and a new view of (m)other reveals itself and, though the infant gradually moves out, he returns to her with some new experience. Paradoxically, there is a need to separate, yet a desire to maintain the connection with (m)other. Bergman (1993) writes: "The expanding space between mother and child which belongs to both, is bridged at first by what happens in that space and later by activities displaced onto objects in the outside world..." (pp.214 /215).

In his pioneering paper on distance in psychoanalysis, Bouvet (1958) defines distance as "the gap which separates the way in which a subject expresses his instinctual drives from how he would express them if the process of "handling" or "managing" (in French: *amenagement*) these expressions did not intervene" (p.211). Though the definition implies intrapsychic aspects, later in the same paper Bouvet recognises the interpersonal aspect of distance. He writes about the "rapprocher", or distance between self and other, that progressively decreases until the space between disappears. The concept of "rapprocher" is reminiscent of, and a precursor to, the work of Margaret Mahler.

Mahler's (1965) rapprochement subphase (third of separation-individuation) recognises both intrapsychic and interpersonal aspects in the process of attaining autonomy. The phase is characterised by the joy of personal competence, but also the anxiety of separation, as the infant is confronted with the awareness of an impending separateness from (m)other. The term rapprochement reflects a juxtaposition of inner and outer. Similarly, the delight of the pursuit of autonomy accompanies the desire for a union with (m)other. The opposing polarities of moving away from, and moving towards, (m)other are paradoxically present. Capturing the contradiction, Mahler (1972 a) writes: "Here in the rapprochement subphase, we feel is the mainspring of man's eternal struggle against both fusion and isolation" (p.130). The young child is challenged to resolve the conflict and find a balance between the two confronting polarities.

Mahler (Mahler, et al., 1975) speaks of the "optimal distance" or position between (m)other and the young child that best allows for individuation. Optimal distance is considered the

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“position between mother and child that best allows the infant to develop those faculties which he needs to grow, that is to individuate” (p.291). For each stage, an optimal distance is arrived at that maintains the balance between the quest for autonomy and the desire to remain connected to (m)other. Optimal distance is attained at a time when the infant has the opportunity to begin moving away from mother and, at some distance, to explore and exercise a degree of autonomy. For each stage of development, an optimal position is reached. At first, during the symbiotic stage, the infant blends with the (m)other’s body; then, during the differentiation subphase, the increasing space created allows for the infant’s exploration of (m)other in a tactile and visual manner. Thereafter, with the practising subphase and the greater distance created, there is the opportunity for exploration. During rapprochement, the toddler seeks to move away, yet desires to return and find (m)other. The infant needs to believe that he determines the distance of separation from (m)other, and that the space and distance created is under his control. The young child retains a connectedness throughout the process of separation, and, though individuation increases, the connectedness is facilitated by (1) language development, as in the use of the personal pronoun and the ability to identify self and others, as well as to find expression; (2) internalisation process, in the identification with the “good” (m)other and father as well as incorporation of their rules and expectations; and (3) the increasing ability to express needs, wishes and fantasies through play where a sense of mastery is also experienced. The interpersonal distance between (m)other and child is eventually internalised to the intrapsychic pattern of individuation, as individual differences arise and a sense of self is defined (Mahler, 1975; 1979).

In moving away from (m)other, the infant continually needs to return to (m)other as home base and to refuel emotionally. This process is particularly evident during the subphase of rapprochement, where we find the paradoxical push – pull experience. Mahler’s intrapsychic perspective of distance “between self and object world” is the oscillation and precarious balance between the fear of merger (push) and the need to achieve a stable sense of self in the desire for a oneness (pull), in the infant’s relation to the (m)other. Akhtar’s (1992) description of optimal distance depicts a precarious balance, regarding space “as a psychic position that permits intimacy without loss of autonomy and separateness without painful aloneness” (p.30).

### 3.7.3 Illusion and Disillusion

The process of separation is dialectical, including both aspects of illusion and disillusion, oneness and separateness. In the space and distance created, the infant needs to retain a connectedness with (m)other, yet seeks to move away and separate. The intermediate area of potential space of which Winnicott (1951) speaks is the area that provides opportunity for the infant to experience something that is both infant and (m)other, both inside and outside, both subject and object. The relationship to the world is experienced within the self. According to Winnicott, contact between the psyche and the environment is established through the use of illusion. The illusion is that which exists between the infant and the environment. What is perceived in the environment is, at first, experienced subjectively, and then attributed as an object of the environment. In terms of the infant (subject-inside) and the mother's breast (object-outside), the two phenomena relate to each other and in the moment of overlap, the illusion resides. In Winnicott's (1951) own words:

The mother's adaptation to the infant's needs, when good enough, gives the infant the *illusion* that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create. In other words, there is an overlap between what the mother supplies and what the child might conceive of . . . . Psychologically the infant takes from the breast that is part of the infant, and the mother gives milk to an infant that is part of herself. In psychology the idea of interchange is based on an illusion (p.239).

The illusory experience occurs in the area of inner reality and external world, the third dimension or "intermediate area of experiencing". It is that area to which both inner reality and external life contribute. The unchallenged intermediate area relieves the strain of relating inner and outer reality. It is the area between subject and object, yet also the area of inner reality and external life. It is an area of retreat. Winnicott (1951) writes:

It (the intermediate area of experiencing) is an area which is not challenged, because no claim is made on its behalf except that it shall exist as a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet inter-related (p.230).

The intermediate area is both inner and outer, yet neither inner nor outer, and the illusion is created in the potential space that makes it possible for the infant to experience a state of omnipotence and a sense of continuity in time. During the period of omnipotence while (m)other and infant mutually share their experience, the infant is protected from experiencing feelings of destructiveness, and this contributes to a sense of continuity. The illusion created is the basis to future relationships regarding the self, world and other (De Astis, 1997; Winnicott, 1992).

The intermediate area makes it possible for the infant to believe that the lived experience is either his own, or is something that belongs to external reality. Accepting reality is never complete, as reality is diffuse and belongs to both inner and outer worlds. The stability of the illusion and sense of the continuity of being determines the infant's successful acceptance of reality. As the infant gradually moves from the illusion to being deluded, reality is finally accepted and resolution achieved. Though the (m)other provides adequate opportunity for the illusion, her subsequent task, paradoxically, is to provide opportunity for the infant's gradual disillusionment, a necessary process in facilitating separation (Winnicott, 1992).

The evolution from illusion to disillusionment may be considered a movement from a state of dependence to greater independence, or from a state of fusion towards greater separation and individuation (Mahler). According to Winnicott (1951), disillusionment is preliminary to weaning, where weaning is not the mere termination of breast-feeding, but a gradual process of coming to terms with reality and recognising (m)other as being beyond infantile omnipotence and part of the external world. According to André Green (1986), for differentiation to take place, the "subjective object" conceived, essentially precedes perception of the "objective object". In other words, the infant has first to experience the object or other as part of the self, before experiencing it as separate. Such transformation occurs in the potential space or space for creative and cultural experience. Aspects of culture (art, science, religion and others) become the unchallenged intermediate area of experience during the adult years (Winnicott, 1992; 1986).

The transitional position, or intermediate area, is the domain of "objective perception", which makes it possible for the infant to be primarily creative, based on external reality. For

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Winnicott, the process of accepting reality is the process of separating from (m)other. Transitional objects and transitional phenomena fill the space between and facilitate the process of accepting reality. The intermediate area of experience between the “subject” and “object” is where transitional objects and transitional phenomena become evident.

#### **3.7.4 Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena**

Transitional objects and phenomena represent the illusion of oneness that the infant creates with the (m)other’s involved presence in her holding and caring. The infant experiences his first possession or transitional object as his own creation. It is the first “not-me” possession. The transitional object is both inside and outside. It is both self and other, but also differentiated. The transitional object facilitates the process of separation from (m)other for the infant.

André Green (1986) writes:

The transitional object, which is neither internal nor external but located in the intermediate area of potential space, comes to life and comes into use ‘in the beginning’ of the separation between mother and baby. The transitional object invokes the idea of transitional space which is extended into the cultural experience of sublimation. (pp.284/285).

The experience of the symbiotic merger replaces the physiological attachment of intrauterine life that is essential to normal foetal and neonatal growth and development. Similarly, the transitional object replaces the symbiosis and the experience of oneness for the infant where, according to Tolpin (1971), the essential bond is “heir to the infant’s original narcissism that is preserved when it is assigned to the idealised parent imago” (p.324). The transitional object provides the bridge between the coming and going, the parting and arriving, from the old to the new. Essentially, the transitional object is used in the infant’s attempt to deal with the inevitable conflict of anxiety (moving into the unknown) and sadness (leaving the merger with (m)other). Early separation evokes anxiety and a depressive effect due to the physical separation and psychological differentiation of self from (m)other. The transitional object

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provides an attachment in the separateness from (m)other, as subjective and objective reality merge. (Attwood & Stolorow, 1984).

Tolpin (1971) considers the transitional object as a transitional form of mental structure that is eventually integrated as part of the child's own psychological structure. By virtue of the infant's mental activities, the child becomes more able to soothe himself and, in a sense, autonomously to recreate the illusion and merger with (m)other as the inanimate object (e.g. bottle, blanket) becomes a treasured "not me" possession. To Tolpin, the transitional object phenomenon is an essential "leap" from maternal regulation to self-regulation, but recognises a further special "leap" from the soothing inanimate object to an eventual personal capacity for self-soothing. Tolpin explicates that "the transitional bond between mother and infant will "pass away" like the transitional object itself – the functions of the self object tie 'go inside' as 'the mysterious knot' of the personality which binds isolated parts into a whole unit" (pp.348/349). Such a step is a 'leap' forward in the infant's psychological structure, promoting resolution and the successful conclusion of the separation-individuation phase of development.

The infant's relationship to the transitional object includes particular qualities, a summary of which is presented as follows:

1. The infant assumes rights over the object...some abrogation of "omnipotence" is a feature from the start.
2. The object is affectionately cuddled, as well as excitedly loved and mutilated.
3. It must never change unless changed by the infant.
4. It must survive instinctual loving, and also hating and...pure aggression.
5. Nevertheless, it must seem to the infant to give warmth, or to move, or to have texture...to show it has vitality or reality of its own.
6. It comes from without...but not so from the point of view of the baby. Neither does it come from within; it is not a hallucination.
7. Its fate is to be gradually allowed to be "decathected"...It is not forgotten and it is not mourned... (Khan, 1992; pp.xix/xx)

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The transitional object is more than the object it is and diverse in its function. The presence of the object in being “there” makes it possible for the child to evolve and develop an inner reality and external world and yet, at the same time, to differentiate it as “not-me”. The significance of the object is its paradox and diversity in meaning. Winnicott purports that the presence of the paradox needs to be maintained rather than resolved. Transitional “objects” extend beyond what is tangible. The presence of language provides a connectedness for the infant, where language is paradoxical and created within the potential space, differentiating and separating, yet uniting in oneness.

The value and significance of sound cannot be overlooked. Barclay (1993) acknowledges Winnicott’s verification of a link for the infant regarding aural and oral phenomena, where the sounds produced either by the environment or by the infant are associated with feeding and general sustenance. Sounds bear meaning for the infant who may wish to retain these. Transitional objects can take various forms. In Barclay’s own words, “when transitional ‘objects’ are heard in the form of tunes, songs, or fragments of tunes, or when they are phrases or words, these objects can be understood as *transitional acoumena*” (p.40). The potential for the unfolding of the acoumena begins during the Echo Phase. Barclay identifies the Echo Phase and includes it as the dimension of sound akin to Lacan’s Mirror Stage (3-18 months). The transitional object, whether tangible or not, is created in the intermediate area or space between the infant and (m)other that serves the illusion of oneness. Speech and language are created in the potential space.

#### **3.7.4.1 Transitional Object and Separateness**

While the transitional object serves the illusion of oneness, the borrowed object serves the concept of separateness. Anni Bergman (1993) points to a difference between the borrowed and the given object. Though the infant “creates” the transitional object given by mother, the object borrowed from the world as it is explored, is the object discovered (and created) by the infant. The object is brought to (m)other from the horizons beyond the parameters with (m)other. Bergman explicates as follows:



These (discovered) objects represent both mother and the outside world. Thus, they may serve both as a confirmation of the early ‘we’ and ‘ours’ experience – one moment part of the mother, the next moment part of the self, a self not yet fully experienced as separate – and at the same time are experienced as not-mother, that is part of the world outside (pp. 204/205).

The conflicts related to separation are dealt with by the creative process which includes the creation of the transitional object, as well as the creation of the (m)other as a separate person. The intensity of the illusion colours the pleasure the infant experiences in finding the (m)other each time he returns, and, reassured each time of her presence, believes that he has created her. The infant requires the opportunity to create the (m)other for himself. If elusive, (m)other can be stressful, while the intrusive (m)other can deny the infant the opportunity of creating her for himself. As the infant continues to return with each consecutive widening circle of his world, the mother continues to be pivotal to the infant’s being. Initial explorations tend to include those objects (such as glasses or jewellery) that are part of mother, yet not part of her. With his expanding world and increasing exploration, a special interest regarding inanimate objects develops. Transitional objects play a significant role in facilitating the infant’s separation and exploration of the “space between” (Bergman, 1993).

With the increasing space and distances created during the differentiation and practising (Mahler’s) subphases, the child gradually becomes aware of his separateness. A significant awareness of separateness is achieved as the gap widens between the (m)other and infant during the rapprochement subphase. As objects are removed from the (m)other, the infant symbolically takes her along with him and, in bringing objects to her, he gives himself in return. While separateness is identified and attended to, (m)other is experienced as an extension of, but also as an entity that is separate from, the self. The infant’s behaviour, and his use of transitional objects affirms the inevitable separateness, yet maintains the desired oneness. Once again, the intermediate area with the transitional object provides the solution, yet retains the paradox of the transitional space or gap.

### **3.7.5 The Gap and Illusion**

The gap is the void or absence in the presence. Lacan (1988b) employs the term gap to denote the space or to use his words, “large hole or opening” that evolves “whereby death makes itself felt” (p.210). For Lacan, the gap is essentially the rupture between man and nature, initially evident during the mirror stage, where man becomes alienated from his true self. The gap is the illusion or dual relation between the ego and the reflected image that fills the gap. Lacan (1988b) attends to the specific and special relation that the human being has to his own image, and describes it as “a relation of gap, of alienating tension” (p.323).

Winnicott’s (1951) theory of the transitional object is that in the absence of the mother’s presence, the transitional object creates the illusion of a union with mother. Both Winnicott and Lacan speak of an illusion arising in the space between the self and other. Winnicott’s concept of “illusion” appears akin to Lacan’s notion of “deception” that emerges during the Mirror Phase. For Winnicott, the transitional space (or gap) is filled through the transitional object or sublimated cultural activities of adulthood. For Lacan, the gap is filled via the illusionary realm that captures and entraps the individual, and though the mirror or social image entraps him, it also reflects subjectivity. As discussed, the transitional object facilitates the move from the inner (subjective object) to the outer (objective object) and, through the process, we find the expansion in the space of thought and experience as taking precedence over the “object”. The object facilitates the process of transition and the expansion of self, regarding thought and emotions.

The transitional object is the “not-me” possession. The concept of absence is a crucial inclusion in Winnicott’s (1951) transitional objects theory regarding the “not-me” possessions. André Green (1986) formulates the concept of “negative satisfaction” where paradoxically, in possession of the object, the point is posed that “all I have got is what I have not got” (p.285). It is the space that makes the creation of the object possible, for what the child experiences as being present in reality is actually not. The experience is the retention of what is absent. To Bowlby (1979), absence of the (m)other for the young infant is death of the (m)other to the infant. To Green (1986), in absence or death, “the only thing real is the gap” (p. 291). Green expands upon the concept of absence as follows:

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Absence does not mean loss but potential presence. For absence, paradoxically, may signify either an imaginary presence, or else an unimaginable non-existence. It is absence in this first sense which leads to the capacity to be alone (in the presence of the object) and to the activity of representation and of creating the imaginary: the transitional object constructed within that space of illusion never violated by the question “Was the object created or was it found? (p.293)

Finding and creating the (symbolic) order of language liberates man from the tension and entrapment of the imaginary order of vision. Lacan (1988b) accepts that “there is no absence in the real. There is only absence if you suggest that there may be a presence, there where there isn’t one” (p.313). For Lacan (Evans, 1996), the “symbolic order (of language) is characterised by the fundamental binary opposition between absence and presence”. The word is “a presence made of absence” (Evans, 1996, p. 65). We attempt to fill the void through language. Verbal communication or the symbolic order of language facilitates and resolves entrapment of the visual or imaginary (Wolman 1997; Lacan, 1978). Winnicott’s (1951) intermediate space or area of illusion remains unchallenged in respect of whether it belongs to an “inner” or “outer” (shared) reality. The intense experiences of culture, religion, the arts, creative and scientific work, reflective of that space, constitute a great part of human experience. Transitional space essentially pertains to the presence or absence of the object as it is found or created.

#### **3.7.6 Presence in Absence**

Absence and presence are found in the gap. Bowlby (1998) defines the concepts of presence and absence in terms of accessibility, where presence means “ready accessibility”, while absence means inaccessibility. To Bowlby, attachment figures are either accessible (present) or inaccessible (absent), whether temporarily (through separation) or permanently (through loss). The inaccessibility of the attachment figure gives rise to feelings of anxiety. André Green (1986) recognises absence as potential space rather than loss, signifying either an “imaginary presence” or an “unimaginable non-existence”.

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”Object losing” (letting go) and “object finding” (holding on) processes occur and recur during development in the ego’s attempt to restructure (Blos, 1967). These processes of holding on and letting go are evidenced in games regarding presence and absence. Such games are initiated during the preverbal period, with the impact on visual perception. Freud illustrates such a game by describing his grandchild playing the cotton-reel game. This is perhaps the most famous of all transitional objects recorded in the psychological literature. Freud’s (1971) description reads as follows:

What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive “o-o-o-o”. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful ‘da’. This then was the complete game – disappearance and return... . It was related to the child’s cultural achievement...”  
(p. 9).

Similarly, in the context of absence and presence, Winnicott (1941) describes a spatula game played by an infant he observed. At first, the infant accidentally drops a spatula, restores it and drops it again, but less by mistake than before. With joy, he retrieves it and is delighted at its return. The spatula game (between five and thirteen months) is analogous to Freud’s observation of the *fort-da* (gone-here) cotton-reel game, whereby the infant practises ridding himself of the spatula, which is essentially the (m)other. This is the game of disappearance and return. The child voluntarily throws away or rids himself of the spatula (or reel) and prepares for the absent (m)other. Winnicott provides the following description: “ When the mother goes away, this is not only a loss for him of the external real (m)other, but also a test of the child’s relation to his *inside* mother” (p.68). The (m)other in the external world, and the (m)other of the internal world are closely bound and present in the young child’s mind. Through these games, the young child is able to demonstrate to himself that his internal mother has neither disappeared from his inner world, nor is she destroyed, but continues to be present in the manner in which he knows her. Through such activities, the young child is able to revise his relationship to the world and to himself. In the words of Winnicott (1941): “The child gains reassurance about the fate of his internal mother and about her attitude; a depressed mood which accompanies anxiety about the internal mother is relieved, and happiness regained (pp. 68/69).

Another early game that the young child tends to enjoy playing is the peek-a-boo game, initiated by (m)other and then continued by the little one. The peek-a-boo game usually commences during the first subphase (differentiation) of the individuation process and often becomes a favourite pastime during the early rapprochement period, where the awareness of separateness increases in the presence of interpersonal relationships. The peek-a-boo game enjoyed by (m)other and child is indicative of this movement away from, yet reunion with, (m)other. It is the movement from passive to active, from loss to regaining the preliminary push and pull that Mahler describes as necessary in the process of separation individuation. Ball games facilitate social interaction, yet also help to resolve the fears and feelings of separation or parting as the object (ball) is retrieved and a sense of continuity is retained (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975). The significance of language development during the push-pull process of rapprochement in the separation from (m)other cannot be underestimated. The words “hello” and “bye-bye” are significantly used words during the Practising Period. The words are reflective of the to-and-fro movement of development. It is in games and then in language that we find the child’s first awareness of separateness (*fort*), yet also the realisation of a reunion (*da*) through language. Essentially, language is a presence in absence (Lacan, 1988).

We encounter the experience of absence and presence early in our lives as we attempt to integrate this with our being in the world, initially non-verbally through the imaginary sphere, and later verbally through language. The early peek-a-boo game of infancy often played with (m)other during the early phases of separation-individuation is later replaced with the hide-and-seek game played with peers. Throughout development, attempts are made to resolve the polarity of presence and absence, life and death.

Though the examples cited above depend on visual perception, the visual aspects involved are gradually connoted with verbal expression which eventually replaces what is visually perceived. Pertaining to language and auditory phenomena, Freud’s “fort/da” game with the two sounds “O/A” are a verbal modulation of presence and absence. The O/A sounds are accepted as “a primitive phonemic opposition representing the child’s entry into the symbolic order of language. These sounds reflect the presence and absence of persons and things”

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(Evans, 1996, p.1). For Lacan, as the word fills the void, the word is “a presence made of absence”. Viewed through a Winnicottian lens, we could perhaps say that the word is the transitional object of the original potential space between infant and mother. The presence and absence of words connects, yet separates, us in our relationship to others.

To the young child, the presence and absence of the object, the back-and-forth movement between (m)other and child is echoed in the fort-da experience or the push-and-pull aspects of the to and fro rhythm of development that occurs in the space of transition. The word connects, yet separates. To quote Ruth Josselson (1992): “Relatedness and individuality are not dichotomous. Action takes place only within a relational matrix; the self is realised through others; development concerns both maintaining our ties to others and differentiating from them” (p.15). In “man’s eternal struggle against both fusion and isolation”, there is the fear of object loss, yet desire for union. It is from this precarious balance that autonomy unfolds.

## **3.8 Autonomy**

Developmental psychology appears to have focused on the process of human growth and maturity in terms of the journey from dependence to autonomy. The concept of separation remains dominant in the literature where selfhood, as it pertains to the theory of separation-individuation, is the dominant paradigm. With its emphasis on autonomy and the developmental progress towards the individuation of self, the work of Margaret Mahler holds prominence. In letting go, human development is the mobility of growth and maturity from a state of dependence to independence or merger to separateness, with an evolving and differentiated sense of self.

### **3.8.1 Autonomy and Independence**

The terms dependence, independence and autonomy are predominant in the developmental literature. Fairbairn (1941) views development in terms of object relationships and describes it as “a process whereby infantile dependence upon the object gradually gives place to mature dependence upon the object” (p.34). Acknowledging the significance of relationships, Fairbairn prefers to use the term “mature dependence” rather than independence. Mature dependence is described as involving “a relationship between two independent individuals,

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who are completely differentiated from one another as mutual objects”, while independence is the absolute differentiation of individuals from one another.

Infantile dependence is the primary identification with the object. In the process of development, the primary identification with the original object relationship with (m)other is abandoned and a differentiated object relationship is adopted. The initial stage of infantile dependence or predominantly “taking” (sucking, incorporating) attitude is replaced by a mature dependence or predominantly ‘giving’ attitude. A transition period arises between the immature and mature dependence periods as the maturing infant seeks to abandon the “taking” attitude and gradually adopts the more “giving” attitude of mature dependence. Fairbairn (1994) speaks of the dichotomy of the transition period or stage of quasi-independence where (m)other is accepted and rejected until mature dependence is attained. He recognises the paradox of the transition stage as conflict arises between the urge to progress and the urge to regress. While Winnicott (1951) accepts the paradox present in the transitional space, Fairbairn views the transition to “mature independence” as a basic phobic dependence/independence conflict. Evidence of the significant ambivalence of the developing young child is recognised by both theorists as the significance of relationships continues.

Winnicott (1963b) views maturity as a process that moves through stages “towards independence”, within a social context. From a state of ‘absolute dependence’, the infant moves through relative dependence towards independence. To Winnicott “Independence is never absolute. The healthy individual does not become isolated, but becomes related to the environment in such a way that the individual and the environment can be said to be interdependent” (p.84). In discussing the concept of the healthy individual, Winnicott (1986) believes that there is no such thing as independence and postulates that “it would be unhealthy for an individual to be so withdrawn as to feel independent and invulnerable” adding that, “if such a person is alive, then there is dependence indeed!” (p.21). As discussed earlier, the young infant begins its life in the context of a holding environment, which, if good enough and consistently present, makes personal development possible according to the tendencies inherited. That which unfolds is “ a continuity of existence that becomes a sense of existing, a sense of self, and eventually results in autonomy” (p.28).

Erikson (1971; 1969) recognises autonomy as arriving with the resolution of the Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt phase, when the young child moves from being a receptive, passive infant, controlled by the (m)other and /or parents, towards greater independence and autonomy. For the toddler to develop autonomy, a firmly established sense of trust is necessary. At first, there is a significant awareness of the ability to control bodily functions and later, possibly, aspects of the environment, perhaps even people and events. The maturity experienced initially pertains to muscular co-ordination and verbal abilities, characterised by the ability to hold on and to let go. The highly dependent young child undergoes and experiences changes that influence the relationship with his world, whether he is comfortable with self-expression or controlled and anxious. At this point, the young child will either begin to experience an autonomous will, or be confronted with a propensity for doubt and shame.

Knowles (1986) elaborates on Erikson's theory regarding the central existential aspect of the willing experience during the Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt phase, a phase which is integral to the self. During this time, the young child devotes his energies to exercising personal will and participating as a complete human being, relating to a personal and interpersonal world. It is here that the young child begins literally to take a stand. Where Erikson uses the term "self-control", Knowles prefers to speak of "control", reasoning that the control to the young child extends beyond the self. To support his viewpoint Knowles (1986) writes: "I am most myself, not in a narcissistic way but in a dialogal way, since there is always an object pole to my willing" (p.58). The self can extend beyond the self. Unlike Erikson who considers the experience of personal will as subject to the ego, Knowles accepts personal will as the existential aspect of self that facilitates integration. .

### **3.8.2 Internalisation, Integration and Individuation**

Heinz Hartmann (1958, 1952), an ego psychologist, describes autonomy in terms of ego processes and ego functioning. This theorist extended the Freudian concept of the defensive ego to include non-defensive aspects, considered to be the primary autonomous functions of the ego. As Hartman views it, the autonomous functions of the ego belong to its "conflict



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free” domain, whereby the relation between “adaptation” to outer reality and the state of inner reality becomes accessible, and the integration between inner and outer worlds becomes possible. Memory, cognition, reality testing, locomotor integration and other functions are all considered essential for the development of ego autonomy, yet require that the (m)other be available as the libidinal source for the functions to develop and synthesise to their full potential. Hartmann (1958) speaks of the autonomous ego as conflict-free and able to function independent of id pressure. He views the autonomous ego as distancing itself from the id-ego conflicts. Hartmann’s work forms one of the cardinal hypotheses for the work of Mahler and her colleagues regarding the final (yet open) stage of separation-individuation and the integration of inner and outer worlds

In line with Hartmann’s theory, the concept of establishing affective pattern object constancy is incorporated in the separation–individuation theory during the fourth subphase when greater cognitive maturity emerges. At this time, the young child’s task is to achieve individuality as well as to attain a certain degree of object constancy. Awareness that the (m)other’s relieving activities can be signalled for is “a first great step forward” for the young child’s psyche as the narcissistic perception of the mother continues. During the (differentiation) phase, the functions of the (m)other make it possible for the infant to continue experiencing what she does to relieve anxiety as his own doing. The infant’s gradual internalisation of a properly and positively cathected inner image of the (m)other, establishes a pattern of affective object constancy (Tolpin, 1971).

Object constancy is a significant aspect of normal development that facilitates the intrapsychic structure that supports the ego in its capacity to delay and manage separation anxiety. Fleming (1975) gives an account of object constancy being present when “a mental representation of the need satisfying object has been organized in the mind and can be evoked as a memory in the absence of the object” (p.746). According to Tolpin (1971) and Settlege (1994), such a self-regulatory function provides the structure that enables the child to let go of the parent, made possible through identification and internalisation of that parent.

Despite some degree of difficulty and tension, the constant inner image of the object or (m)other will create the opportunity for the young child to function independently while the

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ego is supported in its regulatory functions. To some extent, internalisation liberates the child for, “as the individual internalises what was external, he simultaneously gains autonomy from it” (Josselson 1980, p.190). As the young child begins to reassure and comfort himself in the manner in which mother used to, anxiety is reduced. By means of internalising (m)other and retaining the image he has of her, the child is initially able to comfort himself as he experiences (m)other as comforting him. The tendency is later to identify with this internalisation and to believe that the comforting is part of the self.

Jacques Lacan (1988) challenges Hartmann’s view that the existence of the autonomous ego or state of integration is conflict free, for, in the duality of the ego in relation to its image, there is conflict. Autonomy, to Lacan, is an illusion whereby the ego accepts the conscious or imaginary realm. The “illusion” becomes apparent in the dual relationship between the ego and specular image during the mirror stage (*stade du miroir*), which represents the basic aspect of the structure of subjectivity that lures the infant into believing that he is as whole and integrated as he is reflected and appears in his own image in the mirror. With the quest to maintain the intersubjective experience of a oneness with (m)other, the image and imaginary realm ‘captures’ the infant during the Mirror Stage and continues to capture, deceive and alienate the individual from himself, thus creating a gap. The deception that originates with the reflection of the Mirror Stage is echoed in the relationship with (m)other and later in the social context. For Lacan (1953),

It is the gap separating man from nature that determines his lack of relationship to nature, and begets his narcissistic shield, with its nacreous covering on which is painted the world from which he is ever cut off but this same structure is also the sight where his own milieu is grafted on to hi, i.e. the society of his fellow men. (p.16).

The mirror image serves as a mirage for the “I”. Visually perceived, the image promises competence, yet also alienates with a continuous sense of discord. Autonomy, to Lacan, is an illusion for what the infant begins to believe is his “I” or “Me”. That which is perceived remains the ego that continues to deceive.

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Similar to Hartman's view is Kohut's (1988) understanding of the formation of a transitional psychic structure that facilitates the formation of a cohesive self. Where Hartman speaks of an ego and ego functions, Kohut speaks of the self and the impact of empathy on development. He describes the empathic merger of the child with the empathic responsive human milieu or self-object. The (m)other empathically serves as the self-object, sustains the child and remedies the arising homeostatic imbalance. The presence of anxiety, distress or imbalance with the child brings about an empathic resonance with the (m)other or self-object. The (m)other communicates this via touch and/or vocal contact or other means and restores a balance for the child. The (m)other's (self-object) feeling states are essentially transmitted to the child, but experienced by the child as if these feeling states of the (m)other were his own. As much as oxygen is vital for life, Kohut accepts empathy as a psychological necessity. While the nuclear self of the young child is consolidated, internalisations are transmuted. Kohut views the relationship we have with others as integral to the self, and does not believe that absolute autonomy for the self is possible. Mahler's concept of symbiosis is similar to Kohut's concept of the self-object merger, with its recognition of interpersonal rather than biological aspects of oneness.

Regarding ego development and autonomy, object relations theory has made it possible for us to understand the processes of internalisation and individuation as being central.

Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) define object relations as residing in the individual's "interactions with external and internal (real and imagined) other people, and to the relationship between...

internal and external object worlds" (pp13-14). Mahler, Pine and Bergman's (1975)

description of separation-individuation is complex regarding ego development, as the ego gradually differentiates itself as separate and unique from (m)other. From experiencing the oneness of symbiosis with (m)other, the child differentiates and develops its own personal perceptions. Mahler accepts separation and individuation as two complementary developments, as the young child separates from its fusion with (m)other and undergoes his psychological birth process, whereby identity begins to evolve in the early unfolding of individuality. In gaining a sense of self and becoming autonomous, individuation entails differentiation.

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In Mahler's final phase of separation-individuation we find autonomy and the evolving structure of the self. The task of the final phase of separation-individuation is the resolution of the rapprochement crisis of essentially being able to separate and individuate from (m)other, yet remain one with her. With the increasing cognitive maturity gained, the child is more able to fantasise, test for reality and verbalise, becoming more equipped to deal with the task of resolving the crisis (Akhtar and Parens, 1991). Verbal ability improves considerably with speech and language, facilitating the integration of inner and outer worlds and resolution of the rapprochement crisis.

#### **3.8.3 Speech and Language**

Verbalisation through the use of speech and language is a valuable attainment for the young child as the expression of feelings and wishes are made possible. Such a means of self-expression leads to an increase in the mastery or sense of competency for the ego. Wolman (1997) notes that "verbal communication helps the post rapprochement child catch up from delays in the first three stages of separation-individuation" (p.52). Separation based on verbal rather than imaginary distances is learnt where the use of verbal communications increases the evident differences. In terms of Lacan, the physical conceptual understanding of an optimal distance from (m)other is now also defined symbolically, where the spatial distance between toddler and (m)other is not only the literal distance between them. Furthermore, verbalisation together with an increased cognitive ability, assists the ego in distinguishing between fantasy and reality, thereby providing the ego with fluidity. Katan (1961) attests that:

Verbalization prevents the fixation of a part of the ego at a certain level and keeps open the transition to further development. Thus through verbalization, the ego is able to master its affects and does not have to resort to defences like denial, avoidance, etc., to shut these out (p.188).

Before being able to verbalise, the young child has to be receptive to the sounds or echoes of his world and to acoustical phenomena, aspects of which will later be synthesised into meaningful units. During the eighteen month (rapprochement) period, it is estimated that

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children learn more than 14,000 words or nine new words per day (Rice, 1989). The young child prepares and equips himself to deal with the challenge of autonomy.

Barclay (1993) recognises the significant impact of acoustical phenomena or 'acoumena' in the development of the infant's subjectivity. As the psychological symbiosis begins to dissolve, there is a loss for the infant of the intersubjective oneness that he knew with (m)other. The infant is subjected to the symbolic order and the acquisition of language. Barclay names and includes the Echo Phase as an added dimension to the specular image of Lacan's Mirror Stage, where the young child's sonic relationship to the self, to his parents and to society is set in motion and finds harmony or discord. In Barclay's words: "The Echo Phase is a long musical phrase that obtains meaning around the time of the Mirror Stage (nine months of age, approximately), when the periodicity of social relations begins to hew that music into language" (p.38). Language becomes a significant part in the child's thinking and communication, influencing his relationship to the world and being influenced by it. Language establishes the unique intersubjective relation to the environment, and this is accomplished through the medium of speech. The early verbal echoes to which the infant was receptive gradually attain meaning as the young child begins to express himself and instil personal meaning. To quote Barclay (1993):

Meaning is a primary factor in producing the end of babbling and the inauguration of the infant's slow immersion in an intersubjective dimension. In the normal child, the speech sounds of the surround and their relation to the phonetic sounds the child produces are crucial in that meaning is carried by these sounds and is a consequence of their existence (p.35).

Linguistic relations facilitate the maintenance of the intersubjective relationship. This appears paramount for the young child who attempts to resolve the rapprochement crises, and is also important for the developing individual. That is, while having to move away and individuate from (m)other, the pressing desire is not to lose their primary relationship. Verbal communication makes it possible for the child to articulate his 'lack', loss or absence. Mahler indicates the value of verbal communication in helping to resolve the rapprochement crisis and achieve individuation for the young child. Wolman acknowledges the theory of Lacan in this context and speaks of verbal communication as proving the means of resolving the

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“impasse in the imaginary”. Through the use of language, the child is able to express his inner self to (m)other and attempt to integrate his inner and outer worlds. Mahler and her colleagues purport that the final phase of separation individuation remains open-ended and reverberates through life. Speech and language continue to play a major role in the quest for resolution.

Individuation unfolds with the separation process of the child from the (m)other. In the presence of (m)other the child achieves the ability to separate and function autonomously. The traditional stance regarding human development has been to view it as a process from oneness to separateness. Mahler’s approach begins with a merger and moves to autonomy and separation and individuation. The significant role of the (m)other during early development is gradually replaced by the role of the self and its movement towards greater self-awareness or personal growth. To psychoanalysis, the general developmental assumption is that separation is growth, as the individual moves from merger to separateness, from dependence to autonomy.

#### **3.8.4 Autonomy and Relatedness**

By implication, the concept of autonomy implies separateness and the exclusion of relatedness.

Nevertheless, Kohut (1971; 1988) considers others as extensions of the self, and recognises normal development as revealing man’s inseparability from others. He attests that the outcome of development should be recognised as freedom in our relation with others rather than the attainment of autonomy. Hence, he is critical of the work of Mahler, where separation and autonomy from others are considered the ultimate outcome of separation-individuation. Similarly, Masek (1991) firmly believes that our relationship with others is an undivided *Gestalt*. The division encountered is attributed to the dualism of Cartesian thought. In the context of the inseparability of our relationships, the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty recognises the ambiguity in our experience of the other and our co-dependence as humans. Masek (1991, p.43) cites Merleau-Ponty (1968): “We situate ourselves in ourselves *and* in the things, in ourselves *and* in the other, at the point where by a sort of *chiasm*, we become the others and we become the world” (p.160). As cited by Alapack (1984, p.85)

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Kierkegaard's anthropological-epistemological-hermeneutic principle: "*Unum noris omnes* (if you know one, you know all)" also reflects our interrelatedness as humans.

Ruth Josselson (1988) speaks of the embedded self and recognises the interdependence of separation and attachment. In her view, the concept of separation is misunderstood, for she believes that separation modifies rather than destroys relationships. To Josselson, autonomy does not mean the annihilation of relationships, while separation-individuation is recognised as part of a matrix that connects individuals. Where there is the separation and the moving away from someone we also tend to find a revising and preserving of the relationship by the separating individual. According to Josselson: "Attachment is not the opposite of separation-individuation – it is coincident with it" (p.95). By way of illustration, one may look at the late adolescent, who, in forming new relationships, continues to carry through earlier friendships (attachments) rather than destroy them. This attachment behaviour is reminiscent of the young toddler, who continues the relationship with (m)other while forming new attachments. During rapprochement the young toddler leaves (m)other but returns to 'refuel' and re-affirm their relationship before defining himself in the world out there. A continued connection is assured. To quote Josselson (1988):

Rapprochement is a powerful concept of understanding development because it blends with autonomy in the context of relatedness. We become selves within, not in spite of relationships. Rapprochement is about preserving bonds of relationship in the presence of increasing autonomy. This is as true in adolescence as it is in infancy (pp.94/95).

Similarly, Çigdem Kagitçibasi (1996) identifies the general misinterpretation of autonomy regarding its separateness from others regarding separation-individuation. The writer suggests the presence of an 'autonomous-relational self' which she believes is a healthy synthesis of the need for 'agency' (autonomy) and relatedness. Kagitçibasi differentiates between the dimension of agency and the interpersonal dimension, where the dimension of agency comprises the two poles of autonomy and heteronomy, and the interpersonal dimension includes both separateness and relatedness. Autonomy is viewed as belonging to the agency dimension and as being different to separateness which belongs to the

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interpersonal dimension. According to Kagitçibasi, it is possible for autonomy to co-exist with relatedness and provide a balance to the totalised concept of autonomy and human development. Citing one of his earlier works, Kagitçibasi (1996) believes that: “the simultaneous processes of differentiation (from others) and integration (with others) toward a synthesis of these opposing needs points to the possible emergence of the ‘autonomous relational self’” (p.182).

Strong implications suggest that cultural aspects play a role regarding the contingency of autonomy. Certain writers (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Kagitçibasi, 1996) recognise the individualistic ethos of Western society and the Cartesian dualistic thought that is reflected in existing developmental theories. We are inextricably enmeshed in the culture we share with others. While we influence the culture that holds us, we are influenced by it. How the term autonomy is construed depends on its cultural context. As Kagitçibasi (1996) notes, research studies conducted with Chinese (Yu & Yan, 1994), Indian (Misra & Agarwal, 1985) and Turkish (Phalet & Claeys, 1993) groups recognise the concept as a ‘social achievement motivation’ referring to a sense of achievement that extends beyond the self rather than an absolute autonomy.

Another example of autonomy in relatedness is the South African concept of “Ubuntu”, a word connoting humanity with the essential meaning of “I can only be me through your eyes”, or “A human being is human because of other people” (*The Economist*, 1995, p.72). It is in a relational context, in the presence of the other, that the self finds definition. Similarly, Emmanuel Levinas (1979) explicates that, as the individual goes beyond himself, what is external becomes internal, for ‘the Other is the center of the self’. In his work on the power of weakness, George Kunz (1998) also rejects the view of the autonomous or egocentric ego. The self is accepted as “having its identity, inspired by others, animated by others, empowered by others” (p.11). The self exists because of the “other”. These concepts and viewpoints are quite different from the notion of an individualistic autonomy, the cherished and valued ideal in traditional psychology.

A less orthodox approach to development would be to consider it as commencing



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with the self that is separate and alone, but which also moves towards attaching, connecting and finding a means of meeting its needs and relating interpersonally. Daniel Stern (1985) disagrees with Mahler's view regarding early infant development and believes that the infant seeks relatedness, desiring an "intersubjective union" rather than seeking to pursue an intrapsychic autonomy. The different perspective adopted by these theorists is significant to the experience of letting go. While Mahler conclusively accepts the infant as moving away from an initial connectedness into separation-individuation, Stern views the infant as moving towards connectedness. Stern approaches development from the perspective of connectedness and describes the development of the self as moving towards an interpersonal relatedness or "intersubjective union". Mobility, for Stern, is viewed from the initial stages (viz. emergent, core, subjective and verbal) of self, to connecting with others. From the perspective of Mahler, letting go may be described as the separation- individuation of the human individual in the quest for autonomy, whereas for Stern letting go is rather the need to relate in a desire for connectedness or core-relatedness. The two theories though different in their aims relating to development, can be considered as part of the same continuum, rather than as being polarised and contradictory. In developing the structural concept of the "child ego state" Thunissen (1998) makes use of both theories. Though differing in their views of development, the theories of Mahler and Stern can be complementary.

According to Winnicott (1958), achievement of the "I am" is due to the protective environment that the mother provides in her care, preoccupation and identification with the infant. The subsequent achievement of "I am alone" is attributed to the consistency of the reliable (m)other of whom the infant is aware, making it possible for the infant to be alone. Paradoxically, the infant's ability to be alone depends on the basis of the infant's initial ability to be alone in the presence of the other. Similarly, as adults, though often alone, we need to know that someone is 'there' for us. The internalised (m)other provides the initial capacity to be alone.

We return to the work of John Bowlby (1979; 1998) who believes that the term dependency is often misinterpreted. To Bowlby, attachment and human relatedness incorporate a natural dependence and attachment behaviour like separation anxiety is instinctive, normal and healthy. His extensive work on attachment acknowledges the self in relation to others

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together with the human need for relatedness. Bowlby is emphatic that this need for attachment is not a regressive dependency. To relate is a healthy human phenomenon.

Similarly, dissolving the traditional implication of separateness, Bowlby (1998) prefers to speak of self-reliance rather than use the term autonomy. Studies reveal that in the context of a trusting and supportive attachment, stability and self-reliance are possible. Awareness of the availability of the attachment figure offers security and promotes self-reliance, while the accessibility and responsiveness of the attachment figure also facilitates confidence and offers a secure base from which to develop. Our need to remain attached continues, while the security of knowing that a trusted person is there for one is not limited to young children. According to Bowlby, a healthy, self-reliant individual is able to exchange roles as the situation requires it, either providing a secure base for others or personally being provided with a secure base. Self-reliance is foundational to further relationships.

Prolific research abounds regarding separation-individuation during adolescence. Kroger's (1998) review of research conducted reflects a growing trend in revealing adolescents' connectedness to, and autonomy from, parents in the changing dynamics between them. Kroger cites research that includes the work of Quintana and Kerr (1993), Grotevan and Cooper (1985), Papini, Micka and Barnett (1989), Weinmann and Newcombe (1990) in support of this. Increasingly, the inclination is not to consider development as a mere linear process from dependence to independence, but to recognise development as incorporating the process of autonomy and relatedness. In the words of Josselson (1988): "Perhaps development is not a path from dependence to autonomy but amovement to increasing differentiated forms of relating to others. Perhaps autonomy is merely a form of relatedness" (p.100).

Despite the criticism she has received, Mahler (1975) has consistently recognised the alternation of demands for closeness and autonomy. Our quest as individuals is to maintain the optimal distance in the 'eternal struggle against both fusion and isolation' or the 'push and pull' of development. Edward, Ruskin and Tirrini (1992) are supportive of Mahler's theory, which they believe acknowledges autonomy as well as a human need for others. Autonomy need not exclude relatedness and while the autonomy achieved with separation-

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individuation leads to intrapsychic changes, interpersonal aspects continue to remain significant. To cite Mahler (1972 a):

One could regard the entire life cycle as constituting a more or less successful process of distancing from and introjection of the lost symbiotic mother, an eternal longing for the actual or fantasised 'ideal state of self' with the latter standing for a symbiotic fusion with the 'all good' symbiotic mother, who was at one time part of the self in a blissful state of well being (p.130).

Autonomy signifies relatedness. The following excerpt (recognised by E.J. Anthony, cited by Mahler, 1975, p.73) says it all:

Thus, the child walks alone with his eyes fixed on his mother's face; not on the difficulties in his way. He supports himself by the arms that do not hold him and constantly strives towards the refuge in his mother's embrace, little suspecting that in the very same moment that he is emphasizing his need of her, he is proving that he can do without her because he is walking alone. (Kierkegaard, 1846)

The foregoing literature regarding separation and concepts pertaining to what is understood as letting go, provides a basis for the exploration forward. Definitions of the term to "let go" reflect a concept that is multifaceted in meaning, paradoxically linked with separation, holding containment and space, themes dealt with in the preceding literature. However, what the lived meaning of the experience is, remains to be explored and understood. What is implicit about the term needs to be made explicit. By revealing and describing its structure, I will attempt to identify its significance and relevance to psychology, and to developmental psychology in particular. I hope to achieve this aim in the study that follows.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE STUDY

#### 4.1 Methodological Orientation

The approach to the present study is qualitative, as reflected by the research question: “What is the experience of letting go?” The question asked requires a descriptive answer rather than a quantitative study of measurements and statistical deductions. The intention is to seek to understand the phenomenon of letting go, rather than attempting to control or predict what it is; to explicate its meaning and reveal its structure.

Traditional scientific research methods have their limitations, and are inappropriate in determining the structure or constituents of the experience of letting go. A traditional scientific approach would pursue the already established paradigms, theories and definitions, while attempting, perhaps, to measure the phenomenon quantitatively. Rather than employ a quantitative approach and work deductively, letting go will be approached as a human phenomenon that needs to be understood phenomenologically and approached inductively, with the attitude of discovery from a scientific, yet human, psychological perspective. Giorgi (1975) has indicated that a human science of “psychology can still be practised with rigor and discipline and yet do justice to all human psychological phenomena”(p.82).

The present study uses data obtained in the form of spontaneous descriptions regarding conscious awareness of the experience of letting go, as it appears in the life-world of the research participants. The study is psychological, and does not emulate the natural sciences to confirm to an *a priori* definition of the experience under investigation. The methodological approach is open-ended, and there is no specific, predetermined idea of the outcome, for “psychology should be the study of experience and behaviour as it is experienced and behaved” (Giorgi, 1970, p.165). In his or her idiosyncratic *Dasein* or being-in-the-world, each individual is considered unique, and this has to be taken into account (Tageson, 1982). *Dasein* and the world are so interrelated that we cannot refer

to the one without referring to the other. Our life is always structured in terms of the world in which we live.

Research conducted to date reveals the concept of separation rather than letting go as dominant. A plethora of studies have been conducted in the area of separation, a word often viewed synonymously with letting go, but the quest is to discover what letting go is. Is letting go just separation, an identified construct used in our objectified world? There is the suggestion that the term embodies more than the confines of its definitions for the essence and meaning of what it means to let go remain unexplored. Whether the terms letting go and separation are synonymous, or linked, needs to be explored, elucidated and understood.

Over the last thirty-seven years, separation-individuation theory appears as the prevailing paradigm used in developmental psychology. Particularly during the 1980's, instruments were designed to assess the aspects of separation and individuation. These include the Separation-Individuation Process Inventory (Christianson & Wilson); Adolescent Separation Anxiety Inventory (Hansburg); Psychological Separation Inventory (Hoffman) and Separation-Individuation Test of Adolescence (Levine et al.) While some of these measures were refined during the 1990's, the studies continue to be primarily of a quantitative nature, with the vast majority of the research studies completed relating predominantly to adolescence (Kroger, 1998).

Although the studies conducted have not specifically focused on the theme of letting go, many do have merit. The present study intends to explore the experience of letting go and contribute to the existing findings regarding separation and its implications. We need to bridge the gap between psychological facts and everyday living. In the words of Giorgi (1970) “no science is completely removed from everyday life, and some kind of dialogue with everyday life must go on” (p.86). The intention with this study is to promote this dialogue and discover the meaning of a significant letting-go experience as it occurs in the life-world of individuals. The purpose of this study is not to define separation, but to discover and describe the structure of the experience of letting go. The implicit experience needs to be explicated and understood. Neither an external

validation, nor an external perspective outside the experience is required, but a dialogue between the world of experience and the world of psychological fact.

Giorgi (1970) attests that when studying human phenomena, a human scientific approach is required. The focus of the present research is the human experience of letting go from an existential-phenomenological perspective. With the use of the human scientific approach, as explicated by Giorgi, I hope to discover and describe the structure of the experience. With its adherence to scientific principles and its view of man, the phenomenological research method will be used.

#### **4.2 Phenomenological Research**

The intention of this section is not to expound on the philosophy and psychology of phenomenology, but to focus on the concepts and methods regarding the structural approach to be used in this study regarding phenomenological research.

Phenomenological research is descriptive and qualitative, yet differs from other qualitative approaches in that attention is paid to the experienced meaning of the phenomenon under investigation, rather than to descriptions of visible actions and behaviour (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.44). Phenomenological research focuses on human experience: it is not a direct report of the experience, but a search for the structural meaning of the experience: “It’s always the experienced phenomenon that is being referred to. The aim of the researcher is to discover and describe the structure of the given as experienced ” (Giorgi, 1989b, p.41).

To understand the experience of letting go, we concern ourselves with the phenomenon in the conscious world of everyday living, what Husserl identified as the life-world or *Lebenswelt*: “The life-world is not a construct of consciousness: It is co-constituted or co-created in the dialogue of person and world” (Valle, King & Halling, 1989, p.9). This is the world as given in awareness and immediately expressed, rather than interpreted scientifically. In order to understand the phenomenon, we employ Husserl’s maxim and

go “back to the things themselves” (Giorgi, 1985, p.8). We return to the things as they actually appear in everyday living, and allow the phenomena to speak for themselves.

Phenomenological research does not assume or predict meanings. It favours a transcendental, rather than a natural attitude. By adopting this perspective, the aim was not to deny the existence of the natural world, but rather to suspend our usual beliefs and manner of perceiving. Husserl asserts that “an epistemological investigation that can seriously claim to be scientific must satisfy the principle of freedom from suppositions” (Moustakas, 1994, p.45). Through a process of phenomenological reduction, personal preconceived ideas and beliefs must be suspended and held in abeyance, thereby making it possible for the researcher to become receptive and open to perceiving the phenomenon as it exists in its context, as given in awareness. That the researcher suspends his beliefs, avoiding any *a priori* definition of the experience being investigated, is what Husserl considers the first step in the method of the phenomenological *epoché*. (Polkinghorne, 1989; Kruger, 1988; Sherman, 1987).

Using a phenomenological approach, the present research is interested in understanding the experienced reality of the letting go phenomenon in, as Giorgi (1970) purports, an *accurate*, rather than an *objective* manner. The aim is not to seek causes, or to predict or control the phenomenon, but to understand the experience in its immediacy. With respect to the phenomenon, a comprehensive understanding will be sought, where the “primary aim is to observe, comprehend and render explicit what was initially perceived” (Kruger, 1988, p.143).

The quest is to understand the “what” rather than the “why” of the lived experience and to reveal the structure or essence of letting go as it is given in awareness. As the structure of the phenomenon is that which is common throughout its diverse appearances, a number of specific situational experiences of letting go were explored. According to Giorgi (1970), “it is precisely structure that is the reality that one responds to at the phenomenal level” (p.179). Structure is revealed to us as meaning: “Through description, the pre-reflective life-world is brought to the level of reflective awareness where it manifests itself as psychological meaning” (Valle, King, & Halling 1989, p.14).

### 4.3 Research Participants

The focus is on the nature of the experience itself, but it is the research participants who have made the study possible. Not only was it impossible to separate the phenomenon from the one who was experiencing it, but it would also have been meaningless to do so (Fisher, 1989). The meaning of letting go has to be illuminated as a lived experience in human development.

In my exploratory attempts regarding the sample and context for this study, I consistently found myself caught between two paradigms, viz. that of the natural attitude and that of phenomenology. I was split between the external reality of the quantitative research completed on separation, my own interest in the phenomenon, and my desire to understand its experiential meaning. While diverse information became available, I felt conflicted regarding the polarities of the paradigms. Gradually, however, I realised that I would focus on the phenomenon itself. My intention was not to identify or describe the characteristics of a group who had lived the experience, but to discover and explicate the structure of letting go as experienced in the life-world of individuals. A number of participants were willing to describe their experience and give their story. In an effort to remain faithful to the phenomenon, no particular theoretical framework is adhered to, nor any statistical generalisations made. The approach to the study is from a phenomenological perspective, and in my attempt to answer the question: “What is the experience of letting go?”, I hope to extend existing psychological knowledge in the field.

Polkinghorne (1989) proposes that the first requirement when selecting research participants is that the “subject has had the experience”. The research participants selected have to be able to provide a rich, sensitive and full description, although they may still be in the process of the experience. Like Richard Alapack (1984) in his study on leaving home, I decided to work with participants who had either had the experience, or were in the process of the experience. I accepted the transitional and temporal implications of letting go, and was willing to interview research participants who were still in the process of the experience. I believed that it would provide me with a more



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rich and revealing description. Though I chose to adhere to Alapack's approach regarding the phenomenon as transitional, the following criteria proposed by Clark Moustakas (1994) were accepted as basic requirements:

- the research participant is intensely interested in understanding the nature and meanings of the phenomenon;
- the research participant is willing to participate in a lengthy interview and perhaps a follow-up interview;
- the research participant grants the investigator the right to tape-record and possibly even to videotape the interview;
- the research participant grants the investigator the right to publish the data in a dissertation and other publication (p.107).

In my quest to find volunteer research participants (hereafter referred to simply as participants), colleagues and friends were approached regarding my interest in the letting-go phenomenon. The volunteers who made themselves available were initially contacted telephonically, and, once their interest and suitability had been confirmed, they were briefly informed of the research design. Following the call, an orientation-invitation letter (see Form A: Appendix), together with the 'Consent Form' (see Form B: Appendix) was sent to them. Each participant was assured of confidentiality and anonymity regarding personal information. The structural format employed by Mike Trumbull (Moustakas, 1994) in his correspondence with participants, was modified appropriately and utilised.

The participants are volunteers who, from their own life-world context, willingly identified with the letting-go phenomenon. Each participant had either lived through the experience, or was in the process of living through a significant letting-go experience, and the research makes an attempt to bring the participants' phenomenal level to a phenomenological level. The participants were not patients, and I was free to listen to their stories in an unbiased, non-judgemental manner, with no theoretical framework in mind. The term letting go is often used in the process of therapy. Through the years, while a number of diverse life-situations (e.g. forgiveness, ageing, gender, identity,

relationships and other issues) can be recalled, in the course of my practice, letting go reveals itself ubiquitously in a number of stories and situations. For the study, however, rather than confine the phenomenon to a specific situational experience, I decided to explore the phenomenon as it appears in the life-world at large. The field remained wide open, and the choice regarding situational context would depend on the participants who would provide a contextualisation of the personal meaning and essence of the experience of letting go.

#### 4.4 Pilot study

In their phenomenologically orientated research, William Fisher (1989) and Richard Alapack (1975; 1984) make use of written descriptions. My initial request to three research volunteers was for written descriptions of situations regarding a significant letting-go experience. The descriptions were varied in length, and revealed a fairly organised depiction, rather than a lived account of their experience. The reports received also appeared somewhat distant and reflective in nature. It was at this point that I recalled the words of Levinas (1979) who writes: “The other is not an object that must be interpreted and illumined by my alien light. He shines forth with his own light and *speaks for himself*” (p.14). I realised that in my intention to reduce bias and misinterpretation, I had to create the opportunity for the participants to speak for themselves. Besides, there is an undeniable difference between the written and the spoken word. According to Stevick (1971), though participants may adopt a reflective stance during the interview, they are nevertheless as close to the lived experienced as possible. A first-hand account of the experience had to be provided, and the spoken word took precedence, particularly as some of the participants were still in the process of the letting-go experience.

Susan Chase (1995) refers to Livia Polanyi’s distinction regarding stories and reports. We are encouraged to listen to life stories, rather than to read and accept reports. Chase writes: “If we want to hear stories rather than reports, then our task as interviewers is to invite others to tell their stories, to encourage them to take responsibility for the meaning of their talk” (p.3). Rather than accept a report, the story of the experience had to be told.

Similarly, Levinas (1979) acknowledges the value of speech above the written word when he writes: “Better than comprehension, *discourse* relates with what remains essentially transcendent...Speech cuts across vision” (p.195). Levinas firmly believes that what has been “said” or written totalises and confirms predetermined ideas, whereas “saying” in the presence of the other liberates and reveals the truth. It is through the presence of the other that we are able to enter the infinite and be liberated from the confines of predetermined ideas. The truth of letting go had to be allowed to speak for itself.

While revealing their stories, people make sense of their experience and communicate meaning. In the words of Josselson (1995):

Meaning is not inherent in an act of experience, but is constructed through social discourse. Meaning is generated by the linkages the participant makes between aspects of her life as lived and by the explicit linkages the researcher makes between this understanding and interpretation, which is meaning constructed at another level of analysis (p.32).

With his investigation into anger, Stevick (1971) purports that: “Method and phenomenon must dialogue”. He asks the researcher to consider “What method will best allow the full emergence of the phenomenon in all its aspects: the situation, the behaviour and experience of the subject?” (p.135). My method of choice became clear. I would invite the participants to a face-to-face interview and listen to a verbal account of their experience. With the initial attempt, each interview was opened with the broad statement:

More than likely you have had to let go of someone or something significant (in your life). Please describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of letting go and what it was like for you. I am interested in your personal experience – your thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Perhaps it is something that you are still faced with. Whatever it is, I would like to hear about it. Please describe any situation related to this experience. I would like a clear and detailed description of your experience of letting go.

Responses from participants revealed a broad interpretation of the above, with a number of letting-go experiences being revealed within each protocol. In the absence of defined

parameters, my attempt not to predetermine the situation of the experience made it difficult to contain the phenomenon under investigation. It became evident that letting go invariably reverberates, affecting numerous aspects of one's life. It was decided that though the choice of a situated experience would remain with the participant, reference to a specific situation had to be incorporated. The statement preceding the research interview was reviewed and modified as follows:

More than likely you have had to let go of someone or something significant (in your life). Please can you describe as accurately and concretely as possible, a *specific situation* of your experience of letting go and what it was like for you – your thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Perhaps it is something that you are still faced with. Whatever it is I would like to hear about it. I would like a clear and accurate description of a *specific situation* regarding your experience of letting go.

## **4.5 Interviews**

### **4.5.1 Research Interview**

In my attempt to understand the experience of their world, I decided to read the preceding statement to the participants and listen to their story. For the study, I used a semi-structured life-world interview which, according to Kvale (1996), is “an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to the meaning of the described phenomena” (pp. 5/6). Letting go was the phenomenon to be explored in a qualitative manner, and the qualitative research interview was the method used to collect the descriptions (data): “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to any scientific explanations” (p.1). This description is in harmony with the philosophy of phenomenological psychology and a natural choice for the purpose of this study.

The interview remained open-ended and was receptive to the participant's full story. Each participant was allowed to express himself freely and was not stunted in the personal meanings that were allowed to emerge. While attempting to contain the experience to the specific situation identified by the participant, I engaged in the

phenomenological *epoché* (first level of bracketing) and resisted any temptation to contribute to the original meanings presented. While the focus remained on the experience with letting go as central theme, I listened carefully and attentively to each participant's story.

The qualitative interview is an informal and interactive research method that extends beyond the spontaneous exchange of views found in daily conversation. It is an open-ended conversation, where misconceptions can be clarified as they occur. The interviewer/ researcher must create a relaxed and trusting atmosphere where the interviewee/ participant can be open and honest. Forming an empathic alliance is crucial, as the interviewer/researcher observes, listens and attempts to elucidate the meanings of the experience described (Kvale, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1989).

The search was for a description of the experience. Descriptions are crucial to understanding the life-world of the individual for, as Giorgi (1986) explicates, “a description is the use of language to articulate the objects of experience” (p.4). Elsewhere he attests that “from a phenomenological viewpoint descriptions can serve as legitimate data” (p.14). As researcher, my focus was to ascertain the lived meaning of the phenomenon for the participant, through the words and sentences used to convey meaning. During the interview, the natural language of the participants was used, while the descriptions provided were transcribed and serve as the data.

#### **4.5.2 Follow-up interview**

To avoid misinterpretation and facilitate the clarification of meaning, a follow-up interview was conducted with two of the participants (M and B), who were asked to elaborate on their original meanings. The following statement preceded the follow-up interview:

In my attempt to understand the description you presented, there were certain aspects of the situation that were still not quite clear to me. Would you kindly read the transcribed interview aloud from the beginning and where I have, in colour, highlighted certain sentences, kindly elaborate further and explain exactly what it is you mean.

During the follow-up interview, I was careful to protect the phenomenon experienced by the participant, and not to include additional information (via verbalisations), from my own interpretations, which could influence the participants' original meaning relating to the phenomenon.

In his study on anxiety, Fisher (1982) believes it helpful to conduct a follow-up interview and indicates that: "this procedure of having the subject read his/her original description helps to situate the subject back in the situation that was experienced and thus facilitates the recall of finer details" (p. 67). Though I followed the same procedure as Fischer, rather than focusing on predetermined questions, I chose to highlight those aspects that were not clear to me in the transcript of the original interview. In reading the transcript, the participant's own spontaneous elaboration was possible.

#### **4.5.3 Interview Review**

Subsequent to the interviews shared, all participants were contacted and asked about their experience regarding the original research interview. Four of the participants were approached telephonically, while the one participant, who had emigrated, was contacted via email. The follow-up communication served the dual purpose of (1) ascertaining whether the participants felt that they had been adequately understood, and (ii) determining whether any of the participants would require follow-up assistance. The email forwarded to the one participant provided an opportunity for additional descriptions regarding his experience of letting go, as he was still in the process. A personal thank-you letter to each participant followed.

#### **4.6 Data Explication and Data Analysis**

Van Kaam (1966) and Rahilly (1993) note that interpreting naïve experiences from the life-world as scientific knowledge presents epistemological difficulties, but it is only through expression that experience can become knowledge. It is through meaning that the structure of an experience is revealed as we describe our awareness of the experience.

Husserl expounds that in the process of reduction, the phenomenological researcher moves from the naïve expressive descriptions obtained, through the eidetic *epoché* (second level of bracketing) to the structural description, where naïve and diffuse knowledge is made clear through science (Polkinghorne, 1989). Van Kaam (1966) elucidates as follows: “ Science formulates explicitly what was experienced implicitly in awareness” (p.305). It is this process of explication that grasps the essential structure and constituents of a phenomenon.

The scientific phase of the explication is the data analysis. In the manner proposed by Giorgi (1975), data analysis is applied to the current study. Fisher (1974), Karlsson (1993), de Koning (1979), Wertz (1983), Stevick (1971) and Bargdill (2000) have employed similar ways of doing research, and their influence is evident in the present analysis. Polkinghorne (1989) extends the four essential steps described by Giorgi (1975, 1985, 1989a) to six. For the purpose of this study, however, the following steps will be followed:

#### **4.6.1 Sense of the Whole**

The transcribed language from the interview served as the data. The data was read and re-read to obtain a sense of the whole, while the transcribed interviews required a number of readings (Giorgi, 1985). With the aid of bracketing, the gestalt or whole was allowed to emerge, for, by understanding the meaningful whole, the essence of the phenomenon was able to reveal itself. No theoretical explanatory model was imposed, and it is by grasping the whole description that the relationships among the parts could be understood. Giorgi adopts the gestalt-phenomenological perspective, advising the researcher to neither question nor make explicit the general sense obtained. This initial step served as a basis for the following step.

#### **4.6.2 Natural Meaning Units**

From reading the data (descriptions), natural meaning units emerged, and the text was divided where a shift in meaning was discerned. With each concrete transition in

meaning, the whole was differentiated into manageable, coherent units, where the partial meanings made up the totality. The meaning units vary in length, as the data was differentiated in a spontaneous, rather than in an empirical, manner. Bracketing continued, for “the phenomenological approach is discovery orientated rather than hypothesis testing” (Giorgi, 1989 b, p.49). According to Polkinghorn (1989): “meaning units are constituents of the experience, not elements, in that they retain their identity as contextual parts of the subject’s specific experience” (p. 54). With the present study, while retaining the narrative sequence in the subject’s own original language, the initial description was re-written in the third-person singular.

#### **4.6.3 Central Themes**

Each meaning unit was re-examined in terms of its relevance and significance to letting go. Central themes were established and, in an unbiased manner, attempts were made to identify the dominant meaning of each unit. While redundancies were considered irrelevant material, the implicit psychological aspects of each meaning unit was made explicit. From a psychological perspective, the participant’s descriptions were rephrased in simple language.

#### **4.6.4 Situated Constituents**

The researcher reflected upon and interrogated each central meaning unit in terms of the specific purpose of the study, viz. “What is the experience of letting go?” With respect to the phenomenon under investigation, the essence of that situation for the participant is revealed and understood. Repetitive themes and descriptions within the meaning units that were not relevant to the letting-go experience were eliminated. The remaining themes were addressed and transformed in psychological language, and the meaning implied by the participant was made explicit. An “empathic immersement was obviously involved throughout”, as the description was amplified from an existential baseline (Wertz, 1983, p.212). The psychological statements reflect the participant’s intended meaning, where what is implicitly stated in the original description was made explicit.



#### **4.6.5 Situated Narrative Description (SND)**

The meaning units transformed into psychological language were tied together and synthesised into a consistent description of non-redundant and essential psychological themes. The Individual Situated Structure includes the concrete and specific aspects of the situation of letting go that answers the question: “What is the psychological structure of letting go as it is presented to the participant in this particular situation?” The Situated Narrative Description provides condensation of the meanings expressed into essential constituents regarding the contextual situation of letting go, and while the narrative is sequential in nature, its value is psycho-logical rather than chronological. The Situated Narrative Description (SND) was preparatory to the General Situated Structure (GSS) of each protocol and the General Psychological Structure (GPS) of all the protocols.

#### **4.6.6 General Situated Structure (GSS)**

Having completed the individual situated description (ISS), a general level (situated) description was developed from each protocol. At this point, the aspects of letting go that emerged became the central focus: while the particulars of the specific situation (of the protocol) were omitted, the aspects of the experience that are descriptive of letting go in general were included. Though not universal, the descriptions claim a general validity that goes beyond the specific situation (Giorgi, 1975).

#### **4.6.7 General Psychological Structure (GPS)**

The general structure of letting go is the descriptive answer to the question: “What is the experience of letting go?” The general description of the structure of the phenomenon requires that the above steps (4.6.1 – 4.6.6) are first used for the data analysis of each protocol, starting with the one description (protocol) of the experience, followed by the other protocols. Each protocol was analysed individually, as the eidetic *epoché* (second level bracketing) was applied to allow for emerging themes, while the inductive method moved from a specific to a universal validity. Like Wertz’s (1979) study on criminal victimisation, the General Psychological Structure (GPS) was developed directly from each of the protocols or Individual Situated Structure (ISS). From the transcriptions, the

structural unity of the experience was made explicit. The explorations from the ISS of each participant often already shifted towards statements of what was essential to all imagined experiences. Formulating the GPS required a back-and-forth search among the original transcriptions, the psychological reflections of each protocol, as well as the ISS. The focus was to reveal the constituents that are essential to all experiences of letting go, and diverse experiences were grouped under one general statement. The constituents finally expressed in the GPS are present in every protocol, as well as in every possible experience of letting go that can be imagined. In other words, in moving towards the GPS, what is implicit in the original descriptions is made explicit. According to Wertz (1983), the final GPS includes “ both the necessary and sufficient conditions, constituents and structural relations which constitute the phenomenon in general, that is all instances of the phenomenon under consideration” pp.234 -235). Themes that are generally held true of each protocol appear and emerge as the GPS, as the essence of the letting-go experience is finally distilled. (Fisher & Wertz, 1979; Van Kaam, 1966; Rahilly, 1993).

#### **4.6.8 Structural Synthesis (SS)**

The Structural Synthesis provides a synthesis of what is essential to the General Psychological Structure.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

“Structure is made present to us through meaning” (Valle & Halling, 1989, p.14). The telos of the data analysis is to remain true to each participant’s description of the experience. Throughout the data analysis, rather than attempt to translate the experience into a theoretical system, the eidetic *epoché* is consistently applied. While traditional scientific methods move from universal validities to specific ones, the phenomenological method used in the present study is inductive, shifting from a specific to a universal validity. It is in the explication of the data analysis that the implicit awareness of the phenomenon and experience of letting go is made explicit in scientific knowledge. In the words of Van Kaam (1966): “By explication, implicit awareness of a complex phenomenon becomes explicit, formulated knowledge of its components” (p.305).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE INVESTIGATION AND RESULTS

#### 5.1 The Research Question

The research question of the present study is: “What is the experience of letting go?” To provide the study with the required data which reveals the experience as it appears in the life world, the following statement was posed:

More than likely, you have had to let go of someone, or something, significant (in your life). Please describe as accurately and concretely as possible a specific situation of your experience of letting go and what it was like for you – your thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Perhaps it is something that you are still faced with. Whatever it is, I would like to hear about it. I would like a clear and accurate description of a specific situation regarding your experience of letting go.

#### 5.2 The Research Participants

- (A) Participant M: Marlene    Married  
   Female  
   Age: 35 years  
   Letting go: of her stillborn child.
- (B) Participant B: Ben        Married  
   Male  
   Age: 43 years  
   Letting go: through emigration.

- (C) Participant P: Penny      Married  
   Female  
   Age: 55 years  
   Letting go: of her home, after thirty years.
- (D) Participant J: John:      Married  
   Male  
   Age: 29 years  
   Letting go: of a premarital relationship.
- (E) Participant K: Karen      Married  
   Female  
   Age: 48 years  
   Letting go: of her teenage son (and daughter).

### 5.3 Data Analysis

To be included as follows:

Participant A: Marlene (M)

Table I	Central Themes
Table II	Situated Constituents
Table III	Situated Narrative Description
Table IV	General Situated Structure

Participant B: Ben (B)

Table III	Situated Narrative Description
Table IV	General Situated Structure

Participant C: Penny (P)

Table III	Situated Narrative Description
Table IV	General Situated Structure

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Participant D: John (J)

Table III      Situated Narrative Description

Table IV      General Situated Structure

Participant E: Karen (K)

Table III      Situated Narrative Description

Table IV      General Situated Structure

Tables I & II for Ben, Penny, John and Karen appear in the appendix.

**TABLE I**

Participant A: Marlene (M)

Meaning Units	Central Themes
<p>(1) Two years ago M was pregnant and felt fortunate to be expecting a baby. She and her husband were really looking forward to having this child.</p>	<p>(1) M had not taken the event of her pregnancy for granted and, with her significant other, looked forward to having their baby.</p>
<p>(2) M thinks that it was difficult to let go because for seven and a half months, the baby was just a thought, but it was there and she could feel it kicking. The baby was a little human being that she had only seen on sonar so there was as yet nothing of a personal relationship. She was aware of the physical attachment and had looked forward to the idea.</p>	<p>(2) Although there was an awareness of a physical attachment to a human being, M experienced difficulty in letting go of the concept of a child with whom she had no personal relationship.</p>
<p>(3) M refers to the loss of her baby.</p>	<p>(3) M is aware of the loss of her baby.</p>
<p>(4) M will never forget the first morning when she woke up in hospital. It was as if she was faced with this decision. Her husband was sitting next to her, sleeping. It came before her: she had a choice. It was either to go on sitting there in a corner or just die, or how was she going to face</p>	<p>(4) M recalls the first morning when she was confronted with having to make a decision either to withdraw or to face the loss and move on. The awareness that she was not alone but with the significant other influenced her decision.</p>

<p>it? She knew that she had to make a decision, especially when she looked around and saw her husband asleep and she knew that he was also going through it – through the pain and everything.</p> <p>(5) The first thing is that physically M was empty, so she knew that she had lost something. M knew that she had lost something that, besides being an idea, was also a person. So actually the thoughts of having a child, seeing the child grow up, all of a sudden were gone. It was not just the physical emptiness. Christmas was not going to be the Christmas she thought she would have had for the first time.</p> <p>(6) M knew there was a lot of nonsense lying ahead emotionally. Physically she was going to recover. M knew that that was not a problem, but emotionally she knew that she was faced with a long path lying ahead.</p> <p>(7) The thing is M knew that she had to make a decision. First, she thought she was in control. She thought that she must make a decision and sort it out. It was either 'a' dying or 'b' facing it as there were positive things ahead and she decided on 'b' as she is still able to have more children. She viewed that as a</p>	<p>(5) M's experience of a physical emptiness made her aware of a physical and emotional loss. She realised that her loss was not merely the loss of a concept and its associated future, but also interpersonal.</p> <p>(6) M believed that she would recover physically, but was aware of an emotionally challenging path ahead.</p> <p>(7) M believed that she was in control and knew that she had to make a decision to either withdraw (die) or face (live) what lay ahead. As she could have more children M decided to be positive, and face it.</p>
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<p>positive choice, looking forward to having another baby.</p> <p>(8) She thought that if she did go and sit in that corner, she would just die and just drag everybody who was supporting her, especially my husband, my parents, his parents”. Their parents would have been grandparents for the first time, so it was not just her who was affected, but a lot of people around her as well. They also pretended to be strong in order to carry her.</p> <p>(9) She knew that if she sat for too long, she would nurture the pain and If she sat too long she would be stuck there. The pain and the feeling dead would actually engulf her and everybody around her. M believed that it would pull down her husband Larry as well.</p> <p>(10) What helped M was that she knew that she could not approach it in a selfish way. She could not go and sit and think it was just her. There were a lot of other people who went through this as well, others who lose their children on a daily basis. She heard of people that suffer a loss like that. It was not as if she was the only person.</p>	<p>(8) M rejected withdrawing as she believed that it would be to her detriment (to die) and to all who supported her, particularly the significant others. M realised that she was not alone in her loss.</p> <p>(9) M believed that a lengthy passivity would painfully overwhelm her and prevent her from moving on. The effect would be detrimental to the significant other and those close to her.</p> <p>(10) M’s consideration and awareness of others helped her decision. She realised that others also experience loss and that she was not alone in the pain of loss. She believed that she could not be self-centred and consider the experience as hers alone.</p>
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<p>(11) Really, she asked herself, it was a matter of: “What am I going to get out of this experience, if anything, if I am not getting what I thought I am going to get?” The baby was not in her arms. The physical pleasure of holding and seeing her baby was not there. She thought that if she could not get that, then she must get something positive. She was looking for an alternative to replace the baby.</p>	<p>(11) In the awareness of the loss (of her baby), M questioned herself and sought something positive to fill the void/emptiness she experienced.</p>
<p>(12) M even felt life after that (information about the baby’s death in utero) but when she told the nurses they told her that it usual to think that before the caesarean. She thought that she did feel life after they confirmed that there was no life. M thinks that this was a result of her hoping and still believing.</p>	<p>(12) M did not immediately accept the loss (of her baby) and in her hopes and beliefs held on to her ‘baby’ as being alive and living inside her body.</p>
<p>(13) Then, suddenly, M woke up and she was not pregnant anymore. It was seven and a half months and she still had six weeks to go. She had the Caesar. It did feel as if she had had the baby, but there was nothing. They gave her a little card with the footprints on it because there had been a birth. Now she had to go home two days later.</p>	<p>(13) Despite the pregnancy and ‘birth’, there was no baby, “there was nothing”. M was suddenly confronted with the reality of the absence and she had to go back home with an inadequate replacement (the card with the footprints on it).</p>
<p>(14) Fortunately M and her husband did</p>	<p>(14) M feels fortunate that there was no loss</p>

<p>not start a baby room. They did not know whether it was going to be a boy or girl. They did not want to know.</p> <p>(15) She already pictured her child playing with her sister's children – the dreams, the names she was going to give, whether it was a boy or a girl.</p> <p>(16) M suddenly wondered over and over. "What now?" There was a hopeless feeling of where were the answers</p> <p>(17) For the first month or two, M admits that she thought that she was fine and forced herself after three weeks to go back to work. M thought that it would be good. In a way it was because she would communicate with people. People do come in and convey their condolences. Some do not. She felt, with no ill feeling, that people would avoid the issue. She can understand it from their point of view. M thought that by going back to work she would be fine, and that she would just carry on.</p> <p>(18) Later, M realised that she and her husband Larry avoided talking about their baby at home. She realised that she was starting to bottle it all up and then when they did talk, it would be just fine. M felt</p>	<p>of anything tangible and familiar that she and her significant other had got to know</p> <p>(15) M recognises the loss of future dreams, relationships and possibilities.</p> <p>(16) Suddenly, in awareness of the loss, M questioned what lay ahead. She felt hopeless and needed answers.</p> <p>(17) M initially (1-2 months) believed that she was fine and, in her effort to continue and maintain the familiar order she knew, M compelled herself to return to work, where she would relate to others.</p> <p>(18) M was aware that she and her significant other avoided talking about their baby. She vacillated from one extreme to the other, either controlling or overtly expressing her feelings, yet realised that this</p>
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<p>that it was in a wrong way. Either she just let go completely or she tried to bottle it up. There were the two extremes.</p> <p>(19) It was about two months; M admits that she tried to keep her social schedule extremely busy. M did drink a lot of wine on some occasions and then she would talk a lot. Then it was easy to talk. M also realised then that it was not the right way to solve it. It wasn't as if she was going on a booze cruise. She thinks that it was a way of letting all the inhibitions go so that she could talk.</p> <p>(20) It was after about two and a half to three months that M thought she must look at it from a different angle, because she could feel that the one day she was upset, the other day aggressive towards Larry. She would pick a fight or be miserable at work or just not feel like going to work. So M realised that she had to look at this from a different angle, because what was going to happen in a few years if she did not sort it out. M did not want to have issues about this possibility with future children. She did not want it to drag into her life.</p> <p>(21) It suddenly came to M. It was actually amazing to her that her child</p>	<p>was not satisfactory.</p> <p>(19) Through her behaviour M attempted to either control (keep busy) or express (via drinking) her feelings. She became aware of the need to freely express herself yet realised that she had not found the solution.</p> <p>(20) In the relationship with her significant other, M experienced fluctuating emotional changes and, with time (after about three months), realised that if she were to enter the future without a residue of the experience, she had to view things differently.</p> <p>(21) Suddenly, in amazement M developed an insight that the death of her baby was a</p>
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<p>never had a chance to live and the message was an awakening to life. As a person who had been alive for thirty-three years, the death of her unborn child was a message for (her) life. Her child did not have the opportunity to live but gave her the message for (her) life.</p> <p>(22) It wasn't a dream. The experience was real for M and came to her while she was awake. She had an amazing insight. M could view this experience so that she saw it clearly.</p> <p>(23) This actually opened up a window for M to her life. Previously, she would plan Christmas five months ahead. It was as if she received a gift out of the event. Working out the meaning of (her) life, which is to take out of every day the special things. She looked for these.</p> <p>(24) M believes that she was perhaps looking for the gift, and she is glad that she has found it ". With her everyday rush and running around, M was missing today, because there were so many special occasions when she was pregnant, when the baby would kick and she would sing in the shower, that she would sing a song, and Larry would tickle her stomach. It was so special. There were such special</p>	<p>gift. The realisation that he had not lived was a message for her to awaken to life and its meaningful moments, rather than live for the future.</p> <p>(22) M had an insight, which amazes her, of a clear and conscious experience in her lived reality.</p> <p>(23) The experience provided M with the gift of a new horizon regarding the meaning of (her) life, which is to seek and take the special moments out of every day rather than to live for the future.</p> <p>(24) M is grateful for having found her gift and realises that due to her haste (rush and running) and focus on the future, she had missed numerous special (present) moments of her pregnancy.</p>
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<p>moments on a daily basis.</p> <p>(25) When things did not materialise in the future as expected, and M would cry and make the whole event negative. She approached things from that angle, looking at how she felt when she was pregnant. M felt like the first mother on this planet. She felt beautiful and her child was beautiful. Everything was so perfect.</p> <p>(26) M's wondered what could she actually get out of this? The awakening and the message she received was that every day was so fragile. The future was so fragile. She felt that it was not her place in life to take things for granted or to contain it. Suddenly the message was a gift because she was one of those people who would stress about something that would happen in two months time, or she would stress about tomorrow and she would forget about today. M and Larry talk about it. Their whole life changed when they realised that this is their message from what happened: "Live for today".</p> <p>(27) M started the process slowly and not with sudden outbursts. She started slowly looking at the issue from different angles. Dealing with the loss was slow and so was trying a radically different approach but</p>	<p>(25) M realised that living for a future that could not fulfil itself lead to sadness and negativity, so she decided to approach her loss from a different angle and recall the joy, beauty and perfection of her pregnancy.</p> <p>(26) M sought gain from the experience and received the message as a gift to live for the present. This changes her life and vision as she realises that the fragility of life can neither be captured nor assumed to always be there (taken for granted).</p> <p>(27) With hesitance, M began to look at things from an altered perspective and gradually dealt with her loss as she slowly tested an entirely different approach.</p>
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<p>first testing it slowly. M told herself that she had lost her child and all the dreams of what they were going to do together.</p> <p>(28) M's way of letting go was letting go of the pain and the anger. She admits to having had a lot of anger and adds that she had to let go of the pain and the anger, in order to, accept what had happened. M acknowledges that she was using the pain and the anger as her child. She nurtured the pain before she actually started to move into the "acceptance phase" and start thinking pleasant thoughts</p> <p>(29) M was letting go of the idea of being this child's mother. It had seemed such a sure case that the first week in October she was going to be a mother. M would look into other people's prams and she would start talking to them, asking when they became pregnant and when their baby was due and telling them when her baby was due.</p> <p>(30) Her first "instinct" when M saw mothers and their babies was to avoid the prams, which was not a natural thing for her to do. That is when she started to realise that something was not right and that she was not facing it. M felt that she had to face the idea that she was not going</p>	<p>(28) M no longer held onto the pain and intense anger which she nurtured as her child, before moving onto acceptance and thinking pleasant thoughts.</p> <p>(29) M let go of what had seemed to be a predictable future reality. She let go of the thought of being a mother (to her lost child) and ceased to identify with other mothers.</p> <p>(30) M avoided reminders of the baby which was not natural for her. She began to realise that she had to confront the thought that she was not going to be her baby, Luke's, mother as anticipated.</p>
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<p>to be Luke's mother. She was not going to be this baby's mother now.</p> <p>(31) M did not have the signals at first that something was wrong because everybody thought that she was fine. M thought that she was fine because she was carrying on. M was fooling herself and she admits that she actually started to believe that. There was no warning about the pain, the pain that came later.</p> <p>(32) M repeats that her social schedule was busy and they just carried on. They were carrying this pain. It was there every day and night and she was so aware of it. She tried harder to lie to herself. <i>The heavier the pain, the greater the pretence.</i> M did not let go of the pain.</p> <p>(33) M did not let go of the pain immediately. It was as if nurturing the thoughts of her child was actually the pain itself. It was not happy, joyful or fulfilling during the time when she would sit and think of her child and look at her (first) little sonar photo's. The thoughts were filled with pain and she was angry. M did not want to forget and she thought of her child quite often, but it was just sad.</p> <p>(34) M also thinks that it is such a big</p>	<p>(31) There were no warning signs regarding the pain, as M carried on and continued to deceive herself and others, believing that all was well.</p> <p>(32) M continued with her busy schedule as she carried and held on to the pain that was consciously and constantly with her. She persevered with the deception and the façade ("The heavier the pain, the greater the pretence").</p> <p>(33) M held onto the pain. Sustaining the painful thoughts maintained a link to her child, whom she wanted to retain in memory. The frequent thoughts of her baby were not happy or joyful, but filled with pain, sadness and anger.</p> <p>(34) In anticipation of the significant event</p>
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<p>thing to actually have a child that she saw that she was running around in circle, around the event that never took place. <i>M</i> could not move on. It was part of the fooling game. Whatever she did would come back to the event. <i>M</i> could not move on. It was like a tornado sucking her back. It was big and overshadowed everything.</p> <p>(35) At some stage <i>M</i> realised that she was going on like a robot. <i>M</i> looked as if she was fine. She would smile, work, but it was false. She did what was expected of her. It was raw inside. Deep inside she was shattered and there was something wrong. She did not want to let go of the event that was supposed to take place.</p> <p>(36) <i>M</i> was so looking forward to this child that when she did lose her baby it was as if she did not want to put things away. This included everything that had happened and all the little things that had been bought. <i>M</i> was still living off everything that had happened – the pain, the sad news, thinking about the time when they saw the sonar. That is, the last sonar where they switched it off and the doctor said that there was no heart beat and she and Larry were sent for a second opinion.</p>	<p>of having a child, <i>M</i> found herself focused on the future but going nowhere, “running around in circles”. As part of the façade, <i>M</i> was stuck, as an overpowering and obscuring force constantly pulled her back “like a tornado sucking”, returning her to the event that could not become a future reality.</p> <p>(35) With time <i>M</i> realised that something was wrong. Her actions were not authentically lived, but robot-like and socially determined, concealing an inner pain (raw and shattered) as she held onto a false future reality</p> <p>(36) <i>M</i> had keenly looked forward to the future event (having their child) and, with the loss, continued to hold on to all possible links (to the baby that sustained her). These included bought items, as well as the pain and the sad news.</p>
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<p>(37) For M, to let go would be to really get through it, onto the other side, to actually smile again and be able to look at someone's baby and be glad for them and not walk away there and think that that could have been her child, or ask why they were you so lucky to have their child. M saw that she could actually turn the whole event into something beautiful because it was beautiful.</p> <p>(38) It took M nearly three months to get to the point where she could look back and think that she was privileged for seven and a half months. Even if she had suffered this immense loss, there was still something beautiful that came out of it, and she needed to see that.</p> <p>(39) M needed to take things from day to day and not plan ahead and buy kiddie's gifts.</p> <p>(40) But to get to that point, M first had to let go of the negative energy (the pain, anger, misery and conflict) that surrounded the whole event – the sadness that surrounded the whole event; the sadness, the pain, the thinking that it was not fair that someone else had their baby. The sadness was there.</p>	<p>(37) For M, letting go would mean to move through the experience and come out onto the other side and be able to once again to be joyful and to relate positively to others rather than avoiding them and being resentful. M realised that the experience could be beautiful.</p> <p>(38) It took time (three months) for M to get to that point where she could retrospectively accept the loss and recognise the privilege and beauty that she had gained from the experience.</p> <p>(39) M realised that she should live for the present rather than planning and living for the future.</p> <p>(40) M realised that in order to accept the present, she had first to let go of the negative feelings (anger, pain, misery, conflict and resentment) of the past event.</p>
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<p>(41) M and her mother are actually very close, but in that time she did not want her mother close. It actually brought a negative thing into their relationship for the first time. M did not know why, but she did not want her mother to share her pain. M says that maybe she actually protected her mother by not wanting to show her how much she was hurting as she was hurting a great deal.</p> <p>(42) M can let go of the sadness. Even today, M still regrets not having the child with her. The “If only...”, the negative sadness is gone and the regret (positive longing) is there. It does not ache that much.</p> <p>(43) For M it is an achievement that she can still wonder how her child would have looked today and whether he would have been naughty. She pictures him and his daddy walking away and going to the toyshop. She says that it’s fine to do that and a nice thing to think of, because she knows that they will have children in the future. It’s not looking around and looking at that whole year as a disaster anymore.</p> <p>(44) M was able to let go as she tested</p>	<p>(41) M resisted continuing the earlier closeness with her mother and resisted sharing the intense pain with her. M avoided reminders of the mother-child relationship and assumed that she was being protective towards her mother.</p> <p>(42) M continues to let go of the (negative) sadness of the loss (relationship and dreams) and has replaced this with a less painful feeling of regret and hope for the future.</p> <p>(43) M feels a sense of achievement that she can acknowledge the absence of her child and accept the accompanying regret with a positive vision of the future, rather than a negative view of the past.</p> <p>(44) Changing her perspective, and trying it</p>
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<p>viewing things from another angle.</p> <p>(45) For the first three months, M does not think that she was open to any other angle except her anger and disappointment in life and the feeling that she had been done in. M admits that although it happens to other people, she became selfish in her pain. She would ask, “Why me?” Her dad once said to her in relation to a previous incident: “Always ask, Why not me?” She sees the three months as a waste of time in her life and believes that she had made the pain. It went with her to bed and she woke up with it. She had forgotten about the beautiful things, during those seven and a half months.</p> <p>(46) M thought that if she could let go of the pain, she could see things and she could get a message out of it.</p> <p>(47) M repeats that she had a lot of anger. The anger blinded her to the possibilities for making this work. The anger was the opposite of acceptance for her. Anger seemed the only direction. It engulfed her and she allowed it to.</p> <p>(48) About three to four weeks after M lost her baby, she directed her anger towards God. She had always been close</p>	<p>out was how M was able to let go.</p> <p>(45) At first, (for three months), M was not receptive to viewing things differently as she felt angry, disappointed and resentful. She withdrew into herself and the (constant) pain she created. M became oblivious to the beauty of her pregnancy.</p> <p>(46) The pain impeded M from finding new meaning. She realised that she had to let go of the pain.</p> <p>(47) M’s intense feelings of anger overwhelmed her and stood in the way, impeding acceptance, and making acceptance difficult.</p> <p>(48) M had been close to God and had shared a great deal with Him, but her loss had made her very angry and, with time, she</p>
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<p>to God. Religion has always been close to her and her family. M would talk and she would go to God with her problems and sometimes she would also go with her good news. M shared everything and was also verbally very angry towards God. She realised when it started getting worse. It was when it started stretching to three months. Maybe it was because she had all this anger towards God. M actually took her whole attitude back to religion. She wanted an answer.</p> <p>(49) M accepts that the answer really came to her. It was not a dream or a vision but a conscious insight. M believes that it was there all the time but was killed by the negative forces in her and she realises that she actually never saw it. M saw this window opening up with the message, “Never take life for granted”, which she believes must have been there all the time. M repeatedly acknowledges that it must have been there.</p> <p>(50) M carried the message to her religion. It also made it clear for her that there is a positive thing in everything that happens to her and that there will never be an obstacle in front of her that she can't get over. The answer was to get over this in order to go on. M believed that she had to</p>	<p>was furious with God. She verbally directed her intense feelings of anger towards Him. She confronted her religion and expected an answer.</p> <p>(49) In full awareness, M found her answer in the message, never to assume that life would always be present. The message had always been there, but was obscured by the negativity.</p> <p>(50)M sought to resolve the obstacle and became aware of the positive aspects of the negative experience is empowering. She transfers the insight gained to her religion and other aspects of her life. M believes that she is equipped to deal with all future difficulties that may arise. Finding positive</p>
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<p>find something positive out of the experience and told herself that it could not just be something bad. It could not just be a baby that had to die and be meaningless.</p> <p>(51) M was prepared to open herself up to the message, and only then did she realise that someone like her had forgotten about living for today and that she was rushing into tomorrow. M suddenly realised that she had this life and that she had taken life and everybody around her for granted. After the event M actually started phoning her family more. She presently cannot go through a week without phoning her mom every second day.</p> <p>(52) A constant message came from what happened. This only came to M because of what had happened. She says it's as if her baby gave her this special message to know that "It's fine. Let go. It's fine". She must carry on.</p> <p>(53) With all the personal pain, M realised that her child had died, but she could now give the event meaning. With the death of her child, she approaches life differently. M wants to pour love into life and live life on behalf of her 'child'. She would now say to her 'child' that if he could not live</p>	<p>meaning in the negative experience makes the difference.</p> <p>(51) When M became receptive to the new meaning (message), she realised that she had forgotten about living for the present and had taken life and her relationships for granted. M began to treasure her relationships and resumed regular contact with her significant others.</p> <p>(52) From what had happened, M found a constant and special message to trust and let go. M believes that she has to continue.</p> <p>(53) The pain of the death of her child had become meaningful in that she would now approach life differently. On behalf of her child, M desires to embrace her life with love and meaning ("to pour love into life and live life on behalf of (her) child").</p>
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<p>then she will and she will make it meaningful.</p> <p>(54) M says that it's not nice to experience such a waste of her life to 'shlep' on with all this pain and anger. She thinks that the people around her were aware of this and yet she thought that she was fine. M would think that she was fine and strong and that she could carry on. Later, afterwards when everybody could actually see that she was back and being herself again, people, her parents, often came to her and said that they could see that she had this wall around her. It was anger. M felt done in and cheated. The feeling was strong telling her that she had been done in, and that she was supposed to have this child but had not. She felt that about all the beautiful things and about being pregnant. The negative feelings engulfed her like a dark shadow over her.</p> <p>(55) M did not allow herself to go to the beautiful things as this would feel unfair because she could not justify being happy. M just saw the death and not the pregnancy. M says that she had the sense that she must do something about it, but was passive to her pain. The happy things were a no-no. It was her right to carry this pain and be miserable. The pain became</p>	<p>(54) M regrets having carried the negativity of pain and anger which overwhelmed her like a dark shadow. She feels deceived and let down, for although she had thought that she was coping, others were aware of a barrier around her.</p> <p>(55) M denied herself happiness and beauty and submitted to the pain of the loss that she believed she had to carry. The pain had become her baby and she felt guilty at the thought of letting go.</p>
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<p>her baby and she felt guilty if she thought of letting go.</p> <p>(56) Then, in the next moment, M woke up and realised that she was still in the shadow. It was fine and everyone had to stay away and she was okay. It actually just became worse because she was not prepared to go out for a little bit of sunlight.</p> <p>(57) The moment M did try and did say, that she was going to try something else besides this anger, the shadow just lifted. It was really like she could hear the angels sing. Because really it was like there was light and she was suddenly bombarded with the beautiful things. The intensity was sudden. M was aware but avoided it.</p> <p>(58) The eventual realisation that M was going to be fine was slow but the clarity was sudden. For M, it really was like opening the gift slowly, first pulling the ribbon and then the paper. There were stages that she had to go through to appreciate what there was but she took the light as a gift because of the intensity of the darkness.</p> <p>59) However, this is something that M can only say today by looking back, that the</p>	<p>(56) M accepted her place in the shadow and was not prepared to step into the light.</p> <p>(57) Upon changing her angry attitude, the intense light, that she had avoided poured in with beautiful things accompanied by what seemed to be the singing of angels.</p> <p>(58) Because of the intensity of the darkness that M was in, she accepted the insight and sudden clarity (light) as a gift which she slowly (through stages) moved towards, gradually realising that she would be fine.</p> <p>(59) As M was intensely unhappy at the time, it is only retrospectively that she</p>
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<p>pain and anger came in stages. At the time it was just being miserable. She now believes that from pain something beautiful will come her way.</p> <p>(60) M is also so grateful, not because of what happened but because had the insight to go and look for something there. M does not believe that anything just happens to her and others. If one opens up to it, she says, there is a message there. There is something.</p> <p>(61) M says that the letting-go process takes time. M does not think that three months is such a long time as other people go through things much longer. M also thinks that the fact that they can look forward to having another child some time in the future is positive.</p> <p>(62) It was definitely letting go of the anger. This changed her. It changed her from how she looked at things before being pregnant. It changed her outlook on life.</p> <p>(63) M also realised that because she and Larry have a fantastic relationship, in those three months she started picking up signs that something was wrong (in their relationship) although she thought that she</p>	<p>recognises that the pain and anger occurred in stages. She now understands that something beautiful can evolve from pain.</p> <p>(60) M is grateful that she was able to seek and find a message in the experience and now believes that with a receptive and open attitude, there is a message to be found in all experiences.</p> <p>(61) While the process of letting go took time (three months), approaching the future with the possibility of having another child is positive for M.</p> <p>(62) M realises that letting go of the anger changed her and her perspective on life.</p> <p>(63) Through the relationship with the significant other, M realised that something was wrong. She avoided reminders of the baby and often came into conflict with the significant other.</p>
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<p>was fine. M was avoiding the prams and turned her back when she would see couples coming with their little kids. M and Larry started to quarrel quite often. It would usually come from her side. M realised that something was wrong.</p> <p>(64) It did not happen overnight that M went to look for an answer or a new angle. It took a little while. She wanted to start and then would postpone it to the next day. The acceptance wanted to start as she put her foot in the light. The shadow had become a comfort zone and facing it would be entering the next phase and that would be letting go of the pain but at that stage, the pain became her baby.</p> <p>(65) M says that it was like letting the water go out slowly instead of everything at one shot. She states that everything at one shot would take her back to the early stages where she would fool herself again. She recalls that the futile angry outbursts M realised that it was going to be a slow process getting to where she wanted to be. Applying the new approach was slow because the old approach obviously did not work.</p>	<p>(64) M's attempt to approach things differently was slow. She was initially hesitant to enter the light, as the shadow was comforting to her and she realised that leaving the shadow would be leaving the pain, which, at that stage, had replaced her baby. M was not ready to accept what had happened.</p> <p>(65) M realised that she had to let go gradually, and that it was a slow process getting to where she wanted to be. If she were to do so suddenly, she would return to the early stages of pretence and the futile outbursts of anger.</p>
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<p>(66) It was then that M would want to take time or want to be alone at home. Rather than go out shopping, she would want to sit and think this through. M got to the point of rather playing with the dogs outside and half avoiding being alone, because she knew that there was something she had to face.</p> <p>(67) M repeatedly acknowledges that she had to do something about her attitude. She knew that she had to do something, as she did not like herself anymore. It was easy for her to start picking fights. M knows that she is someone who likes to communicate with people and laugh, but she could see something change in her and did not like it. M thinks that in a sense she was missing the ‘old’ her, and believes that the people around her also did. She did not discuss it that often and was very busy. M realised that she did not want to continue like that. Some people do, but if she had gone on like that, she would have lost more in the end, even jeopardising her marriage and her friends.</p> <p>(68) M is happy. M is really happy. As she faces day-to-day living, it’s not as if she is nonchalant about tomorrow. Not at all. It is just that she is more aware of relationships with people and what she</p>	<p>(66) M wanted to be alone and think about letting go, yet tended to avoid doing so by finding other activities. She knew, however, that there was something she had to look at.</p> <p>(67) M realised that she had to alter her attitude as she missed her earlier gregarious self and did not approve of the new (aggressive) self. M realised that if she were to continue in this manner, her marriage and friendships would be threatened and she feared further loss.</p> <p>(68) M feels really happy in her enriched awareness of the present and her interpersonal relationships.</p>
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<p>says to someone.</p> <p>(69) It is really different for M. She feels enriched. She really feels richer and that's why she says that she can now look back and think that her baby gave her this positive new outlook on life. For those first three months, she had nearly missed out on seeing this little message that was left behind.</p> <p>(70) M adds that perhaps finding that gift is her way of making peace with what happened. She can honestly say that if she could not get a message like this out of it, she would still be stuck in that negative, angry attitude.</p> <p>(71) It was like this little light that suddenly went on for her. The light was for getting an answer This gift worked for her. She can only describe the answer as a light and she can see where she is going and she is not stuck anymore. M believes that she has definitely moved on.</p> <p>(72) Someone also said to her that a special answer would lie in the eyes of her last child because that would be the child that she would never have had if the first one were around. So it's the little things like that. M adds that there is meaning in</p>	<p>(69) M feels enriched by the message that she believes her baby gave her, namely, for a positive outlook on life.</p> <p>(70) The message is a gift that has helped M find peace and direction. She realises that she has definitely moved on for, without it, she would have remained immobilised in her negativity.</p> <p>(71) The message with its meaning served as a gift of light in M's darkness providing her with clarity and direction, helping her to move on.</p> <p>(72) M believes that there is meaning in what she experiences. She has become receptive to others and the impact of someone's words has facilitated her acceptance and willingness to face the future (with optimism).</p>
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<p>everything that happens to her. She actually gets excited thinking that she will going to become pregnant again.</p> <p>(73) M believes that she grew up. It was also a growing up experience for her, as well. M says that it may sound corny, but the value of life really begins and ends with a human being's life. Nothing else. She finds it difficult to really put it into words, but when it comes to a human being's life there is nothing that she can take for granted. If she now thinks back on the little movements she felt, it was so amazing to her. She says that she experienced the ultimate of life and death in one year and it was so big. It was too big an event for her to cope with. That is why she says that it was a growing up process for her, in the sense of what life is about and believes that she now has the tools to cope with her life.</p> <p>(74) Sometimes it's frightening for M to think that she could have missed out on the message if she had not experienced it. That was the price that she had to pay to get to this idea and in a sense it balances it out for her. M acknowledges that it is okay.</p> <p>(75) It was okay to let go because M and</p>	<p>(73) M now recognises the value of life as human life, which cannot be taken for granted. The enormous impact of her feeling life's movements inside her and her encounter with life and death (within a year) has been a growth experience for M. She now believes that she is equipped to deal with her life.</p> <p>(74) M is alarmed at the thought that she could have missed the message, and accepts that her experience was the price she had to pay for the new meaning that she acquired.</p> <p>(75) In naming their child, M could let go</p>
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<p>her husband had to name their child. It was a little boy and his name was Luke, and she could say “good bye” in the sense that he would always be there. Their future children would know about him.</p> <p>(76) M says that she did not just need to carry that pain to remember her child, like she did in the first three months. When she did think of her child it was with a broken heart, with sad and angry thoughts, but now it is nice. M can now think of her child and it is a beautiful idea. M could only get to this point by letting go, by really letting go. Literally, that is what she had to do. M really does not know where she would have been.</p> <p>(77) M’s attempt to put the experience in physical terms is to compare it to a bungee-jump. She says that it’s a ‘free fall’, from where she realised was to where she had to get to – to the extreme points. Hers was the opposite to a bungee-jump. It was from a low to a high, if she could reverse a bungee-jump.</p> <p>(78) The process was there, but when the clarity occurred, M did not have doubts. She says that it was the right way. M sometimes tried to avoid facing it. But the next day she had to start spending more</p>	<p>and take leave of her son Luke, whose name would continue with her and her future family.</p> <p>(76) M realises that the pain (anger and sadness) was unnecessary, but was the link to her child. By letting go of that pain, she can now reflect on her child as a beautiful thought.</p> <p>(77) M experiences moving from one extreme point to another, expressed metaphorically as being a bungee-jump in reverse, moving from a low to a high.</p> <p>(78) M vacillated between the dark and the light. Although she avoided facing the light, once the visibility was there, M had no doubt, that it was the correct route to follow.</p>
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<p>time thinking better. There was dark and there was light. It was a light going on. When it was switched on, it stayed on.</p> <p>(79) M realises that she had made her choice that first morning, but she did not stick to her choice of the first morning. It was only after three months that she could go that way. M now realises that what she did was really to take the darker side, and only after three months did she enter the clarity of the positive side.</p> <p>(80) M adds that to let go was also a guilt feeling because she was almost not allowed to face joy.</p> <p>(81) In the beginning it was like playing with the light switch (on and off), but when it suited her. Then suddenly she did not have an effect on this light switch. It just stayed on. So then it was fine. She still thinks of that feeling and still thrives on it today. She is still on that high and hopes that she is going to stay there.</p> <p>(82) M expects that she will have her ups and downs sometimes, as things lie deeper. It is as if she can face anything coming her way now. To have come through it with an answer like that, M feels that can take anything. She</p>	<p>(79) Upon reflection, M realises that she did not adhere to her initial decision, but had actually entered the darker side. Only after three months was the visibility accessible to her.</p> <p>(80) M did not feel entitled to approach joy and equated letting go with feeling guilty.</p> <p>(81) At first, M's initial attempts did, at her discretion, alternate between facing the dark and facing the light, until the light finally stayed on, providing her with an elevated feeling on which she continues to thrive on and which she wishes to retain.</p> <p>(82) M anticipates emotional fluctuations yet feels empowered with the message. Although unable either to predict the future or her competence in it, she does believe that she can cope with life's challenges.</p>
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<p>anticipates that she will be strong and sad in her life and will accept whatever comes her way. M is aware that the future is not up to her and she cannot sit and say that she can face anything coming her way in the future. She says that she still has to get there to see if she can. M thinks that she will be able to cope and believes that she will not go the negative way in approaching something, but will look first.</p> <p>(83) M thinks that the negative would have come out at a later stage and that she would have broken down at some point in her life. She thinks that it would have been a denial thing if she did not go through the pain and the anger.</p> <p>(84) M says that she definitely went through stages. It was a process. The process was in stages of pain and anger, active processes that really happened. She could not see it at that stage, but looking back now she can see it. At that stage it was all “deurmekaar” (confused). M did think that she was fine and might have skipped any of those stages because M told everybody that she was fine and that life was beautiful. She even took out the movie “Life is beautiful” where she cried with Larry and thought, that she was fine. But M now realises that she wasn’t fine</p>	<p>(83) M believes that she had to experience the negativity (anger and pain), otherwise she would have collapsed in the future.</p> <p>(84) It is only retrospectively that M recognises phases of pain and anger, a process of which she was unaware at the time. Her behaviour (ability to cry through the experience of an event) preserved the belief that she was fine. M now realises that her emotional attitude (reluctance to have children), and her feeling miserable and different, did not concur.</p>
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<p>because of the things she did. She was just miserable and different. M did not want children and did not even want to bring up the issue of having a child. M realises that she was not fine.</p> <p>(85) Letting go for M occurred in stages. It was the little light switch thing that she had mentioned. When it happened, it was clear to her. It was definitely clear. M could feel it and it was great. She felt good about it.</p> <p>(86) M views herself as obviously overprotective now when she sees a pregnant mother. M does not turn her back anymore, and actually wants to tell her that she must take it easy and go to her doctor everyday. M says that it is definitely an attitude change. It's as if it did not come just from within her. She feels that it is a little gift. It definitely balances it out for her because the answer is there and makes her understand it. She can't say that it just came from her. She admits that she obviously would love to say that the gift came from her baby. As she said earlier it was as if she could hear the angels, (imitates chimes) when it happened. It definitely happened.</p> <p>(87) M started looking around her and she</p>	<p>(85) Letting go occurred in phases, where light and dark would vacillate until there was final clarity which provided a sense of well-being. This M continues to enjoy.</p> <p>(86) The message (gift) from her baby has helped M understand, change her attitude and find stability. Though the experience occurred in M's conscious reality, she believes that it was not merely her own creation but something of spiritual significance from an outer reality.</p> <p>(87) M retrospectively realised that she was</p>
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<p>saw people, especially in her kind of work, mothers who had lost their children in accidents. She realised that she was not alone. Looking around her she became aware of other people who were also in pain.</p> <p>(88) M says that she could not go and sit in the corner. It did cross her mind but she believes that no good would have come from it – “Nothing. Zilch”.</p> <p>(89) The process occurred, but not immediately. As M had said, she only realised it three months later. That’s the thing that she said the first morning. There were the choices: sitting in the corner dying or going on with this, facing this and letting go.</p> <p>(90) M had to move through the stages, to get to the brighter side. M thought that morning when she made the decision that she would be fine, but had actually come down but realises that she has come through on the other side. It is a gift and she is definitely stronger now.</p>	<p>not alone in her pain. She became aware of the loss of other mothers and others who were also in pain.</p> <p>(88) Although she had considered it, M believes that withdrawing would have been futile.</p> <p>(89) The process of letting go, was gradual. M recalls the initial choice she had the first morning either to face (let go) the experience and move on, or withdraw (die).</p> <p>(90) Unlike her initial expectation that she would be fine, M now realises that to get to the brighter side she first had to move through different levels and come down before moving through. She feels enriched and empowered</p>
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TABLE II

Participant A: Marlene (M)

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*Constituents of the Individual Situated Structure of Letting Go*

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**A. Attachment: (1. 2)**

M had not taken her pregnancy for granted and was fondly *attached* to the idea of having her baby (which dies in utero). M was aware of a physiological attachment to a human being but found it difficult to let go of a relationship that had only existed in thought and had not become a reality. There had been no mutual sharing of an interpersonal attachment.

**B. Loss/ Emptiness: (3. 5. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16.)**

The physical *emptiness* made M aware of a physical and emotional loss and she realised that her loss was not merely of an idea, but was also interpersonal. At first, M held on to the concept of her baby, and resisted accepting the loss. She still believed that the baby was alive and living inside her body. The inadequate replacement (in the form of a card with the baby's footprints) confronted her with the reality that she had nothing but emptiness. Returning to the familiar order she knew, M was relieved to discover that though she had lost a future to which she had become attached, she had lost nothing tangible or familiar to her. Facing the reality of her emptiness and loss led to feelings of hopelessness with a need for answers. A quest unfolded, as M sought to find something positive to fill the void.

**C. Initial Decision: (4. 7. 8. 9.)**

**Soon after the loss, M was confronted with having to make a *decision*, either to withdraw (die) or face the loss (live) and move on. Feeling competent, and believing that she could replace what had been lost, M decided to retain control and move on. She was aware of her attachment to others, and in the awareness of the loss, she realised that her attachments were threatened. She resisted withdrawing, for fear of the potential negative and detrimental effects that the overpowering and lengthy**

passivity would have on her. Besides, withdrawal meant the negativity of pain and death. The attachment to her spouse influenced her decision and she decided to be positive and move on.

**D. Relationship with Others:** (10. 17. 41. 63. 67. 87.)

Although withdrawal was an option, M viewed it as a selfish choice. She was aware that others also experience loss and that she was not alone in her pain. Her consideration for, and awareness of, *others* helped her move on. With the belief that she would be fine, M attempted to regain the familiar psychological order and returned to the familiarity of her work, where she could also relate to other people. Once again, she realised that she was not alone, for, at work, M became aware of the loss experienced by others who were also in pain.

Though others were significant, M resisted the closeness that she had previously enjoyed with her mother and evaded sharing the pain of the loss with her. While protective of her mother, M avoided reminders of the mother-child relationship. Nevertheless, conflict arose in the close relationship with the significant other, and she realised that something was wrong and that she had altered. M disliked the aggressive change she saw in herself and she missed the earlier gregarious self with which she was familiar. M realised that she had to do something, for if she were to continue in this manner, her significant relationships (marriage and friendships) were being threatened, so further loss could ensue.

**E. Vacillation:** (6. 18. 19. 20.)

M believed that she would recover physically, but was aware of an emotionally challenging path ahead. Though she avoided talking about the baby, M would *vacillate* emotionally from one extreme to the other, either controlling her feelings by keeping busy, or overtly expressing what she felt while under the influence of alcohol. M was not satisfied with her behaviour and, although she had become aware of the need to express herself freely, she understood that this was not the solution. She gradually realised (over a

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period of three months) that if she were to find a solution, she would first have to view things differently.

**F. Different approach (2nd Decision):** (25. 27. 44. 45.)

M decided to approach the loss from a *different* perspective and looked at the past, recalling the joy, beauty and perfection of her pregnancy. Due to her emotional state following the loss, M realised that she had been oblivious to the beauty of her pregnancy, as she withdrew into the pain which prevented her from facing joy and viewing things differently. M had remained attached to a future that could not fulfil itself, and she realised that this led only to sadness and negativity. Ambivalently, M accepted the pain, but realised that she could not continue in this manner, and gradually adopted a new perspective as she hesitantly tested an entirely different approach, accepted her loss and gradually let go. The experience had gained new meaning. From viewing what she had lost, M began to see what she had gained.

**G. The Message** (21. 22. 23. 24. 26. 39. 49. 51. 71.)

The decision to view things differently provided M with sudden insight which was a clear and conscious experience. She found new meaning in the death of her baby, and, in the realisation that he had not lived, was enriched by the *message* perceived, for her to awaken to life and its meaningful moments, to live for the present and to take the special times out of every day, rather than to live and plan for the future. M began to realise that, due to her haste and focus on the future, she had missed the numerous special moments of her pregnancy and had been oblivious to the present. She had taken her life and relationships for granted. With the new perspective, an awareness unfolded that the fragility of life can neither be captured nor assumed. In the darkness of her pain, the message served as a gift of light that provided her with clarity and direction and helped her to move on. In her quest for gain, the message, with its new meaning, provided an answer that changed her life and vision, offering her a new horizon for which she is very grateful. M has now resumed a regular contact in her relationships with others and treasures her relationships.

**H. Holding on:** (33. 36. 55. 80.)

M had remained fondly attached to the thought of having their child and, despite the loss, continued to *hold on* to that concept and was reluctant to put things away. M had keenly looked forward to the event and wanted to retain a meaningful link to her baby, so she withdrew into the pain (disappointment, anger, sadness, and resentment) that was constantly with her. She frequently thought about her baby, but the memories, although neither joyful nor fulfilling, continued to sustain her. The pain had become her baby, and she felt guilty at the thought of letting go, as she continued to care. M would deny herself happiness and beauty, and submitted to the pain of the loss which she felt obliged to carry.

**I. Façade** (31. 32. 34. 35. 84.)

M held on to the pain that was constantly with her, and remained attached to a false future that could not become a reality. She was acutely aware of the unresolved (raw) inner pain which she concealed and evaded acknowledging. M maintained a *façade* and, while she continued with a busy social schedule and appeared to “move on” with her life, her actions were not authentically lived but socially determined, concealing the inner pain. M deceived herself into believing that all was well and that she was fine. There were no warning signs regarding the pain, for the more intense the truth of the pain, the greater the façade: “the heavier the pain, the greater the pretence”. Her ability to cry through an unrelated experience facilitated the deception that she was fine, and she persevered with it. Eventually, however, M found that she was stuck, immobilised and unable to move on, as an overpowering and obscuring force would constantly pull her back, “like a tornado sucking”, repeatedly returning her to the anticipated event that could not become a reality. M found that she was spinning, “running around in circles”, going nowhere and, with time, realised that something was wrong. She became aware that her attitude had changed, as she was reluctant to have children and avoided reminders about the baby. M was not her usual self.

**J. Anger and Pain:** (45. 46. 47. 48. 59.)

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Following the loss, M withdrew into herself, submitting to the constant pain. The *anger and pain* impeded acceptance of the reality of what had happened, and the negativity prevented her from finding new meaning and seeing the message. M realised that she had to let go of the pain.

M had always been close to God and had shared a great deal with Him, but the loss had made her very angry. With time, she became furious with God and verbally directed her intense feelings of anger towards Him, confronted her religion and expected an answer. It is only retrospectively that M became aware that the pain and anger occurred at intervals.

**K. Ambivalence and Vacillation:** (56. 57. 58. 61. 64. 65. 66. 70. 78. 79. 81. 85.)

By withdrawing into the negativity (pain, sadness and anger), M remained in the darkness (shadow) which had become her comfort zone. She was not prepared to step into the light, of which she was aware, but nevertheless still knew that she had to face it. M avoided doing so by keeping busy with something else. Although she wanted to be alone and think about entering the light and letting go, she evaded this, believing that if she were to leave the darkness, she would be leaving the pain and the attachment to her baby. M was not ready to accept what had happened. She needed to remain attached, yet desired to move on. Moving to where she wanted to be took time, as M realised that if she were to move on suddenly, she would return to the early stages of pretence and the futile outbursts of anger.

The mobility towards change was slow. In the darkness of her pain, the message served, and continues to serve, as a gift of light, releasing M from the negativity and angry attitude. M was hesitant to enter the light and approach things differently, and her initial attempts were discretionary, as she avoided facing the light. However, the change in her attitude made it possible for the intense light and aspects of beauty to pour in. Letting go occurred only at intervals, as M *vacillated* between facing the dark and facing the light, until there was final clarity, peace and direction to move on. Once the clarity was there and the visibility remained, M had no doubt that it was the correct route to follow and

that she would be fine. The positive view (the possibility of having another child in the future) facilitated the process.

In retrospect, M realises that she had not adhered to her initial decision to move on, but had inadvertently entered the darker side. The message provided her with an elevated feeling, on which she still thrives and which she wishes to retain. The experience transcends the self and is spiritual.

**L. Acceptance:** (28. 29. 30. 40. 42. 43. 53. 62. 72. 75.)

M realised that in order to accept the present, she had first to let go of the negative feelings (anger, pain, misery, conflict, resentment) that she held on to. By letting go of the negativity, M was able to move on to *acceptance* and pleasant thoughts. She let go of an unrealistic future and ceased to identify with other mothers, accepting the idea that she was not going to be her baby's mother as she had expected. She let go of her "baby", but holds on to his name, a name that will continue with her and her family into the future. M decided to approach her life differently, and the negativity of the pain of the loss acquired new (positive) meaning. She accepted the absence in the present, and replaced the negative sadness of the loss with regret for the past and hope for the future. There was a sense of achievement in accomplishing the less painful perspective.

The changed attitude and space created made it possible for M to be open and receptive to others, where she found fresh sustenance in someone's words. This further facilitated her acceptance and willingness to face the future, as M accepted that from pain (negative), something beautiful (positive) could evolve. On behalf of her baby, M desires to embrace her life with love and live it with meaning. She believes that there is meaning in the things that happened to her.

**M. Retrospective View:**

(37. 38. 52)

For M, letting go means having *moved* through the experience and come out on the other side. It is being joyful once again and relating positively to others, rather than avoiding them and being resentful. Arriving at the point where she could, in retrospect, accept the

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loss and recognise the privilege and beauty that had come out of the experience, took time (three months). From the experience, M has learned to trust the process and let go. She believes that she has to continue.

(54. 76. 83.)

M regrets the *pain and anger* she held on to, which overwhelmed her like a dark shadow. She feels deceived and let down, for although she had thought that she was fine, she realises that others were aware of a barrier around her. Nevertheless, M accepts that the pain (anger and sadness) was a necessary link to her child and inevitable. Had she not experienced the negativity, she believes that she would have experienced a collapse in the future.

(77. 88. 89. 90.)

M recalls her initial decision not to withdraw and believes that had she done so, it would have been futile, for the *process* was gradual as she went through different phases. To get to the brighter side, M had first to move through different levels, and had come down before moving through. M has moved from one extreme point to another, metaphorically like a bungee-jump in reverse, from a low to a high. The process has enriched and empowered her.

(60. 70. 74.)

The *message* facilitated M's mobility, for without it she would have remained stuck in the negative angry attitude she had held on to. The message, with its positive meaning, had, like a light, entered her dark world of pain and provided relief, peace and direction. M is grateful that she sought and found the message, and believes that, with a receptive and open attitude, a message is to be found in all experiences. M is alarmed at the possibility of having missed the message, and accepts that the experience was the price she had to pay for the positive meaning which she received.

(73. 86.)

The message bears *spiritual significance* for M, helping her to understand, find stability and change her attitude. She now treasures the present and her relationships, and considers the value of life as human life, which she no longer takes for granted. The



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enormous impact of her close encounter with life and death – within a year – has been a growth experience for her.

(50. 68. 69. 82.)

The insight gained from the *message* and its positive meaning is transferred to M's religion and other aspects of her life. M looks to the future in the awareness that she cannot predict either what is to be, or her ability to deal with it. Nevertheless, she feels positive about the future and trusts that all impending difficulties can be overcome, as something meaningful and positive can be found in her experiences. M anticipates emotional fluctuations, yet feels empowered and enriched by her new positive outlook. She feels competent and confident to deal with the challenges of her life.

**TABLE III**

Participant A: Marlene (M)

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*Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go*

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M does not take the event of her pregnancy for granted and, with her spouse, is positively focused on the future and the joy of having their child. She is aware of a physiological and conceptual attachment to a human being, but the unexpected loss of the baby replaces the anticipated joyful event.

At first, M remains fondly attached to the thought of having her baby and, despite the loss, continues to hold on to the idea. She continues to believe that the baby is a living part of her, in their mutual oneness, and finds it difficult to let go even of a relationship that had existed only in thought, with no interpersonal sharing. However, with the loss, the experience of physical emptiness makes her aware of a physical and interpersonal loss that is emotional. Initially, she holds on to the concept of her baby and resists accepting the loss, but having moved through the processes of pregnancy and birth, she realises that she is left with nothing but emptiness, and is confronted with the reality of her loss. The oneness shared will not continue interpersonally as expected. M becomes aware that she has lost a future, but is relieved to know that she has lost nothing tangible or familiar to her. With the awareness of her loss and sense of emptiness, feelings of hopelessness emerge, and, in her need to find something positive to fill the void, M seeks answers and a quest unfolds.

Soon after the loss, M is confronted with having to make a decision, either to withdraw (die) or face the loss (live) and move on. Feeling optimistic in her view of the future (to replace what she has lost) and competent regarding her ability to cope with what had happened, M decides to be positive and move on. The attachment to her spouse, who has shared the experience with her, influences her decision. She resists withdrawing for fear of the impact it would have on him and the significant others in her life. Although

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withdrawal is an option, she considers it to be a selfish move that will be potentially painful and detrimental. She recognises her attachment to others and decides to move on.

M's consideration for the significant others (spouse and parents) in her life promotes her decision not to withdraw, but to move on. She realises that she is not alone in her pain, and seeks to return to the familiarity of the psychological order she knew. She returns to work. At her workplace she identifies with others who have also experienced loss. She enjoys relating to others at work and initially believes that she will be fine.

M continues to hold on and is reluctant to detach herself, seeking instead to retain the links to her baby, whom she frequently thinks of with painful memories that continue to sustain her. She withdraws into the pain and negativity (anger, disappointment and resentment) that is constantly with her, and the pain has become her baby. She feels guilty at the thought of letting go of the pain, for to do so would mean that she would be letting go of her baby. She denies herself happiness and beauty, and submits to the pain of the loss which she feels obliged to carry.

The attachment to her baby continues, as M withdraws into the pain (sadness and anger) and remains in the darkness (shadow), which becomes a comfort zone. Although she believes that she will recover physically, she is aware of an emotionally challenging path ahead. M resists all reminders of the loss and evades discussing it, even with her mother, with whom she had previously been very close. M believes that she is protecting her mother from the pain, while the deception and façade continue.

To avoid talking about the loss, M keeps busy, yet finds that she vacillates from one emotional extreme to the other, either controlling her feelings or overtly expressing what she feels, particularly when under the influence of alcohol. Although M becomes aware of the need to express herself freely, she disapproves of her negative behaviour and realises that this is not the answer.

M keeps busy and continues to hold on to the pain that is constantly with her. She attempts to conceal and protect the inner pain that she feels intensely, creating a façade as she continues to pretend and only seems to move on with her life. Her behaviour is

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socially determined and she does not live authentically, but deceives herself into believing that she is fine. The absence of any warning signs helps preserve the deception. M persevered with the façade, for “the heavier the pain, the greater the pretence”. Her ability to cry through an unrelated experience further reinforces the deception that she has recovered. Eventually, however, M finds that she is stuck, blocked and immobilised, unable to move forward as an overpowering and obscuring force constantly pulls her back, “like a tornado sucking”, repeatedly returning her to the reality of what she has not achieved. M finds that she is entrapped, “running around in circles”, going nowhere. With time, she realises that something is wrong.

M becomes aware that she is not her usual self, as she is now reluctant to have children and avoids reminders about the baby. Conflict arises in the close relationship with her spouse, and she becomes aware that she has changed. Feelings of aggression arise in her relationship with God, with whom she had always been close and had shared a great deal. With time, she becomes furious with God, and verbally directs her intense feelings of anger towards Him. She confronts her religion and demands an answer to what has happened. She misses her earlier gregarious self, and disapproves of the aggressiveness that has emerged. M realises that she has to make a change, for continuing in this manner will threaten her meaningful relationships (marriage and friendships), and she fears further loss. With the threat of further loss, M decides to view things differently and moves from the negativity (anger, pain, misery conflict and resentment) that she held on to and recalls the positive aspects (joy, beauty and perfection) of her experience of the pregnancy. She realises that, due to her haste and focus on the future, she had missed the numerous special moments of her pregnancy.

The decision to view things differently provides M with a message that appears in her conscious awareness. The change in her attitude and the quest for new meaning regarding her baby’s death, provide her with the answer that she was looking for. The answer is a message for her to awaken to life and its meaningful moments, to live for the present, rather than to live and plan for the future.

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The process towards change is slow and, in the darkness of her pain, the message serves as a gift of light which liberates her from the entrapment. She realises that she has to face the light, but avoids doing so. At first, M is not willing to accept the light, for this would mean having to accept what had happened to her, and having to let go of the pain and darkness which have replaced her baby. This would mean that she would have to let go of her baby and she is reluctant to do so. M resists the change and, although she wants to be alone to think about entering the light, she evades this as well. M realises that if she suddenly has to let go, she will return to the early stages of pretence and the futile outbursts of anger. Moving to where she wants to be takes time.

Her initial attempts to enter the light and approach things differently are cautious. Letting go occurs in phases as she vacillates between anger and pain, between facing the dark and facing the light. The vacillation continues until there is final clarity, peace and direction to move on. Once there is clarity and stability, she has no doubt that she is on the correct route. M trusts that she will be fine. The change in her attitude makes it possible for the intense light and beautiful things to pour in. Her positive view of the future facilitates the process and, in her quest for gain, the new meaning provided by the message changes her life and provides her with a new horizon, for which she is very grateful. While the attachment is retained, new meaning is linked to her experience of loss. M hesitantly tests the entirely different approach and gradually accepts the new perspective. As she comes to terms with her loss and finds new meaning, M is able to let go.

She realises that she had been prevented from seeing the positive message that she now believes was always there. In retrospect, she realises that her negativity had impeded her acceptance of what had happened. Though initially reluctant to do so, M moves on to *acceptance* and, with the acceptance, she is able to accept the present and let go of an unrealistic future and acknowledge the sadness of the loss. In the process, she becomes aware of hope for the future. She is able to have pleasant thoughts and find resolution, accepting the idea that she is not going to be her baby's mother as expected. Although she does let go of her "baby", she remains attached to his name with which she will enter the future. A sense of continuity is retained. The pain of the loss acquires new meaning and, as M decides to approach her life differently, she feels a sense of achievement. From

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viewing what she had lost, M begins to see what she has gained. She resumes regular contact in her interpersonal relationships and begins to treasure them, no longer assuming that they will always be there.

M's changed attitude also makes it possible for her to become receptive to others, and she finds fresh sustenance in the meaning of someone's words which reinforces her acceptance and her willingness to face the future. With the new perspective, M realises that from pain, something beautiful can evolve. She accepts that the fragility of life cannot be taken for granted and, on behalf of her baby, desires to embrace her life with love and live it with meaning. She believes that there is meaning in the things that happened to her.

Arriving at the point where she could, in retrospect, accept the loss and recognise the beauty that had come out of the experience takes time. She realises that letting go was a gradual *process*, where she had first to enter the darkness before moving into the light. In retrospect, she becomes aware of the process and realises that she had not adhered to her initial decision to move on, but had inadvertently entered the darker side. Letting go is a shift from one extreme point to another, moving from feelings of deep sadness to feelings of elation. She had *moved* through the experience to the other side and was joyful once again, relating positively to others, rather than avoiding them and being resentful. With the new meaning, M finds resolution, and is provided with a sense of enrichment and empowerment, a feeling on which she still thrives and wishes to retain. The experience is transformational. M has learned to trust (the process of life) and let go.

M regrets the *pain and anger* that she held on to. There were phases of pain and anger. Although the negativity had enveloped her in darkness, it was a necessary link to her child and an inevitable part of the process. She feels deceived and let down for not seeing the barrier around her.

In the process, the new positive meaning gained facilitates M's transition and mobility, liberating her from the entrapment of the negative angry attitude that had enveloped her and which she had held on to. In the darkness of her pain, the positive meaning of the

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message is a light that provides relief, peace and direction. She is grateful for having sought and found the “message” with its new meaning, and now believes that significance can be found in all experiences. She accepts that the experience was the price she had to pay for the message.

The message bears spiritual significance which M transfers to her religion and other aspects of her life. M finds stability and changes her attitude, with a greater appreciation for life and existing relationships. The awareness of the present also appears to have increased. M is optimistic about the future and trusts that she can overcome all future difficulties that may confront her. M feels empowered, enriched, competent and confident to deal with the challenges in her life.

TABLE IV

Participant A: Marlene (M)

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*General Situated Structure of Letting Go*

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The expected (birth) event is significant and, in anticipation of the event, there is a positive focus on the future, when the new significant other will enter the world of the self. In waiting for the future, there is awareness of a physiological and conceptual bond to a human being. The mother-to-be feels a sense of oneness with the anticipated arrival of her baby. The event, considered to be joyful, is, however, suddenly replaced by loss.

Despite the physical loss, the concept of the new significant other (baby) continues to be held on to, but the experience of physical emptiness confronts the self with the reality of a physical and interpersonal loss. Letting go of a relationship that had not been enjoyed as a shared reality, but had only existed in thought, is difficult. Confrontation with the physical loss and the feeling of emptiness brings to awareness both the physical and interpersonal meaning of the loss. Resistance to accepting the loss arises, along with an accompanying emotionality, but, with the emptiness following the waiting period, the loss becomes a reality. Loss of the anticipated future is acknowledged, but with relief in the knowledge that no familiar attachment has been lost. Feelings of emptiness and hopelessness emerge, with the need for something positive to fill the void. A quest unfolds.

Soon after the loss, a decision confronts the self, either to withdraw and accept death or face the loss, live and let go. The emotionality of the experience is avoided and, with the belief of being able to cope and optimism regarding the future, the decision is to be positive and move on. The self justifies its decision not to withdraw, a step considered selfish and potentially painful and detrimental to the significant others with whom the experience has been shared.

Following the decision, the familiarity of the known psychological order is returned to with the pleasure resumed of relating to others. In the familiar environment, the self



identifies with others who have also experienced loss. There is the initial belief of competence.

Holding on continues, with a reluctance to detach the self from the loss of the baby. Links are retained, as painful memories continue to sustain the self, while the presence of the pain and negativity replace the absence of what was meaningful (the baby). There is attachment to the pain experienced, as it has replaced the baby, and feelings of guilt arise at the thought of letting go. Happiness and joyful thoughts are denied, and the pain is carried with a sense of obligation.

Withdrawal into the pain and negativity envelops the self in darkness which paradoxically becomes a comfort zone. Although there is trust in a physical recovery, an emotionally challenging path is envisaged. All reminders of the loss are evaded particularly those associated with parenting relationships. In the continued effort to avoid reminders of the loss, activities increase. Nevertheless, the self vacillates in emotions and behaviour from one extreme to another. Emotions are either controlled or expressed overtly, particularly when under the influence of alcohol. Although the need for self-expression becomes evident, there is disapproval of the negative behaviour connected with achieving this.

While holding on to the pain continues, attempts are made to conceal and protect what lies hidden. A façade emerges that conceals the truth. Behaviour is not authentic, but socially determined, with a deceptive belief regarding personal competence and stability: the heavier the pain, the greater the pretence characterising the behaviour that is false, behaviour which is not lived in truth. The evident ability to behave “normally” reinforces the perseverance in the deception. Eventually, the self becomes stuck, blocked and immobilised, unable to move forward, as an overpowering and obscuring force constantly returns the self, in defiance of personal will, to the reality of the loss and the reality of the present. With the entrapment, the self experiences a sense of spinning and going nowhere. With time, awareness increases that something is wrong.

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Intense aggressive feelings arise, and are expressed in the close relationship with the significant other, as well as in the close relationship with God. Religion is confronted, with demands for an answer. The different and negative sense of self emerges with a disapproval of the aggressiveness and a desire for the premorbid self. The self is confronted with the need for change, with an increasing awareness that to continue in the present manner threatens existing meaningful relationships. Further loss is feared. With the threat of further loss, the self decides to view things differently and move from the pain and negativity that had been held on to.

The change in attitude and quest for new meaning provide an answer which is perceived as a message, requesting for a greater awareness of life and its meaningful moments: to live for the present, rather than to live and plan for the future. There is an increasing realisation that, due to haste and a focus on the future, the numerous special moments of the present were not evident to the self. The joy and beauty of life – moments in the present, and meaningful relationships – had been taken for granted.

Although the message is accepted, the process towards change is slow. In the darkness of the pain, the message serves as a gift of light which liberates the self from the entrapment. Although there is awareness of the light, the self avoids facing the light, which means acceptance of what had happened. There is resistance to letting go of the meaningful, though painful, attachment that had replaced the absent baby. Change is resisted and, although there is a need to consider entering the light, such a step is evaded. Besides, there is the awareness that to suddenly let go can lead the self to return to the early stages of pretence and the futile outbursts of anger. The approach is gradual, and making the change takes time.

Initial attempts to enter the light and approach things differently are cautious. The entirely different approach is tested hesitantly, and the new perspective gradually accepted. Letting go occurs in phases, with swings between anger and pain, between facing the dark and facing the light. Vacillation between the dark and the light continues until clarity is attained, providing peace and direction. With the arising stability, there is conviction of being on the correct route, while the self trusts that it can continue. The

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change in attitude makes it possible for beauty to be perceived in the intense light. There is an awareness of the presence of beauty in the new world, and a positive view of the future facilitates the process. In the quest for gain, the new meaning provided by the message is significant, providing the self with a new horizon. With the new meaning acquired, the attachment is retained as it continues to link with the experience of loss. With the acceptance of the loss, new meaning emerges, along with a capacity to let go. The future is entered with a sense of continuity.

In retrospect, there is awareness that the negativity had prevented the self from finding new meaning. Although the positive message was always there, there is awareness that negativity impedes acceptance of what had happened. Despite the initial reluctance to do so, letting go of an unrealistic future makes acceptance of the present possible. Although the loss is accepted with sadness, hope for the future emerges. As true feelings are revealed, clarity is provided. With the discovery of new meaning, the approach to life is different, as pleasant thoughts enter consciousness. From viewing what had been lost, there is new awareness of what has been gained along with a sense of having encountered life and its meaning. The value of interpersonal relationship is accepted and resumed. Awareness of the positive change provides a sense of achievement. Positive and sustaining influences reinforce the acceptance with a willingness to face the future. The changed attitude makes the self more willing to relate to the world and become receptive to its influences. Beliefs and values are influenced by the experience of change.

Despite the negativity experienced, having moved through the experience provides the self with the capacity to view what is positive. Upon reflection, there is regret for the pain and anger that was held on to, but this is accepted as a necessary initial link to what was to be a new significant other. Retrospectively awareness unfolds that the pain and anger occurred in phases, but the self feels deceived for not having been aware of the truth. The process of letting go is acknowledged as timeous and gradual, for, before moving into the light, darkness has first to be entered. Despite initial efforts to avoid, the darkness, this is an inevitable part of the process. In the darkness of the pain, the positive meaning of the message is a light that provides relief, peace and direction. The meaning gained facilitates transition and mobility, liberating the self from the entrapment and the

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negativity that was held on to. The negativity of the experience is accepted as a necessary exchange for the positive message found.

Letting go is accepted as a shift from one extreme point to another, a mobility from feelings of deep sadness to feelings of elation. Moving through the experience to the other side is to re-experience pleasure and relate positively to others, rather than being negative and avoiding them. Finding resolution provides the self with a sense of enrichment and empowerment, a positive feeling that the self thrives on and wishes to retain.

The message bears spiritual significance which is transferred to religion and other aspects of life, as stability is found. The change in attitude accompanies a greater appreciation for life and existing relationships. Awareness of the present increases with a greater optimism regarding the future. The experience is transformational. Successful resolution of the process of letting go and the meaning discovered facilitates the acceptance of life. There is gratitude for the new meaning as life-beliefs are altered, with fresh conviction that future difficulties can be overcome. Feelings of empowerment, enrichment and competence emerge with a sense of confidence to deal with the challenges of life.

**Participant B: Ben (B)**

Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go

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A family man, B works for Correctional Services as a psychologist from eight to five daily. He earns a monthly salary which makes it possible for him to live a stable and predictable life.

B's employment provides him with a feeling of safety and security, yet denies him freedom. The institution where he works has demilitarised and, although the new context liberates him emotionally, ironically, he also feels trapped where he is. He believes that his presence and contributions are not being appreciated, and he feels abused and professionally rejected. In the changed context, B reflects on who he is and realises that he is different to the others. He does not feel that he belongs there and wants to leave.

There is conflict, doubt and tension about leaving his work, but letting go begins with his decision to leave. He questions himself regarding his decision, and wonders whether he is being selfish and inconsiderate of others. With his decision to leave his place of employment, B decides to emigrate, and becomes aware of horizons beyond his familiar world. Admission to the country of his choice is conditional, as he is expected to meet certain criteria. He accepts being rejected initially, a necessary step, he believes, for the greater opportunity he pursues.

B is excited and motivated about leaving and looks forward to being of value again through fulfilling his vocation and making meaningful contributions. The security of a salary no longer seems necessary. He is willing to make a complete change, and, although he is aware of risks, he nevertheless trusts that he will continue to survive.

Before his departure, B returns to say goodbye and rekindle the memories of his past with which will continue to sustain him. The close contact he had with family

and relatives has diminished, and has been replaced with meaningful attachments to certain places and people. He returns to his past and visits the places of his birth, the places of his childhood and of earlier youth. B retraces the early steps and paths that he had taken in his life, and relives the journey of his earlier years. The trip is meaningful to him, particularly as he says goodbye in a personal, rather than in a socially expected, manner. During his visit, B is reassured that, in the consistent diversity and newness of life, the foundations and familiarity of past structures do continue. He finds the visit a positive experience and leaves with meaningful memories that he finds empowering. The memories retain attachments to the pleasure of the places and people he knew and loved, and to which he would like to return in the future. Rekindling the early memories of people and concrete places revives his link to foundations, the foundations of his childhood. B's memories are fundamental to his experience of letting go.

The initial motivator for B to change is spiritual. As a Christian and as someone who is religious, B is reminded that the most important aspects of life are spiritual rather than material. In his journey, B identifies with Christ as his leader, and decides to follow him by adhering to the values and beliefs of his faith. B is reminded of the spiritual journey of being a Christian. He is reminded of the meaning of letting go of material attachments and securities by submitting to spiritual values. A religious practice conveys the significance of a spiritual (Easter) message that, before he can experience new life, he has to sacrifice and let go. In identifying with Christ and accepting his religious beliefs, the unknown path on which B embarks becomes more familiar to him.

Upon accepting that material attachments are not of primary importance, B is able to relax (let go), accepting himself beyond his regular values and the context of daily living. He becomes aware of not being a failure and accepts his spiritual calling in serving others. Throughout the process, the focal point of serving "the other" remains a beacon to B and he decides to refocus on it once he has relinquished the material or "false" securities to which he is attached. It is not easy relinquishing the material securities, but, rather than think of himself and dwell on his feelings, B

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considers others and decides to submit to his spiritual (Christian) principles which will continue to provide him with a sense of security.

Looking beyond the move into the future, B's intention is to continue with his desire to serve others and to continue to commit himself to his belief. He would like to help others with the knowledge that he has gained through the experience and the discovery he has made – “To let go when it is necessary to let go” – particularly as the lived experience that he has come to know it as, rather than in its cognitive context. B has also discovered that an open attitude with a willingness to be receptive to spiritual paths, has drawn him closer to his purpose in life. The securities of material attachments have had to be relinquished. Letting go is a challenge and not easy. The experience is a fearful leap into the vastness and unpredictability of space, like “jumping from a plane before the parachute opens”.

Although the material attachments are considered to be false, his ability to retain these attachments provides relief. B realises that eventually almost all material attachments will have to be relinquished, but that the process will be gradual. In facing the emptiness of the unknown, B assures himself that securities are based on spiritual aspects. In the absence of the tangible securities, B is guided by his spiritual values and principles. He considers others rather than thinking of himself, and this, together with his spiritual beliefs, facilitates the move. He understands that the process of letting go is not continuous, and accepts that there is a time to hold on and a time to let go – a time for constancy and a time for change. Holding on is stabilising and a necessary restraint and attachment before the leap of letting go. Repeated change, with its entry into the unknown, has to be resisted.

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Having emigrated, B relates to his new environment and attempts to find a balance between the positive and negative aspects of the change. His negative perceptions are that he feels that he is still an outsider who does not yet belong. He desires acceptance but is aware that he still has to prove his credibility in the new country. His position seems precarious, as he also has to reassure the significant others in his life that he can be

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trusted regarding the choice he has made and also regarding the safety and security of the new environment that they are due to enter.

With relief, B acknowledges the dominance of the positive aspects regarding the change and this motivates him further. He feels that he is accepted within his work context regarding his professional identity and vocational commitment. This is a positive change from the feelings that pertained before, of neither belonging nor being valued. He also believes that the new environment can positively accommodate his children's needs, and he envisages a happy family life in the new country. B experiences a new world.

Aware of the change around him, B feels a greater sense of freedom and security and finds that he is less anxious. He recognises the paradox that he finds regarding this security which, with its negative aspects of control, excludes him, whilst simultaneously providing him with a positive sense of security that he believes he will one day be part of. He looks forward to sharing in the protection that others presently have, and to restoring a sense of belonging and of oneness.

On a social and interpersonal level, B begins to feel accepted and supported and is creating new friendships as he begins to relate to others. He enjoys the familiarity of family attachments, but finds that he still has to orientate himself by familiarising himself with the new environment. He makes a continuous effort to adapt to changes regarding weather, time and general behaviour, so that he may soon be like the rest of his new compatriots. B continues to relate to his different environment and make it more familiar and trusting so that he will soon be integrated in the country of his choice. The perceived dominance of positive aspects in the present, and the potential for positive aspects in the future, provide him with optimism.



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**TABLE III**

Participant C: Penny (P)

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*Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go*

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P's situation of letting go arises in her leaving the home she lived in for thirty years. Prior to any reflective thought of moving, P is content in her familiar routine and the at-homeness of her domestic world. She is settled in the home that she and the family have, over the years, developed to accommodate themselves and their needs. P continues to move along the familiar route and in the known routine of her world. She does not think of letting go, but, with a long-term illness, is confined to her home and experiences a sense of 'darkness and depression'.

P finds the noise from the neighbouring school intrusive, while its intensity and unpredictability become absolutely intolerable. Despite her efforts to change her situation, she can do nothing, and, with time, P finds herself trapped and unable to leave the situation. She feels helpless and, in her frustration, becomes destructively angry. In addition to her loss of agency (illness), the intrusion is too much for her to endure. Escalation of the intrusion is so devastating and unbearable that all she can do is just scream. With time, P feels that her personal stability is being threatened and, in her decision to move, she needs the support of her significant other (spouse).

P is unable to change the detrimental situation in which she finds herself and decides to move. She looks for, and finds, a place that she considers ideal and suitable to her needs. It meets her criteria of peace, a view and the need to be close to nature. With her significant other, she buys a new place. P is excited about the move and believes that she has found the answer, but the move does not materialise. She realises that the criteria only reflected her personal ideals, and that the new place was not suitable for the rest of the family. With feelings of sadness, she cancels the sale.

P resists moving only for personal reasons, and attempts to guard against her decision being self-centred. In her decision to move, P considers the needs of her significant

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other, as well as the needs of her children. The needs of the family have changed over the years, and their present home is no longer suitable. Though her children are ready to move, P seeks the commitment and support of her significant other regarding her decision to move.

In the context in which P finds herself, she feels trapped and intruded upon. She is confined to where she is and not able to move on. P feels helpless, frustrated and destructively angry. She realises that her personal stability and sense of self are being threatened and she needs to go. She also understands that there is no reason for her to continue where she is but, at the thought of moving, P becomes resistant, angry and resentful that, because of the unbearable intrusion, she and the family have to leave their home.

Committing herself to the final decision to move is agonising for P, who, over time, repeatedly thinks of leaving. She constantly considers the move, reflects, ponders and thinks about the following step. To P, it is the process of committing herself to the decision that is the actual move rather than the move itself, which is nevertheless physically unpleasant. P finds that it is the commitment to the final decision that is the actual turning point of letting go. To P, “The decision (is) the move”, but with the decision there is ambivalence and conflict, for at the thought of deciding to leave, P then changes her mind and accepts that she should stay.

In making up her mind, P finds that she vacillates in her thoughts, and repeatedly moves backwards and forwards before taking the final step. Arriving at the decision is gradual and takes place over a lengthy period. P becomes aware that her spouse is also going through the same lengthy process of moving back and forth. She realises that she is not alone in her experience. For P, however, the vacillating experience depends on the level of intrusion that is present, as she feels the presence or absence of the intrusion in a physically experiential manner reflected in her breathing pattern, which is affected according to whether the intrusion is approaching or receding in relation to her. For example, in the absence (weekends/holidays) of the intrusion, the air seems clear and easy to breathe, but with the approaching presence (new school day) of the intrusion, the air gradually becomes more difficult to inhale.

In the search for a new home, P's priority is to find peace, although she also desires to have a view, trees and spacious rooms. To find this, P realises that she will have to move to a new area, and she feels ambivalent about leaving the familiar area she knows. Although her home does not have a view, she does enjoy a meaningful relationship with its natural environment, a relationship she intends to continue in the new area she might find. Nevertheless, she feels anxious at the prospect of finding this meaningful relationship in the absence of her spouse, who differs from her in this regard.

P seeks a sense of continuity and makes a concerted effort to continue the meaningful relationship she has with nature in preparing for the transition. Once aware that she will leave her home, P evades long-term commitments and finds a manner of retaining her meaningful attachments throughout the transitional process. P continues with the (planting) activity she enjoys, but retains the attachment to the natural objects (trees) and the relationship these offer. Throughout the process P retains the attachment and sense of continuity that is important to her. (Instead of planting trees in the garden, she begins to plant in pots that she can save and carry with her to her new destination.)

In the need for continuity and to defend against loss, P hopes to maintain the familiar psychological order she knows. With ambivalence, P acknowledges the anger and resentment she continues to feel regarding the move. Having lived in her home for thirty years, it is with tremendous sadness that P looks back and recalls the meaningful relationship she enjoyed with the natural environment (trees), and she realises that she has left this behind.

In the new area, P finds an order that is not familiar to her. She has to adjust to changes in time, distance and space, as well as to the new interpersonal aspects of a new world. The psychological order is different to that which she has known. Similarly, in the new environment, P finds the people different to her, and she feels foreign and displaced in relation to them, and yet ambiguously, she also becomes aware of similarities between her and them. Paradoxically, although P does not feel at one with the new people she has met, she does feel favourably disposed towards them. She acknowledges and appreciates

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their mutual respect for privacy and interpersonal space, where contact is voluntary rather than intrusive. She finds a similarity with them in his regard.

P is resistant to the term letting go, which she believes does not acknowledge the personal experience involved. Committing herself to the process of letting go is a major decision for her, particularly in the need to define her personal *space*. P is constantly in the presence of others, and desires personal space and privacy. Having arrived in the new world, P feels victorious and experiences indescribable joy in having acquired her own (auditory and physical) space that cannot be intruded upon. Believing the decision to be self-centred is now resisted, as P justifies her need for the space as being due to the fact that she is constantly in the presence of others. Once again, ambiguities arise, for, although P seeks to define personal space, she seeks to retain the relationships she has. There is anxiety at the thought of being isolated.

To find personal meaning and order in her new space (home), P has to clear the new space of its existing foreign meaning deriving from stories regarding the previous residents. She is resentful that the stories of the earlier residents were shared with her, as their meaning still lingers. P seeks to become familiar in the new space and to make the new home her own by gradually personalising its newness. She eclectically removes what she cannot accept, and begins to make her new environment familiar to her. P realises that personalising the new world (home and garden) is going to be a lengthy process, particularly as she would like to create personal meaning (by being receptive to the people/animals).

In the new environment, P finds the view that she had hoped for, but despite her efforts to hold on to what she finds, P soon experiences the loss (of the view) which devastates her. The loss revives the earlier struggle and returns her to the feelings of helplessness, frustration and violent anger that she had experienced prior to the move. She is angry, and blames her spouse for not retaining or restoring what she had. The sense of loss is dominant, and P feels that she has gained nothing with the move. Though she has desperately tried to communicate the impact of her loss to her spouse (significant other), she finds him oblivious to her feelings and she accepts the loss as final.



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P experiences her loss as extremely painful and evades confronting this reality. She withdraws both in her behaviour and in her attitude from reminders of the loss. Apart from the death of her son, nothing has been as devastating to her, and she resists exploring the deeper emotional aspects of the loss. P acknowledges that the loss of a significant other is the most intense and devastating experience of loss she has ever had. Despite the feelings of anger she feels towards the significant other, P feels threatened by loss and makes an effort to restore their relationship. She does not want to lose the significant other, and encourages him to come closer to her. P seeks to retain their relationship, and conceals her true feelings (by putting on a façade). P defends herself against isolation.

*General Situated Structure of Letting Go*

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Prior to any reflective thought of letting go, there is contentment with the predominant horizon and the familiar routine of the domestic world that provides comfort and security, along with a sense of continuity through the years.

In the at-homeness and at-oneness of the familiar environment, noise from outside becomes intrusive. Over a period of time, the increasing intensity and overpowering unpredictability of the invasive sounds becomes absolutely intolerable. The self feels trapped and unable to leave the present situation. Despite efforts to exclude the intrusion, this is not possible, thus compounding feelings of helplessness, frustration and destructive anger. In addition to the loss of agency experienced, the intrusion is unbearable, and, with its increasing intensity and persistence, disturbs the stability and comfort of the self. The ability to scream provides the only relief in the entrapment. With the threat to personal stability and self, support from the significant other is needed.

Awareness of the inability to change the invidious situation prompts a decision to leave. Ideal criteria are determined by what best suits the self. Although a new home is found and viewed as a potential solution, the move does not materialise. There is an acknowledgement that, in meeting the criteria and considering the move, the needs of the significant others were not recognised. With sadness, the possibility does not become a reality.

Letting go for personal reasons is resisted as being self-centred and is defended against. Subsequently, in considering the move, the needs of the significant other/s are recognised, and it is accepted that the existing home is also not suitable for them. Support from the significant other (spouse) is necessary before there can be a firm commitment to the decision.

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Within the negative context there is a sense of entrapment, with accompanying feelings of helplessness, frustration and destructive anger. Awareness of a threat to personal stability, together with the fear of fragmentation and disintegration, provide adequate justification to leave. However, at the thought of letting go, feelings of anger and resentment emerge, stemming from the fact that because of the unbearable intrusion, the familiar world has to left behind. There is a resistance to leaving the familiar world.

In letting go, the decision to move, rather than the move itself is considered to be of greater significance. The commitment to making the decision to leave amounts to the move itself and is the pivotal point in letting go. Letting go is synonymous with the decision. However, once the decision is made, ambivalence and conflict arise. With the desire to move, there is also a need to stay.

Arriving at the final decision to let go is agonising, as thoughts about leaving are repetitive. The decision process incites vacillating thoughts, as the self repeatedly moves backwards and forwards before making a commitment. Commitment to the decision is gradual, but, in the process of arriving at the decision, there is recognition of the shared nature of the experience with the significant other (spouse). The experience seems to be mirrored. The vacillation connected with the personal lived experience depends on the degree of intrusion. The experience of entrapment or relief varies according to the presence or absence of the intrusion and is experienced somatically.

In letting go, there is a desire to seek an ideal that meets certain criteria considered important to the self. However, the awareness of finding the ideal in a different environment gives rise to feelings of ambivalence. With the reality of having to let go, the self seeks to retain continuity within the values associated with the criteria pursued. Feelings of anxiety arise regarding the possibility of finding such continuity in the absence of the significant other (spouse), who does not share the same values.

Nevertheless, the desire for continuity is significant, and efforts are made to retain what is meaningful. With the realisation that the move is inevitable, long-term commitments to the familiar environment are evaded, although, throughout the transition process, there

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are still efforts to maintain a continued attachment to what is meaningful. There is continued pursuit of activities enjoyed in the familiar environment, and the intention is to remain attached to the objects that have been significant to the self. A plan is made to retain an attachment to the significant objects during the process of transition.

In the desire for continuity and defence against loss, the self seeks to maintain the familiar psychological order. Feelings of ambivalence arise, for, while the move is considered positive, there is anger and resentment associated with having to let go of the familiar environment that affords continuity for the self and significant others (family). Feelings of sadness arise regarding the loss of what was meaningful in the known environment.

The newness of the unfamiliar environment requires spatial and temporal orientation, as well as including interpersonal aspects where differences and similarities are identified. Ambiguous feelings emerge, because, although there is a sense of not belonging and being foreign in relation to the others, a sense of oneness is also present. Favourable and unfavourable evaluations are made. The parameters of interpersonal space appear different in the new environment.

The process of letting go is uniquely personal as a lived experience. Space is significant to the process of letting go, particularly regarding the need to define personal space. Personal space (auditory and physical) is significant, but not to be attained at the threat of isolation. Feelings of anxiety surface in this regard, and the self defends against being self-centred in the decisions made.

Defining personal space requires projecting personal meaning into the new space and clearing it of what is foreign to the self. The lingering negative foreign residues are resented. There is a desire for a meaningful sense of oneness to be enjoyed in the new environment. Personalising the new world is a gradual and lengthy process, as what is foreign is selectively removed, while what is familiar is held on to. There is a quest to create personal meaning in the new context.

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A number of ideal criteria are met in the new environment but, despite efforts to retain what has been hoped for and gained in the process, the loss of a valued relationship to the natural environment in a form of a beautiful view is experienced soon after arrival. The loss revives the earlier struggle, and returns the self to the feelings of helplessness, frustration and violent anger that were evident prior to the move. Subsequently, there is a sense of having gained nothing by the move. Feelings of aloneness arise, where the significant other (spouse) is perceived as being oblivious to the feelings of the self.

While the loss is extremely painful, efforts are made to evade confronting its reality. Loss of what is valued elicits memories of the devastating loss of a significant other (son) endured in the past, and the destructiveness of interpersonal loss is acknowledged. Despite the feelings of anger in relation to the spouse, efforts are made to restore their existing relationship. In the process, the truth remains hidden, protected by a façade that conceals. There is a defence against loss and isolation.

TABLE III

Participant D : John (J)

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**Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go**

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J describes two letting-go situations, letting go of his first business, which was easy, and letting go of the emotional relationship with his ex-fiancée, which has been a lengthy and difficult process. While both situations are considered, the premarital relationship is the dominant situation described.

**The Two Situations**

J recalls and compares *two* different situated experiences of letting go, where the decision preceding the break determined the nature of letting go. While letting go of the business is easy, letting go of the premarital relationship with his ex-fiancée continues to be difficult. Both experiences occur over the same period in his life (ten years ago), and, although he continues to hold on to what he values in the relationship, he allows the relationship to recede in memory. At the time, in his view of the future, J sees himself in another business, but also sees himself as being married with children in a happy family. Though there is a constructive continuity from the business, providing him with knowledge and experience that he retains and applies later, this is not the case regarding the relationship.

**The Business**

For J, letting go of his first business is easy as he convinced of his decision to leave. The negative aspects of the business far exceed what is positive, and the anger he feels facilitates him leaving. He has not held on to the business and is convinced of his decision.

The pain of leaving the business is not intense and the recovery from it is speedy. The stability and calm that follows soon brings relief. He is able to think clearly and is willing to move and continue with his life. Leaving the business is liberating and simple, with no difficult process involved. J is happy in his present business.

**The Pre-marital Relationship**

J is in a premarital relationship, engaged to be married. The engagement is lengthy, and he finds that he cannot remain stuck in a situation that is moving nowhere. He needs to know where he is going. J considers leaving the relationship, but doubts his decision and experiences pain and conflict in the process. He is rationally assured about leaving, but emotionally unhappy to do so, as the unpleasant aspects only slightly exceed what is pleasant, and there is only a small gap between the two.

He feels emotionally vulnerable. Realising that the break is going to be painful, he seeks to protect himself against the pain. Nevertheless, J is irritated with the uncertainty, and, in the hope that the decision will help him find conviction and stability, he decides to be impulsive and make the break. However, once he has made the break, the conviction that he had hoped to find is absent, and he continues to doubt his decision. Despite the uncertainty, though, time and circumstance coerce him finally to let go. With the decision to make the break, J experiences a painful desire to resume the relationship. Rather than relieving the existing doubt and uncertainty as he had hoped, the decision to make the break creates further uncertainty and greater instability.

With the imbalance occasioned by doubting, J suddenly returns to his initial holding-on position, and holds on to the pleasant aspects of the earlier relationship. In holding on, J attempts to protect himself against the turmoil and pain of the break. Holding on is sustaining, but deters progress and impedes healing. His continued attachment gives rise to inner turmoil and emotional instability.

With the decision to leave the relationship, conflict emerges, where turbulent thoughts bring on an emotional crisis. The struggle is destabilising and painful and occurs along with rational attempts to find resolution. There is conflict between J's thoughts and his feelings. Due to the uncertainty, the oscillating process is repeated, while the pain and conflict continue as the period of instability and turmoil is extended. In the storm of the repetitive emotional turmoil, a continuous struggle for stability and survival emerges along with an urgent need to find resolution.

In an attempt to find a solution, J hastily marries and hastily has a child. He believes that he has let go of the relationship, but deceives himself in the process. He is pleased that the negative frustrations are no longer present, and justifies the change by holding on to what is positive about the new situation.

J's commitment to a doubtful decision provokes uncertainties in the present, which lead him to return (ten years later) to the earlier events that had led to that initial decision. Reflectively, he returns to the past, to question and re-evaluate the initial decision that he had taken in haste, but, before he can finally let go, J has to return again to reaffirm his initial decision as correct. J still has to complete the process of letting go, which he finds difficult.

Upon returning to the past, J finds that he has to relive the painful, unpleasant experiences that had receded from his awareness in the present. He returns to the deeper, diffuse levels of his memory, and relives the pain and distress of the premarital relationship. Familiar with the pain encountered, J becomes aware that he had initially sought to avoid the impact of the confusion, and realises that he had hastened the process to protect himself and come through unscathed. J realises that he had *walked* through rather than *worked* through the pain. He becomes aware that he now has to face the challenging confusion and must adopt a different approach. Finding nothing pleasant upon his return, J believes that he is finally committed and serious about confronting the matter.

Leaving the premarital relationship impulsively was an attempt, for J, to find a hasty solution. Rather than attending to the problem itself, J had examined only its surface aspects, and had superficially moved on by hastily getting married and having a child. Subsequently, however, environmental and contextual circumstances provoke the underlying turmoil, and J realises that he had misinterpreted his recovery. He becomes aware that he is not able to deal with the present challenges of his role as husband and father. In the relationship with the significant other (wife) J becomes aware that he has changed. He reflects on their relationship and realises that his reactions to minor incidents



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are exaggerated and aggressive. While his emotional self continues to hold on to the earlier relationship, the continued attachment to the premarital relationship impedes the present marital relationship. J realises that his attachment to the past continues and that he is not committed to the present. This was evident even in the significant life-decision of his marriage. He becomes aware of his unusual behaviour and realises that this is not the way he knows himself.

J realises that the knowledge gained from the premarital relationship was not applied to the present marital relationship. Such continuity is absent, for, although he thought that he had gained from the relationship, in the turbulence and instability that followed the break, he was unable to apply his knowledge constructively. In the reality of his interpersonal world, the conflict of the earlier relationship has ended, but continues to be experienced as a lived struggle. J has found it difficult to extricate himself completely, but nevertheless does believe that aspects retained from the earlier relationship have influenced his choice of marital partner.

After the break, J attempts to discard all memories of the relationship, but holds on to the powerful pleasant memories that continue to sustain him. At first, the pleasant memories that are easy to recall outnumber the unpleasant memories that have receded, and which are concealed from awareness. The meaningful memories that could easily be recalled soon after the break are now (ten years later) only vaguely present. The emotional instability has also receded in memory as J continues with his life. The concealed memories are misinterpreted as proof of healing, and J proudly believes that he has recovered. It is only in retrospect that he realises that he has deceived himself. The memories were present, but not available for immediate recall, and remained hidden from awareness.

J misinterprets his residual memory as meaning that he has let go. The deception is confusing. J assumes that just as he has let go of the business and moved on with his life, so, too, he can let go of the premarital relationship. He considers the visible absence of the relationship as being akin to the finality of death, and assumes that the process of letting go will evolve “naturally” over time.

With effort and perseverance, J convincingly portrays to the world a façade that the past is behind him. He pretends that he has let go and moved on, but, despite his appearance of living, he does not feel alive. He continues to hold on tightly to the former relationship. By holding on he feels protected against the emotional instability and turmoil. In a further attempt to protect himself, J increases his activities and keeps busy by working and drinking. He avoids confronting the issues which threaten him. Ironically, despite his efforts to let go and move on, J continues to hold on to the earlier relationship.

Retrospectively with time, J realises that he has deceived himself and admits that he is faced with a problem. He acknowledges that he has perceived his world in a manner that suited him, for the positions of his truth (holding on) and reality (letting go) do not concur. He finds it painful to integrate who he is and find contentment. J experiences a divided sense of self, and has to resume his holding-on position and face the truth. Once he has achieved this, he realises that he can gradually release the hold he has on the previous relationship. He can create space and finally move on.

For J, the gap or area of vacillation is relevant to letting go. The vacillation and mobility between what was experienced as positive and negative create the gap. He discovers that the more excessive the negative aspects, the easier it is to leave. However, where the gap between the unpleasant and pleasant aspects is marginal and the imbalance slightly negative, then there is doubt and difficulty in the decision to leave. To commit himself to his decision, and make up his mind about leaving, J needs an absolute. His efforts to create a positive balance are not successful, and he accepts the slightly negative gap as sufficient reason to leave.

J continues with the lived struggle and in his attempts to resolve the emotional crisis, pain and aspects related to the break. He reflects and realises that he has deceived himself regarding his recovery. J realises that had he resolved the emotional challenge sooner, then he would have gained from the experience and could have prevented the negative effects which have become part of his present daily reality. Had he not held on to the

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past, then the present would have been different. He realises that by attending to the surface aspects of the problem and naively committing himself to marriage, he has created a new problem. Facing the new conflict brings the reality of his personal choice and will to awareness. He can now decide whether or not to accept the challenge of the conflict with which he is faced. There is the awareness that he can either accept the challenge, or repeat his earlier superficial behaviour. Letting go is recognised as the initial step towards healing, which he acknowledges he was unable achieve at the time.

Living through the struggle and past events of the last ten years, J acknowledges that letting go is a lengthy process. He believes that the process is almost over, and, as he approaches the new world, J finds that the turmoil and threatening disturbances are clearing. The “struggle” appears to be almost over, and he feels a sense of calm and stability approaching. J looks forward to the (future) light and the tranquillity that will soon enter his life.

In the anticipated calm, however, J foresees a problem on the horizon and realises that he is not alone, but attached to significant others (wife and child). He is not free to move on and continue with his life. He is aware that relationships are attachments and that he is not alone. He realises that the more intense the attachments, the more difficult it is for him to let go. Due to his having held on to the past, J realises that he is faced with a new problem. He has to acknowledge the realities of the present, acknowledge his truth, and accept personal responsibility for his decisions. Self-reflection facilitates a greater awareness of the present, with acknowledgement for the new challenge that he accepts and believes he can resolve.

**TABLE IV**

Participant D: John (J)

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**General Situated Structure of Letting Go**

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Letting go of a meaningful relationship with a significant other is difficult and can continue indefinitely. Letting go of a business relationship with no emotional attachments is easy. Although there may be no conscious recall of the significant relationship, emotional holding on does continue. The decision preceding the break determines the nature of letting go.

Conviction of the decision to leave facilitates the process and reduces the pain and healing period. Similarly, where negative values exceed what is positive, then the experience is liberating. The decision to leave is easy, particularly in the presence of angry feelings. The ease of leaving is accompanied by a sense of stability and calm, and is followed by a sense of relief. Commitment to a convincing decision provides clarity and continuity regarding the present and future.

The unfulfilled reality of an anticipated future and extended period of waiting gives rise to feelings of frustration, as the self seeks to determine how to move forward. The sense of being stuck prompts the self to seek direction. Although letting go is considered, there is no conviction and the decision is doubted. There is pain and conflict. An excess of negative values facilitates the move with conviction, but where rational certainty about leaving does not concur with emotions regarding the step, feelings of unhappiness arise at the thought of letting go. Despite the uncertainty, time and circumstance precipitate the movement forwards, as normative social structures are hastily adopted and conformed to. Emotional reluctance impedes the rational consideration to leave and conflict arises. Feelings of vulnerability are also present, and attempts are made to protect the self against the envisaged pain of the break. The slight dominance of what is negative in the relationship gives uncertainty to the decision, but feelings of anger and frustration

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promote the break that is sudden. An impulsive decision is made in the hope of finding conviction and stability.

Nevertheless, once there is a commitment to the decision to leave, there is a painful desire to resume the relationship. The break elicits further doubt and a greater sense of instability, rather than relieving the existing doubt and uncertainty associated with the decision. Positive feelings relating to the changed situation are part of an attempt to justify what has happened, and there is a sense of contentment that the negative frustrations present in the relationship are no longer there. However, as the unpleasant aspects of the relationship only slightly exceeded what was pleasant, there is continued uncertainty regarding the commitment made.

Turbulent thoughts give rise to an emotional crisis. With the decision to leave the relationship, rational and emotional aspects of self are polarised with conflicting thoughts and feelings. The ensuing struggle is destabilising and painful, with rational attempts to find resolution and gain control. Due to uncertainty, the oscillating process is repeated and, with the pain and conflict, there is instability and turmoil. As the struggle is repetitive, so the desire for stability continues. In the emerging chaos, there is an urgent need to find resolution.

Due to the doubtful decision, the earlier relationship continues to be held on to, providing comfort and sustenance, but also deterring progress and impeding healing. However, with the extended period of holding, the emotional turmoil and instability continue. The experience is stormy and tempestuous, with an urgent need for its resolution. Throughout the turmoil of repetitive thoughts and oscillating emotions, the struggle for stability and survival continues.

In the process of experiencing the turmoil and the pain, holding on is protective. Holding on to what is positive and valued in the relationship is desperate and provides a sense of stability that continues to be grasped. In the desire to end the turmoil, the decision to leave is committed to in the hope that the commitment will end the oscillating doubt, ensure conviction and provide stability. This does not occur, however, as the oscillations

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of doubt and the emotional turmoil continue. The experience is rotational, with the self returning to the initial position of holding on. The process repeats itself and extends the experienced instability.

The doubtful past decision elicits uncertainties in the present and the self returns, after many years, to the earlier events that had led to the initial decision. Reflectively, the past is returned to, questioned and re-evaluated, with attempts to understand the reasons for the initial decision, in the hope of finding conviction regarding the correctness of the earlier conclusion. This conviction, even after many years, is necessary for the resolution of the process, and, until this can be successfully accomplished, the oscillating process is repetitive and difficult. Letting go entails struggle and conflict.

By returning to the past, the painful unpleasant experiences that had receded from present awareness have to be relived. The self returns to the deeper, diffuse levels of memory and re-encounters the distress of the earlier relationship. The experience is painful, but familiar. Its familiarity brings about an awareness of having initially evaded the pain, and having avoided actively confronting the impact of the confusion. The self is willing to find resolution and face the challenging doubts, and a serious attitude of commitment is acknowledged in confronting the matter. The unpleasantness encountered in the process of returning to the past in an active manner, is reassuring, as the self believes that it is finally in the process of finding resolution. The initial attempt at finding a solution to the confusion was conducted in a rushed manner, without true intent. Protecting the self from the threat of danger and coming through unscathed was of primary concern. The decision is made to adopt a different approach and attain resolution.

There is acknowledgement that the initial impulsive decision to leave was an attempt to find a hasty solution. In this manner, the surface aspects of the problem, rather than the problem itself, had been attended to. The progress had been superficial, as normative social structures were conformed to. Subsequently, however, environmental and contextual circumstances provoke the contained and concealed turmoil of the past. With the false sense of competence, recovery had been misinterpreted. In recognition of what had happened, a greater awareness of the present unfolds. There is also

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acknowledgement of the presence of fresh challenges that confront the self regarding the new demanding roles associated with the new context regarding the self.

Awareness of a changed self arises in the relationship with the significant other, along with recognition of the exaggerated and aggressive behaviour that has been present. The self acknowledges the emotional attachment to the earlier relationship, where its residues impede the existing significant relationship. With the continued attachment to the past, commitment to the present has been absent, even in the significant life-decision of marriage. There is acknowledgment of an estrangement from the self, where a continuity of being the self is threatened.

Although there is belief in a sense of continuity, this belief is false for the turbulence and instability that follow the break mean that a constructive retrieval and application of the knowledge and experience gained is impeded. While the visible reality of the earlier relationship has ended, experiencing it as a lived struggle continues, as there is difficulty in completely extricating the self. Nevertheless, certain aspects from the earlier relationship have lingered and influenced the choices made regarding the present relationship.

While attempts are made to discard all memories following the break, powerful pleasant memories continue to be held on to. Initially, the pleasant memories remain in conscious awareness and outnumber the unpleasant thoughts of the experience. The unpleasant thoughts recede, and although contained, are hidden from awareness. Years later, with time, all memories, including the emotional instability that was experienced, have receded in memory and are only vaguely present. The absence of the memories is interpreted as meaning that the self has healed, and as the process of daily living continues, and, the self with pride, believes in its recovery. The recovery is false, however, as the concealed memories are misinterpreted. The self proudly believes in having achieved resolution, but the belief is deceptive. Only in retrospect does the deception of the self become a reality. The self realises that, despite the absence of the relationship, the memories were present, although contained and hidden from awareness.

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Successful resolution of an earlier experience of letting go promotes the false belief of recovery. The self believes in what it wants to believe, and deception confuses the matter. The visible absence of the earlier relationship is viewed as being akin to the finality of death. It is falsely assumed that the reality of the relationship would not be retained. There is acceptance of the belief that the process of letting go evolves naturally over time.

Through effort and perseverance, the façade is maintained in the form of a convincing portrayal to the world that the past no longer exists. There is the pretence of having let go and having moved on. Although there is the appearance of being alive, this lacks authenticity, as the genuine feeling is absent. The relationship continues to be held on to, as it provides protection against the threat of instability and turmoil. In an attempt to evade the surfacing of the concealed memories and to protect himself against confronting the threatening issues, there are conscious efforts to keep busy, either through working or drinking. Ironically, despite efforts to let go and move on, holding on to unresolved aspects of the earlier relationship continues.

Retrospectively with time, awareness of the self-deception increases, along with acknowledgment of being faced with a problem. There is a realisation that the world is perceived in a manner that is suitable to personal reality. The self believes in what it seeks to believe. Awareness of the deception brings to the fore the polarised presence of personal truth and personal reality. The positions of truth and reality do not concur, and a divided sense of self becomes evident. Self-integration is difficult, particularly regarding a reconciliation of the past with the present and finding harmony and contentment in the process. The holding-on position has to be resumed, while the truth has to be confronted. Confronting truth and reality is an achievement, and allows for the hold gradually to be released. Space is created in the process and mobility assured.

The space between what is positive and what is negative creates a gap that is relevant to letting go. Mobility within the gap is an attempt to find meaning. Positive and negative values are weighed against each other. Dominance of the negative values makes it easier to let go, while a marginal difference creates doubt and difficulty regarding the decision



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to leave. In making a committed decision, the absolute is pursued in the desire for stability. Despite efforts to create a positive balance, the slightly negative inclination is considered sufficient reason to leave.

The lived struggle persists in the present, with continued attempts to find resolution. Upon reflection, the deception becomes a reality, with the realisation that resolution of the emotional challenge can prevent negativity in the present. How the past is dealt with influences present reality. By attending to the surface aspects of the problem a solution is not found, and instead a new problem is created. Facing the new conflict brings to awareness the meaning of personal choice – either confronting the challenge of the existing conflict, or repeating the earlier superficial behaviour. The self has to be actively involved in finding an effective resolution. Letting go is the initial step towards healing and not always easy. Letting go is a struggle that extends over time and can continue indefinitely. However, as the turmoil clears, there is awareness that the struggle is almost over. Perception of the future, with its promise of light and tranquillity, creates optimism.

However, in the anticipated calm and stability, a problem on the horizon is foreseen and the self becomes aware of not being alone. The attachment to significant others is recognised as impeding independent mobility. The greater the attachments made, the greater the difficulty in letting go. The significance of interpersonal relationships is acknowledged together with an awareness of the inevitable holding on that is part of the process, and the implications of holding on to the past. A greater awareness of the present with its challenges emerges. With a renewed sense of trust in the self, the challenge is accepted.

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**Situated Narrative Description of Letting Go**

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The situation of letting go for K arises in the parent-child relationship with her adolescent son (and daughter). K is married with a family and enjoys being the parent of her two (adolescent) children. Letting go is absent from her thematic field, and she assumes that the family integrity, oneness and feeling of belonging that she enjoys will continue.

In the midst of the familiar order she knows and enjoys, a new dialectic emerges as K becomes aware of change. She realises that her son is in the process of creating a distance between them. His comments are hurtful and because of their previous closeness, she feels totally rejected. The initial letting-go process began during her son's early adolescence. It is painful for her as she often feels sad and cries with feelings of *rejection* and disapproval. Although the closeness with her son does resume, she continues to feel his disapproval. She realises that their relationship is changing as he is growing up and in the process of separating from her. K realises that she is no longer the significant other in his life.

Rationally, K understands that she has to grant her adolescents space, but nevertheless finds letting go very stressful, as conflicting thoughts and feelings arise where she is also afraid of loss. For K, letting go is a gradual experience of *loss*, which appears as separation during the adolescent years and is difficult for her. K fears the absolute loss of her adolescents through death which would ultimately devastate her. The loss of significant others in her life has influenced her, as she needs to hold on tightly to her relationships and retain what she has. K desires to maintain the continuity of the oneness shared with her family and the significant others, but feels an impending threat of interpersonal loss and deprivation. Letting go means having to lose the meaningful sense of oneness she enjoys. With her adolescents growing up, she senses losing the oneness shared.

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In an effort to accept the change in her son's behaviour, K seeks rationally to *understand* the behavioural *norm* of adolescence, and is receptive to the opinion of respected young adults. A trusted professional opinion that her son's behaviour is normal makes it easier for her to accept. K finds further solace in the fact that she is not alone regarding the tension of parenting adolescents. She recognises and identifies with other mothers in the same plight. K rationally believes that she has to let go, and that she must conceal her feelings. Holding on to the familiar (norm) and gaining knowledge of adolescence facilitates the process of letting go for her.

In the relationship with her adolescent son, K evades acknowledging her emotions (pain, anger, aloneness). She accepts that she has to grant him space and freedom to explore new horizons, and that she *must not reveal her true feelings*. Besides feeling rejected by him, she is anxious about his safety, but evades acknowledging this, yet finds it difficult, painful and unpleasant having to contain and conceal her true feelings. K believes that the presence of a façade is necessary to the process of letting go. Being aware that she is no longer the significant other in her son's life is painful, and she realises that she can no longer rely on him as she used to. K had assumed that the close relationship with her son would always be there, but she becomes aware of a distance between them. Others verify the distance. K decides to conceal the truth and resists being self-centred, while she considers the perspectives of her adolescent children above her own.

There is awareness of an evolving *separateness*, as the originally close-knit family unit is changing. Due to the individuating activities of the adolescents, the joint family holiday is altering. For the first time, K and her husband are separated from their (adolescent) children when they leave on holiday without them. Though the (adolescent) children seemed to accept the separateness, K feels that she is abandoning them and being selfish. The ease with which the significant other accepts the separation facilitates her acceptance of the value of space and separateness.

K experiences conflict and ambiguity. Although she feels that the extended *environment* is a threat to her son, she rationally believes that she has to allow him to enter it and explore new horizons. Despite evidence of her son's competence and legal permission to deal with environmental demands, she continues to view the environment as threatening,

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as potential negligence and destructive aspects could harm him. K believes that her son is possibly only safe in certain areas of the extended environment. She feels protective of him and fears that he may come to harm. K wants him to be safe. There is ambiguity, for, although she trusts her son (and daughter), she mistrusts the changing environment.

Consenting to his holiday with peers is a major step for K, who, despite the knowledge she has regarding his trip, is anxious about his safety, particularly as he is still entering the unknown. Ironically, although K respects her son as a young adult, she feels *anxious* about his present lack of experience and wisdom in life. She believes him to be naïve and imagines what he could do. She does not want him to repeat the carelessness of her adolescent behaviour, which could have dire consequences.

In viewing the past, K reflects on the *memories* of her own adolescence, and her quest for autonomy, despite the attachment to her family of origin. She recalls the joy of separateness, the vacillating behaviour, and the difficult return to her family. In recalling the past, K attempts to gain a view and an understanding of the future. She anticipates a repeat of the situation and recognises the imminent long-term and distant separation (overseas) from her son (and daughter) who now seek/s to move away. Though K accepts that her adolescents are close to her, she fears that they may not return.

In her view of the future, K becomes aware of the *ageing* process as a personal reality, and realises that she will follow the same path as her parents. A new dialectic emerges. Within the context of ageing, K becomes aware of the threat of aloneness, emptiness and fear of *abandonment* with which, due to her paramedical experience, she is familiar. She is aware of elderly people, who either have no significant other, or who are alone with no meaningful relationship. Abandonment is a threatening reality. The process of letting go is painful for K, who experiences a sense of loss, along with feelings of rejection, emptiness and fears of abandonment and aloneness.

There is ambivalence and conflict, for, although K rationally wants her adolescents to fulfil their desires and create their own space, she fears that they may not return. In the process of letting go of her son, and the increasing space between them, K also becomes

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aware of the gradually increasing distance between her and her younger adolescent daughter who is also growing up and moving away. With the experience she now has, K attempts to prevent a repeat of the pain and negativity endured, and she decides to equip herself rationally with knowledge and understanding of adolescence and the process of letting go.

In her attempt to avoid facing the *aleness* she fears, K keeps busy, but in the emerging silence of her passivity, she is suddenly faced with the unfolding reality of her future. K becomes aware of a changed meaning regarding the family. She is confronted with an impending aleness and social seclusion - a world and reality in which her father presently lives. K views her distant future as empty.

As K faces the future, she is reluctant to accept the passing of *time*. She treasures the past and holds on tightly to the earlier developmental phases shared with her son, seeking to capture what she had. Her tight hold on the past makes it difficult for her to deal with the present, like accepting that she is no longer the significant other in her son's life. The unresolved obstacles recognised in the present impede her mobility into the future. Her vision of the future and its positive aspects are obscured, for, in the process, she is more aware of what is negative (threat, pain, sadness) making letting go (in the present) difficult. Despite the initial negativity (turmoil and heartache) experienced, K becomes aware of positive aspects (diversity and excitement) to be enjoyed in the process.

As K looks to the future with visions of what her life will be like in the absence of her adolescents, she continues to live the process of letting go, and seeks to find positive aspects in the future that will facilitate the move. K's situated experience continues and is still to be resolved.

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**General Situated Structure of Letting Go**

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In the familiar and secure family environment, letting go is initially absent from the thematic field as family integrity, oneness and the feeling of belonging are enjoyed. In the midst of the known order, a new dialectic emerges, as change enters the familiar world. Suddenly, new space enters the picture, where, despite the initial closeness enjoyed in the past, the parent becomes aware of a defined distance in the relationship with the adolescent. Others verify the reality of the increasing distance.

The initial letting go during early adolescence is painful, with feelings of rejection and disapproval. Although the closeness is resumed at a later stage in the relationship, the parent continues to feel disapproval which accompanies an increasing awareness of their changing relationship. With growth, there is separation, and the awareness of no longer being the significant other to the adolescent.

There is rational understanding that space has to be granted to the adolescent, yet letting go is very stressful. Conflicting thoughts and feelings arise and there is a fear of loss. Letting go is a gradual experience of separation and loss, which, for the parent during the adolescent years, is difficult. There is fear of absolute loss through death, which would ultimately prove to be devastating. Previous loss of significant others prompts the self to hold on tightly to the valued relationships of the present. There is a desire to continue the meaningful sense of oneness shared with family and significant others, but interpersonal loss is an impending threat. Letting go is viewed as losing the meaningful sense of oneness enjoyed. Growth and development of the adolescent is the loss of closeness for the parent.

Rational understanding of the process is an attempt to accept the change. A developmental and behavioural norm facilitates acceptance of the process. Holding on to

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the familiar (norm) and gaining knowledge of adolescence facilitates the process of letting go. Furthermore, knowledge, too, that the parent is not alone in the experience is helpful, as there is an identification with other parents in similar situations.

There is an acceptance of granting the adolescent space and freedom to explore new horizons, acknowledging that, while space is being granted, feelings should be contained and concealed in an understanding that their truth must remain hidden. Containing and concealing the emotional truth regarding feelings of rejection or anxiety pertaining to the adolescent's safety is painful and unpleasant. A façade is accepted as a necessary part of the process. In concealing the truth, however, there is a resistance to being self-centred, while the perspective of the adolescent is considered as being primary to the will of the self. Accepting the increasing distance is a painful loss, recognising that the relationship had been taken for granted, with the assumption that it would always be there and not change. Relationships, in their immediacy, are deceptively assumed as being permanent.

The evolving separateness is acknowledged, as the original close-knit family unit is changing. Due to the individuating activities of the adolescent/s, joint family holidays change. While the adolescents accept the separateness, the parent feels a sense of guilt in the attachment not being retained. The self continues to defend against being self-centred. Identification with the significant other facilitates the process of allowing space and accepting separateness in the process of letting go.

The parent experiences conflict and ambiguity, for, although there is the feeling that the extended environment is a threat to the adolescent, there is also a rational belief that permission has to be granted for him to explore new horizons. The expanding world for the adolescent is unknown to the parent. Despite evidence of the adolescent's competence which is legally reinforced, the environment is viewed as threatening, as the adolescent may come to harm. Ambivalence continues, as the parent believes that the adolescent is possibly only safe in certain areas of the extended environment. There is a desire to protect the adolescent against harm. Ironically, although the adolescent is trusted, there is

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a mistrust of the changing environment. The parent respects the adolescent as a young adult, but feels anxious regarding the adolescent's lack of wisdom and life experience.

From the perspective of personal history, the parent understands the carelessness of adolescent behaviour, and feelings of anxiety arise in this regard. The parent reviews experiences and memories as she returns to personal adolescent history, with its quest for autonomy through a process of separating from the family of origin. The joy of separateness, the vacillating behaviour, and the difficult return to the family of origin are recalled. In remembering the past, attempts are made to gain an insight into the future. While the adolescent seeks to move away, the parent anticipates the imminent long-term parting involved in the separation process. There is acknowledgement of their present closeness, but as far as the adolescents' explorations of the horizons beyond are concerned, there is anxiety regarding the possibility of being left alone.

The parent's projective view of the future includes awareness of the *ageing* process, where, with its aloneness and emptiness, there is fear of *abandonment* which is a threatening reality. The process of letting go is painful for the parent, who experiences feelings of loss, rejection and emptiness, as well as fears of abandonment and aloneness. Feelings of ambivalence and conflict arise, for, although the parent rationally accepts that the adolescent must be granted space, the emotions experienced in this regard are contradictory. There is anxiety and a need to be protective. While the parent adapts to the increasing space, there is a gradual awareness of the increasing distance between the parent and the younger adolescent who is also growing up and moving away. With attempts to prepare for, and prevent, a repeat of the pain and negativity endured with the initial separation, a decision is made to empower the self with knowledge and understanding of the nature of adolescence and the process of letting go.

In an attempt to avoid facing the aloneness that threatens, the parent attempts to keep busy, but, in the emerging silence of passivity, the parent is suddenly faced with the unfolding reality of the imminent future and changed meaning regarding family. The parent is confronted with the impending aloneness and social seclusion of old age, an inevitable reality that eventually affects every generation.



As a result, there is a reluctance to accept the passing of time. While the past is treasured and tightly held on to, earlier developmental phases are reviewed in a desire to capture what was then present. However, a tight hold on the past makes it difficult to meet with challenges in the present, and creates difficulties regarding mobility into the future. Vision of the positive aspects regarding the future is obscured, for in the process, there is greater awareness of future negativity which does not make letting go easy. While negative values threaten, positive values of the experience can be enjoyed.

The parent looks to the future, with visions of what to expect in the space and emptiness without the meaningful presence of the adolescents who are in the process of leaving. While the process of letting go continues, a positive focus is pursued that will facilitate mobility into the future. The process of letting go continues until resolution is accomplished.

#### 5.4 General Psychological Structure of Letting Go

Different moments emerge with each individual experience of letting go. Sequences vary and depend on idiosyncratic incidents, as certain constituent moments may be repeated, yet differ in duration and intensity. Due to its essential temporality, the experience cannot be contained in stasis, nor can a linear or sequential construct apply to it. The process is one of continuous mobility, of an emerging spiral relative to its contextual environment.

From the individual letting-go experiences explored, the psychological insights achieved invariably revealed the truth of the experience and established its general psychological structure. To illustrate the psychological constituents presented, examples from the original naïve descriptions (edited to the first person, where necessary) have been included to support the general themes discussed.

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### Findings

#### 1. Letting go is a transitional process that gradually extends over time.

Letting go revealed itself as a transitional process of leaving a familiar world and entering the unknown. Change is inevitable to the process. In the present study, not all participants had completed the journey regarding their lived experience of letting go. Participant M had moved through the experience, come through to the other side, and had found resolution. Participants B and P had been through the struggle and had just arrived in their new environment, making attempts to seek a sense of familiarity and at-homeness. Having endured the struggle, participant J was approaching the end of the process and was becoming increasingly aware of the clarity, calm and stability that lay ahead. He was looking forward to the relief soon to be attained, but, with a new appreciation for the present, J becomes aware of the fresh challenges and obligations that face him. Participant K was still in the early stages of her experience.

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Letting go was a process that gradually extended over time. It occurred at intervals, taking place over an indefinite period, confronting the participants with a need to meet with change and move on. Encountering the ubiquitous temporal demand for mobility was difficult, as the invitation to change was initially met with resistance. The process extended over an indefinite period, as the mobility of life was made thematic. Where the challenge of change was evaded, repeated opportunities would arise, renewing the challenge to resolve the process and move on. The process was not immediate and took time, occurring at varying intervals with intermittent pauses (stages). To suddenly let go was considered to be superficial, as aspects of change would have to be returned to and the process repeated until its complete and final resolution. In achieving mobility, the challenge of change had to be accepted. It was only in retrospect that the nature of the process, with its significant idiosyncratic intervals (stages), was recognized.

- Letting go was a transitional process:

J85: I believe that I am quite close to the point that I can say that I am nearly there. I believe that I have really let go, because letting go is a process. Maybe because it was such a process to get to where I am.

M84: I definitely went through stages. It (letting go) was a process. The process was the stages of pain and anger; active processes that really happened.

- Letting go gradually extended over time:

P27: It (letting go) wasn't a one-day thing. It just went on and on and on for months.

M64/65: (Making the change) did not happen overnight that I went to look for an answer or a new angle. It did take a little while. It wanted to start and then you say "No", tomorrow you will. It was like letting the water go out slowly, instead of everything at one shot. Everything at one shot would take (me) back to the early stages and fool myself again, like the angry outbursts were futile. I realised that it was going to be a slow process getting to where I wanted to be. Applying the new approach was slow because the old approach obviously did not work.

J50: Then you have to go back and say, "Oh this is where I am standing and this is where I am holding on. Let's slowly, slowly try and release the grip that we have on this experience and distance ourselves and then move on."

- The nature and reality of the process was only recognised in retrospect:

M79: I now realise that what I did (that first morning) was really take the darker side and only after three months did I enter the clarity of the lighter side.

J42: Therefore, I perceived the fading as healing and it felt to me like I was getting better. Meanwhile, it was my short-term memory that was failing me...and you “sommer gaan aan” (simply carry on).

## **2. Letting go entails making decisions.**

In letting go, an initial decision would be followed by a later subsequent significant final decision to commit to change. The decision to change related the commitment as being subject to personal will and control rather than to unpredictable factors. The initial decision would initiate the intention to meet with environmental change, whereas the significant and subsequent decision was a definitive commitment to meet with change, enter the future and move on. The initial decision provided knowledge and insight useful to the significant final decision, which determined steps into a specific future and reduced the threat of entering the unknown. In an attempt personally to determine the future and take control, self-reflection, self-questioning and self-dialogue preceded the decision to be made. The process of making the decision included self-confrontation and the awareness of the uniquely personal nature of the experience. The decision was an attempt to project into the future and move with intentionality. Decision-making was a conscious attempt to gain rational control of the process. With the decision, change was adapted to with intentionality, as the impending change was subjected to personal will. Ideas and possibilities regarding the future were considered and determined the eventual commitment made. Arriving at the final decision, however, was painful and took time, as the self would vacillate to and fro, approaching and avoiding change, in an ambiguous manner. Commitment to the significant final decision was the pivotal moment of letting go.

- Decisions were made:

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P20/21: If you want to talk about letting go, then that was the part; getting to the point of ‘Yes, I am going to go. Yes. I am leaving this home. I am going to actually sell this place and move’. That was the turning point...The decision was the move, not the physical move.

M4/7 (initial decision): I will never forget the first morning when I woke up in hospital. It was as if I was faced with this decision...I had a choice, I knew I had to make a decision.

M20 (committed decision):... I could feel that the one day I was upset, the other day aggressive towards Larry (spouse) so I realised that I had to look at things from a different angle.

J4: Because (I) was not one hundred per cent sure that it was the right thing to do, letting go became a problem...It boils down again to the decision that I was making.

### **3. Holding on is dialectical to letting go.**

In the process of letting go, there was a powerful need to hold on and retain the familiar significant attachments. Retaining relatedness made it possible for separation to occur. With the threat of impending change and a demand to enter the unknown, holding on maintained the desired continuity and rootedness of remaining attached to the familiar sense of oneness, stability and security known. In letting go, holding on was sustaining and experienced as an essential link to life. While letting go connoted death and non-existence, holding on was synonymous with keeping alive. Meaningful attachments were held on to and included significant others, relationships, inanimate objects, (past) memories, (future) dreams, norms, values and beliefs, whatever would provide stability, security and protection against pain, confusion and the terror of entering the existential vacuum (gap). Participant M's attachment was to the pain of her loss, for its meaningful significance and the vacuum it filled. Holding on to its negativity paradoxically provided a sense of stability. All meaningful and sustaining links were retained in memory for future recall. While holding on was sustaining and provided a sense of stability, persistent holding on was restrictive. Lingering attempts to continue holding on impeded mobility and growth and gave rise to feelings of pain and instability. The greater the intensity of holding on, the greater the reluctance to accept change and allow for the passing of time.

- Holding on is life-sustaining, providing a sense of oneness and stability:

J78: How the hell do I deal with this pain? By grasping on to the good things that I can find because I am desperate and I don't know when to go and when to leave. Now it's the good things I cling to. The knuckles go white because I am holding on so bad and that is what I am not supposed to do...I just hold on for dear life.

K46: By hanging on, I suppose wanting things to still be around. I missed them because there are things that I want to share with them.

M55: The happy things were a 'No, No'. It was (my) right to carry this pain and be miserable. The pain became my baby and I felt guilty if I thought of letting go.

- Persistent holding on impeded mobility and growth:

J12/13: Meanwhile, under the surface, there's a whole lot of unfinished business, which means, no, you have not let go. (Because I did not let go), I could not progress. Holding on was in all respects detrimental.

M33: No, I did not let go of the pain immediately. It was as if nurturing the thoughts of (my) child was actually the pain. It wasn't happy pain, a joyful fulfilling thing...It was with pain and I was angry. I did not want to forget and I thought of my child quite often but I was sad.

#### **4. Letting go includes the experience of spatiality, connoting the fear of loss and entry into the unknown.**

Space and distance were inevitable to the process, creating a gap, which, paradoxically, needed to be avoided. Awareness of the gap gave rise to alienating tension and the gnawing threat of isolation. Holding on attempted to bridge the gap of space and separateness that had entered the process. The creation of space threatened the self with loss, isolation and entering the unknown. Holding on was an attempt to retain a link to familiarities and relieve the emerging anxiety. The increasing space, with its unpredictability and nothingness, implied risk and threat to the self. With the increasing threat, there was a profound need to continue holding on. Though a sense of separateness

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was defined, space and distance were accepted with ambiguity. While space connoted a sense of abandonment, space also conveyed a sense of autonomy and freedom.

- Space and distance were inevitable to the process of letting go:

P24: I can't tell you! I can't tell you the joy of having my own space. Not only from the noise but coming home and not having (the intruders) in my driveway all the time.

J50: Let's slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly try and release the grip that we have on this experience and distance ourselves and then move on.

K2/3: I definitely had to realise my distance, how far I could go. After a while (my son) sort of let me back in again, but if we were on to parents' evening, he would say "Please behave" and things like that... That is when I started to realise that he is getting bigger and moving away.

- With its threat of loss and isolation, there was ambivalence accepting the space:

P32: I need the trees; I need the animals. (My husband) is not like that. He is more of a city slicker. I am a city slicker (but) if I had to land up on a farm, I might say, 'Oh no, this is never what I thought of'.

K34: Both Matt and Alice (adolescent children)... both would like to go overseas and I hope they do go overseas. I want them to do that, to spread their wings. But its also that feeling that they might not come back and that is the sort of scariness being alone.

In the process of letting go, the creation of space whether voluntary (participant P) or not, (participant K), implied the experience of loss, either real or anticipated.

- The experience of loss and emptiness was viewed as synonymous with letting go:

P11: My trees! You know I came here and (the trees that I had planted) were big and I lived there (with the trees) for almost thirty years! They were magnificent trees! I have left them. Terrible, terrible, terrible that!

K42/47: Yes, (letting go) is a painful process...that sort of feeling that you are empty being alone, discarded.... Even if you haven't lost your child, his or her moving on is that you lose that sharing and that togetherness.

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- To let go was to enter the unknown space of nothingness: B30: Letting go is not easy. It is like jumping from the plane before the parachute opens.

K27: The first big thing was the matric holidays...I knew where they were going and how they were going but not whether they were going to get there safely and back. Just allowing them (to go) was a big step.

**5. Letting go entails a façade, which contains and conceals personal truth.**

Maintaining the familiar realm and holding on to what was significant, led to the creation of a façade or false sense of being, whereby participants avoided acknowledging the truth of their feelings. The impression was created of having moved on, but the mobility was merely an appearance. True emotions and thoughts were contained and concealed, protected and prevented from reaching the surface and being exposed. By means of the façade, social attachments were maintained, while thoughts and emotions considered negative to familiar daily life remained hidden, regardless of the pain, discomfort and dis-ease experienced in doing so. Holding on to the security of the known continued, while the visible mobility of life was superficial. Behaviour was robot-like and automatic, devoid of authenticity. However, while others were deceived in the process, the façade would also deceive the self. As life continued, a false sense of competence was assumed. Not revealing the truth helped retain the interpersonal links that were crucial in the process. To avoid acknowledging the truth, activities increased, with conscious efforts to keep very busy. As the truth remained hidden in the everyday world, outer appearances were deceptive regarding the mobility and agency of the self. Consciously avoiding thoughts of negativity facilitated the deception. Only retrospectively, upon completion of the process, does the deception become apparent.

- A façade contained and concealed the truth that remained hidden:

K9: It was dreadful not saying something and not being overprotective but allowing them (adolescents) letting them to experiment and hoping they come out the other side in one piece.



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M35: At some stage I realised that I was going on like a robot. To look as if you are fine, to smile, to work, but it is false. You do what is expected of you but it is raw inside. Deep inside you are shattered.

J23: On the surface there are pretty pictures and everything looks fine. Everything is 'lekker' (nice). Just underneath that, underneath the surface there is actually the bubbling.

- Activity increased in attempting to evade the pain and acknowledging the truth:

M18/19: Either you just let go completely or you try to bottle it up. There was the two extremes. It was about two months. I must admit I tried to keep my social schedule extremely busy.

J22: Practically, on the surface, I was trying to move along. I was trying to let go practically and looking for opportunities, things to do to let these things happen.

K35: I think there are times one can cope because you find activities to do... You are busy, your mind is busy.

J80: You allow other things. You work harder. You drink more. You play, you do whatever you have to do. You shield yourself off from all of these (painful) things to do something else, so that you don't have time to wonder about this stuff which is so threatening.

- The early deceptive belief of personal stability:

M31: I did not have the signals at first that something is wrong because everybody thinks that you are fine. You think that you are fine because you actually carry on. You are fooling yourself and you actually start to believe that.

J46/49: Like I say, maybe the biggest problem with letting go is that it is deceptive. Yes, it deceives you. It presents itself to you as if it (letting go) has happened and that is not true.... You had seen the practical things for what you had hoped they were and then one day you realise that they are not and then you have a problem.

J81: Slowly but surely you get to the deception part where your mind is so desperate for a solution that it starts to tell itself: "Look at me. Just look at me. Am I not the perfect example of someone who is coping?"

**6. Memories are significant, providing continuity as the past is re-turned to.**

Memories made the past thematic in the present, as aspects of personal his-story were repeated. Weaving the past into the present made entry into the future possible. Before moving forward, attempts were made to retain a sense of continuity as past events and experiences were returned to, in an attempt to hold on to what was meaningful. A diffuse, disordered and unresolved past obscured clarity in the present and impeded mobility into the future. Significant links from the past were retained as memories of the past were carried through to the present. Memories, with their meaning, bridged the gap or existential vacuum and provided a sense of continuity. With the consistent diversity of the change encountered, the retention of past memories and structures provided a sense of permanence, with a reassurance sense of continuity. In thought, memories were significant in retaining access to the past, though there was evidence, too, of a physical return to places significant to personal history. An illustration of this occurred with participant (B), who physically returned to his place of birth and relived the earlier phases of history as he rekindled memories of the people and places that were meaningful to him. The people and places recalled were integral to the memories and experiences retained.

Before committing to the significant subsequent decision, the past had to be returned to, as the original steps taken were retraced and experiences useful to the self were retrieved in a re-attempt to find resolution and facilitate mobility forward. Nevertheless, attaining such resolution was not easy and often met with resistance, to be returned to at a later stage. Doubtful decisions regarding forward mobility lead to a re-turn, re-view and a re-tracing of the earlier process, before entering the future. Returning to the past, however, was not always intentional, as contextual experiences could provoke memories of earlier related experiences. This was evidenced with Participant P, whose experience of loss in the new environment following her move, led to a revival of earlier feelings of frustration and helplessness that had been present prior to the move. Negativities of personal history often impeded relating to the world in the present, and impeded forward mobility. While facing the future in the context of the present, experiences and memories were repeatedly re-viewed and re-interpreted, providing a sense of continuity to fill the

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gap that threatened in the present. While a disordered past obscured clarity in the present, the past could also convey re-assuring memories that provided sustenance for moving on.

Returning to the past meant to repeat and re-live the experience, either for it to be re-affirmed as correct, or to re-evaluate and discover a new positive meaning with which to continue. In order to move forward, the necessary clarity and conviction of a final solution meant that the past had to be repeated, and painfully returned to, lived over and over again until attaining its final re-solution. Painful memories remained hidden, often difficult to recall, but were nevertheless retained for future reference, as recall would provide presence and bridge the gap of absence, retaining the necessary attachment in the demand to move on. As there was a return to past structures, memories of the past gained significance in the present and provided the foundation for continuity into the future. A positive focus on the future facilitated forward mobility.

- Steps were retraced, through a return to the past:

J54: But now you have to go back and say, 'You need to finish this off'. The only way to finish this off is to go back into the jungle and let the defenses down and work through it rather than just trying to get through it as quickly as possible.

J11: The problem is that if you make the decision hastily or emotionally unstable and it wasn't a well thought through structured type of decision, then you have to go back before that. Maybe remind yourself and confirm for yourself ten years down the line that that was the right decision for you.

B11: I recently went back to Darwin where I was born...Literally and figuratively, I went along the roads that I was on as a child because I lived part of my life in Cape Town, Stellenbosch and that area.

- Experiences in the present could revive earlier past experiences:

P41/43: I went mad!! I screamed. I was back in Barclay, frustrated and I can't do anything about it. Back to the Bazooka....I would sit on the bed (in the new home) and look at the lights in the distance. I could not tell you how wonderful it was, and its gone!

- Retention of a sense of continuity remained significant:

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P28: Then I start thinking in terms of why should I put this plant here, I am not going to watch it grow. I am going to move... I started putting little plants into pots to move and then I am getting ready for wherever I am going. I need my plats. I need my trees.

M75: Yes and to let go because we had to name our child. It was a little boy and his name was Luke and I could say “good bye” in the sense that he would always be there. Our future children will know about him.

B12/13/15: I really enjoyed it. It was a positive experience. I still have memories of the places and perhaps in time, I will be able to return again....It was quite meaningful. It was good to see that even my father’s grave is still there. Just to know that although things are changing and we are going on our own ways, there are foundations left. There are a lot of new things, buildings and places but the old ones are still there.... the memories that go with the experiences. You can’t really separate the two.

J32: Many an attribute in Joyce (wife) I think came from the experience with Moira (ex-fiancée)...But even selecting her as a potential partner, some very good qualities are there today. You know that she is a very good mom; she is extremely efficient in what she does. All of those things have something to do with the relationship I had with Moira.

## **7. The self is challenged to a repetitive and paradoxical struggle.**

As the unknown confronted the known, in a push-pull motion, change and mobility were evaded. In spite of the initial attempts to continue along the familiar route and evade the reality of change, the relationship to the self did not remain stagnant. In the existential conflict of the decision, the self was challenged through its confrontation with change, through choice, conflict, turmoil and repetition. Conflicting poles emerged in the desire for sameness and the demand for change.

Repetitive confrontation gave rise to a lived struggle, as the self would swing between positives and negatives, moving to and fro, avoiding the gap yet feeling trapped and immobilised in the process. Issues not resolved in the past were re-turned to, relived, repeated and revised over and over again until they were finally re-solved before moving on. Lapses in time apropos the repetition varied as idiosyncratic differences became evident within and between experiences. Returning to the past was relative to circumstances in the present and a willingness to face the future.

The realm of the false facade and concealed emotions gave rise to conflicting feelings of doubt and uncertainty. With the polarisation of rational and emotional aspects, an ambiguous sense of self emerged with increasing efforts to gain and maintain rational control, as emotions, considered negative to the façade, were contained and prevented from coming to the fore. In the process, the self was challenged to seek and find a solution and make a commitment. The polarity of the conflict regarding change increased, the struggle intensified and a painful and laborious process developed, repeatedly confronting and challenging the self. The self was in crisis, as thoughts would oscillate, behaviour would vacillate, and emotions would swing from one extreme to another, pushing and pulling the self, to and fro, forwards and backwards, approaching and avoiding change. The force intensified, creating a circular, whirling, spinning motion, which ironically immobilized the self. What was happening seemed beyond personal control; the power would surge with increasing intensity, pushing the self to the threshold. Instability and fragmentation threatened the self with annihilation. The existence and integrity of the self were at risk.

- Conflicting thoughts were present, as feelings of doubt and uncertainty emerged:

P27: It wasn't a one-day thing. It would just go on and on for months. You know, and then I would think "Yes, I am going to sell it", and then ...the weekends would come and I would think "Gee, the weekends are brilliant: where am I going to have weekends like this?"

J61: So the bad just outweighs the good enough and you are irritated enough and annoyed enough to make the decision and the moment you have made the decision, your mind goes "Are you sure?"

K37: First of all there is conflict. You know that there is conflict. You know that you have to let go but you don't want to lose.

The presence of the deceptive façade and avoidance of the truth gave rise to feelings of entrapment, which the opposing polarities had created. The persistent turmoil of approaching and avoiding change had created a crisis. The feeling was of being seized in the stifling grip of immobility, caught in an impasse, unable to move forward and

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continue with life. The self had deceived, lured, captured and trapped itself, with nowhere to go, no space to move to. With feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, efforts to change the contextual situation were in vain; the position could not be altered. The earlier entrapment in relation to the world had emerged in relation to the self, and the initial space evaded in relation to the world had emerged in relation to the self. Ironically, the experience was one of a whirlpool of oscillating thoughts and vacillating emotions, but with an omnipotent and overpowering force that impeded mobility.

- A sense of being trapped and immobilised:

M34: I saw that I was running around in circles around the event that never took place. I could not move on; it was part of the fooling game. Whatever I did, I would come back to the event. I could not get back. It was like a tornado sucking you back. It was big and overshadowed everything.

P9/14: (The noise) ruined my life. I went to court to put my case to them and I got nowhere. I was very ill at the time but I got nowhere....Then I thought to myself: 'I am doomed to noise for the rest of my life!'

B1: I felt that I had to do it (let go). I felt stuck. I was comfortable because of the securities such as salary, medical aid and pension fund, but it was not what I really wanted to do.

The increasing diverse polarities of the demand to maintain the pretence, and the intensity of the contained personal feelings, had ultimately created the conditions for truth to ripen burst though the mask of social appearances. However painful, once the truth had ruptured through the facade, there was a need to re-view the past and be honest with the self. Though the change appeared impulsive, it had taken time to materialise.

Awareness of the alienated truth and emerging authenticity reduced the opposing polarities, facilitated integration and made mobility possible. The self had changed and with its negative and uncharacteristic behaviour, was strange and threatening. Its incongruity with the familiar world carried implications of loss, and gave rise to a willingness to acknowledge the truth and meet with change. Working though the laborious and repetitive struggle, the challenge of authenticity was accepted. Though

transition and change had been avoided in relation to the world, the self was now challenged to relate to change and transition.

#### **8. With the threat of loss and fragmentation, the self submits to change.**

The rupture of truth through the façade brought to awareness a different and disagreeable sense of self. Bursting through the surface, the surging force of omnipotence created by the struggle threatened to annihilate the self. In a desperate attempt to retain control and not lose the continuity of self, its world and meaningful others, the self sacrificed what it had become and submitted to change. Alienated from personal authenticity and feeling separate from the world and others, the self was threatened with fragmentation. The fear of annihilation and disintegration was real, which, with the need to take control, appropriated a different perspective to accept newness and submit to change.

Willingness to eventually take the ontological leap and accept change was pivotal, for in sacrificing the false sense of self that had evolved, a different perspective and a significant final decision were accepted and committed to. The self, in its continuity, acknowledged personal truth and reality, as growth and mobility were facilitated.

- Awareness of a negatively changed sense of self and the threat of fragmentation:

M67: I did not like myself anymore. It was easier to start picking fights. Where I know that I am someone who likes to communicate with people and laugh, I could see something change in me and I did not like it...I was missing the old me and I think that the people around me also did....I realised that I did not want to go on like that. Some people do. I could have gone on like that but then I would lose more in the end – even jeopardizing my marriage and my friends.

J44/45: The next morning I would think “Why did I explode like that so aggressively and so exaggerated. ...Then only did I realise that letting go was the problem. I said: “You have not let go. You are still there”.

P17: I didn't need to be there and I needed to go. I needed it for my own sanity.

- A different perspective appropriated change:

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J54: But now I had to go back and say: “You need to finish this off, and the only way to finish this off is to go back into the jungle and let the defences down, and work through it rather than just trying to get through it as quickly as possible”.

M57: The moment I did try and say, ‘O.K. I am going to try something else besides this anger’, (the darkness) just lifted. It was really like you could hear the angels sing.

B20: (A book) just reminded me that as a spiritual person and as a Christian, if I wanted to be like Jesus, I have to be able to let go of material things that keep me on my task and financial security and just being able to make money.

**9. With the evolving separateness, the need for relatedness continues.**

The space created gives rise to an increasing and profound awareness of separateness and aloneness, with an emerging need to retain human interconnectedness. The process of letting go revealed a relational basis. Separateness and oneness were dialectical, and while the existential aloneness of the experience created a sense of alienation, defending against the threat of isolation and abandonment seemed imperative. In the face of the challenge to let go, the participants needed to know that others were in the same or a similar situation and that they were not alone, while a preoccupation with the self was avoided. For example, before Participant P would commit to the significant final decision, the impact of the impact that the decision would have on the (significant) other was first taken into account. Concern for, and sensitivity to, the needs of others revealed a capacity to overlook personal interest and avoid being self-centred.

Though attempts were made to evade facing the truth of personal feelings, it was in the close relationship with the significant other that such confrontation revealed itself. In the shared reality of the relationship with the significant other, aspects of the truth came to the fore. Remaining attached to the significant other, and/or being aware of relevant or extended others in the same or similar situation mitigated existential aloneness and facilitated mobility. The presence of the significant other was reassuring and served as a point of attachment, while a positive focus on the future provided a link in the unknown and facilitated mobility. Close identification with another provided a sense of attachment, along with the desired sense of sharing and connectedness, reducing the space that



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threatened with isolation. Throughout the process, awareness of a personal relatedness to the world remained significant as interpersonal connectedness had to be retained.

- Acknowledging the presence of the significant other in the same experience:

P27: So (the decision) was like this going back and forth, but the same thing was happening to Jack (spouse)....

K28/29/30: But I felt so guilty not being there. You know Keith (spouse) took it much easier, but that's letting go; that they(adolescent children) can go...and do their own thing and we (as parents) can actually also do our own thing.

M8: If I do go and sit in the corner, I will just die and I will just drag everybody that is supporting me, especially my husband, my parents, his parents. They would have been grandparents for the first time. So it's not just myself but it's a lot of people around me as well. They also pretend to be strong to carry you.

- Acknowledging the presence of extended others, in a similar/same process.

M 87: I started looking around and I saw people...mothers who have lost their children in accidents. You realise that you are not alone...People in pain as well.

K12: I can see it with some of the other mothers that come to me with their teenagers...They are at loggerheads not with the stuttering problem but with their interpersonal relationship and not being this overprotective mother.

- The close relationship with the significant other provided the context for truth to reveal itself:

M63: I realised that because Larry (spouse) and I have a fantastic relationship... I started picking up signs that something is wrong. Although I thought that I was fine, Larry (spouse) and myself, we started to quarrel. It would usually come from my side. I just realised that something is wrong.

- In the absence of the significant other values and beliefs replaced the link

B22/23: You have to offer a lot and let go in order to experience a new life. That's what Jesus did. The only thing in life, is adding significance to other people's lives. Helping

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people who are suffering and refocus on that again after I let go of the things, maybe its very difficult to let go of, (like) letting go of my salary...Security is based on other things...Not that I see myself as perfect, but I am trying to be guided by spiritual Christian values.

- Acknowledging the needs of the (significant) other rather than the self:

M10: What helped me was that I knew that I could not approach (letting go) in a selfish way. I couldn't go and think it's just myself. There were a lot of people who went through this as well...

K24: I can't get (my anger) out on (the adolescent children). I think sometimes that's letting go, that understanding ....

P14/15: I had to check with him (spouse). I also took into consideration the fact that he was working...He had to back me up because it's a selfish decision.

B25: It's basically to think a bit more before you do anything and not only to think about yourself, but also to think about others.

10. The quest for balance and stability continues throughout the letting-go process.

Ambivalent perceptions and ambiguity had commenced with the early uncertainty and doubt relating to the initial decision. The self would vacillate between the diverse polarities, moving to and fro, towards and away from change. Disequilibrium reigned, as ambiguity reverberated from the outset, through the struggle into the new world, but reduced in intensity once balance and stability were attained. This process was gradual.

Having survived the intensity of the struggle and arriving in the unfamiliar environment of the new world, resonance of the ambivalence continued with attempts to restore a familiar order. Moving from the known to unknown was challenging, for balance and equilibrium had to be maintained. The quest for stability continued as attempts were made to replace negative perceptions with positive experiences and meaning. Positive perceptions provided balance to the negativity experienced. The gap between the polarised points had to be bridged and a solution found. With the experience of ambiguity in the new world, there was a conscious effort to convert negative perceptions

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into positive valuations. Such transformation provided clarity and direction, and a positive view of the future provided motivation and facilitated mobility forward. Though earlier negative perceptions were initially held on to, they were gradually altered and replaced as new meaning was created. Meaningful past familiarities were retained and held on to. In the ambiguity of the process, positive (past, present and future) aspects were pursued for the stability and balance they provided. As the process continued to unfold, the positive replaced negativity, until stability was finally attained. The change was gradual.

In the different environment/world, the newness of interpersonal relationships brought a sense of being dissimilar. The sense of belonging and oneness in relation to the familiar environment had been lost. In the face of this, there was a desire to establish a renewed sense of oneness in relation to the new environment. Acknowledging what was lacking elicited a desire to seek fulfilment and pursue the positive ideal. With one of the participants (P), however, loss of the positive aspect attained in the new world, led to a return to the past and a revival of earlier negative emotions, obscuring the present and impeding mobility forward. However, where there was not a return to the past, the clarity of the present motivated efforts to meet the increasing newness, as the foreign aspects encountered were personalised in an effort to regain a sense of the familiar order. In the new environment/world, returning to a familiar order of at-homeness and at-easeness, was a priority. In spite of the threat of instability and feelings of despair and helplessness, the self continuously sought to restore a harmony with life. Though change was slow, the quest for balance and stability was continuous, as newness was tested and trust allowed to develop.

- In the ambiguous perception of the new world, the quest for stability continued:

P34: There is nothing wrong with these people but they are all Afrikaans. There is not a soul that is English-speaking and I feel a bit of a foreigner. I feel a bit of an outsider but these people are wonderful because they all like their privacy... .

B31: I'm so busy dealing with all the new things. I think, like with many other things in life, my current experience in the USA can be seen as an attempt to find the balance between the negative and positive sides of the same thing.

J 61: Initially you have this good and bad balance and the bad, just, just outweighs the good, otherwise you would not have made the split. I would not have taken my bags and gone my merry way if the good did outweigh the bad.

M59: At the time it was just being miserable. I (now) believe that from the pain something beautiful will come your way.

### **11. Descriptive figurative language explicates sharing the experience.**

In the absence of a tangible context for the experience of letting go, various attempts were made to capture its ineffable quality and share the experience through descriptive language. The experience was shared in the dual relationship with the researcher, and in the process of providing descriptions metaphorical depictions were used.

The experience was described as a “bungie-jump” or “parachute jump” that is akin to taking a risky leap into the unknownness of space. Images of a ship sailing in turbulent and stormy seas would attempt to explicate the efforts to maintain stability, continuity and survival. Although not evident throughout the protocols, images of light and dark were frequently used. The images of light and dark seemed to describe the experienced polarities of the self and the ambiguity of being. Through using images of light and dark there was an attempt to illustrate the presence of knowledge, peace and tranquillity (light) or its absence (darkness). The mobility of moving from the unknown to the known seemed to determine the extent of the light present. Though turbulent, the comfort of the familiar darkness was often held on to. Change, in its unknownness, was approached with hesitance. Nevertheless, although often evaded, the “pull” of the light was continuously pursued, and, by attempting to convert negative values into positive ones, the quest throughout the process was for peace, balance and stability. In spite of the ambiguity, the peace and clarity envisaged in the light of the future provided motivation to survive the struggle, move from the darkness or confusion and continue forward. Though the change was gradual, a positive focus on the future facilitated the process. With the continuous threat of instability, the focus was to enter the light and find peace, clarity and stability.

- Metaphoric language was used to explicate the experience:

J87: The waters are settled. The wind has stopped howling. The sun is rising and it is clear... As you can see a storm building, in the same way I can see the storm almost nearing the end. Some of the clouds are subsiding and I know instinctively that I am almost there where the sun will break through....

M58: It (finding new meaning) really was like opening a gift slowly. You first pull the ribbon and then the paper. The stages that I had to go through to appreciate what there is, but I took it as a gift because of the intensity of the dark.

## **12. Resolution of the process transforms the self.**

All the participants had not resolved their experience of letting go. While only one participant (M) had achieved full resolution, others (B, J, P) were either in the final phase or still in the process of letting go (K). While persistent holding on impeded mobility, letting go facilitated acceptance of the present and its contextual realities. Finding resolution and successfully completing the process was not immediate. Accepting change in the face and threat of instability was to meet the challenge of letting go and to move on. To move on was to grow, because finding resolution and surviving the struggle gave rise to a renewed, empowered and enriched sense of self. The transformation was illuminating and dispelled existing doubts, providing the conviction of being on the right path. Awe and wonder followed the resolution of the intense struggle, while the clarity and awareness of light following the storm of the crisis was welcomed with euphoria. A greater awareness of the present arose with a willingness to accept the present as well as the inevitable challenges that lay ahead. Resolution at having moved through the process led to a positive sense of self with a sense of fulfilment and tranquillity. The gaining of new meaning, fresh knowledge and insights provided opportunity for greater personal integration and self-understanding. The relationship to the self, world and others expanded with an awareness of new horizons. While most participants sought to avoid or fill the gap created, willingness to face the gap lead to a transpersonal (spiritual) experience and the belief of a close encounter with life and its meaning.

- A renewed and empowered sense of self emerged:

M82: It's as if I can face anything coming my way now. To come through with an answer like that, you can take anything. I feel that I will be strong in life.

J89/90: Maybe it (letting go) creates new issues. I don't know, but I can get through it.

- An encounter with life and its meaning:

B26/27: It's just that (the experience) was very rational before, but I have lived it as an experience now...I think that I learned that I had to let go of certain more material things... in order to open up to new and more value based and spiritual based avenues and paths and you come closer to what I experience as my purpose in life.

M74: That's why I say, for me it was a growing up process in the sense of what life is about. I have the tools to cope with life.

## **5.5 Structural Synthesis**

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Letting go is a transitional process that evolves over time, confronting the self to meet with change and move on. The process is rotational as the past is returned to, to meet with the present and face the future. Memories are significant in retaining continuity, while new meaning and a positive focus on the future facilitate the process. To let go is to submit to, and enter the unknown space and time of nothingness.

Entering the unknownness of space and time elicits a fear of loss and feelings of anxiety. Space and distance increase as a sense of separateness unfolds, and there is fear of isolation. With the threat of change, the desire for sameness continues, as the familiar is held on to, providing a sense of wholeness and oneness. Holding on sustains and stabilises and is experienced as an essential link to life. Decisions are pivotal to the process, and made in an attempt to determine steps into a specific future and to retain

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control (hold on). An initial decision provides knowledge and insight for a significant subsequent decision that is committed to later.

*In retaining attachments to the familiar, a façade contains and conceals personal truth. A masked sense of being emerges, where activities increase, with intensified efforts to evade facing the truth. The façade deceives the interpersonal world, but also deceives the self from believing in its personal integrity and stability. However, in spite of attempts to evade the reality of change and retain a constant state of oneness in relation to the world, the self does not remain stagnant. In the existential crossroad of the decision, conflicting thoughts arise and the self is challenged to a repetitive and paradoxical struggle. With oscillating thoughts and vacillating feelings, the self spins in a whirlpool of circularity going nowhere, experiencing entrapment and immobility. Cognitive efforts increase to retain control, while an overpowering force to let go challenges personal will.*

In the conflict between the demands of the social façade (holding on) and the increasing demands for the revelation of personal truth (letting go), intensifies. A contradictory and paradoxical realm unfolds between covert feelings and overt behaviour. In the state of ambiguity, feelings of ambivalence arise. Letting go becomes a lived struggle where thoughts oscillate, behaviour vacillates and emotions swing from one extreme to another, as the self is repeatedly pushed and pulled in approaching and avoiding change. The process is painful, for, while the meaning of personal truth intensifies, the demand for reality persists.

The oscillating process of swinging from one pole to another regarding the decision repeats itself, until its resolution. Either with slow shifts of awareness, or with sudden outbursts that have taken time to emerge, with time the truth ruptures through the façade. The self becomes aware of having changed, but with a negative concept of self. In the confronting awareness, personal stability, self-integrity and meaningful relationships are threatened and a shift emerges, motivating the turning point for the subsequent significant decision to personally commit to change and accept a new meaningful perspective. Thus, with the threat of fragmentation, the existing sense of self finally submits to change.

Though thrust into an existential separateness and sense of aloneness, the need for relatedness continues. The presence of the (significant) other remains fundamental, in the knowledge that the experience is shared. Though space is personally defined, the threat of isolation is defended against. Through concern for the (significant) other, the desired

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attachment is retained. While truth is evaded regarding the self, it is in the close relationship with the significant other that truth ruptures the façade and reveals itself. In the absence of the (significant) other, the presence of values and beliefs becomes a valuable replacement, facilitating transition. Throughout the process, there is a need to retain the “presence” of the significant other as part of the self, and the quest for balance and stability continues. In the new world, the ambiguity of being prevails in the ‘to-and-fro’ swing between positive and negative valuations. The self seeks to reduce the threatening gap that exists between the polarities, with efforts to re-establish the equilibrium of a familiar order. As the quest for stability continues, ambivalence facilitates shifts to positive perceptions.

Descriptive figurative language facilitates explication of the experience, while retaining the empathic connectedness of sharing. The self attempts to find a common ground from which to share the ineffable experience. In the quest for balance and stability, while the positive value of light (relief, tranquillity, knowledge and balance) is continuously pursued, the negativity of darkness (pain, turmoil, the unknown, and instability) is evaded as the challenge is met and resolution achieved. The process is gradually resolved and worked through. Positive valuations gradually replace negative perceptions and new meaning emerges. Having survived the struggle and turbulence, restoring the preferred order of stability is regarded as a successful completion of the process and an achievement. Fresh appreciation for the present unfolds, while willingness to enter the gap creates the opportunity for a transpersonal experience, and the belief of having come closer to the meaning of life. To have let go is to have moved through the darkness of the unknown into the light of the known. Letting go provides a sense of enrichment and empowerment, with feelings of confidence and competence. Having let go involves a transformation of self and is a personal developmental achievement, while in the existential aloneness of the experience, a sense of related-separateness is maintained.

*Essential Structure*

Letting go is a transitional process of spiral mobility, as the past is returned to (and repeated) to meet with the challenge of change in the present and submit to the unknownness of one’s spatiality and temporality. As change threatens with loss and



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isolation, the desire for sameness continues, while a façade conceals and contains the truth as a conflicting struggle arises and a gap emerges in approaching and avoiding change. In the quest for stability, a sense of continuity is held on to, as memories fill the gap in relation to the past and new meaning fills the gap that threatens in the future. With the threat of disintegration, change is submitted to, but in an attempt to gain control, decisions are made, while positive focus on the future is helpful. Creating new meaning and finding resolution is an achievement that gives rise to a sense of omnipotence and empowerment. The self is transformed in the process.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon of letting go by approaching it from an experiential rather than a quantitative perspective. The decision was to focus on the unique personal meanings of the phenomenon as lived by the participants, rather than focusing on facts deduced by statistical findings. The implicit structure regarding the way in which an individual undergoes a significant letting-go experience had to be made explicit.

My investigation began by asking the question: What is the experience of letting go? In other words, what do we mean by “letting go”? The essence and meaning of the experience had to be revealed. Descriptive answers to these questions procured a starting point regarding the process of letting go, which involves a mobility that is foundational to human development, constituting the very structure of life itself. Thus far, the present study has evoked the phenomenon of letting go, revealed its structure and explicated its general psychological meaning. The phenomenon was approached and explored in its diversity, rather than studied within a single specific situational context. The choice of the situated experience of letting-go was left to the Research Participants. Their descriptions of significant letting-go experiences made it possible to investigate the ubiquitous and general psychological meaning of the phenomenon.

Letting go is revealed as a transitional process that evolves with time, confronting the self with the necessity to meet with change and move on. Letting go is more than separation. It is the experience of self in the process of change through separation. The process is rotational and continuously in motion, as the past has to be returned to before the self can meet with the present and face the future in a meaningful manner. Memories are significant in retaining continuity of self, while new meaning and a positive focus on the future facilitate the process. To let go is to submit to, and enter, the unknownness of space and time.

While an attempt is made to weave the findings with existing theory and the literature reviewed, in the process of writing and exploring, new horizons became visible, so that fresh theoretical

references have been included in addition to the original literature. The phenomenon revealed itself as encompassing more than had first been envisaged.

## **6.1 Theory and Findings**

### **6.1.1 Paradox and Polarity**

The current study found that the most salient aspect of letting go is the paradoxical experience of the process. This was evidenced in all the protocols, as the participants, confronted with the reality of change, found themselves in an existential crossroad, not knowing which direction to pursue, whether to remain with the familiar or change to the new. Even after their arrival in the new environment, both participant B and participant P continued to perceive ambiguities in relation to their new world. For B, what ostracised him and made him feel excluded, was also the promise of a secure world that he would soon enter. In the study though the ambiguities often involved negative valuations at first, their ambiguity provided a dialectical capacity for change. In the transitional space, where the experience of ambiguity intensifies, opposing polarities emerge. Polarity is evident in the dialectics of consciousness. Rychlak (1979) identifies this dialectical feature of human consciousness, and, like Kant, accepts the “dialectical transcendence” or implied capacity of consciousness to be self-reflective and to stand apart from the mere imprint of stimuli.

Nicolaus Copernicus, the founder of present-day astronomy, recognised the earth as a moving planet and took us beyond our sensory experience of the rotating sun. We no longer only believe what we see, and do not merely receive stimuli in a receptive and passive manner, but actively confront our perceptions and give them meaning. Meaning fills the gap of unknownness. Prior to Rychlak, Kant, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had recognised the dialectical feature of consciousness. In the process of letting go, the emerging paradoxical struggle appears to involve an intensified dialectic of consciousness. In the words of Rollo May (1972), “human consciousness works in polarity: the positive cannot come out until the negative does also” (p.148). In the present study, this became evident during the struggle of letting go, as well as during the participants’ pursuit of stability. May notes that both Alfred Whitehead and Paul Tillich consider the ontological character of opposing polarities as fundamental to reality, where

reality is a dynamic process of mobility between positive-negative poles, rather than something that is fixed and unchanging. In the dynamic mobility between the opposing polarities of letting go, change is part of the process, and ambivalence and ambiguity pervade the entire phenomenon. Tageson's (1982) explication of Georg Hegel's proposal of the alternating mind is an apt description of the paradoxical struggle and conflicting polarities that arise in the process of letting go. He writes: "the mind innately leaps from any proposition (thesis) to its opposite (antithesis), often resolving the apparent contradiction by a new proposition, which incorporates elements of both (synthesis) and so on indefinitely"(p.29). This became clearly evident in the findings during the struggle of the conflict.

The study reveals that in the process of resolution, a vacillating push-and-pull rhythm between the poles repeats itself in approaching and avoiding change. Vacillation arises from the outset, reaching a climax during the struggle. The struggle of the conflict intensifies to the critical point of chaos, but decreases as stability is gradually attained. Lacan's (1988b) non-acceptance of Hartmann's (1958) 'conflict-free ego' seems justified, for conflict and chaos are essential experiences to the process of change and, though overpowering and immobilising, growth does unfold. As with birth, where the "paroxysms of the womb force a 'letting go' to begin" (Tien's, 1992, p.22), so, too, does the conflict of polarities create an opportunity for the new to emerge. Conflict is not pathological. In laying the foundation for psychoanalytic developmental thought, Freud (1905) focused primarily on psychopathology, with the idea that intrapsychic conflict preceded psychic growth. Wittine's (1989) citation of Trungpa's words, rings profoundly when he states: "Chaotic situations must not be rejected. Nor must we regard them as regressive, as a return to confusion. We must respect whatever happens to our state of mind. Chaos should be regarded as extremely good news" (p.282). The study reveals that prior to growth and commitment to change, the self's experience of conflict intensifies, to the extent of being immobilised, "running around in circles" (M34), "going back and forth" (P27) and going nowhere. The conflict would precede the decision-making process. Bowlby (1979) accepts conflict as a normal state of affairs that has to be lived with. Similarly, Maslow (1968) speaks of the resolution of dichotomies, where oppositions and polarities are not straight-line continua, and with self-actualising individuals, both polarities can co-exist, not as incompatibilities, but in a dynamic synthesis. Understanding oppositions as dialectical is essential to understanding change. Lacan's topology of the 'moebius strip' is useful in comprehending such a dialectic, for,

although separate, two opposing sides can continuously be with each other. Such polarity and separateness are evidenced in the dialectical concept of a related-separateness revealed as a constituent of letting go. With the need to separate, the need to relate remains. Mobility between the two poles (holding on vs letting go) is dialectical and dynamic, contributing to the spiral process of growth and continuity. As development moves to and fro, towards and away from change, psychological growth is rhythmic. With psychological growth, going back (regression) precedes going forward (progression) and, though initially slow, the process gradually increases in intensity to the peak of an ontological spin and a maturational (resolution/revolution) leap forward. This is the mobility of letting go.

The findings of this study agree with the Heideggerian (1962) view that human development occurs in a growing spiral, rather than in a linear or chronological line. Like the hermeneutic circle, “one returns to the point of origin again and again but never at the same level” (Valle, King & Halling, 1989, p.15). The past is re-turned to, re-viewed and re-lived, re-peated over and over again in an attempt to find re-solution and new meaning with which to continue. Returning to the past and finding understanding in the present, precedes and facilitates mobility forward. The process is aptly expressed in the words of T.S. Eliot (1979):

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time (p.43).

(Eliot, T.S ‘Little Gidding’, *Four Quartets*)

The repetition evidenced in the study is akin to Freud’s (1971) “compulsion to repeat”, or what he describes as “a force to overcome the repression” of what remains hidden in the self. The force of repetition is a recurring and necessary attempt to unveil and bring to awareness what has receded in memory and been forgotten. To return to the past and repeat one’s history does not appear pathological, but provides a sense of continuity necessary to the process of mobility. With letting go, fundamental aspects of self that are no longer part of the conscious awareness of self (ego), either resurface or are recalled, to be integrated with the self in the present, a necessary step before continuing with the mobility of life. Alapack (1984), concisely and descriptively explicate the process. To reiterate:

We face certain life issues repeatedly; rarely do we deal with them once and for all. We return to certain meanings again and again in a spiral fashion. Optimistically we return with experience under our belt which we have parlayed into accumulated wisdom. Optimistically we come to a familiar situation with the liberating distance of a retrospective perspective. But often we stumble as Freud's repetition compulsion indicates (p.3-4).

### **6.1.2 Rhythmic Development**

In its continued efforts to understand human development, psychology provides a primary source of order and a predictable sequential progression of growth, referred to as consisting of phases, stages or periods of development. While we cannot dispute the presence of developmental phases that appear regarding childhood, adolescence, adulthood, midlife and the later years, life and the process of human development appear to be more than the definition of the phases identified.

Within the context of adult development, Daniel Levinson (1978) and his colleagues view this as a sequence of alternating periods through which the life structure evolves. To this theorist, the sequence of alternating periods involves "a relatively stable structure-building period...followed by a transitional structure-changing period" (p.317). The description is reflective of the to-and-fro rhythm evidenced in the present study regarding the conflicting decision, as well as in the participants' need to return to their past. Periods of growth do not only appear to be chronologically related and evident in the broader perspective of developmental phases, but are revealed too, in the cyclic process of letting go, present in the living of our daily lives. The cyclic process of letting go is ubiquitous. Erikson (1971) has indicated that mobility occurs within and between the developmental phases. The concept of "individual life structure" is foundational to Levinson's (1978) theory and described as "the underlying pattern or design of a person's life at a given time" (p. 41). To speak of life structure is to consider the self in relation to the world. According to Levinson, life structure evolves through sequential developmental periods that shape the course of adult psychosocial development, where transitional periods are crucial turning points in the life cycle. Levinson speaks of stable or structure-building periods followed by structure-changing periods that last six to eight years and four to five years respectively. The alternating sequence of stable and transitional periods is considered the rhythmic movement of

development in the developmental phases. With letting go, the present study reveals a more specific rhythmic process of development and growth. While letting go is transitional and structure-changing, it is neither predictable nor chronologically linked, but provoked by sporadic contextual life-situations and the meanings we attach to them. In the process of change, while the familiar continues, its presence is gradually reduced. Change is not absolute, as letting go is dialectical to holding on. Where established meanings are confronted with change, a crisis emerges and the struggle to let go is a challenge in development.

The foundational concept of my thesis is that development is not merely chronologically phase-related. In the process of resolving the challenge of change, letting go continues to unfold in the daily structure of our lives. Growth and development are continuous, as change is omnipresent: “*J’y suis, j’y reste; plus cela change, plus cela est meme chose; esto perpetua* (Here I am, Here I remain; The more things change, the more they stay the same; This continues)”. Change is not merely phase-related. Change is development and continues to unfold in the experience of transition. To meet with change is to meet with crisis. Naomi Golan (1981) defines transition as “a period of moving from one state of certainty to another, with an interval of uncertainty and change in between” (p.12). In the uncertainty or unknownness of letting go, decisions are an attempt to define a sense of certainty regarding the future. Until the decision is made, the future remains unknown and anxiety threatens. There is the fear of loss and fear of the unknown. The transitional process of letting go arises in the context of the unknown, as a challenge to meet with change. Decisions provide structure to the process.

Letting go is the transitional and rhythmic mobility of life that occurs within and between the various developmental phases. With the challenge of change, in the process of living, letting go is an entry into the unknownness of space and time. In being born we let go, in dying we let go, and in the process between we live the story of our life or human journey in the unknownness of our spatiality and temporality. As members of individual communities, we reflect the cultural context and social world to which we belong, but also contribute creatively to the pattern of social continuity. We effect cultural change and are affected by cultural change. As we let go, change is inextricably woven into the fabric of our lives. The study reveals that in the struggle of our transitional journey forward, we submit to life’s temporality, for time is not separate to us, time is in us. We embody its existence and surrender to its power.

The rhythmic movement of development is akin to Freud's original life and death instinct of the conflicting life forces. The force to progress, to live and extend beyond oneself (push) and the force to regress and return to an earlier less complex state (pull) comprises a polarity. As revealed, crises are essential to man's struggle and the mobility of life. To resolve the struggle is to let go. Erik Erikson (1969) identifies the conflict of polarity as a developmental challenge that confronts the self. He places the conflict within the developmental framework of his eight ages of man, where each developmental phase constitutes the challenge to resolve the presenting crisis. As evidenced, resolution of crises is seldom complete, yet is sufficiently adequate to move on and meet with subsequent new challenges. In the context of environmental circumstances, residues of an experience remain and are returned to, to be rekindled and possibly resolved. In returning to the past, memories play a significant role in maintaining a sense of continuity, onto which we hold in our mobility forward.

Whether we are rocked in the arms of our (m)other, or move to the rhythmic beat of music in a dance, the push-pull rhythm of life is integral to our existence. In letting go, the rhythmic movement of the push-pull constituent revealed with the polarity is reflected in the to-and-fro movement manifested in the somatic experiences of breathing, eating and most bodily experiences. Erik Erickson (1969) notes the paradoxical lived-body experience of holding on (control) and letting go (submission), and describes the co-ordination of muscular maturation during this phase of early development. This theorist specifically attends to the phenomenon of letting go as it appears during the second (Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt) phase of development. At this time, the oppositional modes of retention and elimination come into play, where the contradictory experience of holding on (control) and letting go (submission) regarding mobility are challenged in order to find resolution and move on. To illustrate, participant P appeared to reflect a somatic experience of her conflict regarding the decision to leave her home. The extent of the intrusion into her space, and her ability to breathe appear to be co-related. Where the presence of the intrusion was felt the environmental air was difficult to inhale, but the air was found to be clear in the absence of the intrusion. The vacillation between submission (letting go) and control (holding on) is reflected in the exhaling and inhaling pattern of breathing, reflective, too, of the conflict she was in. The early process of muscular mobility is perhaps initiated perinatally with the paroxysms of the womb, but appears to continue psychologically



through life. The early experience of muscular control (holding on) and submission (letting go) is dialectically significant. The manner in which the challenge of holding on (control) versus letting go (submission) is dealt with and the conflict resolved during the early developmental phase, is fundamental to subsequent experiences of letting go. Developmental resolution of the polarised conflict (control-submission) influences the efficacy of further resolutions regarding polarisations. To let go is to relinquish control. To concur with Erikson (1969), Mahler (1975) and Alapack (1984), meeting with the challenge of a crisis (of polarities) and finding resolution is a developmental achievement.

Though idiosyncratic in nature, every conflict reveals the ontology of our being, where being and non-being co-exist existentially. Conflict is essential to man's struggle. The confronting question is whether to let go or to hold on; whether to submit to life and define a separate sense of being, or retain the state of oneness and immobility by denying life. The soliloquy of Shakespeare's Hamlet reflects the ubiquitous ambiguity and conflict of being. Hamlet poses the question: "To be, or not to be...". To "be" is to let go and define the self by submitting to life, while "not to be" is to continue holding on and to withdraw from life. The present study reveals the conflict of holding on and letting go, of presence and absence, of life and death. In living and letting go, attempts are made to avoid entering the emptiness of the gap, "where death makes itself felt" (Lacan, 1988b, p.210). The gap is omnipresent. Meaning appears to fill the gap, while an absolute experience is an illusion and merely reflects the dominance of a polarity. Our pursuit for the absolute is deceptive, and yet, in the need for stability, we seek a sense of wholeness.

### **6.1.3 Stability**

Throughout the rhythmic process of letting go, there is a continuous struggle to restore balance and stability. Paradoxically, it is in the presence of polarities that stability can be attained. In achieving stability and a balanced sense of self, both polarities are required. We live in the balance of differences, rather than in what is absolute. Our sense of wholeness is imaginary, and in our quest for stability, we become attached to an illusion and are deceived in the process. Our sense of stability is illusory. Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) was first to argue that there are no positive terms that comprise a linguistic system, only conceptual and phonic *differences*. This

linguist explicates that the value of a word is paradoxical and not fixed. A word is endowed with value and signification. Similarly, as revealed in the present study, meaning is paradoxical and dialectical. It is not fixed and can change. Ironically, however, in order to let go and move on, the self seeks to fill the gap through stability in meaning.

In the process of change, the study reveals that the self vacillates and oscillates between the negative and positive poles in pursuit of positive meaning. Positive meaning provides the stability, with a concomitant ability to move forward. Stability connotes attachments to the familiar. The self seeks to continue to hold on to the familiar, experiencing a sense of oneness. In the process of change and in the demand to move forward, the self is confronted with the deceptive nature of stability and of the meaning held on to. However, with the inevitability of change, the integrity of the self is threatened with fragmentation. The negativity that threatens gives rise to the pursuit of new meaning, and with the decision to submit to the inevitability of change, positive meaning emerges. To submit is to relinquish control. In the context of ambiguity, negative attachments, are gradually transformed and replaced with positive valuations. Successful resolution of the crisis is an achievement that empowers the self with a sense of competence. Upon arriving in the new world, there is a desire to bridge the sense of aloneness and to be one with the new environment. Ambiguity prevails, but is dialectically, facilitative, for in the quest for stability, negative perceptions are gradually replaced and converted to positive valuations. Although the attachment continues, its meaning is creatively transformed. For example, Participant M's initial attachment to the (negative) loss of her baby was transformed, and replaced with a (positive) sense of gain and appreciation for her life. While the attachment to her "baby" continued, a new positive meaning had emerged. In the continued quest for stability, with the creation of new meaning, the negative is transformed into the positive as the self partakes in a creative process.

The present study concurs with Lacan that a sense of stability can be deceptive. A sense of stability accompanies the sense of wholeness and oneness that the self perceives. Though the attachment may be inauthentic, it is nevertheless meaningful. This was evidenced with participant M who remained attached to her baby despite the pain it offered her. She felt obliged to carry the pain, as it connected her to her baby and she continued to perceive herself as its mother. Such deceptive stability is also evident in the attachment to the social façade, for while the truth is concealed, a

connectedness is revealed in relation to the world. The façade or social attachment maintains an illusion or false belief of wholeness, essential to the process of letting go. On entering the unknown spatiality of letting go, the state of deception precedes the awareness of truth. Evidence of the deception is reminiscent of the *méconnaissance* that Lacan portrays as occurring during the mirror phase of infancy, but it is also reflective of the illusion that Winnicott describes as emerging in the intermediate area of experience. Winnicott (1951) explicates how the experience of “illusion” precedes the child’s disillusionment or acceptance of reality. Both theories appear to acknowledge illusion, or deception, as a necessary precursor to accepting reality. The façade is a paradoxical social instrument that masks and alienates, yet retains a necessary attachment in relation to the world. The façade is where the self and other unite. In our quest for stability and wholeness, we seek to remain attached to the familiar.

The infant’s initial visual image of (m)other is a further merger of (mouth, hand, labyrinth, skin) the “unified situational experience” perceived (Spitz, 1965). What is visually perceived supports the experience of oneness. Attachment reinforces the sense of wholeness and oneness perceived in the image of the (m)other, as well as in the “hold” of the mirroring experience. Perception is falsely regarded as synonymous with the experience. To most, “seeing is believing”. We believe what we see, but are deceived by that perception. In perceiving the image or mirroring of the self, a sense of stability and wholeness is accepted, along with a sense of unity and oneness. In the desire for oneness, the value of what is visible continues.

#### **6.1.4 Oneness**

The desired state of oneness returns us to the initial phase of human development with its basic trust (Erikson), narcissism (Kohut) or oneness (Kaplan) experienced in the early relationship with the (m)other. The experience of oneness develops a sense of ontological wholeness and security regarding the self. The early symbiotic relationship with the (m)other, experienced as wholeness and oneness, provides the stability and integrity desired through life. Through life, the early holding experience is retained and extended as a primary ontological security force. Laing (1960) speaks of the “primary ontologically secure” person, who, despite constantly encountering social, ethical, biological and spiritual challenges, continues to acquire a sense of identity. A sense of rootedness is established. This study reveals that throughout the process of letting go, stability is pursued in the desire for oneness and continuity. Indeed, the “homeostatic

equilibrium” that Mahler (1975, p.43) describes as the task of normal autism does appear to continue later in life.

In the need for equilibrium and balance, we seek to be one with the world to which we relate. Though “apart” from the world and others, we are “a part of” the world and others. As contextualised beings in our changing world, we influence and change the world in which we live, but are nevertheless influenced by the somatic, psychological and cultural changes encountered. Our separateness is not absolute, for we are inseparably intertwined with the world to which we relate. We are relatedly-separate, and co-constitute one another. Though we seek to individuate, our separateness is defined in relation to others. Although participant P desperately sought to define her personal space, she nevertheless defended against finding it without retaining the attachment she had to her significant other, and despite their dispute, she considers his needs above her own. Similarly, in the process of letting go, participants M, K and P considered people other rather than themselves and retained the significant attachment. The term “individual” is derived from the Greek word for atom (*ἄτομος*- atomos). The concept contains paradoxical roots as “ it comes from *idivisibilis*, meaning that which cannot be divided; and dual or duality, that which is of two parts” (Tien, 1992, p.28).

In spite of emerging difficulties and tension, in the quest for the oneness desired, the self remains attached to the constant image of (m)other. With his concept of object constancy, Hartmann (1952) acknowledges the significance of the experience of continuity and sense of wholeness as a mental process. With his “object constancy”, the (m)other is gradually incorporated in memory, while the retained attachment provides the capacity to separate. Memories are a significant part in the process of letting go, and the self remains attached to memories in an attempt to find a sense of continuity. Before entering the world of the unknown, all the participants returned to their past to seek the familiar in memory. Participant B physically returns to the towns and roads of his past to rekindle memories of his history that he wishes to store in the album of his mind. The visit reassured him that in the consistently changing world that he was experiencing at the time, there was a sense of constancy in his world. This belief was fundamental to the change which he eventually undergoes.

Winnicott's (1951) "transitional object" is a tangible form of early attempts to retain the feeling of oneness in the relationship with (m)other. As Winnicott describes, the transitional object replaces (m)other, providing the perception of a meaningful link and a sense of stability for the infant. However, in the absence of the transitional object and the perception of a broken link, the infant appears to "fall apart", as if fragmented. Similarly, in the transitional process of letting go, it is revealed that intense efforts arise to retain an attachment to the significant other, while tangible objects substantiate the image in one's lived reality. The façade serves as a transitional phenomenon, and where the self is threatened with loss of the façade, there is the threat of fragmentation and disintegration analogous to that evidenced with the young infant in the absence of the transitional object. In the space of transition, the façade serves as a transitional phenomenon. The façade was so convincing in the participants, relation to their world that they falsely believed that they were fine and coping. The façade serves as their attachment to the social world which they dare not relinquish before their arrival in the new world. It is only in retrospect that they realise the truth and feel deceived. Winnicott (1951) notes that in the process of separation, illusion precedes disillusion. Similarly, in the process of letting go, one moves from deception to reality. Approaching reality is a gradual process. Illusion is the creation of a personal and lived reality that overlaps with reality in relation to the environment. In relinquishing the illusion or the deceptive reality that has been held on to, we submit to the omnipotence of time and change. Not holding on to the deception is to relinquish control and accept the truth that appears in reality. While the awareness of truth erupts, the conflicting duality between the façade and the self dissolves, and the transitional phenomenon that existed disappears. In the desperation for survival, the self retains an attachment to significant meanings that can replace the initial transitional phenomenon. In the absence of the façade and with the threat of disintegration, a new attachment (significant meaning) emerges, providing a sense of stability, where rootedness, centrality and personal continuity are experienced, together with a sense of being intact and whole.

Meaningful thoughts facilitate separation, yet also serve as adequate replacements that provide a sense of wholeness that promotes the resolution of personal conflict. The study reveals that during the process of transition, attachment to a transitional object is retained in its meaningful context, but gradually replaced with meaningful memories, values and beliefs. In the process of letting go, attachments to earlier meanings are replaced with the creation of new meanings,

facilitated by the initial ambiguity. Creation is an integral part of the process of letting go. Tolpin's (1971) conviction that "when the infant begins to use his blanket, to soothe himself, he has *created* something", rings true. Similarly, however, when the participants moved beyond the familiarity of sameness and entered the space beyond and discovered meaning, they too, had *created* something.

In recalling personal history, memories provide a sense of continuity that holds us, and to which we hold on. We attempt to bridge the inescapable discontinuity of letting go. With fear of fragmentation and of loss, positive meanings provide the capacity for stability and a sense of wholeness. In pursuit of the desired stability, while attachments to what is meaningful may be negative, efforts to convert such negativity to positive meaning and value continues. The polarised values of ambiguity facilitate conversions to the positive, and, although change is approached with hesitance, there is a desire to acknowledge the positive and to trust the new. As positive valuations increase, perceptions allow new meaning to unfold. However, in the dynamic, rotational and rhythmic movement of change, negative perceptions can be reverted to. The conflict continues until resolution is attained.

While the sense of integrity and wholeness, reminiscent of the early relationship with (m)other, is pursued, the need for holding continues. Physical and empathic holding is stabilising, creating the potential for future developmental achievements. The desired sense of wholeness facilitates the attachment to what is meaningfully possible, and relieves the anxiety of loss, and fear of entering the unknown. Kohut (1988) identifies empathic holding as providing transitional psychic structure foundational to the "cohesive self" or sense of wholeness. The experience of holding precedes the sense of oneness and ensuing developmental achievements, or what Kohut regards as a cohesive, intact and whole sense of self. With the threat of loss and fragmentation, a whole and cohesive sense of self provides the desired stability. In pursuing the desired state of oneness, positive meaning gradually replaces negative perceptions, and in facilitating balance and stability, mobility is promoted and separateness defined.

### 6.1.5 Separateness

In the findings of the study, although the participants recognised their uniqueness and the personal nature of their lived experience, they appeared to defend against a sense of separateness. They sought to identify with others and needed to know that they were not alone in the experience. Participant K identified with other parents of adolescents, while participant M identified with others who had also experienced loss. In her new environment, P seeks to identify with her new neighbours and feel that she belongs. Participant B also seeks to relate more closely to his new compatriots. The identification with others is reassuring to them that they are not alone.

Is to separate, to let go? Mahler (1975) and her colleagues view separation as individuation or the “psychological birth of the individual”. For the young infant, the process is described as:

The establishment of a sense of separateness from and in relation to a world of reality, particularly with regard to the experiences of one’s own body and to the principal representative of the world, as the infant experiences it, the primary love object (p.3).

The findings of the present study reveal the phenomenon of letting go as the adult experiences it. During adulthood, the lived body does not bear the significance it did during early childhood, but to let go is to establish a sense of separateness in relation to the world. However, the separateness attained is neither visible nor absolute. The façade conceals all truths. However, in the process of letting go, an attempt is made to retain an attachment to the significant other, as a need for relatedness continues. The visibly changing somatic self that confronts the child (and adolescent) no longer confronts the adult (unless with illness or aging). Like Lacan’s infant during the mirror stage, being assured only by what is visible, the adult is deceived and believes himself to be integrated and whole. But the visible body provides a deceptively integrated sense of self, as the adult accepts the somatic self to be part of the self. The ego is “the seat of illusion” (Lacan in Evans, 1996, p.51). Absence of the visual evidence of growth and development allows for the deceptive belief in an attained oneness in relation to the self, world and others, not affected by change. Nevertheless, change is inevitable and confronts the self in a psychological (experiential) rather than physical (visible) manner. The challenge of change during adulthood is

existentially, rather than visibly, evident. The traditional belief in psychology regarding the stability of the adult years is deceptive. Letting go is more than defining separateness; it is a confrontation with the challenge of change, where separation is the challenge to let go and meet with that change. While separation is growth, growth is change. To meet with the challenge of change in the process of separation is to meet with the challenge of letting go.

In the process of change, a façade conceals the truth of the conflicting struggle, where, in the experienced ambiguity, a sense of continuity is held on to, as memories fill the gap. With submission to one's spatiality and temporality, new meaning is created and the successful resolution of the conflict gives rise to a sense of empowerment. Such creation and sense of empowerment is reminiscent of Winnicott's (1963a) description of the "experience of omnipotence" in his theory of the infant "creating" rather than the finding the object. As the self is defined and redefined, it creates and recreates. Decisions are made in an attempt to gain control of the process, and to defend against isolation and fragmentation. .

In the mobility forward, the gradual integration of the duality of the self in relation to the significant other facilitates the successful outcome of separation-individuation. By retaining an attachment in memory, the self can separate and regulate its own sense of balance and stability. According to Hartman's (1952) "self-regulatory function of the ego", in the need to separate and individuate, the early narcissistic relationship is internalised to maintain the desired equilibrium. Meaningful attachments make it possible for us to let go of the psychic symbiosis and move on to our psychic separation. The present study reflects the reverberations of which Margaret Mahler (1975) speaks regarding separation-individuation. Indeed, the initial separation-individuation phase provides a foundational basis for the subsequent struggles and achievements of letting go. The separation-individuation evidenced in childhood is the core process of the psychological birth of the individual, and letting go is the continued process of defining and redefining the self in an existential, rather than in a visible, manner. Successfully resolving the challenge of the conflicting polarities continues to be a developmental achievement.

Just as the infant bursts into the ontological world and effectively lifts itself from the position of "horizontal" (Jager, 1971) to an erect position of mobility with a sense of omnipotence, so, too, the individual, having found resolution to his struggle of the letting go, adopts a different



perspective, and, with a similar sense of omnipotence, enters a new extended horizon with feelings of enrichment and empowerment. The push-pull experience of the struggle of letting go is reminiscent of the “darting-away” (push) and “shadowing” (pull) described by Mahler as arising during the rapprochement phase of separation-individuation which reflects the dialectic of the need for separateness, but also the desire for oneness of “man’s eternal struggle against both fusion and isolation” (Mahler, 1972a, p.130). The refuelling and separation of the earlier process reflects the ambiguity and ambivalence of letting go. Though there is a continuous desire throughout life for the ideal state of stability and wholeness in the union with (m)other, there is also a quest to individuate the self and move on. Just as the infant separates and establishes a sense of separateness and self in relation to (m)other and the world, so too, the adult defines a renewed sense of self in letting go. Although Mahler does not specifically refer to the process of letting go, her explication of the process of separation-individuation in childhood appears to be reflective of the existential experience of letting go during adulthood. Though the process is repeated on a different level, it does continue through life.

Mahler’s (1972a; 1972b; 1975) subdivision of the separation-individuation process includes the four subphases; viz. differentiation; practising (early and proper); rapprochement; and the unfolding of complex cognitive functions on the way to object constancy. Though no specific chronological sequence can be defined, the findings of the present study regarding the process of letting go with the adult can be described according to Mahler’s framework as follows: (1) an awareness of change and new horizons (differentiation); (2) an initial and final decision to commit to change (early and proper practising phase); (3) a paradoxical struggle in the fear of loss and quest for gain (rapprochement); (4) an increase in cognitive attempts to find resolution (on the way to object constancy). Indeed, each childhood subphase of separation-individuation is evidenced in the process of letting go. The increased awareness in relation to the world and the extended horizons beyond the self and significant other, concurs with Mahler’s description of the “differentiation” subphase. The “practising phase” that follows, and which is divided into an early and a proper practising subphase, corresponds to the initial tentative decision that initiates the intention to meet with change, followed by the significant final commitment to change.

In the process of letting go, the initial tentative decision provides knowledge and insight that are useful to the subsequent decision with its final commitment. As changes affect both the self and

the relation to the world, the decision is an attempt to retain control by personally determining the parameters of the commitment into the unknownness of the future. The present findings concur with Karlsson (1993) that decisions are goal-directed and pertain to “ a future, a time to come” (p.110). Through the making of decisions, the future can be determined and possibilities realised. The present study reveals that the making of decisions provides a hold and a sense of control in the space of the impending unknown. Just as Mahler’s (1975) ‘practising’ subphase prepares the infant for the ‘proper’ separation with separation-individuation, the initial decision prepares the self for the reality of change. Significantly, the information obtained from the initial decision contributes experience that equips the self to deal with the reality of change. Following the initial decision, a greater known enters the unknownness, of the second decision

With the participants, a final commitment to their decision was preceded by a paradoxical struggle in the push-pull mobility of the conflict, where the crisis of change confronted the self. The push-pull process is analogous to the mobility away from, and mobility towards, (m)other during Mahler’s rapprochement subphase. Although deceptive, successfully retaining continuity of the desired wholeness facilitates mobility. Hartmann’s (1952) “object constancy” provides stability to the ego rather than to the self. To let go successfully, is to find a solution to the conflicting of polarity, attained through self-reflection or self-confrontation, in the awareness of truth.

As is the case with the young child, in an effort to effect a resolution of the polarised conflict (holding on and letting go) and facilitate mobility forward, cognitive attempts increase. The capacity to regulate the conflict is relative to the ability to hold on to the concept of wholeness and stability. With letting go, awareness of the inevitability of change, and the fear of loss and fragmentation, leads to the submission of the self to the continuity and power of time. In the process, however, retaining a link to the world seems crucial, as new meaning replaces the earlier meaning related to. The need to retain an attachment to the significant other can be replaced by representative values and beliefs that replace the significant other. In the unknown space entered, Participant B finds that his Christian values effectively replace the meaning he had attached to tangible securities like his salary and the structures of his daily life. Meaning fills the gap that is evaded, as the creation of new meaning provides a sense of attachment for the future. Though the process of separation-individuation may resonate through life, to let go is not only to

individuate in separateness, but to retain a connectedness as well. Absolute separateness was defended against. Letting go is more than separation; it is the experience of separation. Though more than separation, letting go is dialectical to holding on, and, in the process of individuation, letting go is a process of related-separateness.

Before letting go and moving on, the participants returned to their past. The findings of the present study agree with the view that “regression” is a precondition for “progression”, reminiscent once again of the push-pull effect discussed earlier. The findings concur with the work of Margaret Mahler (1975) in her study on children, and the work of Peter Blos (1967) in his study on adolescence, considered the second individuation process. With both child and adolescent, before individuation of the self, the earlier relationship with the parent is returned to. We need to recognise, however, that somatic changes arise during the first (Mahler) and second (Blos) process of separation-individuation, where the familiarity with one’s body is disrupted. Such a disruption is most manifest during early childhood, but also during adolescence when “rapid changes of adolescence cause a rapid change in body image” (Couvaras, 1972). Where the self is confronted with physiological change, the challenge for psychological growth arises. However, though physiological change is not obviously evident during adulthood, psychological growth does occur. Change during adulthood tends to evolve more deceptively, as psychological change need not be reflected by somatic change. Nevertheless, regression precedes progression or, stated differently, a return to the past precedes entry into the future. In an attempt to resolve the challenge to let go, and leave the familiar in order successfully to meet with the new, a feeling of omnipotence emerges and a new sense of self is defined. Attachments may increase during transitions, as accepting change in the new and unfamiliar in relation to the self, or the environment, is difficult. The attachment evident in the close relationship with peers during adolescence, and in the refuelling with parents during the rapprochement phase of early childhood, continues during adulthood in relation to the significant other. Present evidence indicates that the separation-individuation of early childhood and adolescence recurs in resolving the challenges that confront the self during significant situations of letting go. The process of separation-individuation or letting go does continue through life. Though ageing and other physiological process during adulthood may play a role regarding psychological growth, such physiological changes were not significant to the present study, but provide an opportunity for future studies in this regard. Changes, whether visible or not, arise, confronting and challenging

the self to let go of the familiar, find resolution and move on. Whether physiological and psychological changes occur, the demand is to let go, to find resolution and define a transformed sense of self.

In her theory of development, Mahler (1975) considers the two concepts of separation and individuation as intertwined and complementary, rather than identical modes of growth. In the process of development, separation and individuation may converge or diverge. With change being omnipresent, concurrence is not always possible, for there is the fear of loss and of entering the unknown. While the familiarity of the past and its meaningful aspects are held on to, the reality of change tends to be avoided. In an effort to maintain control of the process of change, commitment to a decision is an attempt to subject the process of change to personal will and control, rather than subjecting the self to the unpredictability and unknownness of time and space. The decision as commitment is a moment of intentional awareness in relation to the world, a moment of being “conscious of” creating a focal point in the gap.

#### **6.1.6 The Split (or gap within the self)**

In the process of letting go, by encountering diversity, the individual seeks to retain the sense of sameness and links to the familiar. All the participants were resistant to change, even though the change would have been to their advantage. In avoiding the confrontation with change, a façade emerges, as the “false self” conforms to the demands of the social world, while hiding and protecting the “true self”. Participants M, P, K and J concealed their feelings from the significant others in their lives. The findings of the present study concur with the theories of Robert Laing (1960) and Donald Winnicott (1986) regarding the presence of a false self. As Melanie Klein (1997) has postulated, when the very core of self is threatened with destruction, feelings of inner deadness and “splitting” occur. Regarding splitting, Laing (1960) provides a description of the self as split into two parts, where the “real self” is authentic to one’s being and the “false self” is embodied, but lifeless. With a mask of conformity, the social façade, or public image, is presented to the world. Bernd Jager (1990) views masks as socially imposed forms of separation, and yet, as revealed in the study, the mask or social façade is necessary to the personal process of letting go.

Writers and theorists view the presence of a façade or “false self” from a negative perspective. Heidegger also alerts us to the threat of inauthenticity and alienation. However, until final mobility can take place, the transitional move from the known to the unknown requires the retention of such a façade. This is the “illusion” of which Winnicott speaks, and it appears to be a necessary preliminary step to letting go. While an initial illusion or deception seems necessary, it is where the echo of truth is repeatedly ignored, and where holding on to the false self continues regardless, that a lingering sense of inauthenticity with its pathology can emerge. The denial of truth promotes inauthenticity, where we lose sight of our existentiality and the inevitability of our death. It is the persistent deception of holding on to attachments in the “now” together with an illusory immobility, that leads to entrapment. Authentic living requires that we confront our mortality and acknowledge the open-endedness of our existence.

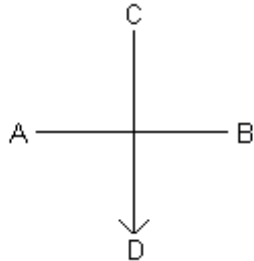
In the face of diversity, splitting arises, while the image of conformity accommodates and conceals the overlapping of the to-and-fro movement in the twisting and twirling mobility for change. The current findings agree with Lacan and Heidegger that social conformity promotes a deceptive image, devoid of authenticity. However, where the self is confronted with the challenge of change, deception is inevitable. As truth is avoided, attachments to the social world and its familiarity increase, facilitating deception and providing a transitional attachment. Meeting with the challenge of change is not immediate, but a gradual process that takes time. While the façade emerges and deceives others, it is also deceptive of the self. Awareness of the split (Lacan’s *clivage du moi*, - Evans, 1996 ) emerges when loss and fragmentation threaten the self, initially evidenced in the conflicting bipolar duality of doubt in the decision-making process. Just as the infant is deceived by his image of wholeness during the Mirror Phase (Lacan), so the adult, in the process of letting go, can be deceived to believe that he has found stability in his social conformity and superficiality. However, this sense of mastery and control in relation to the world is false. The image (façade) created in retaining the attachment to the social world, alienates the self from its truth. While the social image is tightly held on to, there is a misunderstanding of self or a *méconnaissance* of being. The self is trapped and captivated by the deceptive belief that the self and the image are one. What is seen is believed. We note that participant K’s crying behaviour during a movie convinced her that she had recovered and was dealing with “other” emotional aspects in her life. Similarly, participant J’s commitment to marriage and parenthood convinced him that he had recovered and was coping. In addition,

while identification with an “other” is supportive to the self, in its connectedness, the attachment does not facilitate acknowledgment of the authentic self, but further alienates the self from the truth. For example, participant K appeared to find reassurance in identifying with other parents who were also experiencing difficulty in their relationships with their adolescent children. Though this was supportive for K, providing her with a sense of stability, it impeded her from facing the truth of the pain she experienced and concealed. Similarly, both participant M’s identification with others who have also experienced the pain of loss, and her perception of their recovery, promotes the deceptive belief that she is also coping.

As evidenced in the findings of the present study, alienation accompanies inauthenticity and the lack of connectedness to one’s truth and humanity. Lacan (in Evans, 1996) considers alienation to be an inevitable aspect of our humanity, as the split of alienation is the division between nature and culture, the inevitable gap that prevents us from knowing ourselves completely. Jager (1990) believes that the “masks and marks” imposed by society symbolically reveal our humanity, as they refer to separations, and yet, “their cultural uses can be understood as forms of their acceptance” (p.170). With letting go, this declaration does appear applicable to the letting go façade, for it is in the interpersonal and social demands of society that the façade emerges, and is retained as a necessary link to the social and interpersonal world. As revealed in the present study, the façade is a necessary aspect of self. Present evidence also reveals that the sense of inauthenticity and deception is only understood in retrospect. During the process, the splitting is experienced as a mechanical sense of self, devoid of authentic living. Truth is contained and concealed, protected by the façade and false self, while attachments to the social world are retained and held on to. Reflective of the experienced inauthenticity is participant J’s description of the experience: “I was living and I was going through the motions, but I was dead, very dead”. (J.82) Participant M conveys it differently but conveys the same message. She says: “At some stage I realised that I was going on like a robot. I would smile, work, but it was false. I did what was expected of me. It was raw inside” (M35).

Attachment to the façade retains a connectedness to the whole. Just as holding incorporates the initial dual relationship of the connectedness with (m)other, which provides a sense of rootedness, centrality and oneness through time, so attachment (holding on), retains an interpersonal connectedness to others through space. To illustrate, we can assume (1) an axis of

relatedness (AB) that moves in the dimension of space (vision-deception), where time is not taken into account, and (2) an axis of historicity (CD) that continues through time (language-truth) with the impact of change.



In relating contextually to the world and others, both the significance of attachments (AB) and the meaning of one's history (CD) have to be considered. Similarly, regarding language, Saussure (1959) points to the need for "a distinction between the system of values per se and the values as they relate to time" (p.80). Meaning and values can change with time.

To experience a sense of continuity (of holding) through time, attempts are made to retain attachments through space. The self seeks to find balance and stability through finding meaning in relation to the world and others. The past in the present provides mobility into the future. In the words of J.H. Van den Berg (1972), "the past speaks to us in the present" (p. 79). Between the diverse polarisation of holding and attachment is the divide between the social façade and personal truth that emerges as a split. The split is the division constitutive of being, the inevitable split of the self, also known as the "gap".

The gap is the space or opening between oneness and separateness, the cleavage of change. Though the gap is avoided in relation to the world, it emerges as the split of the self, the gap between the image and the truth. Awareness of the gap or split within the self is experienced in the threat of annihilation and instability. The gap is also the space between the polarities of positive and negative perceptions, the space between oneness and separateness, sameness and difference that is evaded in our illusory quest for the absolute. Though we seek what is absolute, we pursue the truth. In the quest for truth, in science and academia we refer to "filling the gap" of the unknown, with the substance of the known. We seek to fill the unknownness of the gap with meaning and knowledge. Awareness of the gap threatens with loss and isolation, where an

entry into the unknown gives rise to existential anxiety. In the words of Lacan (1988b, p. 210), “the gap is produced whereby death makes itself felt”. Death is absence in presence.

### **6.1.7 Absence and Presence**

Death is absence in presence, non-being in being, the gap in being. Fear of loss, and fear of entering the unknown in space and time, reflects our fear of death and annihilation. And yet, in the process of letting go, we are exposed to the threat of loss and of the unknown. In the crisis of the conflict, letting go threatens the loss of the self. The challenge is to find a solution and move on. Finding a solution, however, requires returning to the past and resolving what has been; that is, finding resolution. The conflict confronting the self entails either submitting to time and the inevitability of change, or clinging to the familiar, thereby losing the continuity and knownness of the self. To submit is to return to the earlier phase of retrieving one’s “basic trust” (Erikson, 1969) in the process. Perhaps, from an Eriksonian perspective, we may now speak of the challenge as one of Time vs Self. Here, the initial (basic trust) phase of development is returned to.

To let go is to submit to the process of change and to relinquish control. The dialectic of holding on and letting go reveals itself in the dialectic of presence (life) and absence (death), evident, too, in the to-and-fro movements of mobility; the back and forth movement of oneness and separateness; wholeness and fragmentation; “to be or not to be”. Lacan notes that words are a presence in absence, symbolically replacing what is absent. There is a presence in oneness and wholeness, but an absence in separateness. Paradoxically, as the process of separation and individuation begins, the desire for wholeness emerges. The creation of space gives rise to the desire for the ideal state of oneness and stability. Being and non-being, presence and absence, co-exist in the existential ambiguity of our lives.

The existential co-existence of being and non-being arises in the presence-absence experience and is reflected in the fort-da (gone-here) encounter of the cotton-reel game that Freud (1971) recorded of his grandchild. Confronted with the concept of absence and presence, disappearance and return, the young child attempts to resolve the concept of life and death, through the push-pull of the to-and-fro rhythm of the cotton-reel that alternately moves away and towards the self.



Similarly the peek-a-boo or hide-and-seek game of children entails the disappearance and return, the movement away from, yet reunion with, (m)other. The child retains an illusionary attachment to (m)other through attachment to the transitional object and transitional phenomena. According to Winnicott (1951), during transition, the “internalised” object reassures the child regarding the continued existence or presence of (m)other in her absence. With letting go, meaningful memory provides a significant attachment that facilitates the feeling of oneness and a desired sense of continuity. In terms of Bowlby (1979), absence is death to the young infant. Experiencing the absence of a significant attachment is to experience the gap where death makes itself felt. The transitional space encountered in the process of letting go is a break in predictable continuity. Significant memories fill the gap, provide continuity, and remain a source of attachment conducive to a sense of stability. Appearance of the gap is traumatic, as the self moves from anguish to incredible anxiety, as the annihilation of the self becomes a threatening reality. Where truth ruptures through the façade of deception, the self is threatened with loss and fragmentation. The threat of death to the self compels the self to accept newness and submit to change. Willingness to submit to change at that point acknowledges the presence of the personal will and potential for control. The significance of memories fills the gap and retains the desired sense of oneness, wholeness, continuity and stability.

Letting go is paradoxical. It is the dialectic of life and death, being and non-being, oneness and separateness, wholeness and fragmentation. To let go is to prepare for the absence of what is meaningful. Memories in the moment are held on to as replacements are pursued in an attempt to fill the gap of transition by creating new meaning and moving on. While space and absence create the opportunity to separate and be alone, aloneness is only possible in the awareness of the presence of what is meaningful, something to which we remain attached. In the autonomy of our aloneness and sense of oneness, we need to know that someone is “there” for us (Winnicott, 1958). The participants needed to know that they were not alone. Even in its absence we need to continue holding on to what is meaningful. André Green (1986, p.293) writes:

Absence does not mean loss but potential presence. For absence paradoxically may signify either an imaginary presence, or else an unimaginable non-existence. It is absence in this first sense which leads to the capacity to be alone (in the presence of the

object) and to the activity of representation and of creating the imaginary: the transitional object, constructed with the space of illusion... .

In the context of illusion, we are seduced and fascinated by the image of our façade, and specifically hold on to the dual relationship with (m)other in our quest for wholeness and stability. We find a mirroring in the other, a repeat of our original omnipotent illusory experience, which we hold on to as a reminder of the fundamental narcissistic relationship with (m)other. In our illusion, we relive our early narcissistic experience and are deceived, as we believe ourselves to be whole. The entrapment of duality that arises in the conflicting polarity of self (thesis) and other (antithesis) requires resolution (synthesis). We need to listen to the echo, the call from the past regarding truth, so that we can acknowledge the third dimension. Rather than cling to the deceptive polarity of what we see mirrored in the world to which we relate, we need to listen. What we listen to needs to be incorporated with what we visually accept to be “true”.

#### **6.1.8 Narcissus and Echo**

The power of visual impact is illustrated in Ovid’s Narcissus. The myth tells us of the beautiful youth, Narcissus, who is fixed in adoration of his own image. Echo, the young nymph, who falls in love with Narcissus, can only repeat the ends of his sentences. Echo’s attempts to win the attention of Narcissus are in vain, and while Narcissus ignores her, she wastes away with love. Hidden in the woods, Echo’s voice remains and continues to live. Narcissus, riveted by his image and unable to gain the object of his passion, pines away and dies (Grant, 1994).

In Ovid’s myth, we note Narcissus’s search for maternal love in the desire for oneness found in the reflection of his image in the water. The reflection is analogous to maternal mirroring, essential to self-esteem, personal identity and interpersonal relationships, but deceptive in its conviction of wholeness and totality. Narcissus’s absorption with his own image eventually leads to self-destruction. Narcissus is unable to let go and move beyond the parameters that he has defined for himself. He is unable to move beyond the deception as he ignores the voice of Echo, the voice of truth. Narcissus lures himself into the conflict between duality and entrapment. The entrapment of the self, by the self, is the attachment of the self to the image. Ignoring the call of Echo leads to Narcissus’s self-destruction. To listen to the auditory call of echo is to listen to the truth that can

resolve the entrapment of the conflicting (visual) duality and escape the annihilation of self. Echo is the third dimension of truth conveyed through the word of speech and language. As Jeffrey Berman (1990) expresses it: “The *moi*, or alienated self, escapes its own self-fragmentation only by entering the symbolic world of language” (p.28).

The entrapment of the polarised, conflicting duality is evident in the current findings, reflected, too in the entrapment of which Lacan speaks. From a Lacanian perspective, the entrapment can be described as metaphorical illustration. Focussing on the image and ignoring the voice of Echo, Narcissus, in his desire for wholeness and completeness, is caught in the impasse of the dual relationship. Narcissus is captivated by his own image, deluded by a sense of intactness and stability. This deluded sense of mastery initially attained during Lacan’s mirror phase, with its false promise of wholeness, recurs with the delusion of the façade that is falsely sustaining in the process of letting go. Jeffrey Berman (1990) interprets the entrapment of Narcissus and Echo as contextual to Mahler’s theory in the failure of these two mythical figures to resolve the separation-individuation phase and attain separate identities. I believe, however, that enforcing the separateness of image (Narcissus) and sound (Echo) is to reinforce the entrapment and deception of polarised conflict. The truth lies in their interrelatedness rather than in their separateness. This point of view will, however, be discussed further later under “Speech Language and Meaning”.

Based on surface appearances rather than reality, the perception of wholeness is deceptive, an illusion whereby the other is reflected as being the same as the “self”. The deception that commences with mirroring is further facilitated by identification, where others are recognised as being similar to, or like, the self. Such identification further alienates the self from its personal truth and authenticity. Identification with others is supportive and stabilising to the false self (ego), for it is a reassurance of not being alone or isolated in the experience. However, identification provides resistance to personal growth and change, as the false self (ego) clings to the image of what it believes itself to be. It is the ego that identifies with others and, according to Lacan (1988), “the ego is structured exactly like a symptom...it is only a privileged symptom, the human symptom *par excellence*, the mental illness of man” (p. 16). The ego or false sense of self is responsible for man’s alienation, providing a superficial capacity to move on. The deception of what is believed to be the self is held on to. Research participants in the present study indicated that as they continued conforming to socially expected behaviour, they (falsely) believed

themselves to be coping, yet eventually, in retrospect, became aware of a lack of authenticity. While Lacan warns us of the dangers of the image, Levinas (1979) also appeals to us not to pursue the visual ideal and not to seek totality, as “totalitarian thinking accepts vision rather than language as its model” (p.15). To totalise is to entrap. Truth lies in speech and language rather than in what we see.

Truth, in its meaning, may recede and be hidden but like Echo, it calls, as the voice of the self, to be accepted in the present and find access into the future. The call in the present from the past is the echo of what has preceded, and it cannot be ignored for it is truth. We are not free from our life history, for it contains us and provides us with our sense of continuity and of being. The reality of what is visually perceived can be deceptive. Truth is revealed through the word, in speech and language.

#### **6.1.9 Speech, Language and Meaning**

In the desire to bridge the gap of separateness, speech and language help us to retain a sense of unity and oneness with the other, reminiscent of the narcissistic oneness with (m)other. It is through speech and language via verbal communication that the impasse of the narcissistic relationship and deluded oneness is resolved. The word fills the paradoxical space between. The word is given to, yet created by, the child. To let go is to partake in the process of creation. Ironically, while speech and language unite the dual relationship in dialogue, they also separate and differentiate this duality. According to Nachmann (1991), language develops with the emergence of a verbal sense of self. In an attempt to bridge the gap and sense of isolation, personal experience is communicated through the use of speech and language. Speech and language are a way out for the young child, caught in the entrapment of the dual relationship, but, nevertheless, speech and language provide a way of retaining the attachment. Wolman (1997) and Lacan (1988) accept that language helps dissolve the entrapment of the dual relationship. Language liberates and differentiates, yet also unites the young child in the process of separation-individuation. From a Lacanian perspective, the time of gradual loss of oneness is the time of the infant's subjection to the “symbolic order of language”, an indication of future subjectivity. Though liberating, language is omnipotent and we are subject to its power. The power of words and language is evidenced in the psychotherapeutic process.

The power of words can break through the deceptive power of the image. For example, though the image prevails, it is in the relationship with the significant other, it is where words are exchanged, that the truth reveals itself. Such revelation became evident with participants M and J, each of whom, in their relationship with their significant others experienced aggressive outbursts and realised that something was wrong. While they held on to the familiar meaning they knew, they continued to deceive themselves. The reality of their world was challenged, as truth threatened to reveal itself in the close relationship. Similarly, in the process of psychotherapy, it is the value of words that liberate the self from its self-imposed entrapment. Rather than be deceived and entrapped in our Narcissistic duality by what we see, we should heed the call of the echo of words and meaning that we tend to conceal. The echo of the inner voice of truth liberates the self that holds tightly on to the image or social ego. As noted earlier, true meaning evolves in the interrelatedness of language (Echo) and image (Narcissus). Maintaining the separateness of language (Echo) and the image (Narcissus) is to reinforce the deception and entrapment. Most interpretations of Ovid's myth maintain the separateness of Echo and Narcissus and thus retain the deception. The present findings agree with René Major (1980) that true meaning lies in the interrelatedness of Narcissus and Echo, rather than in their separateness. It is revealed that though personal truth is initially contained and concealed, evaded and ignored, with every effort to keep it separate, the separation is false. Echo is the voice of truth. Echo is the voice of the past that calls. In order that we may have access to the future, the call of Echo must be heeded in the present. Like a seed, with time, truth ripens, matures and ruptures as it splits open and bursts through the façade, confronting the self with the demand to meet with change, adopt a different perspective and find new meaning.

Barclay (1993) makes a profound contribution to Lacan's mirror phase by recognising the impact and value of sound on human development. He proposes the inclusion of a "mirror in sound" to the study of human development regarding acoustical phenomena. The echo is a mirror in sound, and the significant impact of sound during development cannot be ignored. In relation to the world and in the process of development, the infant incorporates somatic, visual and acoustical phenomena. However, in the psychology of human development, although sound is integral to our development, its impact appears to have been overlooked. From the outset, our relation to mother's heartbeat or the voices heard in utero, (m)other's lullaby or sounds in preparation of a

feed, and other acoustic phenomena, must, more than likely, retain some sense of meaning. Sounds, including the infant's own productions during development, must bear psychological significance, in terms of a meaningful relation to the world. As the self experiences and hears the sounds of the world, the meaning of sound privately constitutes subjectivity. Language is the mediator between self and world. According to Barclay, "In the normal child the speech sounds of the surround and their relation to the phonetic sounds the child produces are crucial in that meaning is carried by these sounds and is a consequence of their existence" (p.35). With the creation of meaning, babbling ceases, as the infant gradually absorbs and is absorbed into the world of which he is part. Language bridges the divide. In the present study, the verbal descriptions provided by the participants were an attempt to share the experience in a sense of oneness with the researcher. In relation to the world, meaning is primary, as it provides a sense of continuity and a means of attachment. The significance of meaning through language remains profound.

In the process of transition, while objects may be held on to, and perceptions internalised in order for the achievement of a sense of wholeness, acoustical phenomena may also facilitate the transitional process of letting go. In the absence of the significant other, representative meanings (beliefs and values) can provide a replacement. This was evidenced with participant B who had to take the initial step of leaving his country of origin on his own before his wife and child could join him. In the unknown space he encountered, participant B found strength in his values and beliefs as a Christian. He speaks of "walking in the footsteps of Christ", and finds meaning in his religious beliefs. Meanings are held on to and retained for future use. Similarly, meanings continue through generations. Each generation is shaped by contextual influences predominantly controlled by language and cultural practices, where meaning is conveyed and passed on from generation to generation. Meanings held the participants, and through memory, helped retain their sense of continuity. With the creation of new meaning, the capacity to let go was made possible.

Like memories, language fills the gap that we experience in relation to the world. Language unites and bridges the void of separation. As described by Jager (1989):

Language as the domain of metaphor, carries us (*metapéroo*) beyond the abyss created by that separation and rejoins us to the world, to ourselves, to each other. Language is our

re-entering into communion following our acceptance of an exile from the absolute (p.222).

Language provides a sense of oneness and union in relation to the world. In the transitional process of letting go, significant meanings are held on to as represented by objects, values and beliefs. Attachment to meaning provides a sense of continuity, for in the process of mobility, the meaning of what is significant is held on to. Meaning perpetuates stability and facilitates transition. In the process of being and becoming and in the process of individuating, we require a sense of attachment and need to know that we are not alone.

As we enter the unknownness of space and time, meaning helps maintain a sense of continuity and attachment to the world to which we relate. In relating to our world, language is the transitional phenomenon. Through the use of language, we attain recognition and seek union. Through both image and sound, language is the fundamental dual opposition between absence and presence. As Lacan would explicate, it is by using a word that we create something where there is nothing, and make presence of absence. In the process of transition, words as symbols replace what is absent. Language and memories fill the gap of absence, thereby creating meaning, which, in its continuity and presence, holds us and is held onto by us in turn.

#### **6.1.10 The Liberating Triad**

In our illusion of wholeness, attachments to items, relationships, language, memories and dreams fill the gap, while the continued pursuit of the duality of the early narcissistic relationship is an entrapment. Lacan (1988) speaks of the impasse of the dual relationship, with the illusion of reciprocity that emerges in relation to the image perceived. However, by submitting to the triadic realm of non-duality and non-reciprocity, a third dimension enters the duality. Where there can be liberation from entrapment, the illusion of the dual relation can be resolved as truth breaks through. In the present study the dual relationship is the self in the conflict of holding on or letting go and the entrapment that ensues. An opposing polarity can only find release through entry into the triadic structure. Freud's Oedipus complex enters the present scene, where "the Oedipus complex is the paradigmatic triangular structure, since the Father is introduced into the dual relation between mother and child as a third term" (Evans, 1996, p.49). Just as the inclusion

of the father liberates the child (Freud), so the inclusion of language liberates the entrapment (Lacan). It is in their dialogue with the significant other that participants M and J became aware of an emerging aggressive self that was not consistent with the self they knew, and their identity was threatened as they feared disintegration. The awareness of the truth exposes the deception and confronts us with our humanity.

The present study reveals that, with time, resolution of the impasse is made possible in the revelation and acknowledgement of truth. Truth is the echo of the past that calls. In order to let go and move on, each of the participants had to acknowledge the truth of their past and face it with new meaning. Truth ripens with time and ruptures through the façade of the false sense of wholeness, confronting the inauthentic self with the truth of authenticity and the reality of change. Just as language liberates the child from the entrapped duality of the symbiotic relationship with the (m)other, so language, in the awareness of truth, liberates the self entrapped in conflict. Participants J and M realised that they could not continue unless they reviewed their past. Continued attempts to find resolution were futile, until eventually, with time, the truth threatened to burst through. In the fear of annihilation, the self submits to change. The threat of annihilation is real. This was evident with all of the participants, who, although initially resistant to change, eventually submit to it. Even participant K who was in the early phase of her letting-go process, looked to the future and became aware of the retirement years and the inevitable distance that would enter her life. Despite her resistance to the increasing distance she was experiencing in relation to her son, she realised that she would have to submit to the omnipotence of time. Participants M and B give a metaphoric expression of their submission to their spatiality and temporality. For M it is “like a bungee-jump”, while for B “It’s like jumping from a plane before the parachute opens”. What had been avoided to protect the self was now confronting and challenging the self directly. Where the self is threatened with loss and fragmentation, change is submitted to, and as a different view is taken on, new meaning is created. The existing sense of (a false) self is sacrificed, and a different perspective adopted, together with new meaning. Beyond the attachment to the façade, a significant sense of continuity is held on to. By letting go and submitting to the inevitability of change through time, a creative process emerges, giving rise to a new sense of self. The self is transformed.



To accept the truth and commit to a decision is to discover new meaning and submit to change. The commitment to change is a submission to the omnipotence of time and creation. As evidence reveals, the participants in the present study considered their decisions to be a turning point in the process of letting go. However, proceeding with a decision and making a commitment (to the future) required resolution of the past. With reference to Van den Berg, Kruger (1988) explicates as follows: “We are not free from our life histories: the conditions for a decision are given by the past, whilst the act itself originates from the future, from the expectance or wish or fear or desire” (p. 66). We carry our history and the story of our lives. In order to facilitate mobility into the future, the significance of the past has to be synthesised with the self in the present. While established meanings from the past hold us, we create and find new meaning in the present, to which we attach ourselves and attempt to move on. As we focus on the future, the past lies with us and influences our commitment to the present. An unresolved past leads to a diffuse perception of the present. In the words of J.H. Van den Berg (1972, p.86): “The past provides the conditions for what is going to happen in life, but the acts of life are rooted in the future”. Submission to change is an end of the old, and beginning of the new. But, letting go is not final. As revealed with those participants (M, B, P and J) who had to submit and relinquish their hold their encounter with death not absolute. It was their sense of continuity that needed to survive and does. It is the sense of continuity of self that seeks to be retained and protected. We cannot speak of closure as finality, for in the future, once again, we may return to the past and rekindle the meaning of our experience and continue with our story. In creating new meaning, we partake in the process of creation.

As the present study reveals, submission is to acknowledge the truth and accept the dominance of time. The power of time is reflected in our language and culture that continues through time, dominates us, and to which we are subordinate. For Lacan “language speaks the subject”, for as humans, we are subject to the mastery of language over us. We define ourselves in the context of the profound influence of language and culture. Though forever changing, in our exchange with the world, language and culture bear the continuity that holds us and to which we hold on. Language and culture is there before us, and there after we have left life as we know it. The power of time and its reflection through language and culture continues.

#### **6.1.11 No light in the gap (black hole).**

At the peak of the struggle of letting go, a powerful force is experienced, over which there is no control (hold). The conflicting force is analogous to the early movements during “rapprochement in which the child, precisely because of his clearly perceived state of separateness from mother is prompted to redirect his main attention back to mother...” (Mahler et al., 1975, p.4). Maurice Bouvet’s (1958) “optimal distance” between the self and the object world, may be described as the oscillating position of the self, attained in the balance between the desire for oneness and the quest for selfhood. The protocols of the present study provide descriptions of a conflicting polarity, a repetitive and intense struggle that emerges before the challenge is met and there is a final resolution of letting go. The intensity of the struggle is experienced both as an entrapment in darkness and as a liberation from darkness. Regarding polarity, Sir Isaac Newton’s law of inertia tells us of the powerful force of gravity that pulls at a distance and is understood as the force whereby the moon, in its orbit, moves away from (push), yet towards (pull) the earth. At a distance, planets move away from, yet towards, the sun. The pull, in the desire for union with the significant other, is almost gravitational, and counterbalanced by the quest for a sense of self away from the significant other. Newton found the law of gravity to be universal (Sagan, 1981).

Let us consider the universality of Newton’s law of gravity as it is analogous to man. As humans, we move away from (push), and towards (pull) each other, attaining an optimal distance or balance between. The powerful force of circularity experienced in the push-pull process in the struggle of letting go tends to evoke the cosmic process of which we are a part. Though all beings cling to earth, there is a gravitational pull towards the light of the sun. The present study reveals the metaphorical significance of light as evidenced in the desire to move away from darkness. Light is perceived in the quest for knowledge and freedom. Though the self may be buried in, or attached to, the negativity of darkness, the desire to pursue the light continues. Despite the familiarity that an attachment to darkness provides, the light is perceived as positive. As light begins to enter the darkness, there is a sense of balance and stability. In the presence of light, new meaning emerges as something different is related to. Levinas (1979) explicates the presence of light as follows: “We are in the light inasmuch as we encounter the thing in nothingness. The light makes the thing appear by driving out the shadows: it empties space”

(p.189). In the presence of the light and in the meaningful perception of what appears, the gap of darkness seems to disappear. But, in the process of letting go, due to the confrontation with change and implications of difference, the journey is slow, with hesitant steps forward. Participant M knows that she must face “the light” but is afraid to do so and, although she seeks to sit down and think about it, she also avoids doing so. The paradox and ambiguity of the process of letting go continued indefinitely until the decision to accept the process and commit to change. Although the approach is ambivalent, the desire to attain the positive aspects increases and in the presence of the light, there is the conviction of being on the correct route. A positive focus on the future is helpful. In submitting to change, trust facilitates the process. As evidenced with participants M and B, successful completion of letting go gives rise to a new sense of self, with feelings of empowerment and enrichment. Having successfully met with the challenge through the winding change, and having retained a sense of continuity, is empowering to the self. Participant M plans to carry what she has gained with her throughout her life. Completion of the process is euphoric. Creation starts with a Big Bang.

#### **6.1.12 Creation**

New life is enabled by the elusive death of what has preceded, and there is a submission of the self to the power of time and change. With the threat of loss and fragmentation and the need to preserve the self, there is a willingness to let go and submit to the inevitability of change, thereby partaking in the process of life and creation. In the process there is an awareness that to constantly cling and hold on threatens with death and destruction. To submit and let go is to be part of the creative process. In the process of growth and change, entrapment and frustration are escalating forces in the power of creation. With the submission to time (and space), new meaning is created, and the successful resolution of the conflict gives rise to a sense of empowerment. Such creation and sense of empowerment is reminiscent of Winnicott’s (1963a) description of the “experience of omnipotence” in his theory of the infant “creating” rather than the finding, the object. As the self is defined and redefined, it creates and recreates. Decisions are made in an attempt to accept change, but also to gain control.

As revealed in the awareness of truth, the decision to let go is the conscious turning point of the process and the intensity of the desperate holding is relieved by the breakthrough of a new

perspective. Through reflection, new meaning arises, where, in the words of Merleau-Ponty (1962), we find “a truly creative act of a changed structure of consciousness”. In living of our lives and in the continuity of our being, we hold on, become attached and let go, as we evolve in the process development of our growth and partake in creation. In the passage through time, as we continue to grow in the developmental process, we submit to the power of change. As we partake in process of creation, growth and development continue. Life is not a predetermined script that we live out or enter, but a continuous, evolutionary path of creation that we live through, and which lives through us in our being and becoming as we continue to hold on and to let go.

George Ellis (2001) relates creation to the meaning of kenosis. Understanding creation requires an understanding of the meaning of kenosis. From a kenotic and theological perspective, John Polkinghorne (2001) tells us that: “God shares the unfolding course of creation with creatures, who have their divinely allowed, but not divinely dictated, roles to play in its fruitful becoming” (p.94). Life is not lived through predetermined structures. Kenosis is a letting go, a submission that accompanies a willingness to yield in a creative and positive manner that is in harmony with the nature of God. Kenosis is a readiness to let go of the self in its self-centredness (egoism) with a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of others. Kenosis is creative in meaning, and, though connotations may be similar, kenosis is not altruism. With kenosis, caring and giving emerge in relation to the nature of God. The experience of kenosis is evidenced in participant M’s desire to “pour love into life” (M 53), and in participant B’s willingness to serve others (B 25) and relieve their pain. A different aspect of kenosis is, perhaps, reflected in the willingness of all the participants during the crisis point of their struggle, to consider the needs of others, rather than thinking of themselves. In letting go, one relinquishes holding on, which, though risky, can be rewarding. In the words of Robert Bellah:

If one gives up clinging to what is irretrievably gone, then the nothing which is left is not barren but enormously fruitful. Everything that one has lost comes flooding back out of the darkness, and one’s relation to it is new – free and unclinging. But the richness of the nothing contains far more, it is all possible it is the spring of freedom (Ellis, 2001,p.113).

In the spirit of kenosis, “ubuntu”, a Xhosa-Zulu word used in South Africa, appears to reflect the meaning of letting go. The word is expressed as humanness, where being human lies in recognising the dignity and humanity of others. Ubuntu is a letting go of self-centredness. Throughout South Africa, a number of group leaders and managers across the earlier racial divide have made use of the concept in an effort to resolve the racial oppression of the past and enter the future together (*The Economist*, 1995).

Caring for the other, or considering the needs of the other above the self, is a constituent of letting go. In the process of letting go, participants M, B, P and K keenly desired to retain the attachment to the significant other, while participant J recognised that a failure to acknowledge such an attachment facilitated the emergence of new problems. In the process of letting go, the study reveals a general desire to retain the attachment to the significant other. All participants in the study paused to reflect whether their decision to let go was selfish, and each defended against it being so. There was a concern for what their decision to let go would mean to the significant other. To Heidegger (Sallis, 1993), all aspects of love are grounded in care (*Sorge*), while care also designates the existential-ontological structure of Being (*Dasein*). What Heidegger refers to as care, Paul Tillich (1952) recognises as concern. Care or concern for the significant other was evidenced in the findings of the current study and became primary in the process of letting go. Through care and concern we retain a connectedness to others. Care connects the self to others, and is the core of the relationships that constitute man in his humanity.

Upon receiving the initial care from the (m)other and significant others, we come to care for others; we become concerned about others and retain our connectedness as humans. Though we define our separateness, care is the invisible fibre that weaves us together in our relatedness. Cultural practices define the meaning and nature of this care, and the degree of interpersonal space between its members. From one generation to the other, customs and practices of a culture continue creatively, repeated cyclically through time. Practices of the past which are lived in the present, and conveyed to future generations are considered as constants, and also continue to change. In culture, life is lived and shared in a sense of oneness and mutuality with others. Having been through the transition of change and having arrived in their new world, participants P and B desired to belong to that world and return to a sense of oneness with their environment. By personalising the new so that it became familiar, they created and found new meaning in their

world together, but with a sense of continuity of self. As they seek, they desire to be acknowledged and accepted by others.

Winnicott (1986) considers the shared distance between the self and the (m)other as the area of creativity, the transitional area where “cultural experience starts as play, and leads on to the whole of man’s inheritance, including the arts, the myths of history, the slow march of philosophical thought and the mysteries of mathematics, and of group management and of religion” (p.36). To live creatively is to use what is available in the potential space, the space-time area of oneness between (m)other and child (or adult) where there is no separation; a place where we can realise our related-separateness. Our lives include personal and interpersonal worlds, the world of cultural experience – a world of shared reality. Cultural experience initially created in the intermediate or potential space between the self and (m)other continues in the space beyond the defined parameters of self. The meaning attributed to space and distance varies in significance from culture to culture.

The studies of Guisinger & Blatt (1994) and Kagitçibasi (1996) reveal that Western industrialised cultures tend to place emphasis on individualism that is self-contained, whereas non-Western cultures recognise a more sociocentric ideal. The present study reveals that in the transitional process of letting go, the self places the needs of the significant other above the needs of the self. There is value attached to the relatedness with the significant other. While attachments and relationships are held on to, absolute separation is defended against. The attachment is retained through caring. Caring bridges the gap of the interpersonal divide.

#### **6.1.13 The gap in Being and being in the gap.**

The process of letting go includes the experience of spatiality, connoting the fear of loss and entry into the unknown. Awareness of the initial reality of change is evaded, and with the emerging split, a façade evolves in an attempt to protect and conceal personal truth. With the continued denial of the increasing space in relation to the world, deception protects the self. Gradually, however, though the gap is avoided in relation to the world, the gap emerges in the experience of difference regarding the conflicting polarity of the decision. With time, the self

realises that the gap initially avoided in relation to the world continues to threaten, and arises in the experience of conflict in relation to the self.

The push-pull force that exists in the microcosmic whirlpool of our psyches, exists, too, in the macrocosmos of the universe with its falling planets. Whether a planet on its course, a pirouetting ice skater, or a self in its journey through life, we all participate in the moving fabric of time and in the spiral mobility in space. In the words of Carl Sagan: “We are, in the most profound sense, children of the Cosmos” (1981,p.242). A proverb of ancient China declares this differently with the belief that “sex is the human counterpart of the cosmic process”. In his prolific work on Love and Will, Rollo May (1972) makes reference to the polar rhythm of sexual intercourse and its powerful enactment of relatedness, approach, entrance, union, partial separateness and then re-union again. May writes: “In the rhythm of participation in a union in a dual being and the eventual separation into individual autonomy are contained the two necessary poles of human existence itself, shown in fullness during sexual intercourse” (p.113). In sexual intercourse we find the rhythmic movement of union and separateness; of oneness and distance; of separating and becoming one; the moment of creation.

In being “apart”, we move away from, and yet towards, wholeness. We move from being *a part* of, to being *apart* from, wholeness. In the cosmic process, we are a part of the whole, yet the whole is part of us; we are part of the universe, yet the universe is a part of us. We are beings in the gap, with a gap in our being. In being, we are not absolute but open-ended. We contain, yet are contained and partake in the infinite that is part of us. Paradox lies in the word “apart”, which changes in meaning with separation of the prefix “a”. The resulting terms are dialectical as “apart” in its wholeness, denotes separateness, while “a part”, in its separateness, means wholeness. We are part of the wholeness and not separate to our world or universe. In separating, we individuate, yet incorporate part of the whole. The gap initially avoided in relation to the world is eventually experienced in relation to the self. This became evident with all the participants who sought to avoid confronting the increasing space of change. For example, participant K resisted the space created by her adolescent son, participant P resisted the move, and J resisted the reality of the break in the relationship with his ex-fiancée. Although they avoid the gap created, they are eventually confronted by the gap and have to submit to change. Though we strive and continue to fill the gap, the gap will always be present – the space between science

and religion, life and existence, the brain and the mind. The gap is a part of us, and not apart from us. We are in the gap and the gap is within us. Meaningless space is omnipresent as we continue to fill the gap with meaning.

#### **6.1.14 Individuation**

Individuation is the psychological developmental process of *acknowledging* separateness (Jung, 1953; Mahler, 1975). Individuation is the sense of being separate, and yet is only achieved in the awareness of the presence of a significant other. Individuation is not a totality. The study reveals that while the self moves away from the significant other, the attachment is retained in memory, and in moving away, there is a desire to rekindle the interpersonal relationship.

Knowledge of the self arises with the ego, but the self is more than what is known in awareness, and the relation between the ego and self cannot be scientifically defined. The observer is the observed. Though being is centred in the self, the self is more than the ego, more than the image that it believes itself to be. Both Lacan (in Evans, 1996) and Jung (1953) recognise our containment and enmeshment in an image that is not who we truly are, for we are more than we think we are. Truth is not absolute, but relational (Kierkegaard). Kierkegaard reveals the subjective world, yet retains an ability to accurately observe. According to the philosopher, as cited in May (1958, p.25):

When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth, even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true.

Our capacity to let go and objectively view the truth of who we are is limited. Jung recognises our human limitation in elucidating the sense or relation between the ego and the self. Though acknowledging the split in the awareness of self, Lacan attempts to explicate the reality of this relationship, and the misperceptions that occur during the mirror phase of development. As humans, we are limited in fully knowing who we are for we can never know ourselves completely. We remain divided by the split. Knowledge of the self can never be absolute, for our



“Being is partly ‘in darkness’ and hidden from view” (Halling & Nill, 1995, p.9). In holding on and letting go, our identity is never absolute, but continuously in a process of change. Letting go is a continuous process that gradually extends over time. We are continuously in the process of letting go. We are beings in becoming. As contextuality challenges the self, the initial resolution of conflict regarding separation and separateness recedes sufficiently to be reactivated later in life. In our journey through life, separation-individuation is a process that continues to occur and re-occur. In the words of Aldo Carotenuto (1985), “Individuation is a path, not a goal. The process goes on indefinitely...” (p.79). Individuation is never complete, never absolute, never final.

Successfully meeting with the challenge of change and letting go pertains to defining the self in the process. Where the challenge of resolving the arising conflict is successfully met, feelings of enrichment, fulfilment and empowerment emerge. With the extended horizons, there is an awareness of a widening of the earlier world once known. New meaning unfolds, with a sense of having gained from the experience, often with the belief of having encountered life and its meaning. The new meaning attained permeates through the various aspects of self in relation to the world. Such empowerment is reminiscent of the Narcissistic peak that Mahler (1975) describes as arising with the onset of the practising period. It is the time of the toddler’s success in his ability to walk on his own and in his newly attained vertical position. With the increasing sense of its competence and sense of autonomy, the young child seems to be “intoxicated with his own faculties and with the greatness of his own world” (p.71). Both the toddler (Mahler, 1975) and participants (M, B, J, and P of the present study), literally and figuratively discover a new perspective and vision of the world which excites them. Resolution of the process takes time and in achieving this, a renewed sense of self arises as the self is transformed in the process.

The separation-individuation process of early childhood that Mahler (1975) and her colleagues describe, is the core of “early intrapsychic achievement of a sense of separateness” that continues through life. However, though there is a need to individuate, there is a desire not to be separate, as a sense of related-separateness emerges. Presently, the focus on separation and autonomy is the dominant paradigm for developmental psychology. A number of writers and theorists (Bowlby, 1997; Fairbairn, 1994; Josselson, 1992; Kohut, 1971; Sullivan, 1953; and Winnicott, 1992) recognise the significance of relatedness, and yet this aspect of human development has

not been adequately addressed. With individuation, letting go is paradoxical, for while it entails the process of separateness, it also includes the meaning of relatedness. Letting go has a relational base. The apparently antithetical views of Daniel Stern (1985) and Mahler (1975) regarding early infancy and childhood development need not remain polarised, and can be considered as part of the same continuum of a related-separateness. Stern speaks of the human need for relatedness rather than of the desire for separation. Similarly, the present study reveals that autonomy is not absolute. The capacity to separate requires an awareness of the presence of another, along with the knowledge that one is not alone. In the process of letting go, the participants revealed the need to retain the attachment with the significant other. Before individuating, there needed to be an awareness that someone was there for them. This concurs with Winnicott's (1958) description, where "the basis of the capacity to be alone is the experience of being alone in the presence of someone" (p.36). The capacity for "separateness" is made possible where the link or attachment with the significant other is retained. According to Settlege (1990): "Through internalisation and identification, the regulatory and adaptive functions and the governing values of the developmental partner become part of one's own structure" (p. 31). Affirmed in the present study is that the incorporated sense of the other, and a retained sense of an attachment to the significant other, make separation possible. Autonomy does not appear to exclude relatedness, as separation assumes the presence of relatedness. Besides, as we separate and let go, we move towards another. Separateness is dialectical to relatedness. Though Mahler has been criticised for her view of autonomy as absolute, her theory does acknowledge the (m)other's presence in the process of separation-individuation. Furthermore, though Mahler recognises the significance of separation in the context of the fear of fusion, she also makes pertinent reference in her theory to the fear of isolation and the young child's desire to retain a connectedness in the process of separation. Indeed, to individuate appears to be to retain the "optimal distance" (Bouvet, 1958) or balance between the movement away from (push), yet movement towards (pull), the significant other. As we seek to retain connectedness, the *absolute* dependence of infancy becomes a *relative* dependency in later life. We are a part of, yet apart from, others. To individuate is to realise the self and "resolve" the ambiguity and paradox of letting go.

Jung (1953) describes individuation as "becoming a single homogenous being", a "coming to selfhood" and a "self-realisation" (p.171). Though idiosyncrasies particular to the self are

differentiated, individuation is also a complete fulfilment of the collective qualities of being human, where universal qualities are uniquely combined. Though each individual pursues individuation and difference, seeking to be acknowledged as a unique and separate human being, he also desires sameness and oneness, to remain part of the whole. Paradoxically, individuality is contextually defined in relation to its environment. In the words of Jung (1953), individuality is “the full flowering not only of the single individual, but of the group, in which each adds his portion to the whole” (p.238). We are part of the whole. We are not separate from the world, and cannot view the world as objective or separate to us. When relating to the world, we are part of the equation, for man can never be separated from that which he perceives; he can never be separate to that which he observes. The cancer of Western thought of which Ludwig Binswanger (1963) speaks, is the subject-object duality that leads to entrapment and deception. Though tentatively useful, we have to let go of the deceptive reality to which we attached ourselves. We need to hold on and we need to let go: we require consistency and change through a sense of continuity that appears to be retained through memory.

#### **6.1.15 Truth and Reality**

The study reveals a distinction between truth and reality. What the participants accepted as reality was not necessarily the truth. In an attempt to maintain stability, the known reality continues to be held on to. With time, however, truth reveals itself, and the awareness of truth provides the opportunity for resolution and further growth. For example, as participant M returned to work and her familiar routine, she believed that she was fine. Only later, in the relationship with the significant other, did she become aware of the truth and recognise the need for change. Similarly, participant J was convinced that the absence of the relationship from the real world meant that it no longer existed, but later, in retrospect, he became aware of the deception and realised the truth. He expressed the following thought: “...a day in your life comes that you realise that you have been deceiving yourself...not been true to yourself... . You had seen the practical things for what you had hoped they were and then one day you realise that they are not...”. (J49). For continued stability, perceptions are tinted according to the belief system. The perceived reality can be deceptive.

In the world, we deceptively accept that “seeing is believing”, a typical expression used regarding the objectification of our world. The belief is that the less involved we are in a given situation, the more clearly we are able to observe the truth. However, we are not able to be separate from the world in which we live, and to which relate. Giorgi (1970) proposes an *accurate*, rather than an objective description of phenomena, a point particularly true for psychology as a human science. The ability to see the truth depends on a willingness to listen and to be receptive to the message (John 3:3). In the depth of her darkness and despair, it is only when Participant M decides to change and be open and receptive, that she becomes aware of the truth and finds fresh meaning attached to her “baby”.

Letting go of preconceived ideas and being receptive to the message makes it possible for truth to reveal itself. Listening to the voice of truth that the self contains and conceals gradually unveils the truth. To listen to the Echo is to hear to the sound of the past in the present. The present study reveals that all participants had to return to the past and accept their history as it pertained to the present before they could move on. Finding resolution in the process of letting go depends on the revelation of truth, and not on a superficial attachment to the perceived reality. This was the case with participant J who realises, during his re-attempt to find a solution that, despite his moving on by becoming a husband and parent, he had not found the solution. In his words, he had merely ‘walked’ through the confusion of the struggle, rather than ‘worked’ through the confusion (J53). He had not met the challenge. Resolution requires an active participation and intentionality of personal will. Resolution of the past provides clarity in the present and accessibility to the future. In moving towards the future, we return to the past, and, through re-resolution and the ontological spin, mobility is facilitated. We let go of the conflicting polarity by submitting to the third dimension (time, language, culture) and acknowledging the past, together with its truth. The mobility of life is not merely remaining attached to the image that we believe ourselves to be, but integrating our past with the present and moving into the future. To let go effectively, we have to resolve the deceptive reality of the lived duality in space, and acknowledge the voice of truth in time. An entrapped duality may also arise in the relation of the present to the future, where the significance of the past is ignored. Freedom requires a triadic structure. Truth is freedom (Heidegger, 1962). In becoming aware of the truth, a decision is made that commits the self to an attempt to determine its destiny.

Like Narcissus in the myth, we cannot remain entrapped in the reflected duality of the deceptive image we perceive. We cannot afford to remain alienated and oblivious to the call of Echo, for to do so threatens to destroy the self. The past that holds the truth is revealed in the present. Echo has a tendency for repetition. Returning to the past can be repetitive until the light is perceived and resolution attained. As revealed in the deceptive entrapment of duality, it is the voice of truth that repeats itself and eventually bursts through and ruptures the façade of make-believe, challenging the experienced reality. It is the echo, the voice of the past, the voice of truth, that makes the breakthrough possible. Remaining in the present, while returning to the past with a focus on the future, is rotational, and provides a sense of continuity in the mobility forward. Willingness to sacrifice the existing sense of self and submit to the process of change by adopting a different perspective resolves the crisis and challenge of letting go, creating the spin that leads to change. Our growth and development is not linear.

## **6.2 Implications of Letting go**

In its transition through time and in the context of change, letting go is applicable to diverse aspects of life. To let go is to submit to the dominance of time and space. Letting go is a transitional process that occurs through time and which is not always visibly evident. In its gradual shifts towards change, the process can be deceptive. Spatiality and temporality are not visible.

The mobility of letting go must be viewed from the perspective of Heidegger's (1962) temporality, where letting go is not linear, but constitutive of being, where the 'now' continues in transition through time. As diverse aspects of letting go come to the fore, the experience is more than its temporality implies, and derives its meaning from the contextual situation in which it occurs. During the pilot study, difficulty in containing the phenomenon became evident, for letting go has associative ramifications. One letting-go experience can be linked to another. The meaning of letting go is diverse, but is essentially one of relinquishing control and submitting to the power and omnipotence of time. With letting go, diverse and numerous life situations arise, contextual to the experience. The experience is a transitional process through time and is reflective of the contextual situation in which it occurs. Different contexts give rise to different situations of letting go. With time, as the truth reveals itself, control is relinquished. Broadly,

however, from a psychological perspective, we may consider the following as possible situated examples of letting go: transpersonal (e.g. spirituality); development (e.g. aging); death (loss); identity (e.g. disability); relationships (e.g. divorce); dying (terminal illness); psychotherapy (termination). Furthermore, the microcosmic experience of letting go in its lived context can also arise in the macrocosmic perspective of a group in the evolution of change. With the emergence of political change, the process of letting go becomes evident in the history of a country that was able to relinquish apartheid, find resolution and partake in the process of creation with the birth of a new South Africa.

### **6.2.1 South Africa**

In South Africa, overcoming the past divide of the apartheid era and moving into the transition from authoritarian rule to the rule of democracy was a process of letting go. The conflicting polarities of control (holding on) and freedom (letting go) during the apartheid years had given rise to tension and underlying turmoil. Increasing efforts to intensify the control through authoritarian rule had led to rebellious outbursts (e.g. the Soweto uprising of 1976) that further polarised the conflict and confronted the country with the need for change. Following the release of Nelson Mandela and negotiations for a new constitution, polarities continued as the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party (NP) engaged in a doubtful dual role, where both jointly made the effort to move from one impasse to another, with a common positive focus on the future. The introduction of a third dimension to the polarised crisis was in the form of the negotiations that facilitated the process of transition. With the revelation of truth, the Government of National Unity set up the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in a powerful attempt to resolve the past. The third dimension of negotiation (language) facilitated the transition. At the TRC, there were efforts to return to the past and reconcile the polarised conflicts by finding resolutions with which to move forward. From the knowledge and insight gained through the discussions, decisions were made to gain access to a defined future and to facilitate mobility. On 10 May 1994, referring to the original conflicting polarity (gap) and its resolution through time, the newly elected president Nelson Mandela proclaimed: “The time for healing the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the closeness that divides us has come – the time to build is upon us” (Saunders, 1995, p.518). The time to partake in the process of creation had arrived. This was the birth of a new South Africa.

The relationship to our world provides contextual meaning to the experience of letting go. Within its context, the concept of letting go continues to be paradoxical in meaning. Letting go is a relinquishment of the need for control which has contradictory implications. This, Erik Erikson (1969) succinctly points out when he states that: “To let go...can turn into an inimical letting loose of destructive forces, or it can be a relaxed ‘to let pass’ and ‘to let be’ ” (p.243). While the dialectic of holding on and letting go is fundamental, letting go is neither holding on nor retaining control, but a submission to the process of life’s mobility, as we enter the unknownness of space and time and partake in the creative process. Letting go, as resolution, becomes evident in various domains of life, two of which are bereavement and forgiveness.

### **6.2.2 Bereavement**

Attempts of the bereaved to ‘let go’ of the loved one and find resolution are evident in the process of grief and bereavement, where repetitive weeping and stories of past memories are told and retold. Separation, to Mahler (1975), means the process of individuation, while for Bowlby (1979) the concept of separation means loss. The dialectics of the term to “let go” are evident in the paradox of its meaning. Developmentally, while letting go can mean the gaining of individuation (in the presence of the (m)other), letting go can also mean loss (in the absence of the (m)other). The meaning of letting go is reflected in the contextual environment in which it occurs.

Regarding bereavement, Miller and Omarzu (1998) reveal that the manner in which loss is dealt with can provide the opportunity for gain. Though loss can lead to gain, the experience of loss can also be devastating, as loss can alter one’s sense of self and identity (Harvey, 1998). However, rather than generalise the process of bereavement, it has to be accepted as embedded in cultural practices or the context in which it arises. Practices fully acceptable in one cultural milieu may be deemed pathological or maladjusted in another. The presence or absence of space varies in different cultures. Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen and Stroebe (1996) refer to the work of Sanders (1989) who believes that “letting go” of the attachment to the loved one is necessary for the successful resolution of grief, where the recovery from bereavement is viewed as a letting go of the link to the loved one. From a different perspective, Shinto and Buddhist religions believe

that a holding on should continue, and that contact with the deceased should be maintained. Though letting go is not absolute, its meaning is reflective of the contextual environment in which it emerges. Different contextual beliefs provide different meaning to the experience. Whether in bereavement or in other aspects of resolution, rather than generalise what letting go means universally, we need to listen to the reality and values echoed in the subculture of its practice and reflected by the one who describes the experience. The subculture provides a sustaining and holding environment with meanings attached to the interrelated concepts of holding on and letting go.

In their work with bereaved adults and children, Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) reveal the need to maintain a connection to the deceased and to continue the relationship. The researchers found that a relationship with the deceased would continue through memories, feeling and actions. Part of the resolution of bereaved parents was an intense interaction with the deceased child. Even with the separation of death, there is a quest for oneness and union. The paradoxical process of letting go in the desire for oneness, along with the continual demand for separation, continues. This is reflected in a poem one mother wrote:

Will you forgive me if I go on?  
If you can't make this earthly journey through with me,  
Will you then come along in my heart and wish me well (p..xvii).

### **6.2.3 Forgiveness**

As revealed, letting go is finding resolution through the process of change. In finding resolution, time and space enter the duality of the existing conflict. Letting go of anger and hate and accepting its transformation to love and forgiveness is to find resolution. In her study of survivors of extreme trauma, Baures (1996) found that with the letting go of bitterness and hate and the negative meanings attached to the original traumatic experience, self-compassion replaced self-blame, and, as meanings were transformed, survivors were given strength and hope. Letting go of the need to judge the self and others equals forgiveness. As revealed in the present study, to let go is to transform negative perceptions into positive valuations and to recover. Polarised dualities are dialectical and part of the same continuum. They should be recognised as



such. The present study reveals that, when participant M let go of anger and bitterness in her relationship with God, she was able to see the light, find new meaning and move on. In a separate moment, when participant M let go of the negative (painful) meaningful attachment she felt obliged to carry, she found positive meaning and was able to move on. Though M had found new meaning, she retained her attachment to her unborn baby. While attachment to negativity is self-destructive, letting go and accepting the positive brings relief. To let go is to resolve the past, meet with the present and find mobility. Letting go is fundamental to the process of psychotherapy.

#### **6.2.4 Psychotherapy**

The process of letting go and forward mobility evidenced in the findings of the present study is analogous to the process of resolution evident in the process of psychotherapy concerning the transformation of self. Psychotherapy facilitates the process of letting go, and serves as liberator to the entrapped patient. Crisis resolution is part of the therapeutic relationship that takes place in the context of duality between patient and therapist. In the therapeutic dialogue, the patient is initially confronted with self-deceptions, entrapment and the debilitating paralysis of self-focus and self-absorption. Donald Moss (1989) acknowledges the entrapment and sense of stuckness that is brought to, and re-experienced in experientially oriented psychotherapy. He writes: “Experientially oriented psychotherapy ...moves to facilitate the patient’s search for a path toward the next developmental level and seeks to open the individual awareness, for the fullness of time” (p.202). Though the fullness of time belongs to the individual, in the deceptive duality of existence the impasse of entrapment is encountered. To let go is to return to the past, retrieve personal history, dissolve the entrapment, find a new solution (re-solution), successfully meet with the present, face the future and move on. The rotation of moving backwards and forwards, to-and-fro is the resolution and the mobility of letting go.

In the relationship with the therapist, the patient initially retrieves a sense of oneness and wholeness but, as with letting go, the dual relationship is an illusion of completeness. With the bipolar conflict of the self, the patient oscillates between the two poles of self and other (therapist) in the therapeutic relationship. The oscillating (push-pull) dialogue makes it possible for the patient to let go and move on by acknowledging his-story and revealing his truth.

Through discourse, the therapist creates the opportunity for patients to return to their past and listen to the message or echo of the hidden voice of his truth. Echo is the past made present, as the concealed truth is echoed in the present, revealed and reintegrated to provide the capacity for mobility forward. In the process of psychotherapy, the therapist keeps with the deceptive duality where “the echo of his discourse is symmetrical to the specularity of the image” (Lacan, 1988a, p.284). The dyad (and deception) continues until the patient is able to replace the original meaning held on to (in the duality) with the new meaning created (by being receptive to the truth). Evidenced in the findings is that personal truth is revealed in time and is the third dimension that liberates the entrapment of duality and plays a significant part in finding resolution and letting go. Resolution is not derived in the duality of the two poles of the relationship, for both patient and therapist are subject to the power of time and creation, reflected in their use of language and the cultural context to which they belong. Lacan recognises the dominance of language in psychotherapy and the subjection of both patient and therapist to that power. In psychotherapy, resolution emerges in the synthesis of self (thesis), in relation to the other (antithesis), in the context of truth. With our submission to the concept of the continuity of time and creation, language enters the therapeutic relationship and, as third dimension, liberates the entrapped duality of the therapeutic relationship. The concept of temporality evidenced in the findings of the present study concurs with J.H. Van den Berg’s (1972) description that “the present is an invitation from out of the future to gain mastery of bygone times” (pp.91/92). Through the echo of our truth, the past speaks to us in the present. This process is pertinently evidenced in the process of psychotherapy. Clarity in the present facilitates forward mobility, but is only possible with the resolution of the impasse of the past. As revealed, a well-ordered past provides accessibility to the future.

In the process of change, though a positive focus on the future facilitates mobility, attachment to the memories and meanings of the past facilitates the retention of a sense of continuity in the present, with which to move forward. The capacity to return to the past and act retrospectively yet also project into the future, reflects the fluidity of temporality. We are constantly in the process of change and need to be open to it: “Increasing the capacity to change and be more open to life must be the central therapeutic aim” (Lanyado, 1999, p.365). Heidegger’s temporality and the concept of spiral development is inextricable from the present study. Human development through time is neither absolute nor complete, but open-ended.

### 6.2.5 Transpersonal

To acknowledge openness from an existential-phenomenological perspective is to accept that humanity includes behaviour, cognition, emotions, as well as transcendent experiences. As we move beyond the traditionally defined borders of humanity, we essentially acknowledge that letting go is a submission to the unknownness of space and time and we enter the transpersonal and/or spiritual dimension. To let go and enter the unknown is to enter the mystery of life, of that which is hidden and inexplicable. Mystical experiences are related to the struggle of letting go. Robert Frager (1989) writes: “ One of the great struggles of the mystics is to let go, to be open, empty and receptive in order to plumb the depths of self. Fully experiencing your suffering and pain is an important way of letting go” (p.303). In letting go and entering transpersonal space, religious symbols and related beliefs provide significant meaning.

Transpersonal (fourth force) psychology recognises the ultimate human capacity and potential that is not accommodated by the behaviouristic theory (first force), psychoanalytic theory (second force) or humanistic psychology (third force). Ronald Valle (1989) speaks of a “transhumanistic psychology” (p.260) that has embraced the values of humanistic psychology and has moved beyond the regular boundaries by transcending the limits of the ego-self. In moving beyond the traditionally defined structures of ego-self identity, our understanding of humanity expands. The self is greater than the definition of its ego. As the present study reveals, we are more than we perceive ourselves to be, for what we are aware of can be deceptive. Our perceptions are based on what our senses make possible, and yet we “sense” that we are more than we recognise: “Our true nature cannot be known completely by mind, for the experience of the self is beyond the range and reach of conceptual, dualistic thought” (Wittine, 1989, p.270). While minds perceive, consciousness has gnosis. Consciousness is more than its awareness, more than the mind perceives and more than its intentionality reveals. Consciousness intends and finds its polarity. We are limited in understanding our capacity as humans and our place in the universe. Consciousness has the capacity to let go of the here and now, and transcend the personal moving to a reality beyond the self. To concur with Tageson (1982),

We seek more than knowledge on this transpersonal level. We seek contact as well. We long for a sense of connectedness with all that is, an Absolute to which we can commit ourselves, something or Someone larger than our own ephemeral existence to give meaning to our lives, a meaningful place to be within the entire world of Being itself” (p.46).

Maslow (1968) appeals for a “ Fourth Psychology, transpersonal, transhuman, centred in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interests, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualisation and the like” (p. iii/iv). Our identity and basic sense of self appears to be greater than the awareness of who we are. Acknowledging a broader perspective of self is to accept the transcendence of self. While intentionality can move beyond the self, human experiences can transform the self. The transformation of intentional awareness can emerge and arise in situations that go beyond awareness of self, which Robert Frager (1989) recognises as including out-of-body experiences, ESP phenomena and peak experiences. Frager refers to the work of Ken Wilber, a major consciousness theorist, who postulates that movement towards the state of cosmic unity is the movement of all evolution and personal development. Wilber’s view of development, however, provides a linear model of growth, a point with which the present study does not concur. All future efforts to research and understand the extent and capacity of our human potential should be approached from a broad and open perspective.

#### **6.2.6 Beyond totality and completeness**

To let go is to acknowledge the process of transition, through time and space, with the inevitability of change. Holding on to the familiar is the quest for totality and wholeness that emerges in an effort to deny change and seek the permanence of sameness and constancy. This, ironically, is stagnation and death. Life is mobility and transition. Life is change.

Culture is the “third life” (Winnicott), or that which occupies the space between, the space beyond the self and other. Culture occupies the paradoxical space of our related-separateness for what lies beyond, lies within and between. The self contains, yet is contained in, the paradoxical space of cultural practices which members passionately hold on to and cling to, particularly with the threat of change. In the quest for totality and wholeness, cultural containment replaces the

(m)other's holding, and the shared reality provides a compensatory sense of oneness for its members. Through its closed containment, each ethnic, racial and religious group clings to its practices and beliefs. The polarised opposition of diversities can be a source of intense animosity that threatens stability, similar to the polarised conflict that emerges in the crisis of conflict, with the process of letting go. As evidenced, however, for its resolution to take place, a third dimension must evolve.

Emmanuel Levinas (1979) describes the letting go of existing beliefs as "entering the infinite", where, rather than cling to the familiar or seek to confirm the knownness of preconceived ideas, we need to let go, to be open and receptive to the truth that lies beyond. Maslow's (1968) description of self-actualised individuals also appears to depict the open-endedness of letting go, when he writes:

They do not neglect the unknown, or deny it, or run away from it or try and make believe it is really known, nor do they organize, dichotomize, or rubricize it prematurely. They do not cling to the familiar, nor is their quest for truth a catastrophic need for certainty, safety, definiteness and order... (pp.138/139)

Escaping the totalising scheme of things, however, is difficult, for our theories, language, cultural beliefs and texts, all direct us to the centralising force of universality, where everything is contained in a system of totality. With an intentionality of completeness, we are destined to repeat and return to the familiar. Emmanuel Levinas (1979) implores us to move beyond the safety of the familiar and to transcend our human desire for the rapport of belonging and possessions. We need to move beyond the sense of oneness we seek and the power which it provides for us. While our desire for wholeness is significant, in our journey through time we need to let go and transcend our desire for completion; we need to let go of the confines of totality, by directing our intentionality towards moving beyond the limitations of our desire. Though we desire to feel whole, we must accept our mortality and open-endedness, and, in our vision, allow for what is infinite to break through. Indeed, if we are to attain new insights, we must not cling to the familiar and wish to confirm our beliefs, but be willing to let go. Our intentionality must be to move beyond the familiarity of our confines. In pursuit of truth we seek to bring order to chaos, and connect the known with the unknown, where knowledge and

understanding can unfold. Though we need to hold on to what we know, and need to be held by what has preceded it, we must also be able let go; let go of our need to control and be willing to submit to, and become part of, the creative process. In moving forward, we retain a sense of continuity, for, in the process we, contain (hold), yet are contained (held). We are apart from, and yet, a part of, the world. We hold and yet let go. Our existence is an ontological ambiguity (Merleau-Ponty). We are neither pure nature nor pure psyche. We are both one and the other. As we move into the infinite, the infinite moves through us. In the words of Merleau-Ponty (1962): “The world is not what I think, but what I live through, I am open to the world...” (preface:xvi/xvii). With the continuity of a connectedness through time and the attachment through space, we are able to let go. However, before entering the future, we return to the past and submit to the force and power of the process. We cannot remain trapped and alienated, for the revelation of truth provides the ontological turn and subsequent leap forward. To let go is not to hold on by seeking reciprocity, but to submit to the unknown emptiness of time and space by entering the process of creation.

In our attempt to master theory, we tend to seek a cohesive whole that interlinks, only to find that such cohesion is deceptive and misleading. Both Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Lacan attribute power to incompleteness – to the infinite and to language respectively. Power is continuity, and the endlessness of time and creation is reflected through our language and culture. The power of completeness is a deluded wholeness, for power is paradoxically defined in its incompleteness. Though we pursue completeness, we hold on to our sense of continuity.

The quest for completeness is also not the intention of Maslow’s (1968) self-actualising self. To actualise the self is to continue to meet with the challenges and crises that contextually arise by letting go and moving beyond the self, rather than remaining absorbed with the self. In his description of self-actualised individuals, Maslow appears to illustrate the meaning of letting go and transcending the self. He states: “These same (self- actualising) people, the strongest egos ever described and the most definitely individual, were also precisely the ones who could be most ego-less, self-transcending and problem-centred ” (p.140). Self-actualisation is not to attain completion, but to let go and transcend the personal ego.

The findings of the present study reveal that seeking “closure” or absolute resolution is an illusion, for resolution is never final but only sufficiently adequate to provide the capacity to meet with fresh challenges. What may be considered resolved or “closed” should rather be perceived as an open link in a chain of related events that remain a frame of reference, possibly to be resumed at a later stage. Experiences bear antecedents which live on and are recalled as memories that fill the gap, thereby providing a sense of continuity. Weaving personal history with present experience contributes to the evolving sense of self and is significant to identity. To let go is to return to the past, for a well-ordered past provides clarity in the present and accessibility to the future.

Letting go is a quest for truth and knowledge. As collective man, we seek to understand and know who we are. We seek to realise ourselves in the context of our existence that contains more than we are aware of. Whether in our explorations of the cosmos, or the psyche of ourselves, we seek to let go and move beyond that with which we are familiar and of which we are aware. Though there is a hesitance in entering the unknown, the quest for further exploration calls. Carl Sagan’s (1981) metaphorical description regarding man’s entry into the unknownness of space (and time) and its connection with space travel, rings true. The words appear applicable to man’s existential entry into the void and unknownness of space and time. He writes: “The ocean calls. Some part of our being knows this is from where we came. We long to return” (p.5). We let go and move on. Like Abraham who embarked on his endless journey, we embark on ours, and, like Odysseus, we return to an earlier place, not in the sense of seeking sameness, but in finding constancy and continuity as we refuel and enter into the creative process, exploring the unknownness of what lies ahead. In the journey ahead we need constancy and change. To cite participant B: “ We need to hold on and we need to let go”. The quest for truth continues, while connecting the known with the unknown is never final. Our intentionality makes it possible for us to move into the beyond and break with the confines of totality and the parameters of what has been defined. As we let go, we continue to define and re-define who we are, continuously in the creative process of being and becoming.

### **6.3 Letting go and Human Development**

The focal interest of mainstream developmental psychology has generally been to study and understand the various stages of development as the transitional progress made from the helplessness of infancy to the autonomy of adulthood. The stages broadly recognised as infancy, childhood, adolescence (Freud, 1905) and adulthood (Erikson, 1969) have, more recently, been extended to include the later years with aspects of aging, death and dying (Santrock, 1986; Ross, 1996; Akhtar & Kramer, 1997). Psychoanalytic thinking has come to recognise development as not only initiated by biological factors, but as also including psychological ones. Development is an evolutionary process through life, although the process of individuating and defining the self is not always visibly present. As revealed in the present study, what is visible can be deceptive, for structural change is not always evident.

Although the stage and phase theory provides a helpful invariant framework, it does not address individual differences regarding psychological growth. While stages of development have been identified, the mobility of growth and change, between and within the stages, differs with each individual. In the mobility of the process, the self is challenged to meet with change and move on. The self, in its related-separateness, is continuously defined and redefined. While we continue to unfold in our growth and development, letting go is transitional and temporal, but not chronologically defined. The process of letting go is circular, moving back before moving forward as we deal with change and move on.

Both Erikson (1969; 1971) and Levinson (1978) accept development as evolving through stage-related phases, where the conflict of each phase is a challenge and resolving the crisis of the challenge is a developmental achievement. However, though the findings of this study concur with both these theorists, the present study reveals that crises pertaining to significant situations need not only be phase-related, but may emerge within and between phases as a process of letting go makes this possible. The challenge of development is to find resolution to the arising crisis or conflict. To develop is to meet with the challenge of change and to resolve its crisis, as challenges in the present are met through open-ended links to the past. The crises of letting go are neither phase-related, nor predictable, while finding resolution is a developmental achievement that facilitates growth and mobility and a transformation of self.



Calvin, Settlage, Lozoff, Lozoff, Siberschatz and Simburg, (1988) appear to supplement the stage and phase model of development with the theory of developmental process. What the authors describe as the child's self-regulatory capability appears to be the quest for stability. Regarding the adult, the present study reveals the quest for stability as the pursuit of positive values and meaning. According to Settlage et.al (1988; 1990), the sequence of developmental processes lead to a self-regulatory capacity and may be described in the following sequence: (1) developmental challenge; (2) developmental tension; (3) developmental conflict; (4) resolution of the developmental conflict and (5) change in the self-representation. Regarding the process of letting go and development, the findings of the present study concur with the description of Settlage et al., although the present study accepts the process of letting go as a lived experience that moves through a temporal, rather than a linear perspective. The structural sequence described by Settlage and his colleagues provides a psycho-logical, rather than chrono-logical, value that can be applied to the process of letting go. The "sequence" of letting go may be described as follows: (1) awareness of the challenge of change; (2) holding on to the familiar and evading the new; (3) the struggle of the conflict and sense of loss of control with entrapment; (4) acceptance of a changed sense of self; (5) decisions (initial and subsequent significant decision) in an attempt to gain control; (6) revelation of truth and the submission to change (7) conflict resolution and the change of self-transformation. Letting go is the confrontation with the challenge of change in development.

Settlage (1990) accepts development as a lifelong process, where development is based upon (m)other-child interaction and viewed as occurring potentially in any interpersonal relationship. The adaptive and regulatory functions governing values, internalisation and identifications of the developmental partner become part of the structure of the self. Settlage defines development as "a process of growth, differentiation, and integration that progresses from lower and simpler to higher and more complex forms of organization and function" (p. 351). While the present study agrees with the conceptualisation of development as process, rather than being phase-related, a different definition of development is proposed. Development can be viewed as a continuous process of letting go that is repeated in the challenge to meet with change through time. Though letting go includes the implications of separation-individuation, it emerges in the context of

related-separateness. While individuation can alienate us from ourselves and others, we rekindle what we have lost in our relationship to others.

Carl Jung (1972) accepts individuation regarding adult development as pertaining to the realisation of self in a laborious and continuous exploration into the unknown (shadow). Individuation is a process grounded in one's personal history and cultural inheritance. Expressed in terms of the present thesis, individuating and defining the self is a process of letting go, a transcendence of the personal ego and a solitary path of self-discovery. While Margaret Mahler's concept of individuation is pertinent to development and the phenomenon of letting go, she considers the concept of individuation as the developmental process of the separation from (m)other or "the psychological birth of the individual". For Mahler, to become a unique human being is first to differentiate the self from the (m)other, a process initiated during early childhood, but one that continues through life. Mahler's acceptance of developmental continuity is conveyed in her open-ended attitude, reflected in the phrase "on the way to object constancy", which she accepts as never final or complete. Knowles (1986) too, understands human development as continuous, reflected in his explication of Erikson's developmental stages which includes "human possibility". Such open-ended continuity regarding individuation is evident in the findings of the present study, where the separation of individuation is neither complete nor absolute, but continues in the context of a related-separateness. Participant J, who was determined to separate and be autonomous, illustrates this, as he eventually realised that he could not be completely separate to others. As J approached his point of resolution, he became aware of his inevitable relatedness to significant others. In the process of letting go, the findings reveal a related-separateness. Autonomy is not absolute.

The present study reveals that absolute autonomy is an illusion, while a related-separateness facilitates growth. By remaining attached to the illusion of self with its false sense of autonomy, the self is entrapped and immobilised. The awareness of truth provides resolution for the mobility of letting go. Though identification promotes the deception and alienation of the self, it also facilitates the process of separation and is a necessary aspect of letting go. Throughout the process of separation-individuation, the young child retains a link with the (m)other. Accompanying the child's increasing awareness of separateness, verbal communication becomes a significant aspect of the relationship with (m)other. As the distance between the (m)other and

child expands and the connectedness with (m)other is retained, the spoken word becomes increasingly necessary and valuable. Through the process of separation, speech and language retain a significant connectedness. The value of language becomes evident in the transition of meaning with the gradual process of self-reflection and awareness of truth. In the process of letting go, language facilitates the transition of finding new meaning, while retaining the dialectic of a related-separateness.

While affirming Mahler's theory, the present study accepts the viewpoint of existential phenomenological psychology and takes into account the open-endedness of our lives as existential beings, where in the face of truth, we co-author our lives. While letting go is a process of separation and individuation, with a sense of continuity, it is also a submission to the power of creation and commitment to the unknownness of space and time. Mahler's (1975) acknowledgment of this is perhaps reflected in the fourth phase of separation-individuation, when she writes that this subphase "is not a subphase in the same sense as the other three, since it is open-ended at the older end" (p.112).

In the process of letting go, while we move away from the significant other, we seek to retain connectedness. Do we move towards or away from the significant other? Is our aim to separate and individuate, or to connect and relate? Object relation theorists (e.g. Fairburn; Winnicott) have provided legitimacy to the study of how people relate, experience and perceive the significance of the other in moving beyond and letting go of the self, rather than remaining narcissistically attached to the self. And yet, the traditional view of healthy development is considered to be the attainment of autonomy and the development of the self. Josselson (1988) believes that our innate relatedness is an essential aspect of development. She writes: "Perhaps development is not a path from dependence to autonomy, but a movement to increasingly differentiated forms of relating to others. Perhaps autonomy is a form of relatedness" (p.100). There is the suggestion that individuation intends relatedness. Relatedness is dialectical to autonomy and a sense of self. Letting go is a dialectical related-separateness.

Levinson's (1978) study of adult development identifies "attachment-separateness" as one of the four polarities to be resolved in the task of midlife individuation, where the self is challenged to integrate the need for attachment with the need for separateness. In their studies on midlife and

adolescence respectively, Sherman (1987) and Josselson (1992; 1988) recognise the individual's need to retain a connectedness. The findings of the present study concur with the view of Bowlby, who believes that retaining connectedness is not pathological. To Bowlby (1979): "attachment behaviour is regarded as a normal and healthy part of man's instinctive makeup..." He goes on to say that: "it is held to be most misleading to term it "regressive" or childish when seen in an older child or adult" (p.87). The present study concurs with Bowlby's point of view that separation anxiety is not pathological, but an acceptable reaction to the absence of an attachment figure. The study accepts the concept of an emotional relatedness in the presence of individuation; that is an individual who is self-reliant rather than absolutely autonomous, and emotionally related rather than absolutely dependent. There are no absolutes, merely a sense of balance between the two polarities. Absolutes tend to be illusory and deceptive. In the process of letting go, entering the unknownness of space and time naturally gives rise to feelings of anxiety. The existential awareness of the aloneness of the experience elicits a need to remain interpersonally connected. As revealed, feelings of anxiety and the need for relatedness are integral to letting go during adulthood and normal human development.

Models of development need to take into account that relatedness is an integral part of development and should not be considered pathological. Newly-evolving developmental models should accommodate this accordingly, as relatedness does not appear to hold the prominence it deserves in developmental theory. Like the crisis of the conflict that emerges in the process of letting go, the polarities of relatedness and separateness need not remain polarised, but should be recognised as dialectical and continuous. Taking into account the constituent of a related separateness evidenced in the findings of the present study, the theories of Mahler (1975) and Stern (1985) appear complementary rather than contradictory. Though appearing antithetical, both the need to attach and the need to separate are equally important and both should be recognised in the process of development. While Mahler's understanding of self is that it evolves in the infant's moving away from the relatedness with (m)other, Stern understands the concept of self to mean a movement towards relating. Both theories are dialectically significant to the process of letting go. To Mahler (1975) and her colleagues, development is the attainment of selfhood and autonomy, with a moving away, whereas to Daniel Stern (1985), development is a movement towards relating and connecting. Thunissen (1998) recognises the compatibility of

both these theories. Rather like the moebius strip, though dialectically separate, they are part of the same continuum.

With letting go, the dialectic is one of a related-separateness. In defining the self, we separate and move away from the other, but in the desire for relatedness, we move towards an other. As we separate and individuate in relation to the other, we seek to rekindle the joy of oneness and wholeness as we move towards the other. In the transitional process of separating, letting go and individuating the self, we retain a sense of relatedness.

The present study concurs with Ruth Josselson, who accepts human development as a continuous attempt to attain a balance between the need to separate and the need for closeness. In Josselson's (1988) own words:

A theory of self, or of identity, must be a theory of such a balance, must account for the ways in which the self remains poised between self-expression and relatedness, between the need for self-assertion and social involvement. A theory of self must be interwoven with a theory of relationship (p.104).

With Freud (1905), development was initially regarded as a childhood phenomenon and considered as ending with the attainment of adolescence and adult sexual capacity. The premise of the present study accepts development as a lifelong process, initiated by changes that occur in relation to the self, the world, and others. While childhood and adolescence are initiated by normative biological and somatic change, growth and development in adulthood emerge in the context of change that may not be visible. Heidegger's (1962) concept of the temporality of a given past, a recognised present and existential future is acknowledged as pertinent to the transitional process of life and letting go. We live our development, and meeting the challenge of letting go in its fluidity is significant to the process. While normative phases of development are acknowledged as significant, development is not viewed as being confined to phases, but recognised as a process that unfolds through time. Psychological growth and development are not visibly evident and, though sequential do not necessarily evolve within basic normative structures that result in change. Development *is* change, and change *is* the process. In the words

of Kruger (1988, p.65): “Man is not in time, we should rather say that time is man; it characterises his existence”.

Existing developmental models do not appear adequately to address idiosyncratic differences regarding change and letting go. As psychologists, we need to understand the true nature of change and human development, for what is not accommodated in the models of development may deceptively appear to be pathological. While normative developmental structures are valuable in providing a working framework for human development, they cannot be considered absolute, for it is the individual’s capacity to deal with change and attain stability that remains primarily significant. Bar-Tur and Levi-Shiff (2000) believe that “ the developmental goal is to survive loss, come to terms with change and integrate oneself into a new social context and identity” (p.2.). In other words, the goal of development is to continue to exist and attain stability, despite the conflicts and challenges encountered. This, too, was affirmed in the present study. The primary focus of development appears to be to attain continuity and stability, even requiring repetition and a paradoxical struggle in order to achieve this. Resolving the challenge of letting go is a developmental achievement.

The traditional view of development as a normative chronological graded structure restricts a true understanding of human development. Though normative patterns may apply, individual differences do arise. Colarusso (1990; 1997) moves away from the stage-related theory to arbitrary chronological demarcations, where adulthood is divided into early, middle and late periods. Demarcations during adulthood cannot be clearly defined. Baltes’s (1987) developmental perspective recognises the plasticity, diversification and complexity of development. In a non-traditional manner, Baltes considers the study of development to include longitudinal and cross-sectional features. He takes into account the continuous impact of change on intrapsychic processes. Furthermore, Noam (1988) also proposes a model that encompasses a broader view of development regarding the ego, identity and self, a model that can accept “biographical and transformational activities of the self”. A developmental model must recognise the reality of personal history and change. The axes of historicity and relatedness described above could apply. Personal historicity and its continuity through time, together with the relatedness of self in relation to the world, need to be considered for a developmental model.

Understanding the process of letting go in human development requires recognition of the contextual meaning in which it unfolds. The diversity of human nature has to be acknowledged, as present normative models of development do not appear adequately to address the discrepancies that can, and do, arise. Diversity is an essential aspect of our humanity and existence. Diversity has to be accommodated rather than excluded. On human diversity, Bronfenbrenner (1996) cites one of his earlier works and expresses the following:

Seen in different contexts, human nature, which I once thought of as a singular noun, turns out to be plural and pluralistic; for different environments produce discernable differences, not only across but within societies, in talent, temperament, human relations, and particularly in the ways in which each culture and subculture brings up the next generation (p.85).

Human nature is diverse. Psychological development, or psychic change, is not comprised of ordered predictable structures that find closure, but timeless structures that in a circular manner continue through time. Psychological growth and development is not linear and continuous but regresses before it progresses. As the past is returned we find an ontological spin and a subsequent leap forward. Psychological growth and development is never absolute, for, with the irremediable split of the self, a state of final completion, wholeness and maturity cannot be attained. As we echo our existence, the past is understood retroactively through the present, and the present retroactively through the past. Purely normative models of change do not recognise idiosyncratic differences and are a naïve approach to understanding the human psyche. The process of development cannot be held in stasis, for we are continually in the process of holding on and letting go, being and becoming. Psychological change requires a fluidity of movement that may not necessarily concur with other (e.g. somatic, psychological or social) changes. To borrow the concept from Lacan, our being is like “a chain” that spirals forward in its mobility; a chain comprised of timeless links, powerfully incomplete. Development is change rather than a product of change. Essentially, human development is the process of meeting with the challenge of change through time.

Letting go has diverse implications, while its meaning is contextual to the environment in which it occurs. Letting go is not a predictable but a transitional process of mobility where the past is

returned to (and repeated), to meet with the challenge of change. In letting go, we move into the unknownness of space and time. Our attempts to hold on to the familiar and attach ourselves to what we know are deceptive, yet the deception facilitates stability and transition. Though a sense of separateness emerges, there is a need to remain connected. Letting go is more than separation; it is the experience of separation. It is the experience of self in the process of change. With the ambiguity of the conflicting polarities and threat of the gap, a struggle ensues. Through meaning, a sense of continuity is held on to. However, with the awareness of a different sense of self and the threat of fragmentation, the omnipotence of time and space is submitted to. There is an awareness of the inevitability of change and, in an attempt to gain control of the process, decisions are made as the self partakes in the process of creation and discovers new meaning, continually in the process of being and becoming.

Letting go is a transition forward, where the vacillation and oscillation between positive and negative forces is the rhythmic process of life; the mobility between light and dark, presence and absence, relatedness and separateness, until a sense of stability emerges in the optimal distance between. The dialectic of holding on and letting go is the dialectic of life and death.

#### The Windmills of Your Mind

Round  
Like a circle in a spiral  
Like a Wheel within a wheel  
Never ending or beginning  
On an ever-spinning reel  
Like a snowball down a mountain  
Or a carnival balloon  
Like a carousel that's turning  
Running rings around the moon  
Like a tunnel that you follow  
To a tunnel of its own  
Down a hollow to a cavern  
Where the sun has never shone  
Like a door that keeps revolving  
In a half forgotten dream  
Or the ripples from a pebble  
Someone tosses in a stream  
Like a clock whose hands are sweeping  
Past the minutes of its face  
And the world is like an apple  
Whirling silently in space  
Like the circles that you find  
In the windmills of your mind

(Alan & Marilyn Bergman )



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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Tables I & II**

**TABLE I**

Participant B: Ben (B)

<b>Natural Meaning Units</b>	<b>Central Theme</b>
<p>(1) The first time of letting go for B was from his previous job. This job had been a source of security in his life but was also a sort of a prison. He felt that he had to do it. He had to leave. He felt stuck. He was comfortable because of the securities such as salary and medical aid and pension fund, but it was not what he really wanted to do. B felt used and abused as part of window-dressing undertaken by his employers, but he was not allowed to be a psychologist and he could not find another job due to affirmative action etc.</p>	<p>(1) Letting go initially occurred within B's work context which provided him with security and comfort yet denied him freedom and contentment. He felt trapped, professionally rejected and believed that he was being exploited to maintain a façade. He wanted to leave.</p>
<p>(2) During the time that he worked for Correctional Services, they had sort of demilitarised. Things like that started to prematurely free him on an emotional level. He was 45 years old, white and Afrikaans. He was also very liberal in comparison with other men like him, but that did not really count.</p>	<p>(2) The relaxing of rules at B's work institution liberated him emotionally at first. He became aware of who he was in the changed context and felt different.</p>
<p>(3) It was when B decided to emigrate to</p>	

<p>the USA that he started letting go and saw other horizons. Through emigration, he was not limiting his job opportunity search to South Africa alone.</p>	<p>(3) With the decision to emigrate, B began to let go and became aware of an extended world beyond his familiar environment.</p>
<p>(4) To his applications however, B received a few negative replies but this was more because he was not yet a resident, and one of the conditions was that he had to be a resident to get a job there.</p>	<p>(4) Despite the initial rejection, B considered conditional acceptance as necessary for the greater opportunity he pursued.</p>
<p>(5) B has now had a tentative job offer in a private office as a psychologist and that will give him the opportunity to see what he can do.</p>	<p>(5) B has been offered temporary security (job offer), which will provide him with the chance to look at future possibilities.</p>
<p>(6) B feels that it is nice and exciting. It is making him feel needed again.</p>	<p>(6) B feels needed again and is excited.</p>
<p>(7) A does not see an eight-to-five salaried job as the only source of security that enables him to carry on and do what he feels called to do</p>	<p>(7) B no longer views his previous routine securities as necessary for him to practise his vocation.</p>
<p>(8) B acknowledges that he is taking a risk because there is always the possibility of things happening. B is even willing to do an entirely different job to what he has done and even one that is different from his previous training, but he is sure that he will be able at least to survive.</p>	<p>(8) B is willing to make a complete change vocationally and, although he is aware of entering the unknown he believes that he will continue to keep alive.</p>

<p>(9) B grew up with family around him. He has direct relatives. A lot of them have actually either died or are spread all over the country or all over the world. He does not have close relationships with them any longer, but he very often experiences sentiments regarding places and some people.</p> <p>(10) When he can, he uses the opportunities to go and say good-bye to people and places.</p> <p>(11) He had recently been to Darwin where he was born. He and his family enjoy cycling, but this time he went alone. Literally and figuratively, B rode along the roads he knew, and the roads that he was on as a child and during his youth. B had lived a part of his life in the area of Cape Town and Stellenbosch.</p> <p>(12) B really enjoyed the trip as a positive experience and still has memories of the places that perhaps, in time, he will be able to return to again. The trip was the last positive experience for him, positive in the sense that he could not find a better way to stay more permanently in the places which he loved, and which formed part of his past</p>	<p>(9) B's close contact with family and relatives has diminished, but has been replaced with meaningful attachments to certain people and places.</p> <p>(10) B uses the chances he has to bid farewell to the attachments (to places and people) that he has made.</p> <p>(11) On a personal journey, B returned to visit the town of his birth and cities in which he has lived. He retraced his steps along the familiar, earlier path he had taken in his life.</p> <p>(12) B found great pleasure in the visit, which was a positive experience for him, as he retains a permanent memory of special attachments (past places) to which he may return.</p>
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<p>experiences. Even though the weather in the Cape was not very friendly, he enjoyed the cycling and seeing all the places, roads and things.</p> <p>(13) It was quite meaningful and good to see that even his father's grave was still there. It is satisfying for him to know that although many things are changing and he and others are each going their own way, there are some foundations left. There are a lot of new things, buildings and places, but the old ones are still there.</p> <p>(14) The foundations to which he refers are basically memories and concrete places like the house where B grew up and that part of town that was familiar to him. Even the old cycle shop where he bought his first bicycle was still there. It looked a bit different, but it was still there.</p> <p>(15) Places are significant, not the place itself, but the memories that go with the place, the experiences. B says that he cannot really separate the places and the memories.</p> <p>(16) B believes that it was perhaps symbolic that he cycled from Darwin, where he had his childhood years, and then</p>	<p>(13) It was meaningful and reassuring for B to see that with the consistent diversity and changes in his life, the foundations and familiarity of past structures continued. It was comforting for him to see that the paternal grave remained.</p> <p>(14) There is a sense of permanence regarding specific places and memories from B's childhood.</p> <p>(15) Places are integral to the memories and experiences that are, significant to B.</p> <p>(16) B retraced the steps of his childhood and relived the journey of his earlier</p>
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<p>went on to Stellenbosch where he had studied later in life, and then back from there to Darwin. He “retook the same steps” of his early years. One of his first jobs was in Darwin, so he was very much on that side of the country.</p> <p>(17) Basically, B went back basically to go and say “good-bye”, to refresh his memory for the last time and just to still enjoy some of the places and some of the people that he knew. B uses the metaphor of putting a photo in the photo album of his memory. B needed to say goodbye.</p> <p>(18) One of his friends, who went to London, had a whole party and, before leaving, invited more than one hundred people. B does not see himself as an extrovert, or a party guy like that, but he had the opportunity to create the ritual that he has just described. It was also meaningful for him and made him feel that he said, “Goodbye”.</p> <p>(19) B started changing on a more spiritual level which was something of a precipitator, a trigger, or “kick in the butt”. B would have discussions and also read pieces of Scriptures. As a Christian, he was reminded of what the most important</p>	<p>years. He recognises the possible symbolic significance of the revisitation.</p> <p>(17) B’s need to return was to bid farewell, to capture and rekindle recollections of his past, in an attempt to retain the pleasure of attachments (places and people) he knew.</p> <p>(18) For B the process of saying goodbye had to be made meaningful through a personal rather than social ritual (farewell party).</p> <p>(19) As a Christian, B’s initial impetus towards change was spiritual (discussions and scripture reading). He was reminded of the significance of spiritual values over material concerns. For B, this meant</p>
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<p>things in life should be. He realised that the most important things in life are not the material things, but the value that he adds to other people's lives, as well as fulfilling his mission in life.</p> <p>(20) A friend gave B a book named in Afrikaans: "In Jesus se Voetspore" ("In the Footsteps of Jesus"). It reminded him that, as a spiritual person and as a Christian, if he wanted to be like Jesus, he would have to be able to let go of the material things that kept him going, such as, financial security and earning money.</p> <p>(21) Upon realising that financial security and money are not the most important things in life, B could relax. He did not feel a failure anymore because of the inability to succeed in everyday terms. B believes that he has to practise what he preaches and believes in.</p> <p>(22) Easter, which is a very significant time in a Christian's life was also meaningful for B. Easter reminded him of Jesus who gave up his whole life before he could be resurrected. B went to the church group early in the morning to see the sun rising on a hilltop. The group had planted a cross, which they lit. That ritual was very</p>	<p>accomplishing his vocational calling by contributing to the lives of others.</p> <p>(20) In the identification with Christ, B is reminded by a friend's gift (book) of his spiritual journey as a Christian, which involves being able to let go of material (monetary) aspects and follow in Christ's footsteps.</p> <p>(21) By committing himself to the primacy of his spiritual values and beliefs, B was able to relax and accept himself beyond his daily context and realise that he had not failed.</p> <p>(22) In his close identification with Christ, B found inspiration in the meaning of Easter, with its message that sacrifice and 'letting go' precede the experience of new life. B finds meaning in a religious ritual.</p>
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<p>meaningful to him and reminded him that, in order that he may experience new life, he had to offer a lot, and let go. That is what Jesus did.</p> <p>(23) B accepts that the only thing in life is to add significance to other people's lives and help people who are suffering. After he lets go of the things that are perhaps very difficult to let go of, like letting go of his old false securities such as his salary, B wants to refocus on his calling.</p> <p>(24) B admits that he is not literally letting go of material things, but is letting go of his salary. Fortunately, B and his family were able to keep some things but if they moved to the USA, they would obviously have to let go of just about everything. B nevertheless believes that security is based on other things.</p> <p>(25) B does not see himself as perfect, but he is trying to let himself be guided by spiritual Christian principles. He wishes to be of service to other people, to try and listen to what their mission is in terms of what God's will should be. It is basically to think a bit more before he does anything and not only to think about himself but also to think about others. That is why he</p>	<p>(23) B accepts his spiritual calling and, once he has relinquished the material (false) securities that appear difficult to 'let go' of, he intends to continue in his calling.</p> <p>(24) B retains an aspect of security and holds on to a few material attachments, which, in emigrating, he will have to relinquish (let go). He believes that security is based on other things.</p> <p>(25) In the absence of tangible securities, B is guided by his spiritual Christian values – to heed his calling to serve others in the will of God, and not to be self-centred or impulsive.</p>
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<p>became a psychologist, which he sees as his calling in life. He tries to relieve the suffering of others and add value to their lives.</p> <p>(26) When B says that he is longing to practise what he preaches, he is also hoping to help other people do the same – that is, to let go when it is necessary to let go. B believes that presently he is actually living the meaning of letting go. It is basically a learning experience, which though undertaken very rationally in the past, is now lived experience.</p> <p>(27) B believes that he has learned to let go of certain more materially-based things in his life in order to open up to new and more value - and spiritually - based avenues and paths. He has come closer to what he experiences as his purpose in life, to be able to add meaning to the lives of others and help comfort people who suffer.</p> <p>(28) Sometimes he has to hold onto certain things. B thinks that there is a time to hold on and a time to let go. He cannot just jump from one thing to another all the time. B has got to hold on and resist jumping into other things all the time.</p>	<p>(26) B desires to commit himself to his values and beliefs and also wishes to assist others ‘to let go when it is necessary to let go’, as the lived experience that he has discovered it to be, rather than in its rational meaning.</p> <p>(27) B discovered that by letting go of certain material aspects in his life, he became receptive to spiritual paths and draw closer to what he experiences as the purpose of his life (to serve others and relieve their pain).</p> <p>(28) B found that there is a time to hold on and a time to let go. Holding on is a necessary restraint, for repeated leaps (jumping) and continuous change have to be resisted.</p>
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<p>(29) Leaving work was the first major step for B. There was a lot of tension before he let go. He would ask himself whether he was doing the right thing and also wondered whether his decision to leave wasn't being very selfish.</p> <p>(30) Letting go is not easy. It is like jumping from a plane before the parachute opens!</p>	<p>(29) Prior to making the initial main move (leaving work), B was tense and uncertain. He would question himself regarding his decision, and wondered whether he was being self-centred.</p> <p>(30) Letting go is difficult for B, who relates the experience to a risky leap into the unknown (space). The step seems hazardous.</p>
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(Post emigration email)

<p>(31) Having emigrated, B has to deal with all the new things. As with many other things in his life, his current experience in the USA is seen as an attempt to find the balance between negative and positive sides of the same thing.</p> <p>(32) The negative side is the initiation, the thing that is stopped every year, forever, at schools and universities. Gate-control and initiation are very real, even after he went through a thirty-month screening period in South Africa.</p> <p>(33) B provides an example where banks do not want to open an account for him</p>	<p>(31) B adapts to the new environment and continues in his tendency to seek stability between positive and negative aspects of what he encounters.</p> <p>(32) Regarding the negative, B feels that he is still an outsider and dislikes having to continue with the initial lengthy process of conditional acceptance.</p> <p>(33) At institutions where acceptance is conditional, B has to validate his credibility</p>
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<p>because they cannot find him on their credit checking systems. B gets the same kind of attitude when he approaches organisations with employment enquiries.</p> <p>(34) Since his arrival, B has also had to prove to his wife and family that there is a better life there and that it is okay for them to follow.</p> <p>(35) B is surprised to find that the positive side still overwhelms the negative.</p> <p>(36) In his new environment, B is able to do what he was trained and called for – to help other people. In South Africa, B felt that the different context in which he found himself, did not allow him to continue doing what he was trained for, and he felt that he was a piece of window dressing.</p> <p>(37) When B parks his van and forgets to lock it, or when he leaves the house, the anxiety and fear he feels is much less than when he was in South Africa. He sees women and children walking in the street, playing without fear of being attacked.</p> <p>(38) There are good, warm and friendly people in his new environment and he already has a few new friends. His sister</p>	<p>as his integrity is being questioned.</p> <p>(34) B has to validate his credibility to his significant others regarding a more promising future.</p> <p>(35) With surprise, B realises that the positive aspects outweigh what is negative.</p> <p>(36) Unlike in his previous work context where he had to maintain a façade, B finds his new work meaningful, as his training and vocational calling are accepted and recognised.</p> <p>(37) In his new environment, B is more relaxed (less anxiety and fear) and feels a greater sense of freedom and security with himself and others.</p> <p>(38) Interpersonally, the new environment is amiable and affectionate. Familiar family attachments are within reach, and, when</p>
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<p>and her family are also an hour's drive away. They understand and support when necessary, in spite of still having their own battles to fight.</p> <p>(39) Ironically, B says, sometimes the gate-control mechanisms also give him a sense of security. The authorities do not allow crime or suspects. People's personal rights, their space, and quality of life are protected. Soon he may also be one of those people.</p> <p>40) Educational prospects are good and B believes that he can have a happy family life there. The prospects for his children are good.</p> <p>(41) B has found the winter there a bit longer and warmer than usual, but spring has just arrived, which B discovered when he arrived an hour late for church that morning. He had forgotten to set his alarm clock one hour ahead and had just not attended sufficiently to their ways of doing things.</p>	<p>needed, they are helpful and understanding.</p> <p>(39) B lives an ambiguity, for the negative, controlling aspects he perceives also provide him with a positive sense of security. He looks forward to belonging and sharing the potential protection that the other residents enjoy.</p> <p>(40) B believes that the new environment can positively accommodate the needs of his children and he envisages a happy family life in the new country.</p> <p>(41) B has to adapt to changes regarding weather, time and manner of doing things. He has to orientate himself, and believes that he is catching up.</p>
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TABLE II

Participant B: Ben (B)

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**Constituents of the Individual Situated Structure of Letting go**

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**A. Decision:** (1. 2. 29.)

Letting go initially occurred with B's *decision* to leave his work, which had provided him with security and comfort, but denied him freedom and contentment. He felt trapped and professionally rejected, and believed that he was being exploited to maintain a façade. At first the relaxing of rules at the institution where he worked liberated him emotionally. He reflected on who he was and felt different. B wanted to leave but, before taking the initial step to do so, there was tension and conflict and he doubted his *decision*. Through self-questioning and reflection, B wondered whether he was being self-centred and inconsiderate of others.

**B Future Horizons:** (3.4.5.6. 8.)

After leaving his work, B decided to leave the country of his birth. Letting go began with the decision to emigrate. He became aware of other *horizons* beyond his familiar world. Despite being initially rejected by the country to which he had decided to emigrate, B considered conditional acceptance as necessary for the greater opportunity he pursued. was offered the security of tentative employment which would provide him with the chance to look at other possibilities. He felt excited and needed again, but was willing to make a complete vocational change if necessary. However, although aware of the unknown challenges, B trusts that he would continue to keep alive.

**C. Return:** (11. 16. 17. 18.)

Before leaving his country of origin, B *returned* to visit the town of his birth and the cities in which he lived. Before leaving, B needed to return to the places and people he knows and found the opportunity to revisit and make final contact, to rekindle and capture the memories of significant early attachments (to places and people). He repeated

the familiar, earlier path that he had taken in his life and retraced the steps of his childhood, reliving the journey of his earlier years. The process of saying goodbye was meaningful through a personal rather than a social ritual, and he recognises the possible symbolic significance of the revisit.

**D. Memories:** (9. 10. 12. 15.)

Through revisiting, B was able to rekindle and retain permanent *memories* of the special attachments to which he could return to in the future. The close contact with family and relatives had diminished, but had been replaced with meaningful attachments to certain people and places. The memories and experiences he retained in his attachments were integral to the places of significance. The visit gave him great pleasure and was a positive and meaningful experience.

**E. Permanence:** (13.14.)

With B's decision to leave, it was reassuring for him to find a sense of *permanence* in his past. He realised that, despite the consistent diversity and changes in his life, the foundations and familiarity of past structures continued. It was comforting for him to see that the paternal grave remained and that specific places and memories of his childhood provided a permanent base for him to continue. In his departure, the aspect of permanence was significant.

**F. Identification:** (19. 20. 22.)

As a Christian, B's initial impetus towards change was spiritual, where scripture readings and discussions strengthened the greater significance of spiritual values over material issues. A religious ritual is meaningful and the spiritual values on which he was to rely were reinforced. Inspiration was found in the meaning of the message of Easter, where sacrifice and 'letting go' precede the experience of 'new life'. B found significance in his *identification* with Christ. He will let go of material attachments and follow in the footsteps of Christ. A friend's gift reminds him of the spiritual journey of being a Christian, which, for B, was to accomplish his vocational calling and to serve others by relieving their pain and adding value to their lives.

**G. Attachments:** (21. 23. 26. 27.)

In the process of leaving, B relinquished material *attachment*, which he considered to be ‘false securities’; yet nevertheless found this relinquishment difficult. However, once he has accomplished this, he plans to continue and will refocus on his vocational calling. He seeks to recommit (reattach) himself to the values and beliefs of assisting others. B would also like to help others ‘to let go when it is necessary to let go’; that is, letting go as the lived experience that he has discovered it to be, rather than in its rational meaning. By letting go of certain material attachments in his life, B found to be a transpersonal experience. He was receptive to spiritual paths which bring brought him closer to what he experienced as the purpose of his life – namely, to serve others and relieve their pain. In submitting to the primacy of his spiritual values and beliefs beyond his daily material context, B realises that he has not failed. The attachment to his spiritual beliefs and values allowed him to relax (let go) and he accepted himself in the process.

**H. Security** (7. 24. 25.)

In letting go, B retained some *security* by holding on to a few material aspects which though perceived as false, were necessary and difficult to let go of. However, B realises that with the emigration, he would have to relinquish (let go of) these attachments as well. Nevertheless, he trusted that security is based on alternative aspects and no longer viewed his previous secure routine attachment of employment as necessary to practise his vocation. In the absence of the tangible secure attachments he knew, B was guided by his strong spiritual Christian values, as he heeded the calling to serve others in the will of God, and not to be impulsive or self-centred. B considered others rather than himself.

**I. Holding on:** (28. 30.)

In the process, B found that there was a time to hold on and a time to let go. Holding on was a necessary attachment and restraint, as repeated leaps and continuous change had to be resisted. Letting go was difficult for B, who related the experiences to a risky and hazardous leap into the unknown vastness of space, “like jumping from a plane before the parachute opens”. With feelings of fear and anxiety, the experience appeared to be an apprehensive and unpredictable entry into the vast space of nothingness and the unknown.

**J. The New Environment:** (31.32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41.)

Following his arrival in the *new environment*, B attempted to adapt successfully to the changes he encountered. He orientated himself regarding new environmental aspects, which included the concept of time and general manner of doing things. In his quest for stability, B continues to seek a balance between the positive and negative aspects of the newness he encountered. With pleasure and relief, he became aware of the dominance of positive aspects. However, still being regarded as an outsider was a negative for he disliked having to continue with the process of conditional acceptance. In the new world, B's integrity is still being questioned, as he has to validate his credibility. Similarly, he has to validate his trustworthiness to the significant other, providing assurance of a positive future. His position appears precarious. With pleasure and relief, B acknowledges that positive aspects of the new environment outweigh what is negative. Unlike his previous work context with its imposed façade, B feels accepted and finds that his training and vocational calling are acknowledged.

In the new environment, B found that he is more relaxed and aware of a greater sense of freedom and security in others. Interpersonally, the new environment is amiable and affectionate. Familiar family attachments were within reach and, when needed, were helpful and understanding.

Upon arrival in the new environment, B lived the paradoxical experience of recognising both positive and negative aspects of what he encountered. There was ambiguity, for what he perceived as negatively controlling also provided him with a positive sense of security. He looks forward to belonging, and sharing the potential protection that other residents enjoy, and is optimistic about the future. B trusts that the country of his choice can positively accommodate the needs of his children. He continues seeking to resume and enjoy the oneness he knew in the familiar world order prior to his letting go, and he envisages a happy family life in the new world and country of his choice.



TABLE I

**Participant C: Penny (P)**

<b>Natural Meaning Units</b>	<b>Central Themes</b>
<p>(1) P does not think letting go means a heck of a lot at all. She views it as one of those modern jargon words and does not feel that she has a particular grip on the term. She does not know if she could ever use such terminology and say that she is now ‘letting go’ or that she has now ‘let go’. P acknowledges that she would not know at which point this is letting go and feels that it is typically one of those American type words. She does not have much respect for the word and refers to Oprah Winfrey and her talk show that will philosophise about a word like ‘spirit’, but that means zero to P. It is not that she feels that people should not look after their spirit, but she believes that each person does so in his or her own way.</p>	<p>(1) P is resistant to the term ‘letting go’, which she interprets as diffuse and general rather than applicable to personal experience.</p>
<p>(2) For P, letting go is more personalised. Each person lets go in his or her own way. If someone asks her whether she has let go, she may have to sit down and</p>	<p>(2) P believes that the experience of letting go is more personal than the term denotes. She rationally interprets the term as surpassing whatever has impeded mobility</p>

<p>think what they are you talking about, and perhaps go through her thoughts, and think that she has actually moved beyond a certain point, and has in actual fact let go. It is not a term that she would use. Her view is that a person must move on, beyond whatever has been “dragging”, put things behind, and get on with life.</p>	<p>(dragging) and moving on with life</p>
<p>(3) P sees no sense in living in the past. Once she has come to terms with what her situation is going to be, then she has to accept that and be in that phase, and move on.</p>	<p>(3) P rationally believes that she cannot live in the past but has to accept the present and move on.</p>
<p>(4) P believes that in some things there is letting go, but not in everything. With the house things certainly. Moving from the house was physical hard work, but letting go occurred before the time, making the decision and coming to the realisation that she had to leave her home.</p>	<p>(4) For P, letting go occurred with the cognitive decision and bringing to awareness that she would leave her home.</p>
<p>(5) In the house she would ask herself how people were going to take the move, and whether it was an entirely selfish decision and whether the move was only for her.</p>	<p>(5) P considered the impact of the decision on others and questioned herself as whether she was being self-centred (selfish) and considering her will above the will of others.</p>
<p>(6) But then afterwards, in the time that</p>	<p>(6) P believed that she was being self-</p>

<p>she put the house on the market, Rob, one of her boys, in actual fact said, with no provocation whatsoever, that he absolutely hated the house that they were in. It came as such a surprise to P. Jack, her husband, was shocked as well and later acknowledged that he could not believe that their son had actually said that. The expectation was that their child would have fond memories of his trip overseas or the crack on the wall. But Rob had had enough. One of the other kids that she spoke to said that it was fine, and that it was not a problem. It was Jack, her husband, whom she had to get past. She needed his approval. She felt very selfish</p> <p>(7) On a Friday, (in the absence of the noise), P would think that everything was fine and Saturday would pass. Sunday night she would start getting nervous, as she would think of Monday. On Monday, the noise would start all over again and P would change her mind because of the noise from the schools nearby. The noise of the neighbouring school drove her dilly. The neighbouring school had built the property and extended their school. The bells of the neighbouring school did not go at the same time as the Barclay</p>	<p>centred (selfish) in her decision to leave and had to secure the approval of her significant other. Her children were ready to make the move.</p> <p>(7) Depending on the level of intrusion (school noise), P vacillated from accepting to stay to wanting to leave. The intrusion became so devastating that P would scream and feel violently angry.</p>
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<p>School bell did. She knew Barclay's school bells: they were across the road from her and at a distance.. This school was right next-door, and it drove her mad. It drove her so mad that she wanted to scream, and often did. The noise itself included the noise of the kids. Sometimes they would come and knock their ball over. Then, P would throw her toys out of the cot and curse the kids. Sometimes P wanted one of those bazookas so that she could stand on the other side of the school and shoot them.</p>	
<p>(8) Their home was messed. That is the resentment. P resented that she had to get up and go because of the school next-door to her. It just was too much for her that she had to leave her house. It was not just the school across the road from her, but with everything together, the noise was terrible. Singly instances of disturbance she could handle.</p>	<p>(8) P felt resentful that because of the intrusion, she had to leave her home. The accumulative (noise) intrusion had become unbearable.</p>
<p>(9) The noise ruined her life. She went to court to put her case before them but she got nowhere. P was very ill at the time and she got nowhere. The noise was a huge intrusion.</p>	<p>(9) The (noise) intrusion was overwhelming and detrimental to P, who was ill at the time. She felt stuck, and her efforts to change the situation through legal action were futile.</p>
<p>(10) P was angry and aggravated by this</p>	<p>(10) P attempts to deny the anger and</p>

<p>whole thing, but then admits that actually was not so bad. Just talking about it, aggravates her. The family had fixed things in the home for themselves, for their needs and how they wanted the home to be and now finally, after all these years, when things were nice and neat and orderly, then she had to leave.</p> <p>(11) P misses her trees. When she came to her new home, they were big. She had lived there for almost thirty years. They were magnificent trees and P expresses sadness at having left them. She speaks of a “terrible, terrible, terrible sadness”.</p> <p>(12) P had certain criteria for finding another place. She looked and they bought a plot somewhere. For a while she thought that this was answer: to live out on a plot, in the quiet and have a view. She imagined that she would have new little ‘goggatjies’ (insects) in her grass, and believed that it would be wonderful.</p> <p>(13) Nothing like that happened. P realised after a time that Jack was not going to move anywhere there, and the boys would not have wanted to come out there either. P realised that the whole</p>	<p>resentment she continues to feel regarding the family having to leave the home which they had, over the years, organised to accommodate their needs.</p> <p>(11) P had lived a significant part of her life in her home and grieves having left a meaningful aspect (magnificent trees) behind. There is a sense of deep loss.</p> <p>(12) P had specific requirements for finding a new home and looked forward to living on an ideal plot they had bought, which seemed to be the solution for living in peace, with a view and the creatures of nature.</p> <p>(13) With time, P realised that the initial decision to move (to the plot) could not materialise, as it was not suitable to the rest of the family. With sadness, she cancelled the sale.</p>
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<p>thing and the safety aspect would not work. She realised that it wasn't going to work, so sadly, she cancelled buying the plot.</p> <p>(14) P then thought that she was doomed to noise for the rest of my life. She never thought she would get past Jack, her husband. P had to ask him and she did. She asked him over and over again, what he thought and whether it would be OK with him for them to move. P had to check with her husband.</p> <p>(15) P also took into consideration the fact that her husband works. She had to have his, not approval so much, but his backing her up because she thought it was a selfish decision. P also saw this as an expensive decision.</p> <p>(16) P acknowledges that she does not feel entirely selfish, and admits to thinking of herself a little, but justifies this by adding that, like all women, she sees herself as thinking first of everybody else and of herself last. She believes that she had put up with the situation long enough, and realised that it was time to go. Besides, they no longer had kids at the school, so in actual fact the reason</p>	<p>(14) P was stuck and began to feel that she was destined to remain in the unbearable (noisy) situation. In her decision to move, P needed her husband's support and commitment.</p> <p>(15) P resisted a move that was purely self-centred (selfish). She required the support and commitment of the significant other in her decision, and considered his needs.</p> <p>(16) P defends against being purely self-centred in her decision, and acknowledges her persistent tolerance. She gives reasons to justify the move as being necessary for her and the family. Their home was no longer suitable for the family as their needs had changed.</p>
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<p>why she was staying in the house was not the reason she had bought it in the first instance. The reason why she was staying in their new house now, was because it was a home, and it was comfortable, but a lot of those things had been taken away in their earlier home. The reason they had bought that house, in the first instance, was to be near the school because she had five children. P corrects herself for, in fact, she realises that she now has four children. For a moment P loses track of her thoughts but continues.</p> <p>(17) P became aware that she did not have to live in that house, but needed to go. She needed to leave for her own sanity. P recalls that she would stand watering her garden and have long conversations in her head about the school, asking herself what she was going to do and what was she going to say.</p> <p>(18) Often the bells from the school would go off over the weekends. Over the long weekends, the school authorities would forget to switch the school bell off. Just as everybody was restful, the school bells would start going off, or the alarms of the school would start going any hour</p>	<p>(17) P realised that there was no reason for her to stay in their original house and, in order to preserve her personal stability, she needed to leave. P reflected and considered her next step.</p> <p>(18) P's personal stability felt threatened (she felt that she was going insane), as the unpredictable intrusion became absolutely intolerable. With a personal sensitivity to noise, P's needs became paramount.</p>
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<p>of the night. P was driven berserk and just could not take it. Though it did not affect other people, she accepts that some people are more affected by noise than others. P admits that she is sensitive to noise.</p>	
<p>(19) Because P was ill for a very long time she spent a lot of time at home. P had to be home and could not be anywhere else as she was confined to bed. For a very long time, P had M.E. and spent two and a half years in bed with “depression and darkness” and then this noise was on top of her as well. It was all just too much for her.</p>	<p>(19) Due to a long-term illness, P experienced ‘depression and darkness’, which, with the additional intrusion, overwhelmed her.</p>
<p>(20) So then P decided to make the move. P considers the decision the biggest part of letting go. It was the part of getting to the point of saying: “Yes, I am going to go. I am leaving this home. I am actually going to sell this place and move”. That was the turning point. It was not the actual move but the decision to make the move.</p>	<p>(20) Rather than the physical move P’s cognitive decision to leave was the major step and the pivotal moment of letting go.</p>
<p>(21) In P’s own words: “ The decision was the move, not the physical move”. The physical move was physically bad, but there was mental anguish arriving at</p>	<p>(21) P considers the decision as the actual move, rather than the physical move itself. Although the actual move was physically unpleasant, there were agonising thoughts in</p>



<p>the decision.</p> <p>(22) It was anguish for P because she toyed with the idea to move. She does not know for how long. It was also possibly anguish because she was helpless against what was going on around her. She could not dictate to the authorities or the children or the school. She could not tell them to shut up. She could not do anything about it. If those kids jumped into the pool that was tough for her and though she could rant and rave on the other side, she could not do anything about it. It was frustrating, but she could not do anything about it. Then her thoughts would turn to murder and she would think: “I am going to bomb this place!”</p> <p>(23) Weekends were experienced on a visceral level. P could feel when it was a weekend and describes her experience where, on a Saturday morning when she would wake up and there was nobody there, she could feel their absence in the air. She finds it difficult to express, but the feeling was in the air, and she could feel it! The air was clearer. On Saturday, the air was clearer. On Sunday the air was okay, but Sunday night the air would</p>	<p>the process of making the decision.</p> <p>(22) P felt frustrated, anguished and violently angry, as she was unable to change or control the situation in which she found herself. She felt helpless. Conflicting thoughts as to whether or not to move, oscillated over time.</p> <p>(23) P felt the presence (noise) and absence (peace) of the intrusion, on a physical, experiential level. In the absence of the intrusion, the air was clear and easy to breathe whereas, with the approaching presence of the noise, the air became increasingly difficult to inhale.</p>
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<p>start getting really muggy because of Monday, which she expresses with a heavy sigh. P adds that holidays were fantastic blissfulness</p> <p>(24) P finds it difficult to adequately express the joy of having her own space, not only in terms of the noise, but also in coming home and not having “them” in her driveway all the time. She views herself as a private sort of person who needs her space and privacy.</p> <p>(25) P understands that perhaps her need for space is exaggerated. She believes that it is possibly because of so many people being around her that she feels the need to be private. P admits, however, that perhaps if she were completely on her own she would not feel that way but she does. She always has to have others around her. P has a big family and that means that the house is bouncing with constant activity. She just hopes that she can have space.</p> <p>(26) Space is important to P, to the point that she had to take a big decision to leave. P emphasises the magnitude of the</p>	<p>(24) As someone who needs to be alone, P experiences indescribable joy being on her own and defining her personal (auditory and physical) space and distance.</p> <p>(25) As P is constantly in the presence of others, there is a strong need to be alone (private) in her own space. Nevertheless, she resists total isolation.</p> <p>(26) P acknowledges that the move was a major decision for her, particularly in the need to define the significance of her space.</p>
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<p>decision for her.</p> <p>(27) As P saw it, the noise was not a one-day thing. It just went on and on and on for months, and then she would consider selling the house, but then the holidays would come and she would think that she had exaggerated her need to move. Then she would consent to selling the house and then the weekends would come and she would think that the weekends were brilliant and where else could she have such weekends. So, it was like that, going back and forth. P noticed that the same thing was happening to Jack. They would alternate about selling the house. On Monday she would start (complaining) and then by Friday when he would arrive, she would keep quiet about it. On Monday, then she was ready to sell again. Over a long time and long period, P saw that she was moving forward-backwards, forward-backwards. It was a long process of moving backwards and forwards.</p> <p>(28) Then, P started thinking in terms of where she would put her plants as she realised that she would not be there to watch her plants grow as she was going to move. It was at that point that she decided to do something that she believes</p>	<p>(27) Making the decision was gradual and took place over a lengthy period. Conflicted, P would vacillate in her thoughts and would repeatedly approach and avoid (forwards and backwards) the decision to sell, before committing herself to the ultimate step. She realised that the significant other was also going through the same lengthy to-and-fro process.</p> <p>(28) Once aware that she would leave, P sought continuity and avoided long-term commitments (planting trees), preferring something transitional (pot planting), which she could preserve and carry to her new destination.</p>
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<p>is relevant to letting go. She would tell herself that she is not going to do a massive thing at her home because she was not going to be going to be there. She decided to save and she did. P started putting little plants into pots to move and realised that she was getting ready for wherever she was going. She needs her plants and needs her trees. P continued making roots to keep up because she cannot live without her plants. When she had intentions to plant, she would start putting little plants out. She thought of the plot but nothing had come of that.</p> <p>(29) Actually, P did not need the plot so much, but quiet. P would go anywhere quiet and it would have been an absolute bonus if she could have a view. When she thought of moving, and she thought of the criteria regarding the nice things that she needed, she realised that she was not going to get them, because where in Pretoria (her home town) would she go to where there were no throughways and no traffic?</p> <p>(30) The only place near to where they lived would have been The Ridge, which she could not afford. The Ridge would have older houses and would have trees</p>	<p>(29) In search of a new home, P had certain requirements, with peace being a priority. She also desired a view, trees and spacious rooms and realised that she would have to move to a new area to find them.</p> <p>(30) Although the area close to P did meet some of her requirements, the area seemed unsuitable in other respects.</p>
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<p>and would have bigger rooms. Those were her criteria – no noise, trees, bigger rooms and an older house. That is what she wanted, but as she could not get it in the area close by, she started looking elsewhere for a house. It was there but she could not afford it. Besides, she says, the houses in the Ridge were old houses, “rambling places, far too big and needing far too much care”. She needed space, trees and peace, but the view was the other thing.</p> <p>(31) P did not have a view in her previous home as she would look up into the sky and there was a little bit of sky and that was her parameter, her border. She could not see the horizon, so she had to wait for the moon to come above the trees. That’s the stuff that is really important to her.</p> <p>(32) Jack, her husband, does not need that stuff (nature), but she does. P needs to see the sky. She needs to see the clouds. P needs it. She needs the trees and the animals. Her husband is not like that. He is more of a city-slicker. She is also a city-slicker for if she actually had to land up on a farm, she might say: “Oh no, this is never what I thought of”.</p>	<p>(31) P had no view at her previous home, yet did enjoy a meaningful and significant relationship to a natural environment.</p> <p>(32) P realises that she and the significant other differ, regarding their relationship to nature. Nevertheless, she is resistant to the thought of finding what she seeks without him.</p>
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<p>(33) In Barclay, her previous residential area, there were avenues of trees where the birds would come because they knew that they could come down a particular avenue of trees and down the following lane. So where there was an isolated spot of trees, she would have a lot of bird life. P fed the birds and that was all wonderful and she needed to have that again. She needed to hear natural sounds and not traffic.</p> <p>(34) P does not believe that she particularly wanted to be in her new area. Moré Park was never on her agenda. She always thought of living somewhere in area she knew. She wanted to be in her area and she is not and that is an adjustment for her. Although she is half Afrikaans, she feels that she is out of her area and surrounded by Afrikaners. P feels like a displaced person. She finds nothing wrong with the people (neighbours) but they are all Afrikaans. There's not a soul in her new area that is English speaking and she feels a bit of a foreigner. She feels a bit of an outsider.</p> <p>(35) P says that her neighbours are wonderful because they all like their</p>	<p>(33) In her previous area, P had enjoyed a meaningful relationship with nature and needed to continue this in her new home.</p> <p>(34) P had hoped to be in the area she knew but now she is in unfamiliar territory and has had to adapt to change. Despite a common aspect, P finds it difficult to identify with the new neighbours who are different, and she feels like a stranger who does not belong in the new environment.</p> <p>(35) P looks favourably upon the people in her new area. Although they are different to</p>
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<p>privacy, so they steer clear of her and she steers clear of them. But the neighbours all have each others phone numbers, which they never had in Barclay. P knows all these people and has met them. Some of them came to her house and left their phone numbers. P gave them her phone numbers. She thinks that it is probably fine, but finds it different.</p> <p>(36) The other thing for P is having to adjust to time, the traffic and distance. She still shops at the Barclay Mall, which was not even five minutes from her house. P says that she has not yet got it into her head yet, that she now has to travel for twenty minutes, and only then has she arrived. P may look at her watch and say that she has plenty of time and then she realises that she does not have plenty of time.</p> <p>(37) Then, a huge thing for P is to get out of her mind the people (prior residents) who used to live there (in her new home), out of her mind. The estate agent had told her some of the history of the previous residents and she feels that this was very unfair, because it was a miserable sort of history. P had met the ex-owner of the</p>	<p>what she has known, interpersonal links are maintained with a mutual respect for distance, where contact seems voluntary rather than intrusive.</p> <p>(36) To adapt to her new order in the new environment, P has also had to adapt to changes regarding time and space.</p> <p>(37) P's desire to familiarise and be at-one with her new home is impeded by thoughts of its previous residents, whose history she is regretfully aware of.</p>
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<p>house and had taken an immediate dislike to him and trusts that the feeling was mutual, as they did not have much to do with one another. Apparently, the previous owner had married a new wife and the agent had told P the history, which affected P, because the bedrooms were their bedrooms. Though she does not believe that their unhappiness affected her, she really did not need to know all she heard. P accepts it, however, reasoning that it is like that with everyone who moves into a new home.</p> <p>(38) P feels that the house still isn't hers, but it is slowly coming back. Like the kitchen, for instance, putting the rail on top, getting all the dreadful stuff out that was rotting. She now has her granite top and she has cleaned out the kitchen cupboards.</p> <p>(39) P notes that it is going to take a bit longer and although she puts in a full day's work, she does get so tired. She has major plans for the grounds and wants to make it more a people's garden. The garden has a steep gradient and runs down to the street. It is presently not a people's garden as one cannot run around</p>	<p>(38) P feels foreign in the new environment. Personalising her new home is gradual as she eclectically accepts and rejects items, creating personal meaning in her new space.</p> <p>(39) P realises that personalising her home environment is going to be a lengthy process. She intends making personal changes, yet is dependent on the significant other to do so.</p>
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<p>the garden because it is up and down a hill. P has major plans to level the garden for kids to play in for if they have to play outside, they will hurt themselves. She also has her dogs to consider as the dogs were sick running up and down. P would like the changes to happen faster, but she does not earn any money and has to depend on Jack, her husband, to do that. P finds it unfortunate that Jack does all the stuff that he wants to do first, and what she would like to do is not on the list of his priorities.</p> <p>(40) P refers to Jack having done a dreadful thing, She has told everyone about it. P speaks of when she had moved into the second bedroom, where the doors open into the garden. From her bedroom, she could sit on the stairs and look at the view. However, within a month of their move, Jack had blocked the view.</p> <p>(41) P screamed and went mad. It felt as if she was back in Barclay, immediately back in Barclay. P feels frustrated but cannot do anything about it. “Back to the Bazooka!” she says.</p> <p>(42) So P moved out of that room and that’s why she is upstairs. She refuses to</p>	<p>(40) Soon after their arrival, P feels distressed about the loss of the significant environmental aspect (view) that she had just gained and enjoyed. She blames the significant other for the loss.</p> <p>(41) P’s inability to change her situation, revived the earlier feelings of frustration, helplessness, violent anger and screaming behaviour, prior the move.</p> <p>(42) P resisted facing the loss of what she</p>
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<p>go back into that bedroom because she can't look at that wall blocking the view. Where she is, is not really a bedroom but she refuses to go to the bedroom. P has put her foot down. She used to sit on the bed and look at the lights in the distance and enjoyed the view. P finds it difficult to express how wonderful it was, but it has now gone.</p> <p>(43) One month after her arrival and with the loss, P felt that she was back in Barclay. The only way that her husband and the builder could fix it for her is if they could break the wall down. She wants them to break it all down. Jack blames the builder, and the builder blames Jack. P was the one who kept reminding them to watch her view.</p> <p>(44) P believes that her husband Jack does not know just how affected she is. She believes that he either chooses not to know or he deliberately passes over it. P cannot handle it and believes that he could have controlled it but did not.</p> <p>(45) P is very angry and very resentful about the loss. P has told her husband. She ranted and raved about it on the specific day and phoned her daughter in</p>	<p>had gained in the new world, and in defiance, physically withdraws (to another room) from the situation. She yearns to restore what (view) she had.</p> <p>(43) The experience of the loss (view) made P feel that she had gained nothing with the move. Despite her attempts to retain what (view) she had gained, her appeals were not being heeded.</p> <p>(44) She is angry towards the significant other, for although he could have prevented the loss and could restore what she had, she finds him oblivious to her feelings.</p> <p>(45) P feels intense anger and resentment towards the significant other for, although she has desperately tried to communicate</p>
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<p>Australia, who sent her father a fax. P dragged her bed up to the other room that same day. She screamed around. When her husband came in from work she knew what he was going to say to her and she knew that he was never going to fix it. P was hoping that he would say that they could remove the wall but he did not say that. P feels that he is never going to say it. She feels a great sense of loss regarding the view she had.</p> <p>(46) Jack, her husband, was very upset because, when he came home their daughter had sent him a fax. P knew that she was not going to get anything out of him anyway, particularly if he was aggravated. P asked whether he was going to join her and sleep upstairs, to which he provided a negative reply She then asked whether he was taking it personally, and when he acknowledged that he was, she asked him please not to. “Come along. There’s a lovely view, a lovely bedroom so come upstairs”. She invited him to join her.</p> <p>(47) P does not like a rift. She knows that there is a barrier between them, but does not know if he is aware of it.</p>	<p>the impact of her loss to him, she realises that he will not restore what she had. She views the loss as final.</p> <p>(46) Rather than estrange her annoyed and irritated significant other further, P attempts to restore their relationship and seeks a closer relationship with him. She feels threatened by the increasing distance between them.</p> <p>(47) P dislikes the separateness she experiences between her and the significant other. She is, however, unaware of his</p>
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<p>(48) P is very, very hurt and apart from the death of her son, she admits that she has never had such a massive thing happen in her life. P uses the expression that she is “dead affected” by it. She acknowledges that there is nothing, nothing that is as big as the death of her son, but outside of that, in the material sense of everyday things, she has never in her life been as upset about something as she was with that.</p> <p>(49) The death of her son and the loss of the view do not come together. There is no link between the two. The death is too bad.</p>	<p>perceptions in this regard.</p> <p>(48) With the loss (view) P feels intense pain, which, although not as devastating as the death of her son, bears the implications of death and is detrimental to her.</p> <p>(49) P denies a connection between the loss of a significant aspect in relation to her world (view), and the loss of a significant other (son), as the experience of interpersonal loss is intensely devastating.</p>
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TABLE II  
Participant C: Penny (P)

## Constituents of the Individual Situated Structure of Letting Go

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**A. The term** (1. 2. 3.)

P is resistant to *the term* letting go, which she finds diffuse and general rather than expressive of her personal experience. The term is rationally interpreted as moving beyond what impedes mobility and continuing with life. P logically believes that she cannot live in the past but has to accept the present and move on.

**B. Stuck:** (9. 14. 18. 19.)

The intrusion of the noise was overwhelming and detrimental to P who was ill at the time and, due to a long-term illness, experienced feelings of darkness and depression. Her efforts to change the situation were futile, and she felt *stuck* and helpless. She began to believe that she was destined to remain in the unbearable situation, but the intensity of the intrusion and its unpredictability became absolutely intolerable. With a personal sensitivity to noise, P's needs became paramount as her sense of self felt threatened and she believed that she would disintegrate. In her decision to move, however, P needed the support and commitment of the significant other.

**C. Ambivalence:** (7. 8. 10. 22. 23. 27.)

Depending on the extent of the intrusion, P would vacillate from accepting to stay to wanting to leave. There was *ambivalence* and conflict, with feelings of helplessness, as her thoughts would oscillate and her behaviour would vacillate. P moved 'forwards and backwards', backwards and forwards before finally committing herself to the ultimate step of leaving. Nevertheless, she realised that she was not alone, and that the significant other was also going through the same lengthy to-and-fro process. The presence (noise) and absence (peace) relating to the intrusion was felt on a physical-experiential level and reflected in the breathing pattern, as P on a physical experiential level accepted and rejected the situation she was in.

P attempted to deny the anger and resentment she felt regarding the move. The resentment and anger stemmed from the fact that because of the intrusion, she and the significant others had to leave their home, the home that they had over the years organised to accommodate their needs. Arriving at the final decisive point was gradual and took place over an indefinitely long period.

**D. Initial Decision:** (12. 13.)

With the *initial decision* to move, P first looked forward to living on an ideal plot that they had bought, which met her requirements of living in peace, with a view and the creatures of nature. P reflected and believed that she had found the solution. This decision to move (to the plot), however, did not materialise for she realised that the move was only a personal ideal and not suitable for the rest of the family. With sadness, P cancelled the sale.

**E. Consideration of Others:** (5. 6. 15. 16.)

In her decision to move, P *considered* the needs of *others*. She was aware of not being alone and considered the impact of her decision on the family and significant other. She resisted being purely self-centred and imposing her will upon the will of the family. Though the children are ready to make the move, P sought to secure the support, commitment and approval of the significant other and consider his needs. She was against making a purely self-centred decision, and though the decision was hers, she acknowledged her persistent tolerance and justified the move as necessary for the whole family as she believed that the home could no longer accommodate their needs.

**F. Committed Decision:** (4. 17. 20. 21.)

In order to preserve her personal stability and sense of self, which she felt was being threatened, P realised that there is no reason to remain there and she decided to leave. She reflected and considered her next step regarding the move. In the process of making the decision, conflicting thoughts oscillated. Though the visible move was physically unpleasant, arriving at the *decision* to leave was agonising as P finally committed herself to the decision. The conscious awareness was the significant move for P rather than the move itself. The decision was the major step and a pivotal moment in letting go.

**G. Quest :** (29. 30.)

In the *search* for a new home the desire was to find peace, a view, trees and spacious rooms. To meet her requirements, P realised that she would have to move to a new area for the more familiar areas were unsuitable.

**H. Old World Loss:** (11.)

Having lived a significant part of her life in the earlier home, P felt a sense of deep *loss* and grieves having left a meaningful aspect behind.

**I. Continuity:** (28. 31. 33.)

Once aware that she would leave, P sought *continuity* and avoided any new long-term commitments. She preferred to retain what was meaningful and, in a transitional manner carried it with her to the new destination. P sought to continue the meaningful relationship she has with nature.

**J. Significant Other:** (24. 25. 26. 32.)

In her decision to move, P needed the support and commitment of the *significant other*. Though she desired to continue the meaningful relationship she had with nature, P realised that the significant other differed to her in this regard, but she was resistant to finding what she is looking for without him. While constantly in the presence of others, P needed to be alone and expressed indescribable joy at the opportunity to define her personal (auditory and physical) space and distance. The move is a major decision. Paradoxically, although there was a profound need for personal (private) space, there was also a fear of isolation. She continued to retain a connectedness with the significant other.

**K. New Environment:** (34. 35. 36.)

In the *new environment*, feelings of ambivalence arose regarding the new interpersonal relationships. Though she felt favourable (positive) towards them, she found it difficult (negative) to identify with them. P enjoyed their manner of relating as interpersonal

contact was voluntary rather than intrusive and, while interpersonal links were maintained there was a mutual respect for distance. This was different to what she had known. Nevertheless, despite a common aspect, P felt like a stranger amongst her new neighbours. She felt that she did not belong there but attempted to become familiar with the new environment. In the process, P had to orientate herself regarding the newness of time and space encountered.

**L. Personalising the New Environment** (37. 38. 39.)

P's desire to familiarise and be at-one with the new home was impeded by thoughts of the presence of its previous residents, of whose history she was regretfully aware. Creating personal meaning in the new space was gradual, where what could not be accepted was eclectically removed and what could be identified with was allowed to remain. There is the awareness that *personalising* the new home is going to be a lengthy process and the intention to make personal changes appeared to be dependent on the significant other.

**M. New World Loss:** (40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 48.)

In the new environment, P enjoyed and appreciated a meaningful gain, in the form of an attractive view from her new home but, soon after their arrival, P was distressed by its *loss*. She resisted being reminded of the loss and withdrew physically from the situation. The experience of loss made her feel that she had gained nothing from the move. Once again, it is as if she returned to the past, as P felt stuck and unable to change the situation in which she found herself. This revived the earlier feelings of frustration, helplessness and violent anger she felt before the move. She resorted to the same behaviour she did then.

P yearned to restore what she had lost (the view) and realised that her attempts to hold on to what she had were futile. She blames the significant other for the loss of the meaningful aspect that she had gained in to the new environment. P felt frustrated and intensely angry towards him, for despite her desperate attempted to communicate the impact of the loss to him, he appeared oblivious to her feelings and he would not restore what she had enjoyed. She felt resentful. The loss elicited intense feelings of pain, which, while not as devastating her son's death, bore implications of death and detriment.



In the fear of suffering further interpersonal loss, P maintained a façade in the relationship with her significant other.

**N. Threat of Interpersonal Loss:** (46. 47. 49.)

P denied any connection between the loss or absence of a meaningful aspect to her environment and the *loss* and death of a significant other (son). However, the increasing distance between her and the significant other (spouse) in the new world was *threatening* to her. She was unaware of his perception of the barrier she felt between them. Rather than further estrange the significant other and increase the space between them, P attempted to restore their relationship and reduce the space. Separateness was experienced as threatening, and a re-establishment of closeness was desired in their relationship.

**TABLE II**

Participant D: John (J)

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**Constituents of the Individual Situated Structure of Letting Go**

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**A. Two Situations:** (1. 7. 27. 28. 29.)

J recalls and compares two different situated experiences of letting go. The one was letting go of his first business, while the other was letting go of his ex-fiancée. J believes that the decision preceding the separation from his ex-fiancée, determined the nature of letting go. While letting go of his business was easy, letting go of the relationship continues to be difficult. Both situations took place during the same period (ten years ago) in his life but he continues to hold on to the relationship. In his view of the future, at the time of the business and the premarital relationship, J saw himself in another business, but also married with children in a happy family. He considered letting go to be the same in both situations but has discovered that he had not let go of the relationship. Furthermore, he experienced a constructive continuity from the business as he could apply what he had learned and retained to his present business, but this was not the case regarding the knowledge and experience gained in the earlier relationship.

**B. Business:** (8. 24. 26. 39. 63. 64. 65. 67. 72. 86.)

For J, letting go of his first business was easy, as he had been convinced of his decision to leave. Remaining in a negative situation can lead to aggression. The excessive negative aspects of the business far exceeded what was positive and the anger he felt at the time pushed for the break, making it easier for him to leave. He had not held on to the business and knew that he had made the right decision.

Upon leaving the business, the pain and healing period was brief. In the stability and calm that followed, J soon felt relief at having let go. He could think clearly and allow for future opportunity, as well as move on and continue with his life. Leaving the

business was not a process, but was liberating and simple. He is happy in his present business.

**C. Decision** (4. 5.)

Feeling immobilised in a situation that he felt was going nowhere, J decided to take control and made a *decision* to leave the premarital relationship. He felt conflicted about leaving, for although rationally assured about the move, he was emotionally unhappy to do so. He experienced pain and conflict, and doubted his decision to leave. Despite his uncertainty about leaving, time and circumstance coerced him to move on and he believed that he had 'let go'.

**D. Emotional crisis:** (35. 36. 37. 38.)

The decision and commitment to leave the relationship gave rise to an *emotional crisis*, which led to a stormy mental struggle that created pain and instability (turbulence). In a later attempt to resolve the emotional crisis, J returned to review his earlier decision, but the uncertainty surrounding the decision led to a repeat of the process and extended the pain and instability (turbulence) further. J continues with the lived struggle and attempts to resolve the emotional crisis, pain and aspects related to the break.

**E. Holding on:** (13. 14. 15. 18. 25.)

In doubting his decision, J continued to *hold on to* the premarital relationship, which though sustaining, was also damaging and detrimental as it deterred progress and impeded healing. J admits that had he let go and not held on, he would have made the initial step towards healing, but this was not possible at the time. The holding on continued and gave rise to inner turmoil and emotional instability which needed to be resolved urgently. In the storm of emotional turmoil, doubt and conflict, there was a struggle for stability and survival.

**F. Stability vs Instability:** (61. 69. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78.)

In the conflict associated with the decision, J oscillated emotionally and vacillated in his thoughts. He doubted his decision and felt emotionally vulnerable. He realised that

leaving would be painful and he attempted to protect himself against the turmoil and pain of the break. In the experienced *instability* and turbulence, J had hoped that his decision would help him find stability. However, even after the decision was made, the doubt and turbulence continued as the negative aspects of the relationship had only slightly exceeded what was pleasant. His anger and irritation at the time provided the extra push for him to leave. However, once he had let go of the relationship, he held on to the positive aspects of the changed situation in which he found himself, and sought to protect himself against the pain. J sought *stability* by desperately holding onto the pleasant memories of the relationship. He also justified the change, feeling pleased that the negative frustrations of the relationship were no longer present. Though he felt relief at having left, there was a painful desire to resume the relationship. The turbulence continued, for though J had hoped to find stability, the intense desire following the decision created further instability. The process was repetitive and the instability and turbulence continued.

**G. Return:** (6. 9. 11. 52. 53. 54. 55. 60.)

J's doubtful initial decision gave rise to uncertainties in the present which led him to *return* (ten years later) to the earlier events preceding the decision. J reflected upon and returned to the past in order to question and re-evaluate the impulsive decision he had taken. Before he can finally let go, he has to reaffirm the fact that his initial decision was correct. He has to complete the process of letting go, which he finds difficult.

In returning to the past, J realised that he had to face the challenging confusion and adopt a different approach. He relived the painful unpleasant experiences, which had receded in memory and he returned to the deeper and darker levels of self, reliving the distress of the premarital relationship. J was familiar with the pain and realised that he had initially attempted to avoid the pain and confusion. J becomes aware that he had hastened the process in order to protect himself and come through unscathed. Finding nothing pleasant upon his return, J believes that he is finally confronting the matter in earnest.

**H. Significant Other:** (2. 3. 43. 44. 45. 84.)

Attempting to find a (quick) solution, J had attended to the surface aspects of the problem rather than the problem itself, and had moved on. He married hastily and had a child and, although he felt 'fine' and continued with his life, environmental aspects provoked the turmoil beneath the façade, and J realised that he had misinterpreted his recovery. He was unable to deal with the challenges of his present role as husband and father. It was in the relationship with the *significant other* (spouse) that J became aware that he had changed. He reflected on their relationship and realised that his reactions to minor incidents were exaggerated and aggressive. His emotional self continued to hold onto the earlier relationship with his ex-fiancée, and this impeded his marital relationship. J held on to the past relationship and was not committed to the present, even in the significant life-decision of his marriage. He was surprised at his own behaviour, perceiving it to be totally foreign.

**I. Continuity:** (30. 31. 32. 33. 34.)

Although the visible reality of the earlier relationship was absent in his interpersonal world, J continued to experience the conflict. He had gained from the experience but in the turbulence and instability that followed him leaving, J was unable constructively to apply what he had learned. J assumed that he would have applied the knowledge that he had gained from the relationship, but realised that such continuity was absent. He sought continuity in his life and made every effort simply to move on, committing himself to marriage and parenthood, rushed and confused roles that were hastily adopted. Nevertheless, he does believe that aspects from the earlier relationship have been retained, particularly regarding his choice of marital partner.

**J. Memories:** (10. 40. 41. 42. 56. 57. 58. 59. 81.)

After the break, J believed that he had discarded almost all memories of the relationship but still held onto the powerful pleasant *memories* on which he could continue to reflect. Pleasant memories remained on the surface and were meaningful. Those memories that he could easily recall soon after the break were now ten years later, vaguely present and,

like the relationship that no longer existed, the pain and emotional instability had receded in memory. Initially, the pleasant memories of the relationship outnumbered what were unpleasant, for the unpleasant memories had receded, and were hidden from awareness. With no ready recall of the unpleasant aspects, J misinterpreted the hidden memories as having healed and he continued with his life. He proudly believed that he had recovered, until the exaggerated outburst in the relationship with the significant other made him realise that he was not coping, but was still holding onto the earlier relationship. In the emerging turbulence, J needed to affirm that his initial decision had been correct. He had to return to the past and reveal the unpleasant thoughts and memories that had led to the initial decision. In retrospect, he realised that while the memories were not readily available for recall, the deeper (hidden) memories continued. J became aware of having deceived himself.

**K. Deception:** (46. 47. 48.)

*Deception* was a major complication, as J had misinterpreted his lack of immediate recall as meaning that he had successfully let go. He had falsely assumed that in the same manner that he had let go of his business and moved on with his life, so too, had he also let go of the relationship. Despite any retention in memory, J considered the visible absence of the relationship as being akin to the finality of death, and falsely assumed that the process of letting go would ‘naturally’ evolve over time.

**L. Façade:** (12. 22. 23. 80. 82. 83.)

With every effort, J convincingly portrayed a *façade* that the past was behind him and that he had let go and moved on. Though he appeared to be living, J did not feel alive. He continued to hold on tightly to the earlier relationship, and protected himself against the threatening instability and turmoil. To avoid confronting the issues that threatened, J continued to protect himself by increasing his activities and keeping busy by working and drinking. J’s efforts to let go and move on were merely appearances and superficial, as he desperately continued to hold on and continues to find it difficult to extricate himself completely.

**M. Integration:** (49. 50. 51.)

J had deceived himself, by perceiving his world in a manner that suited him. The reality he had perceived did not concur with the truth. His awareness of this made him realise that he had a problem. A divided sense of self emerged and J found it painful and difficult to *integrate* the self, define who he was, and find contentment. In order to do so, he had to return to the past, resume his holding-on position and face the truth. J gradually had to release holding on to the relationship, create space and finally move on.

**N. Gap:** (62. 66. 68. 71.)

For J, the ‘gap’ or area of vacillation was relevant to letting go. Mobility between what was positive and negative created the *gap*. The more excessive the negative aspects, the easier it was to leave but where the gap between the unpleasant and pleasant aspects of the relationship was marginal, then the decision to leave was doubtful and difficult. In his quest for stability, J sought an absolute. Despite his efforts to create a positive balance, the slightly negative factors appeared to justify him leaving.

**O. Retrospection:** (16. 17. 19. 20. 21. 35. 70.)

J continues with the lived struggle and attempts to resolve the emotional crisis, pain and aspects related to the break. *Retrospectively*, on reflection, he realises that he deceived himself, falsely believing that he had recovered. J realises, too, that had he resolved the emotional challenges sooner, he would have gained from the experience and prevented the negative effects that are now part of his present daily reality. Had he not held on to the earlier relationship, his life would have been different. By merely attending to the surface aspects of the problem and naively committing himself to marriage, he had created a new problem. J has learned from his experience and has become more aware of his present reality and his relationship to it. Facing the new conflict brings to awareness the choice and decision he has whether to face the challenge or repeat the earlier superficial behaviour. Personal responsibility is acknowledged with an acceptance of having to endure the consequences of the initial decision.

**P. The Clearing:** (87. 88. 89. 90.)

With the clearing of the turmoil and threatening disturbances, J views the ‘struggle’ as almost over and feels a sense of calm and stability approaching. He looks forward to the *light and tranquillity* that will soon enter his life but, in the anticipated calm, he foresees a problem on the new horizon. He is more aware of his reality, and realises that he is not alone but attached to present significant others (wife and child). J recognises his relatedness and attachment to the significant others and realises that his freedom is not absolute. He is aware that he is faced with additional responsibilities. The insight he gains facilitates his relation to the world. J believes that he can resolve the new challenges which face him

**Q. Process:** (79. 85.)

Because of the events that he has been through, J views letting go as a lengthy *process*, that has lasted ten years. The process is almost over.



**TABLE I**

Participant E: Karen (K)

Meaning Units	Central Theme
<p>(1) For K, letting go is a very broad term that makes her think of her children. K believes that the experience must be absolutely dreadful and devastating for parents who have lost their child. She finds it hard to cope with letting go when they are teenagers.</p>	<p>(1) In the parent-child relationship, K recognises letting go as pertaining to degrees of loss: from separation to death. While separating from her teenagers is difficult, their death would devastate her.</p>
<p>(2) What K found was that with Matt, her son, the first year of high school (age fourteen), was dreadful, because she felt absolutely rejected. Although as a child he was, and still is, very close to her, at parents' meetings he would make remarks and ask her to be quiet or not say anything. He would also ask her to drop him off away from where his friends would see them. K definitely had to realise her distance and how far she could go.</p>	<p>(2) Letting go during her son's early teen years was 'dreadful' for K, for, despite their closeness, she felt totally rejected by his comments and she became aware of a defined distance between them.</p>
<p>(3) After a while, Matt let K back in again. However, if they went out to parents' evening, he would ask her to behave and things like that. K was not really used to getting that sort of reprimand and being</p>	<p>(3) Though their closeness resumed, K continued to feel her son's disapproval. She realised that their relationship was changing; he was growing up and separating from her.</p>

<p>told how to behave. That is when she started to realise that he was growing up and moving away.</p> <p>(4) A psychologist friend explained to K that she could expect that sort of behaviour, which was part of the adolescents growing up and finding their feet. It was then easy for K to accept that.</p> <p>(5) K found it hurtful when her son would say little things about what embarrassed him about her. He would make her feel that she was ‘not cool’ or that she was overweight. It was also hurtful for K, not to react to what he had said but instead let go and let be.”</p> <p>(6) The next part of letting go was him going out to socials. K believed that she had to let her teenage son (and daughter) go. She had always thought that she could trust her children, but now she cannot trust the people out there. K is aware that from when she was a child, things have changed dramatically. When she was a teenager she could go on a bicycle, or on horseback, to places she would not even dream of letting her children go to today.</p>	<p>(4) A trusted professional opinion that her son’s behaviour was normal, made it easier for K to accept.</p> <p>(5) It was painful for K to experience her son’s disapproval and rejection of her, but also painful to contain and conceal her feelings (maintain a façade).</p> <p>(6) K rationally believes that she has to allow her adolescent son to enter the external environment, but emotionally she feels uncertain. K experiences conflict for although she trusts her children, she mistrusts the changing environment, which she finds threatening.</p>
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<p>(7) Letting go is also realising that her son Matt had attained his learner's licence and could start driving. The whole matric year K knew that he was learning to drive and doing well, while he was going for his driver's licence. He had not started driving but when he had obtained that licence, then he could go out and find his freedom. Once again she felt that feeling of wondering what was happening in the world out there. She knew that he could drive because he had his driver's licence. He had had the lessons and a lot of practice, but she still did not trust the people out there.</p> <p>(8) Letting go also occurred when Matt said that he was going to different places, like when he and his friends were going to meet in Hatfield. There are certain areas that K does feel are safer.</p> <p>(9) On the last day of school, Matt had a matric party. It was dreadful for K not saying something, and not being overprotective, but allowing him to experiment and hoping that he would come out on the other side, in one piece.</p> <p>(10) K knew that "boys will be boys".</p>	<p>(7) Despite evidence of her son's competence and legal permission (licence) to deal with the demands of the external environment, she continues to view that environment as threatening.</p> <p>(8) K believes that only certain areas of the external environment reduce the risk of threat to her son.</p> <p>(9) K found it most unpleasant having to maintain a façade to conceal her thoughts and feelings regarding her son's safety, while granting him freedom to explore.</p> <p>(10) In an effort to accept her son's</p>
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<p>Girls, she thinks, aren't as bad, although she has heard rumours that they also try alcohol. Teenagers go through a phase and test these things. Nikki, a colleague, had told her that her (Nikki's) husband believed that youth had to be allowed to get drunk and go overboard at some stage, before they were married. Hearing it from other young men who have been through that phase or are closer to that age, makes it a bit easier for K to accept.</p> <p>(11) In K's words: "But oh boy, it is a stressful time. Letting go, to me, is very stressful".</p> <p>(12) As a speech therapist, K can also see the stress of some of the mothers that come to her with their teenagers with stuttering problems. She has noticed that the parents and teenagers are at loggerheads, not with the stuttering problem, but with their interpersonal relationships, and not wanting to be an overprotective mother. K sees herself as protective but believes that she must not show too much and must let go.</p> <p>(13) Even the last year was quite a difficult year for K when suddenly she realised that Matt had a girlfriend. Matt and his girlfriend go out in a group and they go to a</p>	<p>behaviour, K attempts to understand the behavioural norm of youth and is receptive to the opinion of young adults whom she trusts.</p> <p>(11) K acknowledges that letting go is very stressful for her.</p> <p>(12) K is aware that that she is not the only mother who finds interpersonal tension in parenting adolescents. K rationally understands that she has to let go and must conceal her feelings regarding her son's safety.</p> <p>(13) The sudden realisation that her son had found a significant other, and that she could no longer rely on him as she used to, was difficult for K to accept.</p>
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<p>social but he never really had a girlfriend. Matt took a very nice girl to the matric dance, but she was just a friend. There was nothing serious, but then, suddenly, came the realisation that although K can ask Matt to do things, she has to accept that he cannot always do them for her because he has made prior arrangements with his girlfriend.</p> <p>(14) During matric or the first year at University, K was never driven to tears but in during the first year of high school, that letting go, that getting reprimanded and being put in her place and being a sort of a no-good person, in the eyes of her son, often reduced her to tears. That was really a tough and unhappy time for her.</p> <p>(15) K thinks that the concern that she feels for Matt is one of protection. She does not want anything to happen to him; it is that sort of thing. K really does not want anything to happen to Matt.</p> <p>(16) K sees so many times that it is the innocent person who drives along and is in a car crash and gets hurt. Often it is someone else who is drunk, and playing</p>	<p>(14) K found the initial letting go painful and difficult as she experienced rejection and disapproval. She would often cry and feel sad.</p> <p>(15) K fears that her son may come to harm and wants him to be safe. She feels protective of him.</p> <p>(16) K feels threatened by negligent and destructive aspects of the external environment that could harm her son.</p>
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<p>Russian roulette, is completely relaxed and survives everything.</p> <p>(17) K is aware that Matt has not had experience in driving and reacting to situations. That is what makes her anxious, as Matt does not have the wisdom. He is a young adult and although K feels that she has to respect him for that, she realises that he does not yet have the wisdom or the experience yet.</p> <p>(18) K looks back and realises that as a teenager or young person, she did things that were irresponsible. She did these things and does not want her child to do them, as she knows that it could lead to something. She feels that, luckily her irresponsible behaviour did not lead to something unfortunate, but it could have.</p> <p>(19) K admits to hanging on to the past. When she looks at old photographs, she often looks and sees that each phase is an interesting phase, and a nice phase to grow up with her child. When K looks at photographs, she recognises how fantastic that phase was, and sometimes wishes that she could have made time stand still for a little while.</p>	<p>(17) Though K respects her son as a 'young adult', she is aware that he still lacks experience (in driving) and wisdom (in life). This awareness makes her feel anxious.</p> <p>(18) K recalls her own adolescence and does not want her son to repeat the careless behaviour which could have dire consequences.</p> <p>(19) K treasures and holds on tightly to the past (earlier developmental phases shared with her son) as she desires to capture what she had and is reluctant to accept the passing of time.</p>
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<p>(20) K is not saying that the present is not a nice phase, not at all. It is a nice phase, with different and exciting things that come with it. As the phase of adolescence started, K often went through a lot of turmoil with a little bit of heartache at times.</p>	<p>(20) Despite the initial pain, turmoil and heartache, K recognises the pleasant aspects of the present phase (adolescence) with its diversity and excitement.</p>
<p>(21) K sees herself as a person who clings a bit to the past. She assumes that the difficulty with letting go is not looking to the past but looking forward and seeing positive things. She sometimes gets embroiled in the present and does not really see the things of the future. To K, that is the difficulty in letting go, that is what makes the letting go more difficult, not seeing the positive things ahead.</p>	<p>(21) K realises that her tight hold on the past, and her confused involvement in the present, obscures her vision of the future with its positive aspects, making letting go difficult.</p>
<p>(22) K does see positive things in the future, because when K looks at it, she looks forward to going to Matt's graduation and her daughter Alice's graduations. She believes that it will be fantastic. Another positive aspect is the thought that Matt has a job and is on his own. Although K can accept the positive aspects, sometimes when she is in the situation, it is difficult to accept things, like realising that Matt can have a girl-friend who takes priority over her – for example,</p>	<p>(22) K looks forward to the positive aspects of the future but finds it difficult to resolve conflicts in the present, like accepting that she is no longer the significant other in her son's life.</p>

<p>when Matt informs her that he cannot help her because he has a date – that sort of letting go.</p> <p>(23) K believes that she has sometimes taken things for granted as Matt had always been very close to her. Alice, her daughter sometimes shoves her away, but it was different with Matt. If K had asked him to help her with something he would do it whereas now he will refuse and say that he cannot help her because of some or other reason. K realises that she has to accept this because he has made an arrangement and cannot accommodate her. She believes that she has to respect this.</p> <p>(24) Sometimes, K gets home tired and realises that there is no one in the house to help. She realises that there is no use in her getting angry. She just has to think about it and acknowledge to herself that she is angry and frustrated because of things that have happened at work and that she cannot get it out on her children. That understanding is also letting go for K.</p> <p>(25) Alice, her daughter, is also getting older. K also thinks of the future and the empty nest syndrome and realises that her children are going out. She believes that</p>	<p>(23) K had falsely assumed that the close relationship with her son would always be there (taken for granted), but she has become aware of a distance between them, which she rationally believes she has to accept and respect.</p> <p>(24) In letting go, K rationally accepts that she has to be understanding. Rather than be self-centred, she has to conceal her true feelings (anger and aloneness) and consider her children's perspective above her own.</p> <p>(25) With the gradually increasing distance created by her younger daughter, who is also moving away, K is faced with a sense of aloneness and a changed</p>
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<p>she has to let her children go, and she is on her own now, and not doing family things any more.</p> <p>(26) They have always been a close-knit family. One of the things that has changed is not going on holiday together. Just accepting that, is letting go.</p> <p>(27) The first big thing was the matric holiday. K knew at the end of the year that Matt and his friends all wanted to go on holiday together. That was also letting go. K knew where they were going, and how they were going, but not whether they were going to get there and back safely. Just allowing them to go was a big step for K.</p> <p>(28) Matt's matric year was too terrible for K. The weeks before the December holidays Alice had water polo, as it was the nationals in Johannesburg. K and her husband wanted to fly Alice down on holiday to join them, but by the time Alice decided what she wanted to do, K could no longer get a cheaper ticket. So Alice went to water polo, and Matt stayed home to look after the house. K and her husband went away for the first time since K had been away with friends approximately</p>	<p>meaning of family, where the future is viewed as empty.</p> <p>(26) The family no longer shares a holiday together and K has to accept that their close-knit unit is changing.</p> <p>(27) Consenting to her son's holiday with his peers was a major move for K. Despite the knowledge she had regarding his trip, he was still entering the unknown and she was anxious about his safety.</p> <p>(28) Due to her children's individual activities, their family holiday had changed as K and her husband were separated from the children and, for the first time, left on holiday without them.</p>
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<p>twenty years ago.</p> <p>(29) In the weeks beforehand, there was much guilt about K leaving her children, as she felt that she was actually deserting them yet the children took it more easily easier. Alice missed her parents, and would have liked them to see some of the matches, but Alice was with her buddies and yet K still felt so guilty not being there with her.</p> <p>(30) Keith, her husband, took the separate holiday more easily, and K also saw this as letting go, where the children could have their own holidays and do their own thing while K and her husband could actually also do their own thing.</p> <p>(31) K thinks back on her relationship with her parents. They were also a close-knit family.</p> <p>(32) K also thinks of the future because both Matt and Alice have spoken about going overseas.</p> <p>(33) After being a student, K went overseas and often recalls having had a nice time. She enjoyed where she worked and was not sure whether she wanted to come back. She</p>	<p>(29) Although her children seemed to accept the separateness, K felt that she was being selfish and abandoning them.</p> <p>(30) The significant other's easier acceptance of the separation made K recognise the value of space and separateness.</p> <p>(31) K reflects on her own adolescence and recalls a similar closeness with her family of origin.</p> <p>(32) K looks to the future with its impending long-term and distant (overseas) separation from her children.</p> <p>(33) K recalls the joy of separateness (overseas) during her adolescence, her vacillating behaviour and difficult return. Despite her independence, K remained</p>
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<p>started to come back to visit because she would rather get German citizenship. With great difficulty, K returned, and even though she moved on and had her own flatet, she was still with the family and maintained contact with them.</p> <p>(34) Both Matt and Alice are talking about overseas. They would both like to go overseas. K hopes that they do go overseas. She wants them to go overseas and spread their wings. But she also has the feeling that they might not come back and that is the sort of scariness of being all alone.</p> <p>(35) K thinks that there are times she can cope because she finds activities to do, even when she is alone at home and there's nobody there. Johannes, the gardener comes twice a week and Alice is at school. K is alone with the dogs and has work to do, but it is the stillness of the house that is sort of eerie and uncomfortable. K is busy, her mind is busy but then she suddenly realises that everybody is out of the house. She imagines that she is at an age that she has retired and does not have her job anymore. There is only the stillness. K is very aware of all this because her dad is presently experiencing that loneliness.</p>	<p>attached to her family.</p> <p>(34) K (rationally) wants her children to fulfil their desire and create their distance (overseas), but (emotionally) fears that they may not return and that she will be left alone.</p> <p>(35) To avoid facing her sense of aloneness, K keeps busy, but in the unpleasant silence of her passivity, she is suddenly confronted with the reality of a future social seclusion and inactivity (retirement) which her father is presently experiencing.</p>
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<p>(36) K has seen her parents ageing and realises that it is a path that she has to travel as well. She has reached an age where she becomes aware of it, more aware of it, than if she were younger. Suddenly, ageing becomes a personal reality for K.</p> <p>(37) Regarding letting go, first of all there is a conflict. K knows that there is a conflict. She knows that she has to let go but she does not want to lose.</p> <p>(38) Letting go is, in a way losing – losing the person she shares with, the company and the understanding with her family. K has a different relationship with each member. There are certain things that she does not want to burden her children with, but there are certain things that she does discuss with them. In a way they are a sounding board for her. K sees letting go as a loss, a painful process that is not nice.</p> <p>(39) Erica, a colleague, recently commented that she had not seen Matt for a long time, and asked K whether it was his academic activities, or other activities besides the studies. K replied that it involved all his activities so she had to take second place K sees herself as not being</p>	<p>(36) K becomes aware of the ageing process as a personal reality and she realises that she will follow the same path as her parents.</p> <p>(37) K experiences conflicting thoughts and feelings. She rationally understands that she has to grant her children space, but is emotionally afraid of loss.</p> <p>(38) For K letting go is a painful and unpleasant process of loss, which means being deprived of the sense of oneness (company, sharing and understanding) that she enjoys with the family and its individual members.</p> <p>(39) The outside world verifies the presence of the distance between K and her son. She no longer feels significant to him but, rather than reveal the truth, K attempts to maintain a façade and grant him space.</p>
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<p>needed. She believes that she has got to take a step back but has to remind herself, to do it gracefully.</p> <p>(40) To K it was very difficult to accept that Matt could have a girlfriend, yet with a chuckle adds that she would rather he had a girlfriend than a boyfriend. K realises that he is no longer her little boy.</p> <p>(41) K admits that the girlfriend is a lovely girl and that she really has no complaints about her, but admits to having mixed feelings. The girlfriend attended the local Girls High School and is a bit younger than Matt. She finished school the year after Matt did.</p> <p>(42) Letting go is a painful process for K who feels empty, alone and discarded. With a giggle, K refers to herself as “this interfering old lady” who will possibly be told by her children to “keep out” of their lives. K admits that although these may be silly things, these are the feelings and emotions she has, and she is aware that this does happen.</p>	<p>(40) Being replaced as the significant other in her son’s life is difficult for K to accept, which she attempts to do through cognitive reasoning (regarding his sexual identity).</p> <p>(41) K acknowledges ambivalent feelings regarding the new significant other in her son’s life. K attempts to gain rational control and conceal her true feelings.</p> <p>(42) Letting go is a painful process for K, who experiences a sense of aloneness with feelings of emptiness, abandonment and rejection.</p>
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<p>(43) Discarding is there because K sees it happening with other people. With her dad being in the old age home, she can see how some old people never have families over to visit. Some families may be overseas and the old people may have a friend, a niece or somebody who occasionally comes around and calls on them. Some of them, however, are like an old shoe, just put in the cupboard, put in the drawer and that is it. K thinks of these things because she sees them.</p>	<p>(43) K is aware of abandoned old people, who are either distant from their significant others, or alone, with no meaningful relationships.</p>
<p>(44) K realises that perhaps somebody from a different background would not be as sensitive and critical of things as she is. She believes that her professional role as a speech therapist has influenced her.</p>	<p>(44) K realises that her paramedical experience has influenced her and made her more aware of abandonment.</p>
<p>(45) Furthermore, things that have happened to her have contributed to her attitude, like losing her mother and losing her brother, Adam. Perhaps this has made her want to hang onto things.</p>	<p>(45) The personal loss of significant others in her life has also influenced K in her need to hold on tightly to meaningful relationships.</p>
<p>(46) By hanging on, K means wanting things to still be around as she still misses her mother and brother. There are things that she wants to share with them and she thinks that it is that sort of sharing that she wants to sometimes just talk to them.</p>	<p>(46) Having experienced loss, K holds on tightly to retain what she has. She desires continuity of the oneness shared with the significant others.</p>

<p>(47) Even though K has not lost her child, his or her moving on means that she loses that sharing and that togetherness.</p> <p>(48) K summarises and describes the start of letting go as a painful process, after which her teenagers started telling her that they wanted to let go and wanted her to let go.</p> <p>(49) K does feel a certain amount of rejection. Because her children do not know that, they knock her sometimes and say unpleasant things. K, however, knows that she has to let go. She thinks ahead of what could happen, and the unpleasant negative things that should not happen.</p> <p>(50) The unpleasant, negative things of letting go are scary and painful. They make for the saddest times. K admits to seeing the sadder and more negative things instead of the positive things that are there as well. She realises that there are positive things but, as she is going through the process, the positive aspects are usually overshadowed by what is painful.</p>	<p>(47) As a parent, K feels a sense of loss in losing the shared oneness previously enjoyed.</p> <p>(48) For K, letting go began as a painful process, followed by the adolescents' request for a mutual creation of space and separation.</p> <p>(49) K feels rejected, but believes that her adolescent children are not aware of this. Her knowledge and understanding of the process equip her rationally to gain control and avoid negativity.</p> <p>(50) In the process of letting go, the unpleasant negative aspects (threat, pain, and intense sadness) obscure her perception of what is positive.</p>
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**TABLE II**

Participant D: John (J)

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**Constituents of the Individual Situated Structure of Letting Go**

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**A. Two Situations:** (1. 7. 27. 28. 29.)

J recalls and compares two different situated experiences of letting go. The one was letting go of his first business, while the other was letting go of his ex-fiancée. J believes that the decision preceding the separation from his ex-fiancée, determined the nature of letting go. While letting go of his business was easy, letting go of the relationship continues to be difficult. Both situations took place during the same period (ten years ago) in his life but he continues to hold on to the relationship. In his view of the future, at the time of the business and the premarital relationship, J saw himself in another business, but also married with children in a happy family. He considered letting go to be the same in both situations but has discovered that he had not let go of the relationship. Furthermore, he experienced a constructive continuity from the business as he could apply what he had learned and retained to his present business, but this was not the case regarding the knowledge and experience gained in the earlier relationship.

**B. Business:** (8. 24. 26. 39. 63. 64. 65. 67. 72. 86.)

For J, letting go of his first business was easy, as he had been convinced of his decision to leave. Remaining in a negative situation can lead to aggression. The excessive negative aspects of the business far exceeded what was positive and the anger he felt at the time pushed for the break, making it easier for him to leave. He had not held on to the business and knew that he had made the right decision.

Upon leaving the business, the pain and healing period was brief. In the stability and calm that followed, J soon felt relief at having let go. He could think clearly and allow for future opportunity, as well as move on and continue with his life. Leaving the



business was not a process, but was liberating and simple. He is happy in his present business.

**C. Decision** (4. 5.)

Feeling immobilised in a situation that he felt was going nowhere, J decided to take control and made a *decision* to leave the premarital relationship. He felt conflicted about leaving, for although rationally assured about the move, he was emotionally unhappy to do so. He experienced pain and conflict, and doubted his decision to leave. Despite his uncertainty about leaving, time and circumstance coerced him to move on and he believed that he had 'let go'.

**E. Emotional crisis:** (35. 36. 37. 38.)

The decision and commitment to leave the relationship gave rise to an *emotional crisis*, which led to a stormy mental struggle that created pain and instability (turbulence). In a later attempt to resolve the emotional crisis, J returned to review his earlier decision, but the uncertainty surrounding the decision led to a repeat of the process and extended the pain and instability (turbulence) further. J continues with the lived struggle and attempts to resolve the emotional crisis, pain and aspects related to the break.

**E. Holding on:** (13. 14. 15. 18. 25.)

In doubting his decision, J continued to *hold on to* the premarital relationship, which though sustaining, was also damaging and detrimental as it deterred progress and impeded healing. J admits that had he let go and not held on, he would have made the initial step towards healing, but this was not possible at the time. The holding on continued and gave rise to inner turmoil and emotional instability which needed to be resolved urgently. In the storm of emotional turmoil, doubt and conflict, there was a struggle for stability and survival.

**F. Stability vs Instability:** (61. 69. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78.)

In the conflict associated with the decision, J oscillated emotionally and vacillated in his thoughts. He doubted his decision and felt emotionally vulnerable. He realised that

leaving would be painful and he attempted to protect himself against the turmoil and pain of the break. In the experienced *instability* and turbulence, J had hoped that his decision would help him find stability. However, even after the decision was made, the doubt and turbulence continued as the negative aspects of the relationship had only slightly exceeded what was pleasant. His anger and irritation at the time provided the extra push for him to leave. However, once he had let go of the relationship, he held on to the positive aspects of the changed situation in which he found himself, and sought to protect himself against the pain. J sought *stability* by desperately holding onto the pleasant memories of the relationship. He also justified the change, feeling pleased that the negative frustrations of the relationship were no longer present. Though he felt relief at having left, there was a painful desire to resume the relationship. The turbulence continued, for though J had hoped to find stability, the intense desire following the decision created further instability. The process was repetitive and the instability and turbulence continued.

**G. Return:** (6. 9. 11. 52. 53. 54. 55. 60.)

J's doubtful initial decision gave rise to uncertainties in the present which led him to *return* (ten years later) to the earlier events preceding the decision. J reflected upon and returned to the past in order to question and re-evaluate the impulsive decision he had taken. Before he can finally let go, he has to reaffirm the fact that his initial decision was correct. He has to complete the process of letting go, which he finds difficult.

In returning to the past, J realised that he had to face the challenging confusion and adopt a different approach. He relived the painful unpleasant experiences, which had receded in memory and he returned to the deeper and darker levels of self, reliving the distress of the premarital relationship. J was familiar with the pain and realised that he had initially attempted to avoid the pain and confusion. J becomes aware that he had hastened the process in order to protect himself and come through unscathed. Finding nothing pleasant upon his return, J believes that he is finally confronting the matter in earnest.

**H. Significant Other:** (2. 3. 43. 44. 45. 84.)

Attempting to find a (quick) solution, J had attended to the surface aspects of the problem rather than the problem itself, and had moved on. He married hastily and had a child and, although he felt 'fine' and continued with his life, environmental aspects provoked the turmoil beneath the façade, and J realised that he had misinterpreted his recovery. He was unable to deal with the challenges of his present role as husband and father. It was in the relationship with the *significant other* (spouse) that J became aware that he had changed. He reflected on their relationship and realised that his reactions to minor incidents were exaggerated and aggressive. His emotional self continued to hold onto the earlier relationship with his ex-fiancée, and this impeded his marital relationship. J held on to the past relationship and was not committed to the present, even in the significant life-decision of his marriage. He was surprised at his own behaviour, perceiving it to be totally foreign.

**I. Continuity:** (30. 31. 32. 33. 34.)

Although the visible reality of the earlier relationship was absent in his interpersonal world, J continued to experience the conflict. He had gained from the experience but in the turbulence and instability that followed him leaving, J was unable constructively to apply what he had learned. J assumed that he would have applied the knowledge that he had gained from the relationship, but realised that such continuity was absent. He sought continuity in his life and made every effort simply to move on, committing himself to marriage and parenthood, rushed and confused roles that were hastily adopted. Nevertheless, he does believe that aspects from the earlier relationship have been retained, particularly regarding his choice of marital partner.

**J. Memories:** (10. 40. 41. 42. 56. 57. 58. 59. 81.)

After the break, J believed that he had discarded almost all memories of the relationship but still held onto the powerful pleasant *memories* on which he could continue to reflect. Pleasant memories remained on the surface and were meaningful. Those memories that he could easily recall soon after the break were now ten years later, vaguely present and,

like the relationship that no longer existed, the pain and emotional instability had receded in memory. Initially, the pleasant memories of the relationship outnumbered what were unpleasant, for the unpleasant memories had receded, and were hidden from awareness. With no ready recall of the unpleasant aspects, J misinterpreted the hidden memories as having healed and he continued with his life. He proudly believed that he had recovered, until the exaggerated outburst in the relationship with the significant other made him realise that he was not coping, but was still holding onto the earlier relationship. In the emerging turbulence, J needed to affirm that his initial decision had been correct. He had to return to the past and reveal the unpleasant thoughts and memories that had led to the initial decision. In retrospect, he realised that while the memories were not readily available for recall, the deeper (hidden) memories continued. J became aware of having deceived himself.

**K. Deception:** (46. 47. 48.)

*Deception* was a major complication, as J had misinterpreted his lack of immediate recall as meaning that he had successfully let go. He had falsely assumed that in the same manner that he had let go of his business and moved on with his life, so too, had he also let go of the relationship. Despite any retention in memory, J considered the visible absence of the relationship as being akin to the finality of death, and falsely assumed that the process of letting go would ‘naturally’ evolve over time.

**L. Façade:** (12. 22. 23. 80. 82. 83.)

With every effort, J convincingly portrayed a *façade* that the past was behind him and that he had let go and moved on. Though he appeared to be living, J did not feel alive. He continued to hold on tightly to the earlier relationship, and protected himself against the threatening instability and turmoil. To avoid confronting the issues that threatened, J continued to protect himself by increasing his activities and keeping busy by working and drinking. J’s efforts to let go and move on were merely appearances and superficial, as he desperately continued to hold on and continues to find it difficult to extricate himself completely.

**M. Integration:** (49. 50. 51.)

J had deceived himself, by perceiving his world in a manner that suited him. The reality he had perceived did not concur with the truth. His awareness of this made him realise that he had a problem. A divided sense of self emerged and J found it painful and difficult to *integrate* the self, define who he was, and find contentment. In order to do so, he had to return to the past, resume his holding-on position and face the truth. J gradually had to release holding on to the relationship, create space and finally move on.

**N. Gap:** (62. 66. 68. 71.)

For J, the ‘gap’ or area of vacillation was relevant to letting go. Mobility between what was positive and negative created the *gap*. The more excessive the negative aspects, the easier it was to leave but where the gap between the unpleasant and pleasant aspects of the relationship was marginal, then the decision to leave was doubtful and difficult. In his quest for stability, J sought an absolute. Despite his efforts to create a positive balance, the slightly negative factors appeared to justify him leaving.

**O. Retrospection:** (16. 17. 19. 20. 21. 35. 70.)

J continues with the lived struggle and attempts to resolve the emotional crisis, pain and aspects related to the break. *Retrospectively*, on reflection, he realises that he deceived himself, falsely believing that he had recovered. J realises, too, that had he resolved the emotional challenges sooner, he would have gained from the experience and prevented the negative effects that are now part of his present daily reality. Had he not held on to the earlier relationship, his life would have been different. By merely attending to the surface aspects of the problem and naively committing himself to marriage, he had created a new problem. J has learned from his experience and has become more aware of his present reality and his relationship to it. Facing the new conflict brings to awareness the choice and decision he has whether to face the challenge or repeat the earlier superficial behaviour. Personal responsibility is acknowledged with an acceptance of having to endure the consequences of the initial decision.

**P. The Clearing:** (87. 88. 89. 90.)

With the clearing of the turmoil and threatening disturbances, J views the ‘struggle’ as almost over and feels a sense of calm and stability approaching. He looks forward to the *light and tranquillity* that will soon enter his life but, in the anticipated calm, he foresees a problem on the new horizon. He is more aware of his reality, and realises that he is not alone but attached to present significant others (wife and child). J recognises his relatedness and attachment to the significant others and realises that his freedom is not absolute. He is aware that he is faced with additional responsibilities. The insight he gains facilitates his relation to the world. J believes that he can resolve the new challenges which face him

**Q. Process:** (79. 85.)

Because of the events that he has been through, J views letting go as a lengthy *process*, that has lasted ten years. The process is almost over.

**TABLE I**

Participant E: Karen (K)

Meaning Units	Central Theme
<p>(1) For K, letting go is a very broad term that makes her think of her children. K believes that the experience must be absolutely dreadful and devastating for parents who have lost their child. She finds it hard to cope with letting go when they are teenagers.</p>	<p>(3) In the parent-child relationship, K recognises letting go as pertaining to degrees of loss: from separation to death. While separating from her teenagers is difficult, their death would devastate her.</p>
<p>(2) What K found was that with Matt, her son, the first year of high school (age fourteen), was dreadful, because she felt absolutely rejected. Although as a child he was, and still is, very close to her, at parents' meetings he would make remarks and ask her to be quiet or not say anything. He would also ask her to drop him off away from where his friends would see them. K definitely had to realise her distance and how far she could go.</p>	<p>(4) Letting go during her son's early teen years was 'dreadful' for K, for, despite their closeness, she felt totally rejected by his comments and she became aware of a defined distance between them.</p>
<p>(3) After a while, Matt let K back in again. However, if they went out to parents' evening, he would ask her to behave and things like that. K was not really used to getting that sort of reprimand and being</p>	<p>(3) Though their closeness resumed, K continued to feel her son's disapproval. She realised that their relationship was changing; he was growing up and separating from her.</p>

<p>told how to behave. That is when she started to realise that he was growing up and moving away.</p> <p>(4) A psychologist friend explained to K that she could expect that sort of behaviour, which was part of the adolescents growing up and finding their feet. It was then easy for K to accept that.</p> <p>(5) K found it hurtful when her son would say little things about what embarrassed him about her. He would make her feel that she was ‘not cool’ or that she was overweight. It was also hurtful for K, not to react to what he had said but instead let go and let be.”</p> <p>(6) The next part of letting go was him going out to socials. K believed that she had to let her teenage son (and daughter) go. She had always thought that she could trust her children, but now she cannot trust the people out there. K is aware that from when she was a child, things have changed dramatically. When she was a teenager she could go on a bicycle, or on horseback, to places she would not even dream of letting her children go to today.</p>	<p>(5) A trusted professional opinion that her son’s behaviour was normal, made it easier for K to accept.</p> <p>(5) It was painful for K to experience her son’s disapproval and rejection of her, but also painful to contain and conceal her feelings (maintain a façade).</p> <p>(7) K rationally believes that she has to allow her adolescent son to enter the external environment, but emotionally she feels uncertain. K experiences conflict for although she trusts her children, she mistrusts the changing environment, which she finds threatening.</p>
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<p>(7) Letting go is also realising that her son Matt had attained his learner's licence and could start driving. The whole matric year K knew that he was learning to drive and doing well, while he was going for his driver's licence. He had not started driving but when he had obtained that licence, then he could go out and find his freedom. Once again she felt that feeling of wondering what was happening in the world out there. She knew that he could drive because he had his driver's licence. He had had the lessons and a lot of practice, but she still did not trust the people out there.</p> <p>(8) Letting go also occurred when Matt said that he was going to different places, like when he and his friends were going to meet in Hatfield. There are certain areas that K does feel are safer.</p> <p>(9) On the last day of school, Matt had a matric party. It was dreadful for K not saying something, and not being overprotective, but allowing him to experiment and hoping that he would come out on the other side, in one piece.</p> <p>(10) K knew that "boys will be boys".</p>	<p>(7) Despite evidence of her son's competence and legal permission (licence) to deal with the demands of the external environment, she continues to view that environment as threatening.</p> <p>(9) K believes that only certain areas of the external environment reduce the risk of threat to her son.</p> <p>(9) K found it most unpleasant having to maintain a façade to conceal her thoughts and feelings regarding her son's safety, while granting him freedom to explore.</p> <p>(10) In an effort to accept her son's</p>
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<p>Girls, she thinks, aren't as bad, although she has heard rumours that they also try alcohol. Teenagers go through a phase and test these things. Nikki, a colleague, had told her that her (Nikki's) husband believed that youth had to be allowed to get drunk and go overboard at some stage, before they were married. Hearing it from other young men who have been through that phase or are closer to that age, makes it a bit easier for K to accept.</p> <p>(11) In K's words: "But oh boy, it is a stressful time. Letting go, to me, is very stressful".</p> <p>(12) As a speech therapist, K can also see the stress of some of the mothers that come to her with their teenagers with stuttering problems. She has noticed that the parents and teenagers are at loggerheads, not with the stuttering problem, but with their interpersonal relationships, and not wanting to be an overprotective mother. K sees herself as protective but believes that she must not show too much and must let go.</p> <p>(13) Even the last year was quite a difficult year for K when suddenly she realised that Matt had a girlfriend. Matt and his girlfriend go out in a group and they go to a</p>	<p>behaviour, K attempts to understand the behavioural norm of youth and is receptive to the opinion of young adults whom she trusts.</p> <p>(11) K acknowledges that letting go is very stressful for her.</p> <p>(12) K is aware that that she is not the only mother who finds interpersonal tension in parenting adolescents. K rationally understands that she has to let go and must conceal her feelings regarding her son's safety.</p> <p>(13) The sudden realisation that her son had found a significant other, and that she could no longer rely on him as she used to, was difficult for K to accept.</p>
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<p>social but he never really had a girlfriend. Matt took a very nice girl to the matric dance, but she was just a friend. There was nothing serious, but then, suddenly, came the realisation that although K can ask Matt to do things, she has to accept that he cannot always do them for her because he has made prior arrangements with his girlfriend.</p> <p>(14) During matric or the first year at University, K was never driven to tears but in during the first year of high school, that letting go, that getting reprimanded and being put in her place and being a sort of a no-good person, in the eyes of her son, often reduced her to tears. That was really a tough and unhappy time for her.</p> <p>(15) K thinks that the concern that she feels for Matt is one of protection. She does not want anything to happen to him; it is that sort of thing. K really does not want anything to happen to Matt.</p> <p>(16) K sees so many times that it is the innocent person who drives along and is in a car crash and gets hurt. Often it is someone else who is drunk, and playing</p>	<p>(14) K found the initial letting go painful and difficult as she experienced rejection and disapproval. She would often cry and feel sad.</p> <p>(15) K fears that her son may come to harm and wants him to be safe. She feels protective of him.</p> <p>(16) K feels threatened by negligent and destructive aspects of the external environment that could harm her son.</p>
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<p>Russian roulette, is completely relaxed and survives everything.</p> <p>(17) K is aware that Matt has not had experience in driving and reacting to situations. That is what makes her anxious, as Matt does not have the wisdom. He is a young adult and although K feels that she has to respect him for that, she realises that he does not yet have the wisdom or the experience yet.</p> <p>(18) K looks back and realises that as a teenager or young person, she did things that were irresponsible. She did these things and does not want her child to do them, as she knows that it could lead to something. She feels that, luckily her irresponsible behaviour did not lead to something unfortunate, but it could have.</p> <p>(19) K admits to hanging on to the past. When she looks at old photographs, she often looks and sees that each phase is an interesting phase, and a nice phase to grow up with her child. When K looks at photographs, she recognises how fantastic that phase was, and sometimes wishes that she could have made time stand still for a little while.</p>	<p>(17) Though K respects her son as a 'young adult', she is aware that he still lacks experience (in driving) and wisdom (in life). This awareness makes her feel anxious.</p> <p>(18) K recalls her own adolescence and does not want her son to repeat the careless behaviour which could have dire consequences.</p> <p>(19) K treasures and holds on tightly to the past (earlier developmental phases shared with her son) as she desires to capture what she had and is reluctant to accept the passing of time.</p>
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<p>(20) K is not saying that the present is not a nice phase, not at all. It is a nice phase, with different and exciting things that come with it. As the phase of adolescence started, K often went through a lot of turmoil with a little bit of heartache at times.</p>	<p>(20) Despite the initial pain, turmoil and heartache, K recognises the pleasant aspects of the present phase (adolescence) with its diversity and excitement.</p>
<p>(21) K sees herself as a person who clings a bit to the past. She assumes that the difficulty with letting go is not looking to the past but looking forward and seeing positive things. She sometimes gets embroiled in the present and does not really see the things of the future. To K, that is the difficulty in letting go, that is what makes the letting go more difficult, not seeing the positive things ahead.</p>	<p>(21) K realises that her tight hold on the past, and her confused involvement in the present, obscures her vision of the future with its positive aspects, making letting go difficult.</p>
<p>(22) K does see positive things in the future, because when K looks at it, she looks forward to going to Matt's graduation and her daughter Alice's graduations. She believes that it will be fantastic. Another positive aspect is the thought that Matt has a job and is on his own. Although K can accept the positive aspects, sometimes when she is in the situation, it is difficult to accept things, like realising that Matt can have a girl-friend who takes priority over her – for example,</p>	<p>(22) K looks forward to the positive aspects of the future but finds it difficult to resolve conflicts in the present, like accepting that she is no longer the significant other in her son's life.</p>

<p>when Matt informs her that he cannot help her because he has a date – that sort of letting go.</p> <p>(23) K believes that she has sometimes taken things for granted as Matt had always been very close to her. Alice, her daughter sometimes shoves her away, but it was different with Matt. If K had asked him to help her with something he would do it whereas now he will refuse and say that he cannot help her because of some or other reason. K realises that she has to accept this because he has made an arrangement and cannot accommodate her. She believes that she has to respect this.</p> <p>(24) Sometimes, K gets home tired and realises that there is no one in the house to help. She realises that there is no use in her getting angry. She just has to think about it and acknowledge to herself that she is angry and frustrated because of things that have happened at work and that she cannot get it out on her children. That understanding is also letting go for K.</p> <p>(25) Alice, her daughter, is also getting older. K also thinks of the future and the empty nest syndrome and realises that her children are going out. She believes that</p>	<p>(23) K had falsely assumed that the close relationship with her son would always be there (taken for granted), but she has become aware of a distance between them, which she rationally believes she has to accept and respect.</p> <p>(24) In letting go, K rationally accepts that she has to be understanding. Rather than be self-centred, she has to conceal her true feelings (anger and aloneness) and consider her children's perspective above her own.</p> <p>(25) With the gradually increasing distance created by her younger daughter, who is also moving away, K is faced with a sense of aloneness and a changed</p>
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<p>she has to let her children go, and she is on her own now, and not doing family things any more.</p> <p>(26) They have always been a close-knit family. One of the things that has changed is not going on holiday together. Just accepting that, is letting go.</p> <p>(27) The first big thing was the matric holiday. K knew at the end of the year that Matt and his friends all wanted to go on holiday together. That was also letting go. K knew where they were going, and how they were going, but not whether they were going to get there and back safely. Just allowing them to go was a big step for K.</p> <p>(28) Matt's matric year was too terrible for K. The weeks before the December holidays Alice had water polo, as it was the nationals in Johannesburg. K and her husband wanted to fly Alice down on holiday to join them, but by the time Alice decided what she wanted to do, K could no longer get a cheaper ticket. So Alice went to water polo, and Matt stayed home to look after the house. K and her husband went away for the first time since K had been away with friends approximately</p>	<p>meaning of family, where the future is viewed as empty.</p> <p>(26) The family no longer shares a holiday together and K has to accept that their close-knit unit is changing.</p> <p>(27) Consenting to her son's holiday with his peers was a major move for K. Despite the knowledge she had regarding his trip, he was still entering the unknown and she was anxious about his safety.</p> <p>(28) Due to her children's individual activities, their family holiday had changed as K and her husband were separated from the children and, for the first time, left on holiday without them.</p>
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<p>twenty years ago.</p> <p>(29) In the weeks beforehand, there was much guilt about K leaving her children, as she felt that she was actually deserting them yet the children took it more easily easier. Alice missed her parents, and would have liked them to see some of the matches, but Alice was with her buddies and yet K still felt so guilty not being there with her.</p> <p>(30) Keith, her husband, took the separate holiday more easily, and K also saw this as letting go, where the children could have their own holidays and do their own thing while K and her husband could actually also do their own thing.</p> <p>(31) K thinks back on her relationship with her parents. They were also a close-knit family.</p> <p>(32) K also thinks of the future because both Matt and Alice have spoken about going overseas.</p> <p>(33) After being a student, K went overseas and often recalls having had a nice time. She enjoyed where she worked and was not sure whether she wanted to come back. She</p>	<p>(29) Although her children seemed to accept the separateness, K felt that she was being selfish and abandoning them.</p> <p>(30) The significant other's easier acceptance of the separation made K recognise the value of space and separateness.</p> <p>(31) K reflects on her own adolescence and recalls a similar closeness with her family of origin.</p> <p>(32) K looks to the future with its impending long-term and distant (overseas) separation from her children.</p> <p>(33) K recalls the joy of separateness (overseas) during her adolescence, her vacillating behaviour and difficult return. Despite her independence, K remained</p>
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<p>started to come back to visit because she would rather get German citizenship. With great difficulty, K returned, and even though she moved on and had her own flatet, she was still with the family and maintained contact with them.</p> <p>(34) Both Matt and Alice are talking about overseas. They would both like to go overseas. K hopes that they do go overseas. She wants them to go overseas and spread their wings. But she also has the feeling that they might not come back and that is the sort of scariness of being all alone.</p> <p>(35) K thinks that there are times she can cope because she finds activities to do, even when she is alone at home and there's nobody there. Johannes, the gardener comes twice a week and Alice is at school. K is alone with the dogs and has work to do, but it is the stillness of the house that is sort of eerie and uncomfortable. K is busy, her mind is busy but then she suddenly realises that everybody is out of the house. She imagines that she is at an age that she has retired and does not have her job anymore. There is only the stillness. K is very aware of all this because her dad is presently experiencing that loneliness.</p>	<p>attached to her family.</p> <p>(34) K (rationally) wants her children to fulfil their desire and create their distance (overseas), but (emotionally) fears that they may not return and that she will be left alone.</p> <p>(35) To avoid facing her sense of aloneness, K keeps busy, but in the unpleasant silence of her passivity, she is suddenly confronted with the reality of a future social seclusion and inactivity (retirement) which her father is presently experiencing.</p>
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<p>(36) K has seen her parents ageing and realises that it is a path that she has to travel as well. She has reached an age where she becomes aware of it, more aware of it, than if she were younger. Suddenly, ageing becomes a personal reality for K.</p> <p>(37) Regarding letting go, first of all there is a conflict. K knows that there is a conflict. She knows that she has to let go but she does not want to lose.</p> <p>(38) Letting go is, in a way losing – losing the person she shares with, the company and the understanding with her family. K has a different relationship with each member. There are certain things that she does not want to burden her children with, but there are certain things that she does discuss with them. In a way they are a sounding board for her. K sees letting go as a loss, a painful process that is not nice.</p> <p>(39) Erica, a colleague, recently commented that she had not seen Matt for a long time, and asked K whether it was his academic activities, or other activities besides the studies. K replied that it involved all his activities so she had to take second place K sees herself as not being</p>	<p>(36) K becomes aware of the ageing process as a personal reality and she realises that she will follow the same path as her parents.</p> <p>(37) K experiences conflicting thoughts and feelings. She rationally understands that she has to grant her children space, but is emotionally afraid of loss.</p> <p>(38) For K letting go is a painful and unpleasant process of loss, which means being deprived of the sense of oneness (company, sharing and understanding) that she enjoys with the family and its individual members.</p> <p>(39) The outside world verifies the presence of the distance between K and her son. She no longer feels significant to him but, rather than reveal the truth, K attempts to maintain a façade and grant him space.</p>
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<p>needed. She believes that she has got to take a step back but has to remind herself, to do it gracefully.</p> <p>(40) To K it was very difficult to accept that Matt could have a girlfriend, yet with a chuckle adds that she would rather he had a girlfriend than a boyfriend. K realises that he is no longer her little boy.</p> <p>(41) K admits that the girlfriend is a lovely girl and that she really has no complaints about her, but admits to having mixed feelings. The girlfriend attended the local Girls High School and is a bit younger than Matt. She finished school the year after Matt did.</p> <p>(42) Letting go is a painful process for K who feels empty, alone and discarded. With a giggle, K refers to herself as “this interfering old lady” who will possibly be told by her children to “keep out” of their lives. K admits that although these may be silly things, these are the feelings and emotions she has, and she is aware that this does happen.</p>	<p>(40) Being replaced as the significant other in her son’s life is difficult for K to accept, which she attempts to do through cognitive reasoning (regarding his sexual identity).</p> <p>(41) K acknowledges ambivalent feelings regarding the new significant other in her son’s life. K attempts to gain rational control and conceal her true feelings.</p> <p>(42) Letting go is a painful process for K, who experiences a sense of aloneness with feelings of emptiness, abandonment and rejection.</p>
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<p>(43) Discarding is there because K sees it happening with other people. With her dad being in the old age home, she can see how some old people never have families over to visit. Some families may be overseas and the old people may have a friend, a niece or somebody who occasionally comes around and calls on them. Some of them, however, are like an old shoe, just put in the cupboard, put in the drawer and that is it. K thinks of these things because she sees them.</p>	<p>(43) K is aware of abandoned old people, who are either distant from their significant others, or alone, with no meaningful relationships.</p>
<p>(44) K realises that perhaps somebody from a different background would not be as sensitive and critical of things as she is. She believes that her professional role as a speech therapist has influenced her.</p>	<p>(44) K realises that her paramedical experience has influenced her and made her more aware of abandonment.</p>
<p>(45) Furthermore, things that have happened to her have contributed to her attitude, like losing her mother and losing her brother, Adam. Perhaps this has made her want to hang onto things.</p>	<p>(45) The personal loss of significant others in her life has also influenced K in her need to hold on tightly to meaningful relationships.</p>
<p>(46) By hanging on, K means wanting things to still be around as she still misses her mother and brother. There are things that she wants to share with them and she thinks that it is that sort of sharing that she wants to sometimes just talk to them.</p>	<p>(46) Having experienced loss, K holds on tightly to retain what she has. She desires continuity of the oneness shared with the significant others.</p>

<p>(47) Even though K has not lost her child, his or her moving on means that she loses that sharing and that togetherness.</p> <p>(48) K summarises and describes the start of letting go as a painful process, after which her teenagers started telling her that they wanted to let go and wanted her to let go.</p> <p>(49) K does feel a certain amount of rejection. Because her children do not know that, they knock her sometimes and say unpleasant things. K, however, knows that she has to let go. She thinks ahead of what could happen, and the unpleasant negative things that should not happen.</p> <p>(50) The unpleasant, negative things of letting go are scary and painful. They make for the saddest times. K admits to seeing the sadder and more negative things instead of the positive things that are there as well. She realises that there are positive things but, as she is going through the process, the positive aspects are usually overshadowed by what is painful.</p>	<p>(47) As a parent, K feels a sense of loss in losing the shared oneness previously enjoyed.</p> <p>(48) For K, letting go began as a painful process, followed by the adolescents' request for a mutual creation of space and separation.</p> <p>(49) K feels rejected, but believes that her adolescent children are not aware of this. Her knowledge and understanding of the process equip her rationally to gain control and avoid negativity.</p> <p>(50) In the process of letting go, the unpleasant negative aspects (threat, pain, and intense sadness) obscure her perception of what is positive.</p>
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**TABLE II**

Participant E: Karen (K)

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**Constituents of the Individual Situated Structure of Letting Go**

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**A. Stress and Conflict** (11. 37.)

Letting go was very *stressful* for K who experienced *conflicting thoughts* and feelings. While she rationally understood that she has to grant space to her adolescents, she was emotionally afraid of loss.

**B. Loss:** (1. 38. 45. 46. 47.)

For K, the situation of letting go occurred in the parent-child relationship and recognised as pertaining to degrees of *loss* from separation to death. The process of loss through separation is not easy for a parent during the teen years, though absolute loss through death would ultimately devastate them. The loss of significant and relevant others in her life had influenced K, who needed to hold on tightly and retain the meaningful relationships she had. K sought to retain continuity, but letting go implied the gradual loss of the relationship with her son, as well as a loss of the sense of oneness she enjoyed in the family, and found meaningful. As a parent of adolescents who were gradually maturing, there is a sense of slowly losing their previous closeness.

**C. Rejection:** (2. 3. 14. 49.)

The initial letting go associated with the early teen years was difficult for K, who experienced pain, *rejection* and disapproval. She would often cry and feel sad. Her son's comments hurt her and despite their initial close relationship, felt rejected by him and, became aware of a defined distance between them. Although their closeness did resume, she continued to feel his disapproval and realised that their relationship was changing, as she no longer was, and no longer is, the significant other in his life. Her knowledge and rational understanding of the process equipped her in preventing the pain and negativity which she anticipated.

**D. Norm:** (4. 10. 12.)

In an effort to accept her son's behaviour, K sought to understand the behavioural *norm* of adolescence and was receptive to the opinion of respected young adults. A trusted professional opinion that her son's behaviour was normal made it easier for her to accept. Furthermore, regarding the tension of parenting adolescents, K found solace in the fact that she was not the alone, as she recognised and identified with other mothers in the same plight. K rationally believed that she had to let go but concealed her feelings. Holding on to the familiar (norm) and knowledge of adolescence provided stability and facilitated the process.

**E. Façade:** (5. 9. 24.)

K believed that the presence of a *façade* was a necessary aspect of letting go. In the relationship with her adolescent son, K felt rejected, but evaded revealing her emotions (of pain, anger, aloneness). It was painful for her to acknowledge an awareness that she was no longer the significant other in her son's life, and K was anxious about his safety. Though she found it painful and unpleasant having to contain and conceal her true feelings, she avoided acknowledging the truth. K rationally accepted that she had to understand her son and grant him space and freedom to explore new horizons. With her decision to conceal the truth, K resisted being selfish and considers her son's (and daughter's) perspectives above her own.

**F. Spatiality** (23. 39. 48.)

Letting go began as a painful process, followed by the request for separation and a mutual creation of *space*. K had falsely assumed that the close relationship with her son would always be there but she became aware of a distance between them. The outside world verified the distance and she was painfully conscious that she was no longer the significant other in her son's life. K believed that, despite her feelings, the space had to be granted to her son.

**G. Separateness:** (26. 28. 29. 30.)

There was awareness of *separateness* unfolding as the originally close-knit family unit was changing. Due to the individuating activities of the adolescents, the joint family holiday has changed and for the first time, K was recently separated from their children (adolescents) when she and her husband left on holiday without them. Though the (adolescent) children seemed to accept the separateness, K felt that she was being selfish and abandoning them. However, the ease with which the significant other accepted the separation facilitated her recognition of the value of space and separateness.

**H. Significant Other:** (13. 40. 41.)

P painfully realised that she is being replaced as the *significant other* in her son Matt's life. K had to endure this, as well as the distance created and her son's disapproving comments. She suddenly realised that she could no longer rely on him as she used to. In her attempts to control what she felt and deny the truth, K sought a rational understanding and insight, yet acknowledged her ambivalence (confusion) regarding the significant other in her son's life.

**I. Threatening Environment:** (6. 7. 8. 15. 16.)

K experienced conflict and ambiguity and although she felt that the external environment was a threat to her son, she rationally believed that she had to allow him to enter it, so that he could explore new horizons. Despite evidence of her son's competence and legal permission to deal with environmental demands, she continued to view the environment as threatening due to potential negligent and destructive aspects that could harm him. K trusted only familiar aspects of the *threatening extended environment*. She felt protective and feared that her son could come to harm. She wanted him to be safe. She felt ambivalent for although she trusted her adolescents, she mistrusted the changing environment.



**J. Anxiety:** (17.18. 27.)

With the increasing space between K and her son, feelings of *anxiety* emerged. Consenting to his holiday with peers was a major step for K, who, despite the knowledge she had regarding his trip, was anxious about his safety as he was still entering a world that was unknown to her. Paradoxically, K respected her son as a ‘young adult’ yet felt anxious regarding his present lack of experience and wisdom in life. She viewed him as naïve and imagined what he could do. She did not want him to repeat the careless behaviour of her adolescence, behaviour which could have dire consequences.

**K. Memories** (31. 32. 33.)

In her view of the past, K reflected on the *memories* of her own adolescence, her quest for autonomy and the attachment to her family of origin. She recalled the joy of separateness (going overseas), the vacillating behaviour and the difficult return to the family. In her recall of the past, K attempted to gain insight for the future. She anticipated a repeat of her circumstances and recognised the imminent long-term and distant separation (overseas) from her (adolescent) children who sought to move away in their quest for autonomy. K accepted that the adolescents were close and, though she was willing to grant them the space, she fears that they might not return.

**L. Ageing:** (36)

In her view of the future, K became aware of the *ageing* process as a personal reality and realised that she would follow the same path as her parents.

**M. Abandonment:** (42. 43. 44.)

In the context of ageing, aloneness and emptiness there is fear of *abandonment* which, due to K’s paramedical experience, she was acutely aware of. She realised that there were elderly people, who either had no significant other or who were alone with no meaningful relationship. Abandonment was a threatening reality and the process of letting go was

painful for K, who experienced a sense of loss with feelings of rejection and emptiness. She feared abandonment and aloneness.

**N. Aloneness:** (25. 34. 35)

A sense of *aloneness* threatened K for, although she rationally wanted her adolescents to fulfil their desire and create their own space she feared that they may not return and that she would be left alone. While familiarising herself to the distance between her and her son, K became aware of the gradually increasing distance between her and the younger daughter, who was also growing up and moving away. In her attempt to avoid facing the aloneness she feared, K kept busy, but, in the unpleasant silence of her passivity, she is suddenly faced with the unfolding reality of her future. K became aware of a changed meaning regarding the family. She was confronted with the impending aloneness and social seclusion – a contextual world and reality in which her father presently lives. K viewed her distant future as empty.

**O. Temporality:** (19. 20. 21. 22. 50.)

As K faced the future, she is reluctant to accept the passing of *time*. She treasures the past and held on tightly to the earlier developmental phases shared with her son, seeking to capture what she once had. Her tight hold on the past made it difficult for her to deal with the present, like accepting that she was no longer the significant other in her son's life. The unresolved obstacles impeded her mobility into the future. Her vision of the future and its positive aspects were obscured for in the process, she was more aware of the negativity (threat, pain, sadness) which made letting go (in the present) difficult. Despite the initial negativity (turmoil and heartache) experienced, K became aware of the positive aspects (diversity and excitement) to be enjoyed.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interviews**

*Participant A: Marlene (M)*

(Original Interview)

(Follow-up Interview)

**Marlene: Two years ago when I was fortunate to expect a baby, I fell pregnant. My husband and I were really looking forward to having this baby. I think that it is difficult when it comes to letting go because for seven and a half months it was just a thought. It was a baby and you could feel the child kicking, but it's a little human being that you have only seen on a sonar so there's nothing of a personal relationship yet except the physical attachment or the looking forward to the idea. So, when we did lose the baby, it was a matter of...I will never forget the first morning when I woke up in hospital. It was as if I was faced with this decision. My husband was sitting next to me, sleeping. It came in front of me, I had a choice. It was either going on sitting there in this corner and just die, or how am I going to face it? I knew that I had to make a decision especially when you look around you and you see your husband asleep and you know that he is also going through it – through the pain and everything. The first thing is that physically you are empty so you know that you have lost something. You know that you have lost something that, besides being an idea, is also a person. So actually the thought of having a child, seeing the child grow up, all of a sudden is gone. It's not just the physical emptiness. Christmas is not going to be the Christmas you thought you would have had for the first time. I knew there was a lot of nonsense lying ahead emotionally. Physically you are going to recover. You know that that is not a problem, but emotionally I knew that I was faced with a long path lying ahead. The thing is, I knew that I had to make a decision.**

Interviewer: What was this decision?

Marlene: First, I thought, "I am in control". I thought, "I must make a decision and sort it out". It's either a: dying or b: facing it. *Because there were positive things ahead* and decided that I am still able to have more children. So that was a positive choice, looking forward to having another baby. If I do go and sit in that corner, I will just die and I will just drag everybody that is supporting me, especially my husband, my parents, his parents. They would have been grandparents for the first time so it's not just myself but it's a lot of people around me as well. They also pretended to be strong to carry you. I

know that if I sit for too long you nurture this pain. *If I sat too long I would be stuck there. It, the pain and the feeling dead*, it will actually engulf you and everybody around you. I knew that it would be a dragging down of Larry (husband) as well. What helped me was that I knew that I could not approach it in selfish way. I couldn't go and sit and think it's just myself. There were a lot of other people who went through this as well; others who loose their children on a daily basis. You hear of people that suffer a loss like that. It was not as if you were the only person. It was a matter of really, "What am I going to get out of this experience if anything, if I am not getting what I thought I am going to get? The baby is not in my arms. *The physical pleasure of holding and seeing your baby; if I could not get that then I must get something positive. I was looking for an alternative to replace the baby.*

Interviewer: Do I understand you correctly, you had to make a decision after you were informed about the baby?

Marlene: Yes the next morning, after I was informed that my child was not alive anymore, I went in for a caesarean immediately the next morning.

Interviewer: So you were told that you would no longer have your baby and that your baby and that your baby had died in utero?

Marlene: Yes.

Interviewer: The decision was after you had had the caesarean.

Marlene: I even felt life after that, but when I told people (nurses) they said, "No, before you do the caesarean you think you feel that".

Interviewer: So you felt life?

Marlene: I thought I did, then after, they confirmed that there was no life. I think that it was hoping and still believing. Then suddenly you wake up and you are not pregnant anymore. It was seven and a half months, and I still had six weeks to go. I had the Caesar. It did feel as if you had had the baby but there was nothing. They give you a little card with the footprints on because it was a birth. Now you must go home two days later. Fortunately we did not start a baby room. We did not know whether it was going to be a boy or girl. We did not want to know. Just now you realise that you need to... As I said earlier, the Christmas, the planning. You already picture your child playing with your sister's children.

Interviewer: So the dreams you had...

Marlene: The dreams, the names you're going to give whether it's a boy or girl. Now suddenly. What now? What now? What now? *The names seemed irrelevant. There was a hopeless feeling of "Where are the answers?"*

Interviewer: Your future had suddenly changed.

Marlene: Yes. I think that's where... For the first month or two, I must be honest, I thought I was fine. I forced myself after three weeks to go back to work. I thought that it would be good. In a way it was because I would communicate with people. People do come in and say, "I'm sorry". Some don't; not meaning it in a bad way but they avoid the issue. One can understand it from their point of view, as well. I thought that by going back to work its fine and you can just carry on. Later I realised that...Larry (husband) and I avoided talking about our baby at home. I realised that I was starting to bottle it all up and then when we did talk it would be just "fine". It would be in a wrong way. Either you just let go completely or you try and bottle it up. *There was the two extremes.* It was about two months. I must admit I tried to keep my social schedule extremely busy. I did drink a lot of wine on some occasions and then I would talk a lot. Then it was easy to talk. I also realised then, that it was not the right way to solve it. It wasn't as if I was going on a booze cruise. I think that it was a way of letting all the inhibitions go so that you can talk. It was about two and a half to three months that I thought I must look at it from a different angle because I could feel that the one day I was upset, the other day aggressive towards Larry. I would pick a fight or be miserable at work or just don't feel like going to work. So I realised that I had to look at this from a different angle because what is going to happen a few years from now if I don't sort it out. *I did not want to have issues about the possibility with future children. I did not want it to drag into my life.* It suddenly came to me, it was actually amazing that my child never had a chance to live and the message was an awakening to life. *As a person that has been alive for thirty-three years, the death of my unborn child was a message of life. My child did not have the opportunity to live but gave me the message of life.* It wasn't a dream. *The experience was real for me and came to be while I was awake. I had this amazing experience.* It was clearly that I saw this. This actually opened up this window for me, to life that, "Who are we to actually plan the future?" It was you plan Christmas that was five months ahead. It was as if I got a gift out of the event. *Working out the meaning of life, which is to take out of everyday the special things. You look for it.* Maybe I was looking for it but I am glad that I have found it. It was for me, with our everyday rush and running around you are so missing today because there were so many special occasions when I was pregnant, when the baby would kick and I would sing in the shower, that I would sing a song, Larry would tickle my stomach. It was so special.

Interviewer: They were such precious moments.

Marlene: Yes definitely. There were such special moments on a daily basis that now the things that did not materialise in the future you actually cry and make the whole event negative. I approached it from that angle. Looking at how I felt when I was pregnant. I felt like the first mother on this planet. I felt beautiful and my child was beautiful. Everything was so perfect. My experience was what I could actually get out of this. *The awakening and the message I received.* It is that everyday is so fragile. The future is so fragile that it is not my place in life to take it for granted or to contain it. Suddenly it was a gift because I was one of those people that would stress about something that was happening two months from now. Or I would stress about tomorrow and I would forget

about today. Larry and myself today, we will talk about it. Our whole life changed when we realised this is our message from what happened is, “live for today”. When I started it slowly, and not with sudden outbursts. I started slowly to look at it from different angles. *Dealing with the loss was slow, and also trying a radically different approach, but first testing it slowly.* You have lost your child, you have lost all those dreams of what you were going to do together for the next few months. So you have lost an idea, and you also did lose a child. My way of letting go was the pain and the anger. I had a lot of anger. *I had to let go of the pain and the anger, to accept it. I was using the pain and the anger as a child before I actually started to move into the acceptance phase and start thinking of nice things.*

Interviewer: So what were you letting go of?

Marlene: The idea of being this mother’s child, och, this child’s mother. It was such a sure case that the first week in October, “I am going to be a mother”. I would look into other people’s prams and you start talking to them when they were pregnant and when is your baby due and when is my baby due. My first instinct when I saw mothers and their babies. I avoided the prams. That was not a natural thing for me to do. That’s when I starting realising that something is not right; that I am not facing it. I must face the idea that I am not going to be Luke’s mother. I am not going to be this baby’s mother now. I did not have the signals at first that something is wrong, because everybody thinks that you are fine. You think that you are fine because you are carrying on. *You are fooling yourself and you actually start to believe that.*

Interviewer: There were no signals, no warning.

Marlene: There was no warning about the pain; the pain that came later. As I said my social schedule was busy and we just carried on. We were carrying this pain. *It was there every day and night and you are aware of it. You try harder and lie to yourself. The heavier the pain, the greater the pretence.* I did not let go of the pain.

Interviewer: What do you mean that you did not let go of the pain?

Marlene: No, I did not let go of the pain immediately. It was as if nurturing the thoughts of your child was actually the pain. It wasn’t happy pain, a joyful fulfilling thing of during the time sitting and thinking of my child and looking at my little sonar photo’s. It was with pain, and I was angry. *I did not want to forget and I thought of my child quite often but it was sad.*

Interviewer: Is that how you were holding on by keeping the pain in?

Marlene: Yes. (Holding) onto what happened. I also think that it is such a big thing to actually have a child, that I saw that I was running around in circles, around the event that never took place. *I could not move on. It was part of the fooling game. Whatever I did would come back to the event. I could not get back. It was like a tornado sucking you back. It was big and overshadowed everything.* At some stage I realised that I was going

on like a robot. *To look as if you are fine. To smile, worked but it's false. You do what is expected of you. It is raw inside. Deep inside you are shattered. There was something wrong.* I did not want to let go of the event that was supposed to take place.

Interviewer: It was all so very real to you.

Marlene: It was very real as I was so looking forward to this child that when I did lose my baby it was as if everything that had happened...All the little things that had been bought, I did not want to put it away. I was still living off everything that had happened - the pain, the sad news, thinking about the time when we saw the sonar. *That is, the last sonar when they switched it off and the doctor said that there is no heartbeat and we were sent for a second opinion.*

Interviewer: By letting go would you have had to let go of all that?

Marlene: Yes. By really getting through it on the other side, to actually smile again and be able to look at someone's baby and be glad for them and not walk away there and think, "That could have been my child", or "Why were you so lucky to have your child?" I could actually turn the whole event into something beautiful, because it was beautiful. It took me nearly three months to get to that point, where I could look back and think that I was privileged for seven and a half months. Even if you had suffered this immense loss, there is still something beautiful that came out of it and you need to see that. You need to take it from day to day and not plan ahead and buy kiddie's gifts. But to get to that point I first had to let go of the negative energy (*the pain anger, misery and conflict*) that surrounded the whole event.

Interviewer: What do you mean by the negative energy?

Marlene: The sadness that surrounded the whole event. The sadness, the pain. The not thinking that it is not fair that someone else had, and their baby.

Interviewer: There was great sadness there.

Marlene: It was there. It was there. Also... When my mother...My mother and myself are actually very close but I actually in that time did not want my mother very close. It actually brought in a negative thing for the first time in our relationship. I don't know why, but I did not want her to share my pain. Maybe I actually protected her by not wanting to show her how much I was hurting.

Interviewer: Although you were hurting a great deal you did not want to reveal it.

Marlene: I was, I was hurting a great deal. Even today, You can let go of the sadness. For me it is an achievement that...Yes, you still think how would your child have looked today, would he have been naughty? You picture him and daddy walking away and going to the toyshop. It's fine to do that, and it's nice things to think of, because I know that we



will have children in the future. It's not looking around and looking at that whole year as a disaster anymore.

Interviewer: So you feel that something positive did come out of that?

Marlene: Yes. I was able to let go. As I said earlier, to go from another angle. I tested it. For the first three months I don't think that I was open for any other angle except my anger and disappointment in life and the feeling that you had been done in. Although happens to other people, you become selfish in your pain. You become like, "Why me? Why this?" My dad once said to me, with a previous incident he said, "Always ask, Why not me?" I forgot it at that stage. For three months...that was not a waste of time in my life. I made the pain...It went with me to bed and I woke up with it. I had forgot about the beautiful things, during that seven and a half months. If I could let go of the pain, I can see things and I can get a message out of it.

Interviewer: So once the pain was gone, you could see the beauty that was there?

Marlene: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you let go of that pain?

Marlene: As I said, I had a lot of anger. *The anger blinded me to the possibilities to making this work. The anger was the opposite of acceptance for me. Anger seemed the only direction. It engulfed me and I allowed it to.* About three to four weeks after I lost my baby, I directed my anger towards God. I have always been close to God. My religion has always been close to me and my family. You talk and you go to God with your problems, and also sometimes you go with your good news. You share everything. I was very angry verbally also, towards God. I realised when it started getting worse; when it started going to three months that maybe it is because I had all this anger towards God. I actually took my whole attitude back to religion. I wanted an answer. As I say the answer really came to me. It was not a dream or a vision *but a conscious insight.* I think that it was there all the time. It was all killed by my negative forces in me that I actually never saw it. That was how I saw this window opening up with the message that, "Never take life for granted".

Interviewer: You say that it was there all the time?

Marlene: Yes, it must have been. It must have been. I believe it must have been there. I also think I gave that to my religion, it also made it clear for me that there is positive things in everything that happens to you. There will never be an obstacle in front of you that you can't get over. The answer is to get over this to go on. I must find something positive out of it. It can't just be something bad. It can't just be a baby that must die. It can't be meaningless.

Interviewer: So it has been meaningful for you?

Marlene: Absolutely. When I was prepared to open myself up to it, then only I realised that for someone like me I forgot about living for today and I was rushing into tomorrow. It was like suddenly like “Wow! You have got this life and you take this life for granted.” You take everybody around you for granted. I actually started phoning my family more afterwards. I can’t go through a week without phoning my mom every second day. It became a constant message from what happened. It only came to me because of what had happened.

Interviewer: The experience showed you something?

Marlene: Something. It’s as if my baby gave me this special message to know, “It’s fine. Let go...It’s fine”. I must carry on. *With all the personal pain, I realised that my child died but I gave it meaning that with the death of my child, I approach life differently. You want to pour love into life and live life on behalf of your child. “If you can’t live then I will and I will make it meaningful”.* It’s not nice to have such a waste of your life. To ‘shlep’ on with all this pain and anger. I think that the people around me picked it up and I thought that I was so good. I would think that I’m fine, I’m strong, I will carry on. Later, afterwards when everybody could actually see that I’m back and being myself again, people- my parents - often came to me and said that they can see that I had this wall around me.

Interviewer: So your attitude changed when you let go?

Marlene: Definitely. It definitely did.

Interviewer: Are you referring to the anger that you let go of?

Marlene: Yes it was anger. I felt done in. I felt cheated. As I say it was so strong this feeling “Gee you have been done in. You were supposed to have this child. Why not?” that I felt about all the beautiful things...about being pregnant, about...No, it was like engulfing you, this dark shadow over you. *I did not allow myself to go to the beautiful things because it feels unfair because you can’t justify being happy. I just saw death and not the pregnancy. You have the sense that you must do something about it but I became passive to my pain. The happy things were a no, no. It was your right to carry this pain and be miserable. The pain becomes your baby and you feel guilty if you think of letting go.* Then in the next moment you wake up and you realise that you are still in the shadow and it’s fine, and everyone must stay away and you are OK It actually just gets worse because you are not prepared to go out for a little bit of sunlight. The moment I did try and I did say “O.K. I am going to try something else besides this anger” it just...it lifted. It was really like you could hear the angels sing! *Because of the insight; because really, it was like there was light and you were suddenly bombarded with the beautiful things. The intensity was sudden. I was aware but avoided it. The eventual realisation that you are going to be fine is slow, but the clarity is sudden. It really was like opening a gift slowly. You first pull the ribbon and then the paper...The stages that I had to go through to appreciate what there is, but I took it as a gift because of the intensity of the dark. But that I can only say today, by looking back that the pain and anger was in stages. At the*

*time it was just being miserable. I believe that from the pain something beautiful will come your way.*

Interviewer: The whole experience worked out for you, and you are different because of it.

Marlene: Yes. Yes. Definitely. I am also so grateful, not because of what happened but that I had the insight to go and look for something there. I don't believe anything just happens to us. If you open up to it, there is a message there, there is something. It takes time. I don't think that three months is such a long time. Other people do go through things much longer. I also think that the fact that we can look forward to having another child sometime and that is positive. It's definitely letting go of the anger. It changed me. It changed me from how I looked at things before being pregnant. It changed my outlook on life.

Interviewer: If I understand you correctly, you were tremendously angry when all this happened. You first turned your anger towards God and resented the fact that you were in that position. Gradually, as you viewed things differently, you were able to let go of that anger and pain and started to view things afresh.

Marlene: Yes. I also realised that because Larry and I have a fantastic relationship. But in those three months I started picking up signs that something is wrong (*in our relationship*), although I thought that I was fine. That I was avoiding the prams and turning your back when I would see couples coming with their little kids. Larry and myself, we started to quarrel quite often. It would usually come from my side. I just realised that something is wrong. It did not happen overnight that I went to look for an answer or a new angle. It did take a little while. It wanted to start and then you say, "no, tomorrow you will". *The acceptance wanted to start as you put your foot in the light. The shadow became a comfort zone. Facing it would be entering the next phase and that would be letting go of the pain and at that stage the pain became my baby.* It was like letting the water go out slowly instead of everything at one shot. *Everything at one shot would take you back to the early stages and fool myself again, like the angry outbursts were futile. I realised that it was going to be a slow process getting to where I wanted to be. Applying the new approach was slow because the old approach obviously did not work.*

Interviewer: What do you mean, Marlene, when you say that you wanted to face it anew?

Marlene: It was that now you would want to take time or want to be alone at home. Rather than go out shopping, you want to sit and think this through. I got to this point of rather going to play with the dogs outside then you are half avoiding it because you know that there is something that you must face.

Interviewer: So it was pulling you?

Marlene: Yes, what you say there is right. I knew that I had to do something about it. I knew that I had to do something about it. I knew I had to do something.

Interviewer: How did you know?

Marlene: I did not like myself anymore. It was easy to start picking fights. Where I know that I am someone who likes to communicate with people and laugh. I could see something change in me and I did not like it. I think in a sense I was missing the old me and I think that the people around me also did. As I say, I did not discuss it that often or you are very busy. It was something that I realised that I did not want to go on like that. Some people do. I could have gone on like that, but then I would lose more in the end – *even jeopardising my marriage and my friends.*

Interviewer: How do you see yourself now?

Marlene: I am happy. I am really happy. As I face the day to day things, it's not as if you are nonchalant about tomorrow. Not at all. It is just that I am more aware of relationships with people and what you say to someone. It is really. It is different. I feel richer. I really fell richer and that's why I say I can now look back and think, "My baby gave me this positive new outlook on life" and for me those first three months, I nearly missed out on seeing this little message that was left behind.

Interviewer: It sounds like you got a gift. Did you?

Marlene: Maybe it's my way of making peace with it but it was in finding that gift. I can honestly say that if I could not get a message like this out of it, I still would have been stuck in that negative angry attitude. It was like this little light that suddenly went up for me. *The light was for getting an answer that this gift worked for me. I can only describe the answer as a light, as you can see where you are going, and you are not stuck anymore.*

Interviewer: So you have moved on Marlene?

Marlene: Definitely. I have definitely moved on. Someone also said to me that a special answer will lie in the eyes of your last child because that would be the child that you never would have had if the first one was around. So it's the little things like that. There is meaning in everything that happens to you. I am actually excited now thinking, "Yes, I am going to get pregnant again".

Interviewer: So you have something to look forward to?

Marlene: Yes. I actually think that I grew up. It was a growing up experience as well.

Interviewer: In what way?

Marlene: It sounds like as if it is corny, but the value of life really begins and ends with a human being's life. Nothing else. I can't really put it in words. When it comes to a human being's life, there is nothing that you can take for granted. Things you say and things you do. If I now think back on the little movements I felt. It was so amazing. I experienced the ultimate of life and death in one year. It was so big. It was a bigger event for me to cope with. That is why I say it was for me a growing up process, in the sense of what life is about. *I have the tools to cope with life now.* Sometimes it's frightening for me to think that I could have missed out on that concept, if that did not happen. The price that I had to pay to get to this idea and in a sense it balances it out. So what I am saying is "It's OK".

Interviewer: You feel OK about it.

Marlene: Yes, and to let go because we had to name our child. It was a little boy and his name was Luke and I could say "good-bye" in the sense of he would always be there. Our future children will know about him. I just did not need to carry that pain to remember my child, which I did in the first three months. When I did think of my child, it was with a broken heart, sad thoughts, angry thoughts and now it's nice. I can think of my child and it's a beautiful idea.

Interviewer: Where initially it was a negative pain that you would associate with your child, it is now that has been converted into something positive.

Marlene: Absolutely. I could only get to this point by letting go; by really letting go. Literally that is what I had to do, otherwise I really don't know where I would have been.

Interviewer: So how would you describe the actual letting go experience?

Marlene: If I think you must put it in a physical term you can compare it to a bungee-jump. It's a free fall. It was from where I was to where I had to get to - to the extreme points. Mine was the opposite from a bungee-jump; its from a low to a high, but if you can reverse a bungee-jump.

Interviewer: A bungee-jump is sudden. Was your experience sudden?

Marlene: The process was there, but when the clarity was there, I did not have doubts. It was the right way. As I say, I sometimes I tried to avoid facing it. But the next day, I must start spending more time or thinking better. *There was dark and there was light.* It was a light going on. When it was switched on, it stayed on. In the beginning it was like playing with the light switch (on and off) - but when it suited me. Then suddenly you did not have an effect on this light switch it just stayed on. *As we go through it, I now realise that I had made a choice that first morning but I did not stick to my choice of the first morning. It was only after three months that I could go that way. I now realise that what I did was really take the darker side and only after three months did I enter the clarity of the positive side. To let go is also a guilt feeling because you are almost not allowed to face joy.*

Interviewer: So it was quite illuminating! Forgive the pun.

Marlene: Absolutely. If I think still of that feeling and today I'm still thriving on it. I'm still on that high and I hope that I am going to stay there. You will have your ups and downs sometimes, as things lie deeper. It's as if I can face anything coming my way now. To come through it with an answer like that, that you can take anything. I feel that I will be strong in life. You will be sad. Whatever comes your way. The future is not up to me. So I can't sit here and say I can face anything coming my way in the future. I still have to get there to see if I can. I think that I will be able to cope.

Interviewer: It seems as if you are saying that you feel stronger for this.

Marlene: Yes. I won't go the negative way in approaching something. I will first look.

Interviewer: It's as if you had to go through that to see what you are seeing now.

Marlene: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: Do you think that you could have seen what you are seeing if you had not gone through this?

Marlene: Not at all. I think that it would have come out at a later stage or time. I would have broken down at some point in my life. I think that it would have been a denial thing if I did not go through the pain and the anger. I definitely went through stages; it was a process. *The process was the stages of pain and anger, active processes that really happened. You can't see it at that stage but can only be seen looking back. At that stage it was all "deurmekaar" (confused).* If I skipped any of those stages because I did think that I was fine. I told everybody that, "I am fine" and that "Life is beautiful". I even took out the movie and I cried with Larry and I thought, "I am fine, I am fine". But I wasn't, because if I think of things I did and just being miserable and being different. I did not want children. I did not even want to bring up the issue of having a child. Obviously I wasn't fine. Letting go for me was in stages. It was the little light switch thing that we mentioned. But when it happened, it was clear. It was definitely clear. I could feel it and it was great.

Interviewer: You felt good?

Marlene: Yes. I feel good about it. I am obviously overprotective now when I see a pregnant mother. I don't turn my back any more I actually want to tell them. You must take it easy and go to your doctor everyday. It's definitely an attitude change. It's as if it did not come just from within myself. As I feel it is a little gift. It definitely balances it out for me *because the answer is there and makes me understand it.* I can't say that it just came from myself.

Interviewer: Where do you believe that it has come from?

Marlene: Obviously I would love to say from my baby; you know. As I said earlier it was as if I could hear the angels (imitates chimes) when it happened. It definitely happened. I started looking around you and you seeing people, especially me in my kind of work, mothers who have lost their children in accidents. You realise that you are not alone. Looking around you as well. People in pain as well. You can't go and sit in the corner. It did cross my mind but no good would have come from it. Nothing. Zilch.

Interviewer: So your choice was to let go of this?

Marlene: I thought it was, but not immediately. As I said, I realised it three months later only. That's the thing that I said the first morning there was the choices, sitting in the corner dying or going on with this, facing this and letting go.

Interviewer: Is it by facing this that you went through the phases.

Marlene: Yes, through the stages, to get to the brighter side. I thought that morning when I made the decision I would be fine. But actually I came down. I realise that I came through on the other side and it's a gift and I am definitely stronger now.

Interviewer: It seems like you are feeling powerful through this gift of a different vision to what you had.

Marlene: Yes. Definitely.

Interviewer: Anything else Marlene that you would like to add to what we have said regarding your experience of letting go.

Marlene: You will need another session for this! (laughs) It's a different situation entirely. I don't know if you want me to carry on here or not.

Interviewer: Marlene, Thank you for sharing this letting go experience with me. We can deal with the other one separately.

**Research Participant B: Ben (B)**

(Original Interview)

*(Follow up Interview)*

Ben: Letting go for me. The first time was from my previous job. My previous job has been a source of security in my life but also a sort of a prison. I felt that I had to do it. *I felt stuck. I was comfortable because of securities such as salary and medical aid and pension fund, but it was not what I really wanted to do. I felt used, abused as window-dressing. I was not allowed to be psychologist and I could not find another job, due to affirmative action, etc.* During the time that I worked for them (Correctional Services) they had sort of demilitarised. Things like that started to prematurely free me on an emotional level. I was 42 years old, white and Afrikaans. I am also very liberal in comparison with other men like me, but that really did not really count, but it was with the emigration to the USA that I started letting go and saw other horizons. *Through emigration, I was not limiting my job or opportunity search to South Africa only.* With my applications however, I got a few negative replies, but it's more because I am not a resident yet, and one of the conditions is that you have to be a resident to get a job there. I now have a tentative job offer in a private office that will give me the opportunity to see what I can do.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Ben: It's nice and it's exciting. It is making me feel needed again. I don't see an eight to five salaried job as the only source of security, enabling me to carry on ...*(inaudible tape)...* and doing what I feel called to do.

**Interviewer: You spoke of risks. Do you feel that you are taking a risk?**

Ben: Yes (I do feel that I am taking a risk) because there is always the possibility of things happening. Yes, I am even willing to do an entirely different job to what I have done from my previous training. But I am sure that I will be able to at least survive. *At the worst scenario, I would see myself doing manual labour at a minimum wage.*

Interviewer: So you are willing to make changes?

Ben: Yes.

Interviewer: Something that is new to you?

**Ben: Yes**

Interviewer: You mentioned family (earlier).



Ben: I grew up with them, I have direct relatives. A lot of them have actually either died or are spread all over the country or all over the world. So I don't have close relationships with them anymore but I very often experience that of places, and of some people too. That's why when I have the opportunities, I use the opportunities to go and say goodbye to people and places. I've recently been to Darwin, where I was born. I'm also cycling. The whole family is cycling. But this time I went alone because my wife is on her trip to Canada at the moment. I went to do a bicycle race. Literally and figuratively along the roads that I knew, and was on, as a child and also later on in my life because I lived a part of my life in Cape Town and that environment, Stellenbosch and that area. I really enjoyed it. It was a positive experience. I feel that I still have memories of the places and perhaps in time, I will be able to return again. But it was the last positive experience. *Positive in the sense that I could not find a way to stay more permanently at the places that I loved from past experiences.*

Even though the weather in the Cape wasn't very friendly, I enjoyed the cycling and seeing all the places and roads and the things.

Interviewer: It was meaningful for you to go back.

Ben: It was quite meaningful. It was good to see that even my father's grave is still there. Just to know that, although many things are changing and we are going our own ways, there are also some foundations left. There are a lot of new things, buildings and places, but the old ones are still there.

Interviewer: You speak of foundations being left, what are you referring to?

Ben: Basically memories and concrete places as the house where I grew up. That part of town that was familiar to me. Ja, even the old cycle shop where I bought my first bicycle was still there. It looks a bit different, but it is still there.

Interviewer: The places, for you are significant. How come?

Ben: Yes, not the places itself but the memories that go with it, the experiences. You can't really separate the two.

Interviewer: You went back to visit and recalled the way things used to be.

Ben: Perhaps it was symbolic that I cycled from Darwin, where I had my childhood years, then to Stellenbosch, where I studied later in life and then back from there I went to Darwin.

Interviewer: So you retook the same steps that you had taken originally.

Ben: Yes that's right. One of my first jobs was also in Darwin. So I was very much on that side.

Interviewer: Darwin means a lot to you and you went there. How come?

Ben: I went back basically to go and say “Goodbye”, to refresh my memory for the last time just to still enjoy some of the places and some of that people that I knew. (*It was like putting a photo in the photo album of my memory*).

Interviewer: You needed to say goodbye before you go?

Ben: Yes. One of my friends, who went to London, had a whole party. He invited more than 100 people. I’m not an extrovert or a party guy like that, but I had the opportunity to create a ritual that I have just described. It is also meaningful for me and it makes me feel that I said “Goodbye”.

Interviewer: So where someone would have a party to say good-bye, you felt the need to go back to Darwin and say goodbye.

Ben: Yes.

Interviewer: That’s your way of saying goodbye.

Ben: Yes.

Interviewer: Anything else you would like to add regarding your letting go experience?

Ben: Maybe also something that made me start making changes and getting out of it was on a more spiritual level. *This was something of a precipitator or trigger or kick in the butt*. I just had discussions and read pieces of scripture, as a Christian that reminded me of what the most important things in life should be. The most important things in life are not the material things. It is the value that you add to other people’s lives and fulfilling your mission in life. A friend gave me a book named in Afrikaans: “In Jesus se voetspore” (“In the Footsteps of Jesus”). It just reminded me that as a spiritual person, and also a Christian, if I want to be like Jesus I have to be able to let go of material things that keep me on my own task and financial security and just being able to earn money. Things like that are not the most important things in life, so then I just relaxed. *I did not feel a failure any more because of the inability to succeed in everyday terms*. I have to practice what I believe in; what I preach. It also worked along Easter, which is a very significant time in a Christian’s life.

Interviewer: Do you see Easter related to the letting go experience?

Ben: Easter reminded me of Jesus who gave up his whole life before he could actually be resurrected and the whole experience. I went to the church group early in the morning to see the sun rising on a hilltop. We had a cross planted and we lighted the cross and that ritual was also very meaningful to me to remind us that you have to offer a lot and let go, to experience new life. That’s what Jesus did. Then the only thing in life is adding

significance to other people's lives. Helping people who are suffering and things like that and refocusing on that again, after I let go of the things maybe it's very difficult to let go of. *That is to let go of old false securities, such as salary.*

**Interviewer: Do you mean letting go of material things?**

Ben: Not very literally but yes, letting go of my salary. Fortunately we were able to keep some things, but if we move to the USA we obviously have to let go of just about everything. The security is based on other things.

Interviewer: Your being a Christian has been helpful.

Ben: That's right. Not that I see myself as perfect but I am trying to let myself be guided by spiritual Christian principles.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Ben: To be of service to other people; to try and listen to what our mission in terms of God's will should be. It's basically to think a bit more before you do anything and not only to think about yourself, but also to think about others.

Interviewer: Others play a significant role – to serve others?

Ben: That why I became a psychologist. I see it's my calling in life to try and relieve other people's suffering and not only to relieve suffering but to add value to other people's lives.

Interviewer: How do you feel that this is linked to your letting go?

Ben: When I say that I am longing to practice what I preach, I am also hoping to help other people to do the same. To let go when it is necessary to let go. I think that I actually live the meaning with it, now in our times.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Ben: It's basically a learning experience. It's just that it was very rational before, but I have lived it as an experience now.

Interviewer: Could you please rephrase what you are saying?

Ben: I think that I learned that I had to let go of certain more material things based things in my life in order to open up to new and more value based and spiritually based avenues and paths. And you come closer to what I experience as my purpose in life.

**To be able to add meaning to the lives of others and help comfort people who suffer.**

Interviewer: The more attached you were to the material things the less you gained?

Ben: Yes, but sometimes you have to hold onto certain things. I think that there is a time to hold on and a time to let go. You just can't jump from one thing to another, all the time. You have got to hold on and resist jumping onto other things all the time.

Interviewer: You are willing to attach and let go as the situation requires it is that what you mean?

Ben: Yes.

Interviewer: So, it all started with your leaving work.

Ben: That was the first major step. There was a lot of tension before I let go. *I would ask myself questions such as "Am I doing the right thing?", "Am I not fooling myself?", "Isn't it very self centred?"*

Interviewer: It wasn't easy to let go?

**Ben: No, Letting go is not easy. *It is like jumping from a plane before the parachute opens!***

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your letting go experience?

Ben: I think I have scanned over most of the experiences and I feel we have touched on the most important experiences.

Interviewer: Thank you.

**(ii) Post- emigration email:** (received four months subsequent to B's emigration).

I'm so busy dealing with all the new things. I think, like with many other things in life, my current experience in the USA can be seen as an attempt to find the balance between the negative and positive sides of the same thing.

The negative side is the "ontgroening" or initiation (just like the thing that is every year stopped forever at schools and universities). Gate control and initiation are very real up and going, even after you went through a thirty-month screening period in South Africa.

Banks do not even want to open an account for you because they cannot find you on their credit checking systems. You get the same kind of attitude when you approach organisations with employment enquiries. My current employer reduced the hourly rate that he offered me when I started working because "a probationary period is standard practice". I knew about the probationary period but nothing was said before about the reduced remuneration. During this period I also have to prove to my wife and family that there is a better life out here and it's OK for them to follow.

Enough of the negative side. Believe it or not, the positive side still overwhelms the negative. I am able to do what I am trained and called for – to help other people. In South Africa, I felt that the context did not allow me to do that any more. I was a piece of window dressing.

When I park my van, even when I forget to lock it or leave the house the anxiety and fear is much less. You see women and children walking in the street playing without being afraid of being attacked.

There are good, warm and friendly people here, and I already have a few new friends. My sister and her family are also an hour's drive away. They understand and support when necessary, in spite of still having their own battles to fight.

Ironically, sometimes the gate control mechanisms give me a sense of security. They do not allow crime or suspects here. People's personal rights and space and quality of life are protected. Soon I may be one of these people. Educational prospects are good. I believe I can have a happy family life here and prospects for my children are good.

The winter here is a bit longer and warmer than usual, but spring has arrived. I discovered that when I came an hour late for church this morning because I forgot to set my alarm clock one hour ahead. I just didn't attend to their ways of doing enough.  
How's the weather in South Africa?

### **Research Participant C : Penny (P)**

Penny: I don't think letting go means a heck of a lot to me at all. Like one of those modern jargon words. I don't have a particular grip on it. I don't know if I could ever use that terminology and say that I am now letting go or I have now let go. I wouldn't know at which point one makes the decision that this is letting go.

Interviewer: For you letting go is mere jargon; it's not something that you can identify with.

Penny: I feel that it's very much one of those American type words. I don't know. I don't know. I don't have much respect for the word. (laughs) I can't say that it's just that they can make fusses about stuff like that. Letting go and... I can't think of another example, but if you watch Oprah Winfrey, she will say a word like 'spirit'. She uses the word 'spirit', 'watching your spirit', or something like that, and they will philosophise about it and it means zero to me. I am..., not say that you should not look after your spirit but each person does it in their own way. I don't know. Just don't make a story of it.

Interviewer: You feel they generalise it

Penny: For me, it is more personalised. Each person does it in their own way. If someone asks you, "Have you let go?" you may have to sit down and think "What are you talking about? And perhaps go through these thoughts and think, "OK. I have actually moved beyond this point so, in actual fact I have let go. It's not a term that I will use. It doesn't work for me.

Interviewer: What does the term actually mean to you?

Penny: It's just that a person must move on beyond whatever it is that has been dragging you or as you say, putting things behind you and getting on with your life.

Interviewer: Is that how you see it? Your letting go experience is that you put things behind you and you get on with your life?

Penny: Well, there's no sense in living in the past, so once you have come to terms with what your situation is going to be then you have to accept that and be in that phase and move on now.

Interviewer: Is that where you feel you are at this point?

Penny: In some things, not in everything. With the house things, certainly. Moving from the house. It wasn't the actual move. That was physical hard work. It was before the time to make the decision and to come to the realisation that I have to leave here, you know. Then in the house, how are people going to take this. Is it an entirely selfish decision,

and is it only for me?...which it probably turns out, it is only for me. But then afterwards, in the time that I put the house on the market, one of the boys, Rob in actual fact, said, with no provocation whatsoever, he absolutely hates this house; the house that we were in. It came as such a surprise! (Laughs) Jack (husband) was shocked! He said afterwards, "I can't believe this kid actually said this". You'd think. Here's our house Your child has got fond memories of his trip overseas, the crack on the wall... the house, but he had enough. One of the kids that I spoke to, it was fine with them. It wasn't a problem. It was Jack actually, who I had to get past, as I needed his approval.

Interviewer: So you wanted to make the move but thought it was selfish and you had to get Jack's approval?

Penny: Yes, I felt very selfish. So on a Friday...on a Friday no, on a Friday, yes, On the Friday, I would think everything is fine and what not. Saturday goes away. Sunday night, I start getting nervous to think tomorrow, I'm going to start all over again. Then I change my mind, you know. The noise from the schools...The noise next door drove me dilly. There wasn't a school next door, and then they built the property, and extended the school. Their bells did not go at the same time as Barclay's does. Barclay's bells I knew, but they were across the road from me. It was removed. This is right next door. It drove me mad. It drove me so mad that I wanted to scream and I did, often. So the noise itself was all the kids. It was the kids. Sometimes they would come and knock their ball over. I would throw my toys I would curse the kids, you know. Sometimes, I wanted one of those bazookas to stand on the other side of the school, and shoot them.

Interviewer: So your home was suddenly not your home.

Penny. It was messed. That's the resentment. I resented it. I resented that I have to get up and go because of the school. You know, it just was too much. I had to leave my house!... because of this school next door to me, not the school across the road from me, so much. But together then, it was terrible! Singly I could handle it.

Interviewer: So you had to let go of your home.

Penny: It ruined my life. They ruined my life. I went to court to put my case before them and I got nowhere! I was very ill at the time but I got nowhere.

Interviewer: So you needed the area that was your home.

Penny: I think so. I mean everybody does.

Interviewer: Your home is your home.

Penny: It was a huge intrusion!

Interviewer: You seem angry about that.

Penny: I am. I am aggravated by this whole thing. But actually it's not so bad really, but just talking about it makes me a bit aggravated.

Interviewer: Ja, sure it does. Something that was yours, your home, that you are entitled to and that is intruded upon.

Penny: We fixed things all up for us, for our needs and how we wanted it and now finally after all these years when things are nice and neat and orderly and what not, then you have got to leave!...My trees! You know, I came here and they were big and I lived there for almost thirty years. They were magnificent trees!

Interviewer: You have left the trees.

Penny: I have left them.

Interviewer: There seems to be sadness.

Penny: Terrible, terrible, terrible that. But then I had certain criteria that if I found another place, and I thought I could never fulfil this. I looked, and we bought a plot out somewhere and I thought for a while, "This is my answer. I am going to live out there in the quiet and have a view I would have new little 'goggatjies' in your grass. It would be wonderful. Nothing like that happened. I realised after a time, Jack was not going to move anywhere there and the boys wouldn't have come out there. The whole thing, the safety wouldn't work. I realised that it wasn't going to work, so I cancelled the plot, which was also sadness. Then I thought to myself, I am doomed to noise for the rest of my life. I never thought I would get past Jack (husband). I had to ask him and I did. I asked him over and over again. "What do you think?", "Would it be OK with you? I had to check with him. You also take into consideration the fact that he is working. I had to have his... not approval so much, as...He had to back me up, because I think it's a selfish decision, so I need him to say this. Also it's an expensive decision.

Interviewer: You feel it was a selfish decision.

Penny: Not selfish... Entirely selfish. So what. So I think of myself a little. You know how woman are. Women think of everybody else and women last. I did think also that I had put up with it for long enough, and also, I did realise that it was time to go. We did not have kids at the school, so in actual fact, the reason why I am staying in the house is not why I bought it in the first instance. The reason why I am staying in my house now is because it's a home, its comfortable or whatever makes up that whole story, but a lot of those things had been take away. Now the fact was, why we had bought the house in the first instance was to be near the school because I had five children, four children in fact. So that was brilliant. Anyway, I don't know...eh what was I talking about?

Interviewer: You were moving in to a new phase. You did not need to be near the school any longer.



Penny: I didn't need to be there. I didn't need to be there and I needed to go, and I needed it for my own sanity, for my own sanity. I needed to go because if I tell you that I would stand watering my garden, having long conversations in my head about the school. "What am I going to do?" and "What am I going to say next to them?" Often the bells would go off over the weekends and over the long weekends. They would forget to switch the school bell off. So everybody is restful and the school bells start going or the alarms of the school would start going any hour of the night. I was driven berserk. I just couldn't take it. It did not affect other people. Some people are more affected by noise than others, and I am just one of them. That's all.

Interviewer: The noise affected you and you spent a lot of time at home.

Penny: I spent a lot of time at home because I was ill for a very long time and I had to be at home. I could not be anywhere else because I was in the bed.

Interviewer: You were not well for a while.

Penny: For a very long time, I had M.E. and for two and a half years of those years I spent in bed with depression and darkness and then this noise was on top of me.

Interviewer: It was terrible for you. You were at your weakest and this noise was on top of you.

Penny: It was just too much, too much.

Interviewer: So you decided to move.

Penny: So then I decided to make the move and that, that is actually the thing that, that, that was the...the biggest. If you want to talk about letting go, then that was the part getting to the point of yes I am going to go. I am leaving this home. I am going to actually sell this place and move. That was the turning-point; it was not the actual move. That was the move.

Interviewer: The decision was the move?

Penny: The decision was the move, not the physical move. Not that it wasn't difficult, but mentally that wasn't so bad. Not at all. That was physically bad but the mental anguish was there, to get to the decision.

Interviewer: It was anguish?

Penny: It was anguish. It was anguish because I toyed with the idea for I don't know how long. It was anguish probably because I'm helpless against what's going on around me. I cannot dictate to them. I can't tell them to shut up. Do you understand? I can't do anything about it, so if they go away, go boy! If those kids jump into the pool right next

door to me, ten at time screaming, that's tough for me. I can rant and rave on the other side, I can't do anything about it, you know.

Interviewer: So a total helplessness really.

Penny: Ja. It's a frustration but I can't do anything about it. Then my thoughts turn to murder (laughs). I am going to bomb this place! Weekends were...physically weekends, I could feel this is a weekend. In actual fact, I must tell you, on a Saturday morning if you woke up and you would not know this, when I woke up, you could feel, there's nobody there. It's like on air, I don't know how to tell you, It's many lives and many... leaving a person's activities. I think it's in the air. I could feel it!

Interviewer: It was as if the air was there for you to breathe!

Penny: Yes! (Joint laughter) The air was clearer. Saturday the air was clearer, Sunday the air was OK but Sunday night the air started getting really muggy because of Monday and Monday then ohh!! Then of course holidays were fantastic blissfulness.

Interviewer: The sense relief of having your own territory.

Penny: I can't tell you! I can't tell you the joy of having your own space! Not only from the noise but also coming home and not having them in your driveway all the time.

Interviewer: The intrusion.

Penny: I think that I am a private sort of person. I need my space and I need my privacy. Maybe it's exaggerated, because...because of so many people around that you feel more the need to be private. Maybe if you are completely on your own you would not feel like I do. Do you know what I'm saying its because I always have to have others around me.

Interviewer: Do you mean the school?

Penny: I mean the school, but also the family. I have a big family and that means that means the house is bouncing and going on all the time and you just hope that you can have space.

Interviewer. So space means a lot to you. You need a space that you can define as yours. So much that you were willing to fight for it.

Penny: Ja, to the point that I had to make a big decision; a big decision.

Interviewer: Leaving your home was a big decision.

Penny: It was a big, a big decision. I knew that it was a big decision anyway and then I suppose... You know, I would rather...It wasn't a one day thing,

it just went on and on and on, for months you know, and then I would think, “Yes I’m going to sell it” and then holidays would come and I would think that I have exaggerated and then I would say, “ Yes, I’m going to sell it” and then the weekends would come and I would think, “Gee, the weekends are brilliant, where am I going to have weekends like this?” So, it was like this, going back and forth, but the same thing was happening to Jack because then I would say, “I think we should sell this house, I can’t handle this any more”. Then he would shut up about it. On Monday I would start, and then Friday, when he would arrive, I would keep quiet about it. Monday then, I was ready to sell. So over along time and then over a long period, I was moving forward-backwards, forward-backwards.

Interviewer: So in the process of getting there it was moving backwards and forwards.

Penny: It was a long process of moving backwards and forwards. Then I started thinking in terms of why should I put this plant in here, I am not going to watch it grow, I am going to move. So that, if you also want regarding letting go. Prior to saying I am not going to do this massive thing over here because I am not going to be here, so I would rather save. So I did. I started putting little plants into pots to move and then I am getting ready for wherever I am going. I need my plants, I need my trees.

Interviewer: So you stopped making roots.

Penny: (Laughs) I did still you know, to keep up, because I can’t live without it but I mean I shouldn’t have intentions but I had intentions, and when you have intentions, you have got to start putting little plants out. I actually thought of the plot but then nothing came of that.

Interviewer: So you did not go to the plot that you wanted to go to.

Penny: Actually, not the plot so much, but quite. I would go to anywhere quite, and it would have been an absolute bonus if I could have a view. When I thought of moving and I thought of the criteria, nice things that I needed, I realised that I wasn’t going to get them because where in Pretoria, would I go to? Where there are no throughways and no traffic. The only place near to where we were would have been was The Ridge. I can’t afford The Ridge. They would have older houses, they would have trees, and they would have bigger rooms. Those were my criteria, no noise, trees, bigger rooms, older house. That is what I wanted, and I couldn’t get it there so when I started looking for a house. It is there but I could not afford it. Besides, the houses in The Ridge are old houses, rambling places, far too big and needing too much, too, too much care.

Interviewer: But you needed the trees, the large rooms and quiet.

Penny: I needed that, but the view was the other thing.

Interviewer: Did you have a view at your older house?

Penny: No. You would look up into the sky and there was a little bit of sky, and that was your parameter, your border. You couldn't see the horizon so you had to wait for the moon to come above the trees. That stuff that is really important to me. Jack doesn't need stuff like that. I need stuff like that. I need to see the sky; I need to see the clouds. I need it. I need the trees. I need the animals. I do. He's not like that. He is more a city slicker.

Interviewer: You are not a city slicker.

Penny: I am a city slicker. If I actually had to land up on a farm, I might say, "Oh no, this is never what I thought of". But I had a lot of stuff there because of my trees and in Barclay they have avenues of trees, so the birds come there because they know they can come down this avenue of trees and the next lane, where an isolated spot of trees are. So I had a lot of bird life there, and I fed the birds so that was all wonderful and I needed to have that again.

Interviewer: So you wanted to maintain birds and trees.

Penny: I need to hear natural sounds and not traffic. I don't think that I wanted to be here particularly. Moré Park was never on my agenda. I always thought, there in that area somewhere.

Interviewer: You wanted to be in your area.

Penny: Yes, and I am not, so that is an adjustment. For whatever reason, my background was half Afrikaans. I feel that I am surrounded by Dutchman. I am half Afrikaans but I felt like I am out of my area. Do you understand? I feel like a displaced person. There's nothing wrong with these people, but they are all Afrikaans. There's not a soul here that is English speaking and I feel a bit of a foreigner. Not wildly but I feel a bit of an outsider. But these people are wonderful, because they all like their privacy. So they steer clear of you, and I steer clear of them. But we have all their phone numbers, which we never had in Barclay. I know all these people. I have met them. They came to my house, some of them. They left their phone numbers, I gave my phone numbers and I think that is probably fine. It's different. The other adjusting thing is time, the traffic and distance. It hasn't got into my head yet. I shop at Barclay Mall. From my house that wasn't five minutes. I now, I haven't got it into my head yet, I travel twenty minutes and then only I am there. I look at my watch and say I have plenty of time and then I haven't got plenty of time.

Interviewer: So it's different and you have to adapt to the change.

Penny: Then a huge, huge thing is to get rid of the people that were here out of my head.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Penny: The agent told me some of the history. I feel it was very unfair to me, because it was a miserable sort of history. The ex-owner of the house, when I met him, I had an

immediate dislike and obviously the feeling was mutual so we did not have much to do with one another. He married a new wife and she came and told me the history, and I tell you, it affected me so because these bedrooms were their bedrooms. Which I think it's like that with everyone who moves feels that, but they had told me the history. I don't think their unhappiness affected me, but I really did not need to know all this.

Interviewer: So in a way the house felt foreign to you and not yours.

Penny: It still isn't but slowly it's coming back. As the stuff... like for instance the kitchen, putting the rail on top, getting all the dreadful stuff out that was rotting. That is my granite top. I have cleaned out the kitchen cupboards.

Interviewer: You want to make it your own.

Penny: It's going to take a bit longer. I put in a full day's work but I get so tired. I don't know. But the grounds, I have major plans to make it more a people's garden. It's a steep gradient and runs down to the street. It's not a people's garden. You can't run around the garden because you are up and down a hill. So I have major plans to level the garden for kids to play in. If they have to play outside, they will hurt themselves and I have my dogs to consider as well. The poor things were sick running up and down.

Interviewer: So you would like your home to accommodate your children, grandchildren, your dogs.

Penny. I would like to let it happen faster but I don't earn any money, so I have to depend on Jack to do that. He does unfortunately do the stuff that he wants to do first, and the stuff that I would like to do, is not on the list of priorities. He did a dreadful thing at the bottom of the garden. I told everybody. I moved into the second bedroom, and from the stairs, the doors that open there into the garden, and I could sit on the stairs and look at the view, and he blocked it, inside a month! I went mad!! I screamed. I was back in Barclay, immediately back in Barclay, frustrated and I can't do anything about it. Back to the bazooka! So, I moved out of that room and that's why I am upstairs. I refuse to go back into that room. I can't look at that wall. Where I am is not really a bedroom, but I refuse to go there. I have put my foot down. I sat on the bed and looked at the lights in the distance. I couldn't tell you how wonderful it was and its gone.

Interviewer: So something that was in your grasp disappeared.

Penny: One month and I was back in Barclay.

Interviewer: It was as if you had not moved.

Penny: The only way they could fix it for me is if they could break it down. Break it all down. Jack blames the builder and the builder blames Jack. I was the one that kept saying, "Fine build it, but just watch my view. How is it going? Just watch my view". Jack doesn't know just how affected I am. He either chooses not to know or he

deliberately passes over it. I don't know, but I can't handle it. I feel that he could have controlled it, and he didn't.

Interviewer: You are angry with him.

Penny: I am very angry. I am resentful, very resentful about it.

Interviewer: You say he doesn't know about it.

Penny: I did tell him. I ranted and raved about it on the specific day. I phoned my daughter in Australia. She sent her father a fax. I dragged my bed up that same day, that Saturday. I screamed around and when he came in from work I knew what he was going to say to me and I knew that I was never going to fix it. I was hoping. I was hoping that he would say, "Just break this thing down". He didn't say that. He is never going to say that.

Interviewer: And you have lost your view.

Penny: I've lost and I have lost that, I tell you.

Interviewer: There's sadness.

Penny: He was very upset because when he came home my daughter had sent him a fax, and then I knew that I am not going to get anything out of him anyway. I am not going to get anything out of him if he is aggravated. I said to him, "Are you coming upstairs to sleep with me?" and he said, "No" and I said, "Are you taking this personally?" and he said, "Yes" and I said, "Please don't take it personally" and I said, "Come along. There's a lovely view, a lovely bedroom so come upstairs".

Interviewer: You did not want a rift between the two of you.

Penny: No, I don't like that. No, I don't like that. But there is a barrier. As I say, I don't know if he is aware of it.

Interviewer: You are hurt.

Penny: I am very hurt, very, very hurt. Apart from the death, I have never had such a massive thing happen in my life that I am dead affected by it, as that.

Interviewer: You say a massive thing apart from the death. This is so big for you that it is almost as big as the death.

Penny: No, nothing is, nothing is as big as the death but outside of that, in the material sense of everyday things, I have never in my life been as upset about something as that. Those things do not come together. There is no link between the two (son's death and the absent view). The death is too bad.

(the following is not included with data analysis of 'letting go', yet illustrates the continuous mobility of the phenomenon and the difficulty of containing it in stasis)

Penny: (Cries bitterly)

Interviewer: There's still tremendous pain there.

Penny: I don't want to talk about Barry (deceased son).

Interviewer: You would rather not go there.

Penny: (Cries bitterly).

Interviewer: There's still tremendous sadness about him. Suddenly he wasn't there.

Penny: Interviewer....My mother, my father and my son died in one year!

Interviewer: Gosh.

Penny: And that was just too much. It was just too much.

Interviewer: So three significant people in your life left.

Penny: I don't even think about my parent's death. I just put it on one side. I can't deal with it.

Interviewer: When did Barry die?

Penny: Seven years ago. I can talk a little bit now about it but I can't. I don't want to talk about him, particularly as I did in the beginning. I had to talk about him in the beginning but then everyone was also so uncomfortable with it as well and I needed them not to be like he never lived.

Interviewer: He was part of you and part of your world.

Penny: Yes, but you know how it is with people. People do not know what to do, and people do not know what to say.

Interviewer: You understood that for them it wasn't easy but you had to deal with it.

Penny: They can't offer you anything. What comfort can they give you? They were just uncomfortable speaking about it, you know. I did speak about it. You know I needed to tell everybody that Barry had died and I did, but I don't know. If you talk about this letting go thing, this is the thing that people say you must let go of this and move on. You know, for every person it is so, so different. There can't be prescribed times – that

you have the acceptance stage, the resignation, the anger and those different stages but surely for each person it must be an entirely different thing you know and the same is with the death of someone. To say to a person, “Look after three years you should have reached this stage”. I don’t understand how someone can say that. Each person has to deal with what he has to deal with how best he can deal with it and in the time that he can deal with it.

Interviewer: This was told to you.

Penny: Someone once said that to me about my son. Everybody took it so badly. My son went into depression. I think that he is only just starting to come right – maybe and she said... “No it happened so long ago, you should be over it by now, so move on”.

Interviewer: This is what makes you angry with the expression letting go, which implies that things can be behind you and you feel that you can’t just put things behind you.

Penny. No I am not saying that Interviewer. I am just saying...I am just saying...I am not saying that at all. It’s not a question of putting things behind you but it’s getting on. Of course you have to get on. You as a psychologist have work, and you have to carry on with your work. It’s almost like your work is a saviour because you keep your mind busy. You have to carry on because you are in the land of the living people.

Interviewer: You carried on after Barry’s death.

Penny: I had to carry on. I had to carry on. I was no good at carrying on but I carried on anyway. You know, Jack says he thinks of Barry everyday. Maybe it’s different for him. I don’t like to say because some people say that it’s different for mothers.

Interviewer: You think of him daily.

Penny: Everyday. Everyday...Everyday.

Interviewer: So he is still part of your life.

Penny: Part of my thoughts. You know. I don’t know, part of my mind...I once followed a chap in Cape Town. His profile was like Barry’s. I was sitting somewhere and I was having tea or something. I don’t know and it was in my imagination. (Crying) I did everything to see him...(Crying) it was such a break...(Crying)

Interviewer: He was suddenly gone, suddenly.

Penny: I don’t think one can ever let go of anything like that. Really.

Interviewer: You haven’t let go. You always think of him.



Penny: I don't think anyone can. Maybe... I have got a friend and we talk... We sit and talk. I know I can speak to her because she knows. You know, you go on with your life and then sometimes you have a conflict and you keep the exterior for other people. They don't know what is going on inside of you. I don't think that I am spiritually into Barry. I mean I know that Barry has died and there's nothing. It's the memory. The biggest thing, the very biggest thing is the fact – the lack of life because he was only seventeen and it was the wrong way. It shouldn't have happened like that. The loss of life. He left early. It's wrong. It doesn't make sense. It's not the order of things. You shouldn't bury your children. I'm not saying that death is a natural thing. It's always unnatural to a person. That death is. Nobody wants death to happen...but the natural order of things.

Interviewer: You would be willing to accept the norm.

Penny: It wasn't natural because he would have had to outlive me. You are powerless, powerless and there's no goodbye. Afterwards you don't know how to deal with this stuff. Should you laugh? The first time: "Oh should I have laughed?" You know everything you do after Barry. It's like before and after Barry. I have kept a diary... all this time. I tell him what's happening...in the house...I just do it I don't know for what.

Interviewer: You communicate.

Penny: No, I don't know for what...for continuity. There's no goodbye. It's not like someone is in hospital and they are slowly dying of cancer and you are saying your goodbyes.

Interviewer: You trust that things will continue.

Penny: How do we keep going if we don't?

Interviewer: So continuity is important.

Penny: Maybe with the house. The death of child is not in the same league. There's nothing that's happened to me that has been as traumatic as Barry's death and everything after that...how we think has changed. My way of thinking changed. My way of thinking changed my relationships with the other children. My daughter would say, "But we are still here". I got angry with her and then not, because... I knew that what she was saying was that Barry is not the only child. By the same token I can't minimise his loss and carry on. I can't minimise this. I don't want to but I can't even try.

Interviewer: So it affected your life.

Penny: Absolutely. It changed a whole lot of things. I like music and I would always sing and I realise now that I don't sing any more. I have now started again because I always have a song in my head and now I slowly do... but I didn't for years. I didn't sing out loud.

Interviewer: So you are regaining what you knew.

Penny: Starting to regain. I would have been happy-go-lucky, I would have been frivolous but I am no longer frivolous. My sense of humour went down the shoot. Big changes. Big changes...I mean if you haven't got your family who have you got?

Interviewer: So you would say that these have been the two major letting go experiences in your life – the death of Barry and moving home.

Penny: Letting go what is letting go? You can't just sever the tie and boom!

Interviewer: Is that what letting means to you?

Penny: Yes, cut off – I mean cut the rope and off goes the boat. I don't think so. I think that it stays connected somehow.

Interviewer: So what you are saying is that you never let go?

Penny: Certainly not with the things that have a major importance in your life.

### **Research Participant D : John (J)**

John: Depending on the experience, leading up to this letting go determines how the letting go process will play itself out. In my particular situation there are two that we could actually discuss. They are very different. The one is my first business, where it was very important to me, and I let it go, and now ten years down the line it is not as if it bothers me. So it was an easy let go. The other one was the experience with Moira (ex-fiancée) where ten years down the line, I am still trying to finally get to grips with it, and yet, that was also a situation of letting go. You had to let go in those situations. Both of them are very similar in terms of, I had one business then, I have another business now. The first business does not bother me. I am happy with the second one. I had a relationship then, I have a relationship now. The new relationship bothers me, because one hasn't let go fully, of that first experience. Maybe for this purpose one should look at why is it that you let go of the one and it doesn't bother you, and you do similar things and it doesn't bother you and its fine, and the new venture does not get hampered by thoughts of the old one. This relationship situation which should be similar in principle, the old one that's finished, and the new one that has started, yet the new one is complicated because of the old one and that has got everything to do with letting go of the old one.

The way I experience it is, if one is not one hundred percent sure that it was the right thing to do, then letting go is going to become a problem. Because practically, maybe it was the right decision, yet in your heart, and in your emotions, you are not one hundred percent sure. So objectively speaking, non-emotionally speaking, by just looking at the facts, you could not have made any other choice. So one part of you says, "That was the right thing to do, so now, let it go". That other part of you, which is the emotional, deep down part of you, there's a "I don't really care what the facts are, whether or not it was the right or not the right thing to do, I don't really care". Emotionally, this practice or this thing that you had to do is now causing me pain and causing me issues, which boils down to again the decision that you are making: I now have to let go. If one is not one hundred percent sure of that decision, practically, you will still let go because circumstances will force you in that direction. You will have no choice because practically you can't go on with the situation, like I had with Moira. It was we now had to get married at some point. We had gone through all of the steps but we now had to finally put the stamp on the documents and finish this thing and practically there it broke down. And there was no way for me to continue in that situation. I had to leave the situation because I had no choice, yet ten years down the line, one is now thinking because you were not one hundred percent sure, you now have doubts. How could have done this? Could I have not done something differently? Could I have not have explored another avenue? Did I do everything possible before I let go? That is the only thing that made letting go difficult. So letting go was only an issue in terms of the decision that preceded it. If like with my business, before I let go I was a one hundred percent happy that it's fine, "We will have another opportunity. We will have another chance somewhere. We will never let go of this that we tried to achieve. So we will maintain that. We will try again another day.". And that's fine the decision was taken. The legal documentation was drawn. There were

no issues; there were no risks. There was nothing more and have a nice day! Ten years down the line, I now own a successful business, and I am coping. Whereas on the other side, after a lot of therapy, one has to reiterate to yourself, and actually go back to one stage before the letting go, and go and sort out that part. So that ten years later when memory has now faded and only the good memories have remained and the bad experiences and the practical situations that led to making this decision have now faded. That's human nature. We don't hold on to our thoughts, we let go of them as quickly as what we can. We cherish the good moments. The problem is that if you make the decision hastily or emotionally unstable and it wasn't a well thought through structured type of decision, then you have to go back to before that. Maybe remind yourself and confirm for yourself, ten years down the line that that was the right decision you made. So now ten years down the line for a change you can let go because you hadn't, in ten years, let go. You thought you did, maybe, again practically speaking, if you look at your life you would have convinced anyone that you have moved on. You had a couple of girlfriends, got married, had kids. So on the surface it looks OK and if you are not looking very deep and whoever may be observing, the letting go has happened. Meanwhile under the surface, there's a whole lot of unfinished business, which means, no you have not let go. If you don't let go you cannot progress. Holding on is in all respects detrimental. Permitting that it was the right decision to make, obviously. If after ten years one goes back and says, "It was the wrong decision to make", then you never have to let go. Then you must go back and go and hold on again but if you find out that it was the right decision, then only can you start to let go but whilst you haven't got there yet, this holding on is damaging. In all respects it's bad.

Interviewer: You say the holding on is bad?

John: One hundred percent. Letting go is the only means of starting to heal. Healing can't come if letting go hasn't come, in my opinion. As long as you are still holding on for fear of life, to whatever the experience was, you can't get to healing. If letting go hasn't happened, then you can't think about healing, it hasn't started.

Interviewer: You say holding on is damaging.

John: Tremendously.

Interviewer: How do you see this related to your experience with Moira?

John: Basically, For a start if I had let go properly, the time when the incident happened.

Interviewer: What incident?

John: When we broke up. When we cancelled our engagement and we went our separate ways. I think that if at that point, I had let go properly, my life today, ten years later would be very different. I would probably not be married to my kind of wife, I would probably not have my little one, I would probably have been happier because if I had let go earlier I could have controlled the damage. There's going to be damage. I mean these

big emotional situations. These big emotional traumas always leave scars. But I think that if I had worked through it better, earlier in other words, let go earlier, I could have healed earlier. I could have six years or eight years ago looked at my life and said, “What do I want? What is good for me? If its good for me to maybe look at six or ten different relationships before I commit again and make one hundred percent sure that when I commit again, it will be for all the right reasons, I would have done it. Conversely, or practically speaking, what happened is that holding on that has made you so emotionally unstable and created so much underlying turbulence, turmoil in your emotions that you become desperate for a solution. You are not solving the problem but you are desperate for a solution to the symptoms of the problem and the symptoms of the problem, in my particular case was, “I need to move on, I need something to convince myself that its OK. You have now moved on.”, which led me to hastily get married, hastily have a child and now for the rest of my life I can now decide what I want to do with this new problem. Do I want to manage this problem? Do I want leave this environment and create a new problem? What do I want to do? But the damage is done. There’s nothing we can do. We can’t go back now six or seven years and undo the damage. The scars are there. The practical day-to-day commitments are now there and that is as a direct result of non letting go.

Interviewer: You mean you did not let go?

John: Not at all, not at all. I was desperately holding on, yet practically on the surface, I was trying to move along. So I was trying to let go practically and trying, looking for opportunities, things to do in order to let these things happen.

Interviewer: So it almost as if it is on two levels.

John: Yes. Ja, on the surface there are pretty pictures and everything looks fine, everything is “lekker” (nice). Just underneath that, just under the surface there is actually the bubbling. That’s where the turmoil lies and it’s that turmoil that is directly related to not letting go because if you had let go, the waters would come. Like in my business. I had let go in my first business, got myself a job again, got stability back into my life again, got some income, settled some of my debts and just moved along and progressed in my career and worked hard and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. All with, in the back of my mind, always this thing of, I am going somewhere. Because the waters had calmed down and everything had settled down and now you get a chance to think clearly. There’s no threat, there’s nothing clouding your mind. Everything is normal. Everything is fine. Got a day job, every month there is a salary coming, you can pay your car and you can pay your house. You can live. And while you can live in these placid waters you can now look for opportunity, which because I did not let go of Moira emotionally, I could never do, because the waters emotionally never settle down. You know it was always stormy seas, fighting for survival, trying to keep the ship up straight. You know the ship is sailing the water is calm. So now, for a change, you can take a deep breath and say, “Whew, thank goodness, we got through that rough patch. Now there’s a little bit of calm seas ahead. Let’s look around and clearly thinking, look for new opportunity.” and as I say it’s got everything to do with holding on. If one can let go or rather if you could let

go why did you not let go? Why was it easy for me to let go of the business yet I could not let go of Moira? It was all in the same time period, by the way. So I was as old or as young or as mature or as immature in both situations. It was not as if the one happened when I was eighteen and the other when I was twenty-eight. All the same time and its all the same me yet the one you close off, it goes away. The lingering thought was, “ It wasn’t bad. Yes, maybe it was unpleasant. It was a good experience. I gained a lot of knowledge, which I will apply later when the opportunity arises. I could have done exactly the same with Moira. Maybe, I could have even made more use because I had so much longer with her. I had only had the business for a year. I had a relationship for seven years with Moira. I had so much more information, so much more knowledge in terms of me, of what I want, in terms of how does the ideal potential wife for me. How does she look? Who is she? What are her qualities what are her attributes? What are the things that I have to have? What are the things that I would like to have in a potential partner? Yet all of that information experience, which I could have applied so well in terms of making the decision, like with the business, I was never not going to have another business. I was always going to have another business. I am going to get there, exactly the same in a relationship. I don’t see myself as a bachelor until I am 60. I see myself as a married person. I see myself with kids. I see myself in a happy family so life was a business. There was this lingering thought that should say, “It was unpleasant so take what you could out of it, apply it to this new sort of opportunities that you have, and make sure that you have the right choices now”. It does not a happen. All of that knowledge, all of that information is somewhere but it is not readily available to use. The tools are there somewhere because you can’t have not experienced these things, you can’t have not have gained knowledge out of this exercise, yet you don’t apply it.

Interviewer: So it’s not easily accessible and not available to you?

John: Not all. It is there, somewhere. You know deep down in the back of your mind these tools are there. This information is there but you don’t know it. Many an attribute in Joan (wife), I think came from the experience with Moira. It wasn’t an objective decision from my side. It was like a roller coaster. I landed up in this relationship and we just went with the flow, kind of thing. But even selecting her as a potential partner, some very good qualities are there today. You know that she is a very good mom and she is extremely efficient in what she does. All of those things must have something to do with the relationship I had with Moira. Some of the tools that you get do come up but all of it not all of the knowledge, not all of the experience apply properly because the waters are too turbulent. The storm is raging too much around you for you to really be able to sit down and say, “OK so where are we?” To kind of get an opportunity to rethink.

Interviewer: Tell me about the turbulent storms. It seems like the turbulent storms and the holding on was the difficulty.

John: Very much so, because I think it’s a battle inside yourself. You can’t have this battle with whoever or whatever caused this problem, like with Moira. I can’t have the struggle with her. The struggle with her is finished. Practically we are not seeing each other any more. We are not dating any more. We are not... We are no more. Yet within

me, that's not finalised yet and I am still trying to work through all of this. I am still trying to get to grips with all of the emotional issues, all of the pain; all of the... everything that comes with this break, this emotional crisis. Maybe the turbulence that I am referring to is this battle that rages in your head, especially in the early stages after the emotional friction that causes the need to let go. You try to get to grips with all of this emotion that's going through you and maybe the letting go part again you have to get back to the decision because the decision to break up if it is the right decision and you are one hundred percent convinced. I think the turbulence period might be shorter. Any emotional crisis, as far as I am concerned, is followed by emotional turbulence, it must be otherwise it would not be a crisis and would just be an emotional event. So if it is a crisis, it has to be followed by turbulence or emotional instability. The struggle and the pain that you try to get to grips with. If the decision is right that period of emotional pain is not very long and you kind of get over it and you heal almost I want to say short term. There is a "groot eina" (great ouch) and then it heals, and then you can kind of get to grips with the long-term effects and move on. But again, if you are not sure that the decision was the right one, then this period of emotional instability and the pain stretches and stretches. Yes, it becomes less. It becomes less because of fading, rather than healing.

Interviewer: What do you feel is the difference?

John: One hundred percent. In my opinion, it's very hard to hold on that tight because practically you just don't have the stimulus anymore. You know you are not in that relationship any more. So from both sides, the good and the bad is gone. You don't have the good times any more. You don't have the romantic evenings anymore, but also you don't have the issues like with her mother or her brother, whatever could have caused the friction. So in terms of your everyday life, the stimulus is gone, then the memory starts to fade. Therefore you now perceive this fading as healing and it feels to you like you getting better. Meanwhile it's just your short-term memory that's failing you. You know there is nothing healing here. Your short-term memory is just failing and you "sommer gaan aan" (simply carry on). The stimuli start triggering the turmoil underneath, which is how I realised that I could not cope. I had already thought that everything was fine. I had taken the failing memory as healing until I got married and had children and had new issues, new problems and new things to deal with and my response to the stimuli was out of proportion. You know something small with Joan caused me to explode like it was the end of the world and later I said, "Hold on, maybe she is just the trigger".

Interviewer: So it wasn't appropriate to the context.

John: No, it was out of proportion. The stimulus was small and the reaction was big. The next morning, I would think and wonder to myself, "Why did I explode like that so aggressively and so exaggerated? It's such a small issue. You could have brushed the issue aside. Why? It's such a small issue. It would take you two minutes to resolve an issue like that. It's not a potential divorce". Then only did I realise that letting go was the problem, because I said, "You have not let go, You are still there. Your body is here and only a part of you mind is here. The rest is still there". Like I say maybe that is the

biggest problem with letting go. It's deceptive.

Interviewer: Deceptive?

John: Yes, it deceives you. It presents itself to you as if it has happened, and that is not true. It's like a hologram. A picture that you can see that has more to do with the fading Memory of the good and bad times than anything with letting go but it looks to you like everything is fine and you think that you are on the road to recovery and that you have moved on. You are OK. Meanwhile bottom line basics, you're not, because you have not let go. It's an instinctive thing that we instinctively know that we cannot hold on to the past and maybe it was the death of a grandparent. Things that influenced us in our lives which grandfather. Even if you loved the guy to bits and you are a ten year old and you don't understand these black dresses and tears, but somewhere something registers, this bloke has gone and we have to move on with our lives. Yes we can hold on to the memory and hold his pictures on the sideboard, but he has gone. He is no more. So your mind is almost anticipating this experience of letting go because it's a natural thing because you are ready for it. Now this fading memory comes and presents itself to you and if you are not careful you don't see the difference between, the practical side of a fading memory, and the practical side of having let go, because they look very similar. If you had let go, you would move on. You would have more relationships. You would have kids. If you have a failing memory you will have more relationships. You will have kids. They are so similar in their appearance. If you don't go digging then a day in your life comes that you realise that you have been deceiving yourself. Maybe you have not been true to yourself and maybe just been human. You had seen the practical things for what you had hoped they were and then one day you realise that they are not and then you have a problem. Then you have to go back and you say, "Oh this is where I am standing and this is where I am holding on". Lets slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly try and release the grip that we have on this experience and distance ourself and then move on.

Interviewer: So you had to go back?

John: I think so, because part of you is here and part of you is here (demonstrates), so this part must come back and there you have to fix and finished for the whole of you to emotionally to come back here. The holding on is here so the letting go must be here and that's a painful exercise.

Interviewer: Painful? In what way?

John: Just simply because of the fact that you are going deep, so deep and so dark down into yourself that you have to re-live all of these painful experiences. You have to go back there and go and do what you should have done in the first place and let go. So now you are experiencing the same pain twice. You have been through all the pain but maybe you hadn't worked through it, but you walked through it. You had tried to shield yourself as far as possible. You make the defence as strong as possible, so as few as possible bullets get through, and you walk through this jungle and you get out on the other side. But now you have to go back and say "You need to finish this off and the only way to



finish it off is to go back into the jungle, and let the defences down and work through it rather than just trying to get through it, as quickly as possible. So the pain lies in we living the bad experiences. Your fading memory lets the good times fade. I think it lets the bad times fade three times as quickly. The good times will linger probably until you die. Small parts: A week after we broke up, I could still tell you to the day and the date of things that happened in our lives. I could re-live experiences that were very there and very clear in your mind. Today, ten years down the line, the details are sketchy. It's not there anymore. With some effort I suppose you could work it out, it's gone, it's not there any more but in the same breath, the better times are even deeper, one experience maybe two at a push that you can remember the good memories. Sure there are not 100 anymore but there are still a few, six or seven really strong ones like the Comrade's Marathon they just held out. They are still there but they vastly outnumber the bad experiences, in terms of the really strong ones that have remained. Now if you go back these two bad ones that are here, plus another ten or twelve ones, or how many you can uncover in your search, but they all surface and all come back. Now you are not looking for any deep, good things and now there is a serious imbalance, so it's only the pain, only the bad times because you are basically just looking to reaffirm to yourself the decision that you have made. To look back and see what caused the decision and it's definitely not the good times that cause the decision. The bad things have caused it, so you are going to dig and you are going to search for the bad things and not for the good things. So maybe when it just happened at least you still have the balance of good to bad, because they are all current in your mind. Now when you go back you are looking but you are not digging. All the memoirs you trash, the good times must go. So I think that the pain lies in that that you have to experience the pain and re-live it again and secondly there is no good to look at. Maybe now you are genuinely confronting the issue. Initially you have this good and bad balance and the bad just, just outweighs the good otherwise you would not have made the split. I would not have taken my bags and gone my merry little way if the good did outweigh the bad heavily. So the bad just outweighs the good enough, and you are irritated enough, and annoyed enough, to make the decision, and the moment you have made the decision your mind goes "Are you sure?" It's a small difference it's not a grand difference. Maybe letting go has got to do with the gap between the good and the bad. The gap, like in my business; the good was good. It wasn't overwhelming. We were not coining it and we were not young millionaires in the making. The good was "lekker" (nice) but the bad outweighed it heavily. There were issues with my partner. You have to work until four o'clock in the morning. I have to carry all the burden. He just takes all of my money. It's what pushes you over the edge what makes you go to the point that you make a break. If that push is very strong then the letting go comes easily. If the push is marginal then the letting go will be difficult.

Interviewer: What do you mean by the push?

John: The issues; the bad things, which you perceive in your mind that this situation is not worthwhile anymore. Like someone pushing you. Like my partner not wanting to participate in the tough times. Selling door to door. I have never seen a happy salesman like that, because it's not a nice thing to do. You are intruding on people's time and people are rude. It's not nice. He took the nice things, the bad he never took so he was

pushing me with his actions and at one point, I had to evaluate my current situation. Am I happy with this situation? I would not be asking if I was. I am happy with some things and you take a back step and evaluate, and depending on how heavily the bad outweighs the good will make letting go easier or difficult. I don't think letting go can in its essence be an easy thing. It is a difficult thing it's just the grade of difficulty. Like easier and more difficult maths. I would have physically attacked the guy if I had not left if you can say this makes me so angry then its easy.

Interviewer: So in the business it was easy but not with Moira.

John: Not with Moira because with Moira it was genuinely marginal. It was just that little something that wasn't clicking. It was not as if we were fighting with each other all the time. We were happy. Everything was bliss, but there was this one. You still have to make a decision evaluate and say, "Nope, it's not going to work and I have to go" It was nice and lovely, and I enjoyed the next three months of my life incredibly because I looked up. I was free and gone with the business but with Moira it was, "Why is she not walking down the aisle? Why am I only making one cup of coffee at seven in the morning and not two? She is supposed to be here so that we can have coffee and I can then drop her off at work.. There's no getting around that if you take one step back and re-evaluate the situation and find that the bad outweighs the good. The discrepancy is too small, the margin is too small and I am going to live with this. I am going to stomach it and I will grit my teeth and live with it. Me on the other hand with my black and white type of personality: if its 51% bad and 49% good, then it's a bad thing. I tried to swing the balances but unfortunately the scales tipped in favour of bad and therefore I had to leave. That is, essentially you determine how difficult it is going to be. If you feel relief, then letting go is easy, and I don't think you were ever holding on.

Interviewer: Did you feel relief?

John: With the business yes, but not with Moira. No, but relief of the bad part. The fact that I did not have to see her mother any more. I did not have to listen to her mother's jabbering any more or look at her brother any more with the question of who is first going to pull the guns me, or you? So relief from that part, but the relief immediately balances off with a big part of heartache. There is a part of longing here. The relief is here but the heartache is also here. "Where are you? I'm missing you."

Interviewer: There was the missing and the longing.

John: One hundred percent. Like I said earlier it's the longing that lingers. The relief is lovely but if it's gone, it's gone. The frustration the issues have gone. That's gone... but what about my longing? That's the one that lingers. Like I said, it makes the real letting go so very different. You may try to balance, but it was a precarious balance when you make the decision, and once the decision has been made, it becomes ten times more difficult because your longing outweighs. You are emotionally so vulnerable, absolutely exposed. And you know that somewhere, somehow, there is going to be a lot of pain.

Interviewer: When?

John: When you make the break. Even while you are considering whether I go or not, you know there is pain coming my way. Now the moment you make the decision, and I am going to make the decision, and because you are on the defensive maybe you grasp at any good emotion that you have because of all the pain. Immediately the bad things are gone. That is 'mos' why you left the equation. Her mother, in my situation, of her mother yapping in my ear, that's not going to happen any more because I don't go there any more. I don't see them any more, so lekker (nice) but now the pain that I have. How the hell do I deal with this pain? By grasping onto the good things that I can find, because you are desperate, and you don't know when to go and when to leave. Now it's the good things you cling onto. The knuckles go white because you are holding on so bad and that is what you are not supposed to do. You must let go, maybe because of the precarious balance, the pain, the turmoil. All of that stuff makes you do exactly the opposite. You just hold on for dear life.

Interviewer: So as you are making the break you find that you are going back again.

John: Yes, and then starts the process. In my case it took ten years. Other people might take longer. Other people might take shorter but definitely the process is the same where you allow time to pass. You allow other things. You work harder. You drink more. You play; you do whatever you have to. You shield yourself off from all of these things. To do something else so that you don't have time to wonder about all of this stuff, which is so threatening. Then time starts running by and then the fading thing starts happening. The memories start to fade. Slowly but surely you get to the deception part where you mind was so desperate for a solution that it starts to tell itself. "Look at me. Just look at me. Am I not the perfect example of someone who is coping?"

Interviewer: You actually believe that?

John: One hundred percent. I'm not well yet or over her yet, but boy oh boy, just look at me. You believe that you are getting there but meanwhile back at the ranch you aren't getting there. You are living. You are going through the motions but you definitely are not alive again.

Interviewer: Not alive?

John: Emotionally you are very dead. There's a chunk of you that maybe in a 100 years, there is still a 'geraamtetjie' (little skeleton) that's hanging on. How could I marry my wife as a purely unemotional decision? That is ludicrous, that is crazy!

Interviewer: So the emotional part is not there.

John: And I perceive myself to be an emotional person! After business, the second most important decision in my life, I made unemotionally! Crazy! The only explanation I

could find is that part of you is there, the emotional guy is there, but he is hanging onto something there, he is not here. If he was there, maybe he would have contributed.

Interviewer: Where would you say that you are today?

John: Quite close to the point where one can actually say you are really there. You have really let go because letting go is a process. Maybe, because it was such a process to get here. In the business it was easy, it was clean cut. There is no process. I think with Moira, I am this close to actually having that peace of mind, that general sense of calm. The waters are settled. The wind has stopped howling. The sun is rising and it's clear. I can see the symptoms of the end of the storm. As you can see a storm building, in the same way I can see the storm almost nearing an end. Some of the clouds are subsiding and I know that instinctively, you are almost there where the sun will break through and then, if you look around, there is the calmness. Then everything will be cool, and then, you now have a problem because that letting go has got consequences. Getting to the calm, unlike with my business, you are not free to say, "Where to from here?" because you now have to say, "What to do with what I have got?" because there are passengers on this boat. All of a sudden, there's baggage, things, which have happened as a direct result of not letting go. Maybe it creates new issues. I don't know but you can get through it.

### **Research Participant E: Karen (K)**

Karen: To me, letting go is a very broad term but I really think that having children and letting go... If I think about parents who have lost their child, it must be absolutely dreadful and devastating. It is hard enough having to cope when they are teenagers. Like I found with Matt, specifically during standard six, was dreadful, because I felt absolutely rejected. Although he was close, and still is very close to me, as a child, he would make remarks to me at a parents' meeting, "Please be quiet" and "Don't you have something to say" or "Please you can drop me off over here". I definitely had to realise my distance how far I could go. After a while he sort of let me back in again, but like if we were on to parents evening, he would say to me, "Please behave", and things like that. I wasn't really used to getting this sort of, you can't really call it backchat, but being reprimanded and told how to behave. That is when I started realise that he is getting bigger and moving away. Once it was sort of put to me by a psychologist friend, who explained to me, "You can expect that. It's part of their growing up and finding their feet". It was then easy to accept that. But little things that they say or realise then making you feel that you are not cool, or that you are overweight, or little things that embarrasses them. You sometimes experience it as so hurtful too, and you know, not reacting to it and letting go and letting them be. The next part of it was going out, like to socials. Let him go, let him go to socials. You have got to let them go but you... I always think that I can trust my children but I can't trust the people out there. I think from when we were children things have changed dramatically. We could go on bicycles or on horseback to places you could not even dream of letting them go to now. Also, like realising that he now has his learner's license. Now he can start driving. The whole matric year and matric itself. You know that they are learning and they are doing well but also now they are going for their driver's licence. They haven't started driving and when they have got that licence, now they can go out, they have got that freedom. Once again that feeling of "What's happening out there?", "I know you can drive, you have got your driver's licence, you have had the lessons, you have the lessons and a lot of practice, but I still don't trust the people out there. Also when they say they are going to different places, like they are going to meet in Hatfield. There are certain areas that you feel are safer, and that type of thing. The matric party that they had, the last day of school, or the party that they had. Although it was still school time, it was dreadful. Not saying something, and not being overprotective, but allowing and letting them experiment and hoping they come out the other side in one piece. Like for example, I knew, that boys will be boys and girls, I think, aren't as bad, although I have heard rumours that they also do try alcohol. They go through a phase and they test these things. And you know, Nikki still said that her husband said that you have got to let them get drunk at some stage and let them go overboard so that they do it before they get married, you know. Hearing it from other young men, who have sort of been through that phase, or are closer to that age, it makes it a bit easier. But oh boy, it is a stressful time. That letting go, to me, is very stressful and I think. I can also see it with some of the mothers that come to me with their teenagers with stuttering problems. They are at loggerheads, not with the stuttering problem but with interpersonal relationships, and not being this overprotective mother. You are protective but you have not got to show too much and you have got to let go. Even last

year was quite a difficult year suddenly, also the realisation that Matt has a girlfriend. They go out in a group and they go to a social, but he never really had a girlfriend. He took a very nice girl to the matric dance, but she was just a friend, nothing serious but then suddenly the realisation that I can ask him to do things, but I must accept that he can't always do it for me, because he has made prior arrangements. You know, those little things. During matric or the first year I was never driven to tears but in the standard six; that letting go, that getting reprimanded and being put in my place and being a sort of a no good person - that often reduced me to tears. That was really a tough time.

Interviewer: It was an unhappy time for you?

Karen: It was an unhappy time.

Interviewer: You also speak of the concern. The greater the distance the more concerned you were, like with the going out to socials, taking a girlfriend.

Karen: You know I think the concern is one of protection. You don't want anything to happen, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: So were you anxious?

Karen: Yes, yes because I don't want anything to happen to him.

Interviewer: What could happen to him?

Karen: One sees so many times the innocent person driving along and being in a car crash and getting hurt. Often there is someone that is drunk out there because he has played roulette and he is completely relaxed and survives everything. That's the type of thing, and one also knows that they also, they haven't had experience in driving and reacting to situations. I suppose that is what makes one anxious. They don't have the wisdom. They are young adults. You have got to respect them for that but they haven't got the wisdom, or the experience yet. One looks back and one realises that even as a teenager the young person... I know that I did things that were irresponsible, and I suppose because you did things that were irresponsible, you don't want your child to do it because you know that it could have led to something. Luckily it did not lead to something unfortunate, but it could have, that type of thing.

Interviewer: It could lead to something. Do you mean that he could be irresponsible?

Karen: Yes it could.

Interviewer: So he is not the child you used to know?

Karen: I suppose yes. I suppose one hangs onto the past. If you look at old photographs, you often look and you see that each phase is an interesting phase and a nice phase to grow up with your child. If you look at photographs you sometimes think, "I wish I could

have made time to stand still for a little while during that phase. This is a fantastic period”. I am not saying that now isn’t a nice phase, not at all. It is a nice phase with different things that come with it. There are also exciting things that come with it. As a phase starts, you often go through a lot of turmoil. Sometimes, a little bit of heartache and things like that.

Interviewer: So you do look back at the past. Has the past become significant?

Karen: I don’t know. Maybe I am just a person like that clings a bit to the past. You know, in that sense, it is significant.

Interviewer: Things aren’t the way they used to be and you are anxious about the changes.

Karen: I would say yes.

Interviewer: Is this what you see as letting go?

Karen: I suppose this is the difficulty letting go - not looking to the past, but looking forward and not seeing the positive things. But sometimes one gets embroiled with the now, and then you don’t really see the things of the future, and I think, that is the difficulty in letting go.

Interviewer: Is the difficulty in not seeing the positive things in the future?

Karen: Yes, and I think that is what makes the letting go more difficult, not seeing the positive things ahead.

Interviewer: So you do see positive things there?

Karen: Oh yes, there are positive things there because if I look at it, I am looking forward to going to Matt’s graduation and the same with Alice’s (daughter). I think that will be fantastic. Also, to think that he has got his job; he is on his own. You know I think that those are positive things but sometimes when one is in the situation it is difficult to realise that he can have a girlfriend and she can take priority over you (laughs). He is allowed to say, “You know I can’t help you now because I have this date or whatever”. You know, that sort of letting go.

Interviewer: You say she has priority over you. Do you feel that you are handing over?

Karen: No. I don’t think that I am handing over. I just think that sometimes one takes things, maybe for granted. He has always been very close to me. Alice sometimes shoves me away, but that is another whole thing. But with Matt, if I say, “Can you help me with this”, he would do it, whereas now he will say “ No, I can’t help you now, because....”. I have to accept that because if he has made an appointment or an arrangement, I just respect that. Sometimes, I get home tired and you think that there is no one in the house

is helping me. There is no use getting angry you just have to think about it and you say, “ You know, I am angry and frustrated because of things that have happened at work. I can’t get it out on them and I think that sometimes, just also that letting go, that understanding of you have got to realise me... (*inaudible*)... Alice is also getting older. I also think of the future and the empty nest syndrome. You realise that they are going out. You have got to let them go and now you are on your own and you are not doing family things any more.

Interviewer: So family things have been important?

Karen: Yes and we have always been a close-knit family.

Interviewer: Is that changing?

Karen: Yes and one of the things that has changed is not going on holiday together. Just accepting that. The first big thing was the matric holiday. You know at the end of the year, when they all want to go together. Also just letting go. You know where they are going, and how they are going, but not whether they are going to get there safely, there and back. Just allowing them, and the fact that... When was it? In December; the actual year to me was too terrible. The weeks before that, Alice had water polo. It was the Nationals in Johannesburg and we wanted to fly her down to join us but by the time she decided what she wanted to do, I could not get a cheaper ticket anymore. So she went to water polo and Matt stayed home to look after the house, Kurt and I went away for the first time, since I went to Sun City with friends, approximately twenty years ago! The weeks beforehand, there was all that guilt as well.

Interviewer: Do you mean guilt before you left?

Karen: Yes, to leave these children, you know I am actually deserting them. They took it much easier. I am sure Alice missed me or missed both of us, and would have liked us to have seen some of the matches, but she was with her buddies, but I felt so guilty not being there. You know, Kurt took it much easier but that’s letting go, that they can let go and have their own holidays and do their own thing and we can actually also do our own thing.

Interviewer: You spoke of the empty nest.

Karen: You know I think back on my relationship with my parents. We were also a close-knit family. I suppose, one thinks also to the future, because both of them have spoken about going overseas. I went overseas after I was a student. I often, even now, I think I had a really nice time. I enjoyed where I worked and I was not sure whether I wanted to come back. I started to come back to visit and rather get German citizenship and stay and keep visiting. Really, it was very difficult but I came back and even though I moved on and I had my own flatlet, when I came back, I was always still with the family and maintained contact with the family. Both Matt and Alice are both talking about that they both would like to go overseas, and I hope that they do go overseas. I



want them to do that, to spread their wings. But it's also that feeling that they also might not come back and that is the sort of scariness of being all alone.

Interviewer: How do you feel about being alone?

Karen: I think there are times one can cope because you find activities to do. Even when I'm alone at home and there's nobody there and even Johannes (gardener) is in the garden. He comes twice a week. Alice is at school and I am alone with the dogs. I have work to do but it is the stillness of the house that is sort of eerie and uncomfortable. You are busy, your mind is busy but you still experience that sort of...I think that is when you suddenly realise that everybody is out the house you have got to an age that you have retired but you haven't got your job anymore. There is only the stillness. I suppose that I am very aware of it because my dad is experiencing that loneliness.

Interviewer: Do you see the relationship with your children similar to that with your parents?

Karen: As you see you parents ageing you realise that it is a path that you have to travel as well. You reach a certain age where you become aware of it, more aware of it than if you were younger. Old people, by just talking, because you experience it and live it. Suddenly, it becomes a reality that you realise, that it could be me. Interviewer: Are you saying that you realise that you are getting old as well?

Karen: Yes.

Interviewer: What do you feel this has got to do with your letting go of Matt and the initial separation there?

Karen: First of all there is a conflict. You know that there is a conflict. You know that you have to let go but you don't want to lose.

Interviewer: So is letting go losing?

Karen: It is in a way losing, yes.

Interviewer: Losing what?

Karen: Losing the person you share with, the company, the understanding with your family. You have a different relationship with each member. There are certain things that you don't want to burden your children with, but there are certain things that you discuss with them. In a way they are a sounding board and you know, I do see it as a loss. I suppose I can use the word, but I see it as a painful process.

Interviewer: There is pain?

Karen: There is that pain and it is not nice.

Interviewer: It seems unpleasant.

Karen: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: So it is not any easy process for you?

Karen: No, no, definitely not.

Interviewer: And yet earlier on you said that you were also looking forward to certain things like the graduation.

Karen: Yes. That is right.

Interviewer: Anything else you would like to add?

Karen: Well, all that I can say is and this is just an example and Erica (colleague) said to me the other day, "I haven't seen Matt for a long time". "So," she said "is it his academic activities or other activities besides the studies...and I said, "Its all activities, so the mom has to take second place". So you also see yourself as not needed. You have got to take a step back, and you have got to remind yourself to do it gracefully. You know, to me that was also very difficult that Matt can have a girlfriend although I'd rather he had a girlfriend than a boyfriend! (laughs) But still, this is not my little boy anymore...,that type of thing. I must say that I can't complain. She is a lovely girl There are mixed feelings. She is a bit younger than he is. She finished last year and she was also at Girl's High. I have no complaints.

Interviewer: So there is a distance created and you are not very comfortable with the potential aloneness and losing the meaningful togetherness that you have had.

Karen: Yes, it is a painful process. You have summed it up that sort of feeling that you are empty being alone. Discarded (laughs). Discarding this interfering old lady (laughs). "Just keep out of our lives". I suppose that they are silly things, but these are the feelings and emotions that one has, but I mean this does happen.

Interviewer: You see that it is there.

Karen: It is there because you see it happen with other people. With my dad being in the old age home, you know, and other people talk. You can see that how some old people never have families. Some families may be overseas and then may still have a friend, a niece or somebody who occasionally comes around and calls on them and some of them are like an old shoe, just put in the cupboard and put in the drawer and that is it. I think because one sees these things. Maybe somebody from a different background wouldn't be so sensitive and critical of things that could happen.

Interviewer: You feel that your background has influenced you.

Karen: Maybe yes. My professional (speech therapist) background, I think, has influenced me. Also, things that have happened to me have contributed. You know even like losing my mom and losing my brother Alan. So maybe this has made me want to hang onto things or...

Interviewer: What do you mean by hanging on?

Karen: By hanging on, I suppose wanting things to still be around. You still miss them because there are things that you want to share with them and I think that it is that sort of sharing, that you want to sometimes just talk to them. Even if you haven't lost your child, his or her moving on is that you lose that sharing and that togetherness.

Interviewer: So you enjoy and want to maintain the togetherness that you have now?

Karen: Yes.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Karen: I think that basically sums it up.

Interviewer: Would you like to sum it up? From what we have said how would you describe your experience of letting go?

Karen: I would say that as the process starts, it is a painful process. Then they (teenagers) start telling you that they want to let go and they want you to let go. You do feel a certain amount of rejection because they don't know that, so they knock you some times and say unpleasant things, and then knowing that you have to let go, you think ahead of what could happen, and what shouldn't happen. The unpleasant negative things, they are scary and they are painful. They make for the saddest times. So you see the sadder and more negative instead of the positive things that are there as well.

Interviewer: So there are positive things?

Karen: Yes there are positive things but we are going through a process that is usually overshadowed by the painful and hurtful things.

Interviewer: You find the painful things more dominant at the moment although you do see positive things as well.

Karen: That's right. I hope that all this has been helpful.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Forms**

**Form A:**

**Letter to Research Participant**

Date.....

Dear.....,

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the experience of 'letting go'. I am intrigued by this phenomenon and delighted about your possible participation in my study. I truly value the unique contribution that you can make to the knowledge and structure regarding this phenomenon.

The purpose of this letter is to reiterate the points already discussed as well as to request that you sign the participation release form, enclosed herewith. Particulars regarding the time and place for the interview are included Confidentiality is ensured and will be maintained at all times. Any identifiable information will be disguised or removed.

I intend using a qualitative model in my search for comprehensive descriptions and depictions of your experience. From this, I hope to elucidate and answer my question "What is the experience of letting-go? The aim of this study is an attempt to understand the meaning and significance that this experience holds for you.

Through your participation with this study, I hope to understand the essence of letting go as it reveals itself through your experience. I am interested in specific situations, incidents and events that have occurred, linked to your experience of letting go. That is, how you thought, felt and behaved at the time, the meaning and significance it has for you. Perhaps you may still be anticipating this experience, as it confronts you. Whatever it is, I would like to hear about it. That is, I am looking for a comprehensive description of your experience of 'letting go'.

I appreciate your participation and thank you for your commitment, time and effort. Should there be any problem with the time and date of our meeting, or any further questions you would like to have answered before signing the release form, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached either at 012- 3477069 or 082-5744754.

With kind regards,

Denise Fourtounas

**Form B:**

## **Participant Release Agreement**

I agree to participate in the research study of “What is the experience of letting go?” My participation is voluntary and I understand the purpose and nature of the study. I grant permission for the data to be used in the process of completing a PhD (Psychotherapy) degree including a dissertation and any other publication.

I understand that confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that any identifiable information may be disguised or removed.

I agree to meet at.....(location) on the .....(date) at.....(time) for an initial interview (1-2 hrs.) I will be available at a mutually agreed upon time and place for any additional interviews (1-1 ½ hrs.), should it be necessary. I also grant permission for the interviews to be recorded on audio-tape.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Research Participant / Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Primary Researcher / Date

**Form C:**

**Thank you letter to Co-Researcher**

Date.....

Dear.....,

Thank you for meeting with me in the extended interview and for sharing your experience of letting go. Your willingness to share your personal and unique feelings, thoughts and recollections is greatly appreciated. It is contributions such as yours that can expand psychological knowledge in the field.

I truly value your participation in this research. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the present study, then please do not hesitate to contact me. I may be reached at either (012) 3477069 or 082-5744754.

With kind regards

Denise Fourtounas.