CHAPTER 7

7.   DISCUSSION

> 'The most hopeful nod came from France's Etienne de Balasay, who chose
> 'Us' - the people of the world - for what he believes we can do. He said,
> 'we have, in our own hands, the possibility to change things. The answers
> to our future are in our past' (Chu, 'Reader's Choice – Heroes: A Search
> For Meaning', in Time Magazine, April 28, 2003, p.41).

The aim of this research was to undertake a hermeneutic/existential approach in order to study the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy. A qualitative hermeneutic/existential approach rather than a quantitative approach was used in order to understand the reasoning of the subjects' responses, the researcher's own and the other professionals deliberations within the discussion group. Thus to understand the psychological phenomenon in a meaningful way, one needs 'to return to the things themselves' (Husserl, 1962, cited in Colaizzi, 1978, p.56).

In order to locate self-forgiveness (and forgiveness of others) in the context of particular lives, it is important to study how forgiveness and self-forgiveness occur in the individuals' everyday world as well as the experiences of this phenomenon in psychotherapy. It thus seemed that a mixed method approach was the most appropriate method of research of this phenomenon, where the researcher remained faithful to the basis of the phenomenological principle of staying true to the phenomenon being studied but applied an interpretive hermeneutic/existential approach to the study of the human experience of self-forgiveness. 'Reports of specific experiences provide a basis for integrating and interpreting in a more experiential and existential fashion, the sometimes abstract notion of forgiveness articulated in the literature' (Rowe, et al., 1989, p.237).

This chapter includes a comprehensive summary of the salient points of preceding chapters, including important literature, theoretical and therapeutic approaches to the phenomenon of self-forgiveness. This discussion will include the significant themes in the General Psychological and Elaborated Descriptions (extrapolated from the constituents of the phenomenon) (see Chapter 6) and the analysis of the six participants' data which was obtained in response to the three questions asked in the retrospective interviews with the participants once they had terminated therapy with me. The three interview research questions were:

1.   'Can you tell me what self-forgiveness means to you?'

2.   'What situation(s) in your life gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness?'

3.   'How did your experience in psychotherapy contribute to your understanding of self-forgiveness?'

In addition, the role of the self of the client and the self of the therapist, will be included in this discussion of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy. The implications of the psychologists' group discussions pertaining to the phenomenon, the cultural and social implications regarding this phenomenon for psychotherapy, limitations of this research and how the experience of self-forgiveness differs from other experiences in psychotherapy, will be addressed.

In this discussion the researcher will attempt to show that the experience of self-forgiveness (and forgiveness of others) forms an integral part of treatment and healing in the therapy process. It is particularly in the psychotherapeutic environment where the person of the other/therapist becomes the reference point, where the client feels affirmed and develops a sense of trust in order to risk exposing his/her feelings regarding painful, injurious issues which involve the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others.

7.1 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS

Rowe, et al. (1989) & Rowe & Halling, (1998), found that the process of self-forgiveness was similar to forgiving another, in that it requires more than one's will. For this reason, it was not experienced as something that one does for oneself, but rather seems to come when one least expects it (Rowe, et al., 1989). These researchers stated that the experience of self-forgiveness seemed to be intimately related with forgiving another and suspected that these phenomena were two sides of the same coin and that 'self-forgiveness is in the background of forgiving another and vice-versa (ibid 1989, p.243). It was found in the analysis of the research data that each of the participants spoke about forgiving themselves, not in isolation, but in relation to forgiving significant others, principally parents, guardians and/or spouses or partners. Thus the interrelatedness of the two phenomena, as illustrated in the current research, confirmed the work of the research team at Seattle University (1984-1998), i.e. that 'one cannot realize one's own freedom and humanity without realising that of the other' (ibid, 1989, p.243).

It must be stated that the research participants in the current study found that the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness was not a blanket condoning of oneself, one's own actions, or the actions of others. This experience resulted in gaining insight and acceptance of one's own humanness and fallibility, as well as the humanness and fallibility of others. Feelings of guilt and anger continued when the memory of the experience surfaced. However, these

feelings were not overwhelming nor all consuming and pervasive, and the individual was no longer directed nor uniquely defined by feelings of being 'bad' or 'wrong'. These feelings of self-acceptance, integration, authenticity and congruence were inevitably accompanied by feelings of an increased connectedness to the self and a reconnectedness to the world. Each of the six participants had developed a clarity and insight about themselves and their place in the world. A sense of freedom and liberation had taken place, as well as the ability to face future possibilities and choices in a more empowered way. Each participant expressed the fact that they had experienced their brokenness and estrangement and had moved towards healing themselves with the assistance, validation and acceptance of an 'enlightened witness' - the therapist - in psychotherapy.

Halling (1994) stated that self-forgiveness, compared with forgiving others, was the more difficult issue to examine. He states that 'our judgements of our own actions and our very being, permeate our lives and that how we feel about ourselves and what we forgive and do not forgive, influences and are implied in everything we do but remain carefully hidden' (p.112). There are no clear boundaries with self-forgiveness, whereas in forgiving another, there is a specific person who causes injury and specific events that follow this injury. Halling states that with the issues associated with self-forgiveness 'we operate in murkier territory' (p.112). According to the participants' responses, there is no doubt that in the current study, the experience of self-forgiveness (and forgiveness of others) was enhanced by the 'educative insight' and 'consensual validation' gained in therapy and that obstacles to self-forgiveness may have been resolved due to the systematic attention and intervention of the empathic, accepting other/ therapist. The insight gained by the participants in psychotherapy resulted in the formation of a renewed identity, self-acceptance, acceptance of others and ultimately, the experiences of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others, which were not explicitly on the therapeutic agenda, nor articulated directly during the psychotherapy sessions.

7.2   TEMPORALITY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS

In a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic approach to forgiveness and self-forgiveness, Martyn (1977) uses the case study method in order to analyze an abused child in play therapy and combines psychoanalytic concepts of personality structure and theological principles of grace and forgiveness. Martyn conceptualized the therapeutic journey as a 'recapitulative miracle' in that, within the therapeutic relationship, the individual will embark on a recapitulation of the past which unfolds within the contained transference relationship of the nurturing,

validating other/therapist.

In the phenomenological approach to the experience of self-forgiveness, the psychotherapy experience of this phenomenon could be regarded as a 'recapitulative miracle' in that the individual experienced a journey through time. 'Time is not something outside of us flowing past us, we are time' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, cited in Halling, 1979, p.201). In other words: 'The past is the present, isn't it? It is the future too' (ibid, 1979, p.201). Reassessing and reinterpreting the past, gaining insight and meeting one's 'shadow self' (Jung, 1917), accepting one's humanness and that of others and renewing one's identity, resulted in an unblocking of the individual's becoming and opened her up to the future with a sense of freedom and liberation, based on the acceptance and integration of past actions and significant changes in her present actions, commitments and self-understandings. 'Man's present is the potentiality and givenness of the past as he anticipates the unfolding and fulfilment of the future *now*' (Kruger, 1986, p.190).

7.3   **EDUCATIVE INSIGHT AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS**
        IN THE PSYCHOTHERAPY RELATIONSHIP

Self-forgiveness 'is not a solitary act completed in isolation from others' (Bauer, et al., 1992, p.150), and the experience of self-forgiveness took place within the validating, affirming relationship with an empathic other/therapist. Rooney (1989), conducted a phenomenological study of five patients and how they found forgiveness through individual psychotherapy. In his study, as in the current research, psychotherapy was not specifically designed to promote forgiveness and the study was from the patient's point of view on forgiveness, not that of the psychotherapist.   A significant finding in Rooney's research was that a 'confessional exchange' takes place in psychotherapy 'between the patient and therapist in which the patient experiences a continued acceptance by the therapist within the context of mutual recognition of the patient's wrongdoing' (Rooney, 1989, p.ii).   Rooney found that the outcome of forgiveness was a restoration of self-belief, physical, emotional cleansing and a more compassionate stance towards one's own wrongdoings and those of others' (Rooney, 1989 cited in Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.230).   Bauer et al. (1992) state that it is particularly important to experience this acceptance and validation from others, especially of the disliked, disowned parts of the self. The authors state that 'self-forgiveness always takes place in the context of some variation of a loving relationship with others' (Bauer et al., 1992, p.155).

However, of utmost significance in the present study of the experience of this phenomenon,

was the constituent of 'educative insight' within a nurturing, validating, accepting relationship with the other/therapist. It was the participants' insight into the origin of their pain and overcoming their irrational feelings in therapy which resulted in a behavioural and emotional change, realistic expectations and an unblocking of and taking responsibility for their own issues and ambiguities. They were able to let go, move on and face the future in a more realistic and positive manner and, ultimately experience self-forgiveness and the forgiveness of others (although one of the participants did not find this experience as satisfying and healing as the others). This finding correlates with the earlier research of Eppel (1978, cited in Kruger, 1989), who found that insight was a core component in the client's retrospective experience in psychotherapy. Eppel found that insight gained in therapy was then integrated into the client's everyday life. This understanding and insight resulted in a greater sense of freedom and 'so therapy, in a sense, never ends because it has meaning in terms of the unfolding of the client's life' (Eppel, 1978, cited in Kruger, 1989, p.199). This was validated in the current study with the retrospective interviews of the six participants after therapy had ended.

In this study, insight took place on a cognitive and emotional level, which confirmed the work of Enright and the Human Development Study Group at the University of Wisconsin, Madison (1985-2000). This research group maintains that therapeutic intervention within the forgiveness triad of forgiving another, receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness, results in the individual gaining cognitive insight into these interacting processes, which goes beyond solving interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict. As the current research confirms, this insight would not only benefit one's relationship with the other, but would also focus on the intrinsic worth of the self and the other. The feelings of worth would, in turn, increase one's moral strength, create a barrier against ongoing anxiety, depression, feelings of despair and hopelessness and result in emotional healing and well-being (Enright, 1996). The results of the current research confirm that commitment and insight are core components of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

Gaining insight resulted firstly in a relatedness between forgiving another and self-forgiveness which had an impact on the individual's own sense of self-worth, despite the immoral action of the wrongdoer. Secondly, a 'change of heart' occurred which resulted in overcoming anger and resentment and resulted in healing and giving of the 'gift' or 'grace' of acceptance to the offending other. Thirdly, in experiencing forgiveness or self-forgiveness, there was the additional element of taking responsibility for one's part in the wrongdoing, while acknowledging the impossibility of the task of wiping away an event in space and time.

Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000), assert that self-forgiveness originates from a position of guilt, remorse and pain and is not an opiate which blinds us to our faults.

7.4 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY IS AN ONGOING, CONTINUOUS PROCESS

This research shows that the client participant experienced therapeutic changes which resulted in a gradual process of developing his/her authentic self by learning to confront and be open to himself/herself within the safe encounter of the therapist/client relationship. The collaborative dialogal encounter of the therapeutic relationship can be seen as the beginning of movement towards the process of change, the nature of which is so subtle that the client is only aware of this happening retrospectively, as it only gains momentum and is assimilated as she goes on living her life. The retrospective interviews with the six participants confirmed that therapy was experienced as a trigger mechanism, not only for the experience of self-forgiveness (and forgiveness of others), but for a whole new life experience towards the process of growing and becoming who the individual truly was, renewing one's identity, and gaining a new perspective of one's life. The participants reported that their experience of self-forgiveness was an ongoing arduous process, which began when they entered therapy realizing that there was something fundamentally wrong with their lives. The experience of self-forgiveness continued and was exacerbated by the knowledge and acknowledgement of painful relational issues which had resulted in difficult and profound changes in their lives.

Recognizing her inherent value and relating her experience in therapy, Subject C said, retrospectively:

> 'So that was a very big step because it was like I could just suddenly connect all the dots and start taking action and steps in my own life and kind of becoming master of my own destiny and I just think it's something that will never stop'.

> 'So it's a process as opposed to a one-off like experience of now I really have forgiven myself. It takes time. It takes time and it might even be over a year or two…., for me it has definitely been a process, it's not been something that just happened over a very specific point in time. It's something that started and if I think of the specific experience, the initial thing was when it was really addressed, was like the biggest chunk and then other little aspects have kind of needed to be addressed at a later time'.

Psychotherapy is experienced by the client as an initiation into this lifelong process – a vital stimulating phase in life's journey towards the discovery and experience of oneself as a whole being living congruently and relating authentically to the world. 'The journey of self-forgiveness does not end as long as one is alive, for to be alive is to be fallible to provide material for forgiveness' (Halling, 1994, p.112).

7.5 RESPONSIBILITY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Insight and the experience of self-forgiveness took place on cognitive, emotional and behavioural levels. This often resulted in a 'change of heart' and a different attitude towards the self and others. Taking responsibility involved an acknowledgement and acceptance of one's own humanness and the humanness of others which involved reowning the disowned, disliked parts of the self, as well as one's actions. Whereas before, 'there was a denying or blaming stance toward oneself, now there is the honest acknowledgement of one's participation in the event' (Bauer et al., 1992, p.158). Thus taking responsibility for oneself and one's own actions, frees one to move into a more accepting relationship with oneself and others and results in a sense of being integrated and 'at home' in the world. In this current research it was found that both self-acceptance and insight were mandatory in the experience of self-forgiveness and healing. This validates the work of the researchers (Rowe, et al., 1989; Rowe & Halling, 1998; Bauer et al., 1992 & Enright et al., 1996 & 2000), who found acceptance of the self and others to be the crux of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others.

7.6 MORAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS ISSUES RELATING TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Feelings of worth, self-respect and a 'change of heart' towards the offending other are all aspects of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy which correlated with interdisciplinary fields pertaining to self-forgiveness and forgiveness. The pastoral counselling approaches to self-forgiveness (Smedes, 1984 & Patton, 1985), are a mixture of psychological insights, theological assumptions and the individual's personal stories. Spiritual insights gained from these works are significant for the psychologist's wholistic understanding of forgiveness. The experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others are interdiscpilinary issues and philosophical and theological enquiries into forgiveness have extended over longer periods of time than have those of psychological science (Enright &

Fitzgibbons, 2000).   Although the manifestation of forgiveness differs across different cultures and religions, underlying concepts do converge and co-exist. Pattison (1965) claims that forgiveness is not a superego phenomenon and that it occurs on a different plane than that of moral and psychological factors (cited in Rowe, et al., 1989, p.236). Stauffer (nd, cited in Rowe, Halling, et al., 1989, p.236) states that at this level, one is in touch with one's spiritual centre or higher self.   Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000) warn that 'if we incorrectly equate forgiveness only with its usefulness in therapy, then the moral principles underlying the concept may be slowly lost' (p. 324). These authors assert that one cannot lose sight of the interdisciplinary nature of forgiveness, nor focus only on its pragmatic outcomes.   The authors state that we cannot conclude that forgiveness is what therapists and clients do, without considering the moral principle founded on beneficence (ibid, 2000). They claim that forgiveness is not a technique (although their work focuses on equating the meaning of forgiveness with its consequences of reduced anger, anxiety and related emotions), but a process developing out of a moral sense of the other person's goodness. They maintain that forgiveness is centred in morality, which is concerned for the quest for good, and that morality has intrapersonal as well as interpersonal qualities because the individual seeks good in relation to the self as well as others. A significant moral aspect of the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others, is that transformation takes place or there is a 'change of heart' (North, 1998). The theory of human worth, ie. maintaining one's self-respect and self-worth and being accorded better treatment, is a significant component of the experience of self-forgiveness.

In this research, Subject C described developing feelings of self-worth and the de-idealization of the other in her experience of self-forgiveness and said:

> 'I think that something I really should have mentioned, it is coming to realize that I have worth and I have value, just by the fact that I was born and everybody on this planet has worth and value. I think that was huge to me ..... that I didn't have to look good in someone's eyes to achieve academically, to please my father, or cook a nice meal for my husband, that I actually had inherent value and that was when I kind of almost integrated that into my being. It took a long time but, you know, just to remind myself I have value and I have worth, that allowed me to forgive myself because I think the two go very hand-in-hand. It's like the worth issues and the forgiveness issues go hand-in-hand and those wonderful other things would really be in place and you just know that it's very pivotal in any healing process of the whole being, it's critical'.

Healing the split between self-condemnation and self-acceptance, the experience of self-forgiveness being a discovery and not an act, taking responsibility for one's own life, one's feelings of guilt and acceptance of one's human fallibility as well as that of others, were all core constituents of this research of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy. These concepts, which emanated from the data obtained from the participants' interviews, validated the pastoral/rabbinical counselling approaches to this phenomenon, as described by Smedes (1984); Patton (1985), & Kushner (1998).

The impact of religious beliefs on the experience of self-forgiveness, as articulated by Subjects D (in a supportive way) and E (in a punitive, guilt evoking way), were as follows:

Subject D said:

'Also in self-forgiveness, because we know that Jesus always forgives us. He will forgive us whatever we do and we're all actually sinners and we only get to eternal life through the grace of God and through Jesus and He did for us and if God can forgive you for the things that you do, then surely you should forgive yourself'.

Subject E said:

'Through the therapy that I have been having and through the better understanding of my youth that I've gained, I realize that I have misplaced feelings that were beliefs that were sort of formed at a very young age which I felt guilty about, not adhering to the Catholic/Calvinistic beliefs that I don't agree with now and being able to understand those beliefs and see the inadequacies or the faults in the belief system that I've developed'.

North (1998) states that forgiveness is closely allied to the spiritual component of our nature and thus transcends the narrow religious denominational belief of individual religions. In addition, North believes that this spiritual side is connected in a complex way to our capacity for morally significant feelings and actions. North states that forgiveness is profoundly significant, morally and spiritually, regardless of whether we hold specific religious beliefs.

One of the observations of colleagues' discussions was that there was a transcendental, spiritual, highly moral quality to this phenomenon:

* John* said: 'It's (the experience of self-forgiveness) got major implications and I think it's one that we're not *au fait* with in our training because it goes beyond guilt and undoing, it's a much more spiritual sort of concept and it's a concept to do with healing, it's like psycho-neuro-immunology and existentialism'.

* Rene* said about self-forgiveness: 'That higher power stuff and it, you know, if you think about in terms of the addict, it is about somehow giving to the self, the self-forgiveness thing because I've got to say I can't judge it all myself, I can't take all this on my own shoulders and that it, in a way, I think it is really a part of accepting the higher power, perhaps also part of it, realizing it'.

(*Pseudonyms used)

Without being prescriptive and directive in psychotherapy, it is clear that what is significant is that the psychotherapist takes into account the spiritual and moral dimensions of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy when dealing with human behaviour and treatment. This does not mean abandoning one's theoretical framework but instead, 'building upon it by adding another cornerstone' (Bergin, 1988, p.22).

7.7   A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH REGARDING THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING EMOTIONAL IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

In an empirical phenomenological approach to the study of being emotional, Fischer (1982) exemplifies how being anxious 'concretely instantiates some of the general themes of being emotional' (Fischer, 1989, p.134). An emotional situation can be defined as 'a state of affairs that is experienced and lived, as signifying the current standing of at least one of one's projects of the world-with-others, that is, its realizability, its uncertainty, or its unrealizability' (p.135). Fischer, (1989) states that 'the various forms of being emotional are actually diverse ways of being-in-the-world' (p.130).

The six participants' experience of being emotional in the world in response to painful relational issues and in a particular way, of being involved in situations, manifested in feelings of self-blame, anxiety, anger, guilt, shame, and at times, despair and pain. More than half of the participants were referred for psychotherapy for panic and anxiety disorder, which described the manner in which they co-created, were affected by, and responded to, a situation. Being emotional included feelings of panic, anxiety, guilt, shame, self-blame, anger, pain, loss, despair and a loss of a sense of self, a disconnectedness with the self and others and of being blocked, which resulted in a lack of direction and meaning in the participants' lives.

Within the therapeutic relationship, staying with and reflecting upon these feelings, developing insight and understanding in psychotherapy, meant that the participants could endure the discomfort of being emotional and reflect upon its significance in their lives and relationships with others. Overcoming irrational feelings, integrating realistic expectations, gaining educative insight, self-acceptance and acceptance of the other, were mandatory experiences in the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

All the constituents of being emotional described by the participants in this research, have the following characteristics in common. Firstly, from an existential perspective, 'being emotional is a particular way of being in a situation, one that shows itself through a specific intertwining or configuration of situational, self, bodily, and behavioural themes' (Fischer, 1982, cited in Fischer 1989, p.131). Secondly, being emotional whether feeling anxiety, shame, guilt, anger, self-blame, despair or pain, may imply an adamantly ambivalent refusal on the part of the individual to confront and accept the ambiguity of her projects and self-understandings in her world. Thirdly, being emotional is a relational phenomenon and 'describes the manner in which an individual co-creates is affected by and responds to a situation' (ibid, 1982, p.65). Lastly, the temporality aspect of being emotional reflects the individual's refusal to confront and accept the ambiguities of her projects and self-understandings. i.e. the past, as it moves through the present was no longer open to future possibilities. During psychotherapy, the participants' gradual confrontation and acceptance of the present ambiguities of their projects and self-understandings, resulted in self-acceptance, taking responsibility for their own issues and the experience of self-forgiveness. This in turn, resulted in a sense of freedom, a feeling of empowerment to face future possibilities, feeling open to their potential, as well as allowing for significant changes in the present as well as future commitments and self-understandings.

Subject C illustrated this point by saying:

> 'It's also, there's a timing aspect to it, it's something that almost has to be worked through at levels. I think, sometimes when the actual experience came, when I was in that experience, often it was almost too painful to deal with at the time, so I put it aside and I almost just used my defenses to cope and take me through that experience. But it's later when it either presents as a pattern repeating itself, where you know, where I felt more consolidated and because it's repeating, you are forced to look at it but with more strength and more kind of clarity, in a way'.

7.7.1 ANXIETY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Of significance in psychotherapy is the awareness of the psychotherapist that 'existential anxiety, the anxiety of being, is anxiety that cannot be analyzed away, it can only be confronted as steadfastly as possible and then incorporated into one's being' (Bugental, 1987, p.238). Fischer (1982) found that an anxious situation is constituted by its 'power to announce as imminent, a crisis in the individual's family of self-other-world projects and therefore in his unfolding self-understanding' (Fischer, 1982 cited in Kruger, 1986, p.197). In other words, the individual experiences an increasing uncertainty re '*his lived sense of power* to effectively participate in the activity and to actualize his project, is radically undermined' (ibid, 1982, cited in Kruger, 1986 p.197 (italics in original).

Fischer, states that, 'for the most part, being emotional is lived as a way of expressing how one is, rather than as a mode of being informed about one's projects and relations of the world-with-others' (Fischer, 1989, p.136). The experience of the six participants validates Fischer's research where 'one tends to live out, rather than learn about, the diverse aspects of one's situation in the significance for one's projects' (ibid, 1989, p.136). In the case of the participants, being anxious (or emotional) meant turning away from threatening stimuli and the possibility of discovering and exploring what one's transformed body was announcing (ibid, 1989). It was only in a safe, contained, validating and accepting environment within the therapeutic alliance that they were able 'to endure the discomfort of being anxious' (as well as their additional feelings), 'reflect upon its significance' and consciously confront and assimilate these feelings (p.136).

In this research, it was found that the experience of self-forgiveness was enhanced by gaining clarity, insight and integrating feelings of self-worth, by self-confrontation, by feeling strengthened, empowered and liberated, by healing and making peace with the past, with the assistance and validation of an independent and empathic therapist. The task of the therapist was to assist another to live more authentically in her world, to find more meaning and coherence in her life and to come to terms with emotional anxiety.   This task was accompanied by the acknowledgement on the part of the therapist, 'that living an existence free of anxiety cannot be the aim' of therapy (Kruger, 1986, p.197).

Subject C spoke of confronting and assimilating her feelings of anxiety and her experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy and staying with those feelings:

'For me it's that part of self-forgiveness that is really wanting from within myself, a wanting to look at it and a willingness to kind of go there and really look at it and almost take it apart and try and see it for what it is, to try and tell myself to take myself, kind of almost as an empathic observer. I found that, and to look at it as opposed to kind of being in it …. But I think, specifically, it's about the feeling that one gets that you don't have that feeling of dread and that like stomach churning when you remember the experience. It's kind of, okay well now I would respond or could respond differently, but I didn't and it's okay that I didn't ….. So I think it's about when that memory comes up and you can really just let is pass and the memory flows as opposed to like a jolting in the body'.

7.7.2   FEELINGS OF GUILT, SHAME AND SELF-BLAME IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS

Halling (1994) states that feelings of guilt and shame give rise to the search for forgiveness and that in experiencing self-forgiveness or forgiveness of others one 'moves into a deeper and more profound connection with one's own life, as well as the lives of others' (p.107). Understanding the difference between shame and guilt is important when dealing with the individual's experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy and her connectedness with the self and others. Guilt refers to an action 'that by our actions, we damage the relationship which we value' (p.81), e.g. hurt inflicted upon others by ourselves and/or guilt at being punitive and angry towards others who have injured us. 'Shame is experienced when we are exposed to ourselves in a moment of unforgettable immediacy' (p.81).

An enlightening moment and a valuable insight for me as a psychotherapist in researching this phenomenon, was that the existential phenomenological approach to psychotherapy involved helping another to live more authentically, i.e. 'to find those meaning coherences which specially appeal to him and thus to be able to come to terms with existential guilt and the meaning of life' (Kruger, 1986, p.197). Yalom (1980) describes existential guilt 'as more than a dysphoric affect state, a symptom to be worked through and eliminated'. He states that the therapist should regard it 'as a call from within which, if heeded, can function as a guide to personal fulfillment' (p.285), i.e. the client developing her potential and coming to terms with who she truly is. 'Transgressed against one's own destiny, the victim is one's own potential self' (p.285). Self-reparation and redemption is achieved by plunging oneself into the 'true' vocation of the human being, which, as Kierkegaard said, 'is to will to be oneself' (cited in May, 1977 in Yalom, 1980, p.285).

In dealing with the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, it was important for the researcher/psychotherapist to understand in existential terms, the distinction between 'neurotic guilt' and 'real guilt'. ''Neurotic guilt' emanates from *imagined* transgressions or minor transgressions which one responds to in a disproportionality powerful manner', which would include transgressions against another individual, parental, social, religious norms and values, 'ancient and modern taboos' (Yalom, 1980, p.276). ''Real guilt' flows from an *actual* transgression against another' (p.277). In the therapeutic setting, it was important to work through the client's neurotic guilt, their sense of 'badness' and wrongdoing, their unconscious aggression and the wish for punishment and often self-destructive actions. In psychotherapy, the clients were confronted by their role in the co-creation of situations and were guided to develop insight and understanding and take responsibility for their issues in the therapeutic environment, which resulted in guilt being reinterpreted and assessed from a realistic adult perspective. The existential concept of guilt broadens one's scope of accountability, i.e. not only does one feel guilty about transgressions against another or against some moral or social code but one may feel guilty about transgressions against oneself, resulting in the need for self-forgiveness. One is thus guilty to the same extent that one is responsible for the self in one's world. 'Guilt is a fundamental part of *Dasein*, that is, human be-ing' (p.277).

Heidegger (1962), 'uses the word *schuldig* to refer to both guilt and responsibility' (cited in Yalom, 1980, p.277). Yalom (1980) claims that in attempting to facilitate a client's awareness of responsibility, the therapist discovers the presence of guilt. Thus guilt is closely connected to anxiety and responsibility in psychotherapy. Overcoming guilt and anxiety cannot be the aim of psychotherapy and in the current research, the participants integrating realistic

feelings, understanding and gaining insight into realistic expectations of the self and others as well as taking responsibility for their own issues and ambiguities in psychotherapy, resulted in a reconnectedness to the self and their feeling 'at home' in the world. As Kruger (1986), states: 'living an existence, free of anxiety and guilt, cannot be the aim' of being in the world (p.197).

In the current research, the participants answering the call, accepting their humanness and owning their unique set of relationships, resulted in a growth in authenticity in that each participant had taken up a set of possibilities as part of their unique existence (ibid, 1986). However, this did not result in a guilt-free existence because, in choosing one alternative, others were excluded.

Subject B continued to struggle with integrating her feelings of guilt and said:

'Often self-forgiveness, for me, is feeling guilty about things, I tend to carry a lot of blame. I battle to let go, but maybe if I try and understand and put that time of my life into context, as long as I can sort of justify it and move on from it, then that's self-forgiveness, maybe, understanding myself'.

She continued:

'I think I still carry guilt around for a lot of things. I think I just have a problem letting to. I mean, how do you, how can you just forget the past? You can just come to terms with it'.

Insight and understanding helped Subject B to let go of her neurotic guilt:

'To forgive myself for the guilt, I don't carry that around anymore so I can't project it on to other people and that is what is important to me'.

Understanding the difference between shame and guilt is important when dealing with the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy. Feelings of guilt relate to an action involving the other, shame relates to feeling ashamed before the self and the other. Shame has to do with the feelings of the self towards the self. A significant point Kaufman (1989) makes is that 'experiencing shame reveals the inner self, exposing it to view and the self feels exposed both to itself and to anyone present' (p.17). Exposure can thus be of the self, to the self alone or it can be of the self to others. The alienating experience in the individual's world can be an entirely internal experience. No one else need be present in order for shame to be felt but when others are present, shame is an impediment to further communication (ibid, 1989).

In blaming others for one's issues, one moves away from the self and creates a target for other-directed, focused and active behaviour. With self-blame there is a controlling and directing force. According to Halling, feeling guilt and 'blaming oneself, is 'paradoxically to repudiate what one has done and is therefore as antithetical to accepting responsibility as blaming others is' (Halling, 1979, p.200). Halling states that, 'in self-blame, I am divided into the accuser and the accused almost as if I believe that if I berate myself severely enough, my action will be undone'. Self-blame is an experience of 'not being at one with oneself and is therefore an obstacle to being forgiven and accepting forgiveness' (p.200).

In researching the six participants' experience of shame, guilt and self-blame in relation to the phenomenon of self-forgiveness, the internalization of these feelings arose within the context of relationships with significant others in their environment, particularly in relation to their developmental history and childhood experiences. This resulted in the individuals' feelings of unrealistic self-blame, shame, guilt and self-expectations.   With the participants' past experience, one concurs with Erikson's (1950) eight stages or identity crises spanning the individual's life cycle, all of which include experiences of shame and guilt in relation to the self and others (cited in Kaufman, 1989, p.10). In Erikson's second stage, shame and doubt are the stumbling blocks to autonomy and a sense of identity. However, insight gained in psychotherapy resulted in the obstacles to forgiving oneself and others being overcome, 'even though prior learning has focused on blaming and repudiating' (Stauffer (nd) cited in Rowe, et al., 1989, p.236). The experience of shame results in the forward movement of individuals' lives being blocked (Straus, 1966, cited in Halling, 1994), 'each self reduced to observable qualities, unworthy and inadequate' (Halling, 1994, p.82).   In the psychotherapeutic environment the individuals were confronted with their sense of shame, guilt and self-blame and with the support of the therapist, were able to express their feelings and insecurities. When a client is experiencing feelings of shame in psychotherapy, identification with the therapist provides a healing for the self. 'These are critical moments in therapy when clients need to know their therapists on the inside, to feel identified with them, to feel one' (Kaufman, 1989, p.210). Kaufman maintains that 'a self-blame script can be replaced with giving oneself the inalienable human right to make mistakes', (p.210) i.e. self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

The participants in this research were able to reflect and reassess these feelings from a realistic adult perspective and forgive themselves in psychotherapy for feelings of misplaced shame, guilt and self-blame.

Subject E said that his experience in psychotherapy had helped him understand 'the difference between guilt and shame and the fact that this was misplaced, the shame from my childhood, it helped me get in touch with the part of my childhood that I wasn't in touch with'.

7.7.3 THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING EMOTIONAL AND RENEWING ONE'S IDENTITY IN THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Feelings of shame, guilt and self-blame are closely linked to the question of identity. 'The injury that involves forgiving is one that violates a person's identity' (Rowe, et al. 1989, p.239). The unfolding of one's identity is blocked, the experience of being humiliated by betrayal and thus rendered helpless, is an example of such an injury of the self. The present research confirms the fact that Bauer et al. (1992), state that self-forgiveness involves one coming to terms with and accepting the disowned parts of the self, which previously have been viewed as unacceptable or in need of change. Halling (1994), states that this requires overcoming one's shame. In this research, the participants' acceptance of their human fallibility and their vulnerabililty and limitations, as well as realistic expectations of the self and others, resulted in a recovery from shame, a sense of humility and the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. Experiencing self-forgiveness resulted in a feeling of reconnectedness to the self, which involved a change in one's identity. Full acceptance of oneself involved an acknowledgement of one's true identity, 'one moves from an attitude of judgement to embracing who one is' (Bauer et al., 1992. p.153).

The participants' words, 'recognizing myself', 'contentment within', 'reaching an equilibrium', 'making peace', 'not feeling adrift in a situation' and 'realizing onself', described their shift from fundamental estrangement to a deepened sense of involvement and 'being at home' with themselves in the world. This shift in identity took place within the therapeutic relationship, where insight and identity into the initial distress and context of specific incidents and issues of wrongdoing pertaining to the self were seen from a realistic adult perspective. From this, an awareness grew that one is in need of forgiveness, as are the significant others in one's life, for merely being human. This clarity and insight resulted in an acceptance of responsibility for one's own issues, clarity about one's own role in the world and a sense of freedom and liberation in order to face future possibilities and develop one's own potential.

A colleague illustrated this point regarding the experience of self-forgiveness and grace towards the self by saying:

'It means, it actually means being given to, to owe and to give emotional debt to yourself. It means being compassionate towards yourself. Owes you kindness/compassion, understanding, cancelling the debt reward yourself, pay it back to yourself and giving back to yourself, self-acceptance. Thus, partly in giving, you emotionally go where the energy was owed, you're having got energy back - it's your energy debt'.

7.7.4 FEELINGS OF ANGER AND RE-OWNING DISOWNED PARTS OF THE SELF IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

For the participants in this research, self-forgiveness became an issue although not necessarily articulated in psychotherapy as a result of an event (divorce, betrayal, abuse, deprivation) that leaves 'one acutely aware of being estranged from one's self and others' (Bauer et al, 1992; Rowe & Halling, 1998). The participants' experience of self-forgiveness involved a shift from fundamental estrangement to feeling reconnected with themselves and the world, a feeling of being 'at home' in the world. This reconnectedness involved a change in their identity and accepting hitherto disowned and disliked parts of the self, which included the capacity to be enraged, hurtful, vengeful, and embracing the negative side or 'shadow self' (Jung, 1917) and who they truly were. Kaufman (1989) maintains that 'the way to heal inner strife and division is through consciously re-owning disowned parts of the self' and that 're-owning is also a way of directly re-parenting the self' (p.211). In this research, additional hurt caused to the self was often as a result of childhood experiences in relation to significant others. Feelings of pain were often masked by cynicism and anger. Often feelings of anger were accompanied by a sense of guilt at being angry with the other, especially in the regressive, dependent, child-like state relating to powerful parental caretaker figures.

Anger was defined in Stevick's (1971) research 'to be a mode of lived consciousness which emerges out of an interpersonal situation, in which an important other prevents one's being'. The author states that 'it is a pre-reflective presence and a response to a situation in which the lived body is pulled into the world to protect its very being' (Stevick, 1971, cited in Giorgi, Fischer & von Eckertsberg, 1971, p.147). 'Anger is a relational and protective phenomenon which will never emerge out of the world alone or out of the self, it comes out of a dialogue between the two' (ibid, 1971, p.146). Before healing and self-acceptance took place in the

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participants' psychotherapy, there was on the one hand, a continuous movement of hurt and anger (which created distance between the self and other) and on the other hand, the participants experiencing feelings of trying to accept the self and the other and let go of the past. Staying with the hurt and anger in psychotherapy helped the individual separate from the grief and loss of the sense of self and the loss of the relationship with the other, of what was or what might have been. Anger and the search for revenge gives us a sense, however transient, 'that one need not be helpless in the face of the violation of what was important to us' (Halling, 1979, p.200).

'Vengefulness is often seen as a cover for grief and separation anxiety' (Searles, 1956 cited in Halling, 1979, p.200). To move away from revenge is to move towards the recognition of pain and loss and to admit that the actions of the other have brought about irreversible changes in one's life. Recognizing this change and loss results in a grieving process and an awareness of one's own helplessness and vulnerabilities in the face of 'the arbitrariness of existence' (p.200). In addition, grief and loss result in a loss of the sense of self and one's identity or of a particular 'way of viewing oneself and the world' (Rowe, et al., 1989, p.241). With the experience of self-forgiveness and self-acceptance, the participants experienced a shift in their understanding towards themselves, the other and the world.

Reparation took place on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level with the self, reciprocal engagement with others and - for over half of the respondents - a reparation and healing of the parental structure. Experiencing and integrating the hurt and anger, taking responsibility for oneself in the co-creation of a situation and accepting one's humanness resulted in the hurt being shared with the other; no longer was the wrongdoing experienced solely as an injury inflicted by another. Subject E understood how his anger became self-destructive and this cognitive understanding resulted in a corrective integrative, emotional and behavioural experience. He said:

> 'The therapy helped me use my anger, or use different emotions, which made it more constructive, which assisted me greatly to be able to like myself more in that I was being more the person I wanted to be, having developed more skills'.

The difference in experiencing anger compared to other emotions is that in being angry, 'one struggles to realize projects of having and/or doing rather than projects of being', 'one tends to live out rather than dwell and reflect or learn about, the diverse aspects of one's situation in their significances for one's projects' (Frankel, 1985, cited in Fischer, 1989, p.136). Frankel (1985), states that in being angry, the individuals ' are absorbed with the felt necessity, the

demand to get through to the other, to attribute blame and to insist upon redress' for the wrongdoing (ibid, 1989, p.136). These individuals neither have the time nor the inclination to stop, dwell and genuinely reflect upon what is happening to them in relation to the other (ibid, 1985). It was with the compassionate, validating, accepting other, the therapist in the therapy situation, that the participants were able to endure the discomfort and pain of being angry, reflect upon its significance and gradually confront, accept and take responsibility for their projects, ambiguities and self-understandings. Re-experiencing the anger and hurt in the therapeutic setting and taking responsibility for one's own issues heals and broadens the self and is a humbling experience (Brandsma, 1982).

In the process of forgiveness, one abandons one's egocentric position of only seeing others in terms of one's own needs. This results in self-acceptance as well as acceptance of others. At the same time, a detachment occurs as one separates oneself from the other and the consequences.

In the research, it was reviewing past experiences - usually childhood experiences - from a more realistic adult perspective that resulted in realistic expectations of the self and others. Subject A, seeing his father from a more realistic stance, said:

> 'It's about learning to forgive him (my father), understanding who he was and looking at him sympathetically rather than with anger. I think I've carried a lot of anger towards him and I'm learning to look at him more sympathetically, that's been very good for me. In that sense, I'm learning to forgive myself as well, because part of my anger has also been about, I think, not liking parts of myself that are like him. I think I've recognized myself in him more and more and maybe that's also part of growing up'.

For Subject A, self-forgiveness meant taking responsibility and accepting those parts of himself which previously he had regarded as unacceptable and had tried to change. In other words, he overcame his anger and also his shame and it was humility that replaced his shame.

Brandsma (1982), claims that 'forgiving oneself requires an expanded awareness of one's motives and impact on others' and 'it is often the end of innocence' or of growing up, 'wherein one must accept a humbler view of the self', and a realistic perspective of one's relationship with others (p.45). High standards become 'lowered or tempered' and one accepts one's human fallibility and that of others (ibid, 1982).

7.8   **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MEMORY IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Revision of their past in psychotherapy resulted in the six research participants gaining a renewed understanding, clarity and insight and reassessment of misperceptions of the past, resulting in de-idealizing others and re-owning disowned, disliked parts of the self. This in turn resulted in self-acceptance and a reconnectedness with the self and others.   The experience of self-forgiveness (and forgiveness of others) involved a re-intepretation of memory and a renewed identity: 'if the name survives, the essence somehow survives as well' (Margalit, 2002, p.23). The experience of self-forgiveness resulted in 'feeling at home' in the world which involved a renewed identity and a renaming of the self. The former identity had a particular role in memory and the individual's personal history and the survival and perpetuation of the renewed identity would mean the survival of the renewed essence of 'being in the world'. The renewed identity and the multigenerational transmission of memory would be further changed in the individual's personal history. Thus the individual has become a transitional person, at a crossroads in her family history.

The experience of self-forgiveness and forgiving others may result in the transitional individual (who has been a victim of painful relational events in her life), now arresting the process of multigenerational transmission of pain and anger. This figure may become 'the generator of positive change in the next generation, the therapeutically changed individual thereby becomes intergenerationally transitional by resisting the disordered relational patterns of the past, transmitting to the next generation a healthier mode of functioning' (Bergin, 1988, p.29). This pattern of conduct applies the ideal of the redemptive, reparative role in a therapeutically powerful way (ibid, 1988). Restoring a reframed, reinterpreted memory in psychotherapy resulted in the experience of self-forgiveness and a change of attitude, a change of heart towards oneself and others and a restoration of dignity and trust in the world. 'This change of attitude became an indirect decision not to forget or condone the past wrong, but rather overcoming the resentment that accompanies it' (Margalit, 2002, p.208).

Subject A said:

'So I think my own healing needs to be about making sense of that (the past) and understanding how I forgive myself and then forgiving myself, make sure that I don't pass that on to other people, that I have more understanding or adult relationship with the people around me and whatever children I have in the future'.

7.9   THE SELF OF THE CLIENT IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

According to Preston Cole (1971), a mode of being that is peculiar to man is selfhood and the problem of the self is a most persistent one which has confused many observers. He states that 'it is a perennial problem which emerges periodically with compelling necessity, for it is man's most intimate and therefore, most significant problem' (Preston Cole, 1971, p.1).

Martin Buber (1957) has noted that 'the problem emerges at times of 'cosmic homelessness' (cited in Preston Cole, 1971, p.1) These are 'times when the structures of meaning, which bring cosmos out of chaos, begin to crumble, when the metaphysical home in which man dwells secure, begins to collapse and the problem of the self reappears with existential urgency. Thrown back on his resources man asks in desperation, 'Who am I?' (ibid, 1957 in Preston Cole, 1971, p.1). Heidegger (1962) uses the term '*geworwenheit*' or '*thrownness*' to refer to this state (cited in Yalom, 1980, p.358).   This results in feelings of loneliness, alienation and helplessness, as one finds oneself 'thrown' without one's consent into an existence not of one's choosing (ibid, 1980). Although from an existential experiential perspective 'the human being is seen as an 'active agent' in 'being-in-the-world', one can only make choices within preexisting external constraints i.e. human freedom is a situated freedom' (Valle, 1989, p.258).

Identity crisis and a search for life's meaning were issues raised by the present research participants (and other clients) with regularity in psychotherapy. The acceptance of their human fallibility and a renewed identity resulted in a feeling of reconnectedness with the self and others, a feeling of 'at homeness' in the world. 'No cosmic home is possible, no new house in the universe is being planned for man, but he, as the builder of houses is being required to know himself' (Buber, 1957, p.137, cited in Preston Cole, 1971, p.1). With the general fear and chaos in the world, this statement is as valid in 2003 as it was in 1957.

The experience of self-forgiveness is not a solitary act achieved in isolation and it takes place on both an intrapersonal and interpersonal level, usually within a caring, validating and accepting relationship. 'Full acceptance of one's humanness involved an awareness of one's connection with others and the world' (Bauer et al., 1992, p.159). 'Recognizing myself', 'contentment within', 'reaching an equilibrium', 'making peace', 'not feeling adrift in a situation' and 'realizing oneself', were words which the participants used to describe the deepened sense of involvement and forgiveness towards themselves. With the experience of

self-forgiveness, there was a movement from a feeling of estrangement from the self and others towards a reconnectedness with the self and feeling 'at home' in the world. Educative insight gained in psychotherapy resulted in self-acceptance which involved a renewed identity. It was in the therapeutic relationship that the individual was confronted with her 'shadow self' (Jung, 1917), re-owned and integrated previously disowned and disliked parts of the self and felt a sense of freedom and empowerment to face the future with renewed hope. With the experience of self-forgiveness, 'there is a shift of focus to a meta-perspective that can embrace all aspects of one's self' (Bauer et al., 1992, p.158). There is no longer a self-definition based solely on feeling 'bad' or 'wrong', no longer is the individual overwhelmed by irrational feelings. However, the participants' responses showed that the experience of self-forgiveness did not result in a blanket condoning of their actions nor the actions of others.

The experience of self-forgiveness was an acceptance and acknowledgement of the 'geworwenheit' or 'thrownness' of human existence (Heidegger, 1962). On entering psychotherapy, the participants found themselves 'already immersed in a situation, a history and network of relationships, not originally chosen' (cited in Moss, 1989, p.204). It was within the therapeutic relationship that the participants were confronted and challenged with their 'thrownness' in order to make it their own. However, Sartre (1956) emphasized 'the freedom and responsibility of each individual for his or her entire existence' (cited in Moss, 1989, p.204). Selfhood, according to Kierkegaard (1941), was understood to be the mode of being which is characterized by freedom (cited in Preston Cole, 1971). This freedom was not indeterminatedness but self-determination. Forever present in the human being is 'one's unrealized potential, a task to be performed, a possibility to be actualized' (ibid, 1971, p132).

In the current research, the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy resulted in the participants experiencing the possibility of freedom, the possibility of acknowledging and being able to develop their potential. Thus the individual was no longer determined by nature or her past history, but had accepted the responsibility for her existence. The task of the therapist was on the one hand, to help the client make peace with and accept her own issues, (i.e. come to terms with the unchangeable) and on the other, to take responsibility for past actions as well as for the future course of her life's possibilities and potential. In the current research within the therapy situation, accepting responsibility for the self and the individual's own existence and to be essentially guilty (Kierkegaard, 1941), resulted in the restoration of freedom, growth potential and the experience of forgiveness (cited in Preston Cole, 1971).

At the same time as feeling a re-connectedness with the self and the world, the experience of self-forgiveness resulted in a feeling of the individual's own separateness and individuality, not forever condemned to a past identity as well as a sense of being freed from the yoke of the past. The re-owning of disowned parts of the self resulted in the formation of a new identity. Buber (1957) claims 'that integration of the evil, (the 'shadow self') as the unification of opposites in the psyche, is put forward as a central motif in the process of 'individuation' of the realization of the self' (p.116). This separation and individuation took place on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level within the therapeutic relationship, a sense of 'seeing a significant other as if for the first time' (Chesterton, cited in Halling, 1983, p.122). It is hoped that in genuine discourse with the other in the therapy situation that ''the hope resides not in the wisdom and cleverness of the therapist, but in the fact that we are in the presence of someone who may dispossess of our understanding, our comprehension and allow us to hear and speak' (Halling, 1975, p.221). In other words one is aware of the other person as 'a source of meaning' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, cited in Halling, 1983,p.129). The significant point here is the notion of participation, i.e.' the other person's world compelling, unfolds for us, touching us emotionally and existentially.' (Halling,1983,p.127). This renewed insight and understanding of the self takes place on both cognitive and emotional levels.

It was through the eyes of the Other, the face of the Other (Levinas, 1969, in Halling 1975) that the participants were able to recognize their own sense of self, their own individuality and separateness, as well as the separateness of the Other (parent, sibling or spouse), 'seeing a significant other as if for the first time'. (Halling, 1983, p.122). In separating from the Other, the participants realized not only that their perception of the Other was unrealistic and incomplete, but that their own self-perception was unfair and unrealistic and they were then able to forgive the Other and themselves. According to Kunz (1998) (who was inspired by Levinas' (1961), philosophy of the ethical responsibility of radical altruism), decentering is at the basis of the most fundamental paradox of the human, i.e. the self finds its meaning not centred in itself, as an ego establishing its individual freedom and power, but as a self facing the other person, who calls the self out of its centre to be ethically responsible.(ibid, 1998) It was in the therapeutic relatonship that the acceptance of the participants' own human fallibility took place and in all cases, also resulted in the acceptance of the fallibility of others. 'The identity of the self lies in listening to the call of others, in being touched by their absolute dignity and their vulnerability and in using its invested freedom to respond responsibly to the other' (Kunz, 1998, p.34). The other (the participant) experienced self-forgiveness (as well as forgiving significant others) in his/her life through the therapist being touched by the dignity and vulnerability of the other and acting responsibly towards her, as

well as through the mirroring of the contained, validating, accepting relationship of the therapist with the other.

Subject A recognized his own separateness from his father and, at the same time, identified with him, saw his vulnerability and humanness and said:

'I think it (self-forgiveness) means coming to terms with one's own sense of self and confronting'. He continued, 'self-forgiveness, it's about living with the pain of not having had a relationship with my father and it's about learning to forgive him, understanding who he was and looking at him sympathetically, rather than with anger. It's about forgiving my father and forgiving myself for letting myself be like him. I think recognizing myself in making peace with who he was'.

7.10   THE SELF OF THE THERAPIST IN RELATION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

This research validates the work of previous researchers (Rowe, et al., 1989; Rooney, 1989; Bauer et al., 1992, & Rowe & Halling, 1998), who state that self-forgiveness takes place within the context of some variation of a loving relationship with others. Ferch (2000), found in a study entitled, *Meanings of Touch and Forgiveness: A Humanistic Phenomenological Inquiry*, that intentionality was an important aspect of forgiving. However, the author states that even if intentionality is required, forgiveness cannot be achieved before the emotional blockages are overcome. The author further states that although forgiveness (and self-forgiveness) remain an internal struggle and choice, that this choice is enacted, confirmed, and often realized in relating to others (ibid, 2000). For the participants in Ferch's study, touch in a relationship became this action: the confirmation and tangible completion of what began intentionally. For the participants in the current study, the consensual validation, acceptance, detached concern and educative insight of the therapist resulted in a sense of trust developing, in a situation in which the participants were able to present their true selves and outwardly manifest their internal struggle. This was then assessed, reintepreted, acted on, confirmed from an adult perspective and completed in relation to the therapist within the contained therapeutic relationship. This experience resulted in the participants gaining cognitive insight, which led to a corrective, emotional and behavioural experience. The participants stated in their retrospective interviews that this was an ongoing process which was accompanied by different reactive responses, even after the therapy had ended.

As a psychotherapist walking the path of psychotherapy with one's clients, one is aware that

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psychotherapy is not a technique but a human relationship: 'it is a co-created experience between two phenomenal selves, client and therapist' (Kaufman, 1989, p.220). This research indicated that self-forgiveness, as well as forgiveness of others, do not always surface, nor are these phenomena necessarily directly articulated in therapy. Nevertheless, this research has shown that these are important phenomena which need to be considered when regarding the individual's experience of being in the world. The task of the therapist when facilitating self-forgiveness or forgiveness of others, is not unlike the therapist's approach when working through other psychological issues (Rowe & Halling, 1998).

This approach involves the therapist's patience, detached concern, acceptance, empathy, congruence, competence (which includes knowing and understanding one's own limitations), a sense of commitment and responsibility towards the other (the client) and a knowledge of human experience. These qualities are not mutually exclusive within the therapeutic alliance, but are interrelated (ibid, 1998).

For the therapist, competence and responsibility also involve coming to terms with one's own issues regarding the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others and an acceptance of one's own human fallibility and ordinariness. These are ongoing issues which the psychotherapist presumably has dealt with in her own personal psychotherapy and supervision of cases. At the same time, the therapist must learn to affirm herself from within, knowing that self-acceptance and feelings of worth are connected with the experience of self-forgiveness. This capacity to affirm the self translates into developing one's own self-esteem, self-value and self-respect. The therapist has acquired the knowledge that the capacity to affirm and accept oneself derives from actively embracing all the disparate aspects of one's being, that owning the disowned parts of an integrated self is the only route to self-acceptance and self-forgiveness (Kaufman,.1989). 'It is as I (the therapist) am secure in my identity, that I can genuinely move towards the Other' (Levinas, 1969 cited in Halling, 1975, p.211) in what Levinas calls desire. 'Desire is animated by the Other, it is a pull from without, it is insatiable, because one never fully reaches, one never quite grasps the Other in that he is absolutely Other' (ibid, 1975, p.211)

For the therapist, knowing one's limitations means not feeling entirely responsible for the care and growth of the clients or their ultimate success in coming to terms with the past, their self-acceptance and ultimately, experiencing self-forgiveness, i.e. 'the power to be treated or cured, is always in the hands of the client' (Kaufman, 1989, p.230). The client is not a 'patient' in the 'technical-medical' sense, 'who is subject to a process called 'therapy' in any

other sense than growing towards selfhood' (Kruger, 1986, p.198). Kruger further states that the client is a fellow man in a caring relationship with the therapist. However, this caring relationship does not 'take care' of the client, 'thus relieving him of responsibility, but must rather be a leaping-ahead concern, which enables the client to *take* the responsibility on for himself' (Kruger, 1986, p.198). Therefore the therapist remains responsible to the individual in 'his growing towards selfhood' (p.198).

'Response-ability' is the ability of the therapist to respond to the Other, 'of freedom within the face-to-face relationship' (Halling, 1975, p.215). The therapist responds to the Other's separateness and individuality with care, respect and congruence, even if this means difficult and awkward confrontations.   The participant's experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy indicated that the therapy situation was not simply a protective, contained environment where the participants were relieved of distress, but a place where they were called from 'unreal obligation and false guilt to real responsibility and genuine guilt in the face of the Other' (Halling, 1974, p.219).

In psychotherapy, the participants took responsibility for their own issues, co-creation of situations and accepted responsibility for their own humanness and fallibility which did not include a blanket condoning of their actions. The therapist's role was not merely to assist in this process, nor was the therapist as an enlightened witness, merely a dispenser of 'educative insight'. More fundamentally, the therapy situation was one in which 'the Other calls upon me (the therapist) to be responsive to the Other' in his/her separateness and individuality (Halling, 1975, p.219).

Congruence is another significant aspect of the self of the psychotherapist in the therapeutic relationship. Kruger (1986) states that the dialogue of the therapist and client each with herself as well as with each other, is perhaps one of the most important aspects of therapy. Halling (1975) states that the therapy situation may be one place where genuine discourse can take place. To address and speak about the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others 'within the therapeutic relationship and not from a position standing outside of it, is to be (genuinely) present to the Other in what one says' (Levinas, 1969, cited in Halling, 1975, p.221). This does not depend on 'the wisdom and cleverness of the therapist, but on the fact that 'we are in the presence of someone (the client) who may dispossess us of our understanding, our comprehension, and allow us to hear and to speak' (p.221). Halling goes on to say that 'therapy then is in some sense possible, but it is possible only because

everything does not depend on the therapist, because there is another whom each of us can meet' (p.223).

An important aspect of the participants' therapeutic experience of self-forgiveness was that the participants entered therapy with unrealistic self-expectations which, at that stage, were crucial to their psychological survival. Only in adulthood, from a more realistic perspective, could these often irrational childhood beliefs, feelings and scripts be reassessed and reinterpreted in psychotherapy. Thus the role of the therapist involved establishing a reconstructive relationship which provided a safe, secure, contained environment for the participants to experience the past and live out a corrective emotional experience. Completing developmental tasks or failures was an inherent feature of the therapeutic process with the participants. The therapeutic environment thus revealed the conditions for growth and ignited the development process itself. 'The imperative of 'being in relationship', is an evolutionary imperative' (Kaufman, 1989, p.169). Kaufman further states that psychotherapy is not a neutral activity, but a human one and it must create an analogue of parenting to be effective, i.e. a genuine, validating, secure human relationship between client and therapist in which a new identity can be created. He maintains 'that offering an identification relationship' in psychotherapy, based on caring and respect, 'translates into offering a model for a new way of relating to oneself, one that is active in promoting inner security' (p.209).

Research has shown (and as the current research proves), that forgiveness comes, but cannot be willed (Rowe & Halling, 1998). Acceptance of the client entails accepting and honouring where she is at in the therapy process, allowing the process to unfold and not attempting to rush it. As therapists, it is important not to foist our values and principles on the client, especially when dealing with the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others.

A most enlightening work from a psychotherapist's personal perspective was Safer's (2000) work on *Forgiving and not Forgiving*. Here the author proposes a paradigm shift, challenging conventional wisdom when stating that forgiveness as it is commonly understood, is only one of many routes to resolution and that 'false' forgiveness damages the self and society. She states that, at times, not forgiving without vindictiveness can be emotionally and morally appropriate for the client. An open acknowledgement and examination of the injustice by the therapist, as experienced by the client, enables the client to move past the hurt. 'It is this attitude of genuine regard for experience which is at the heart of depth psychotherapy' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.245).

The two processes of forgiveness and psychotherapy are harmonious and in the 'confessional exchange' between client and therapist, it is the therapist's acceptance, patience and sensitive presence that are ideal facilitators of self-forgiveness (Rooney, 1989 and Rowe & Halling, 1998). This current research on the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy validated the 'confessional exchange between patient and therapist' (Rooney, 1989). In addition, the educative insight gained by the participants within the therapeutic relationship, resulted in a restoration of self-worth, a sense of reconnectedness to the self and others involving an acceptance of one's human fallibility and that of others and understanding the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. Buber (1957), states that an 'existential exchange is possible only as a breaking-through to the great action of the high conscience in self-illumination, persevering self-identification and a reconciling relationship to the world' (p.124).

Thus from the analysis of the research data in addition to the 'confessional exchange' and 'educative insight' being important components of psychotherapy, one could state that the participants experienced an 'existential exchange' which emanated from greater self-understanding, a renewed sense of identity and a reconnectedness with the self and the world, resulting in a transformation in how one viewed oneself and how one viewed and responded to others. The important issue here is that the therapist is aware that the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy is not only about self-acceptance but about self-illumination and renewed identity. The participants stated that a blanket condoning of themselves and others did not take place with the experience of self-forgiveness or forgiveness of others. Partial success, a to-ing and fro-ing, lingering doubts and residual bitterness and guilt are typical of this experience. Of significance was that the process of self-forgiveness which had taken place in therapy without open acknowledgement, was as important as the outcome. Feelings of guilt, anger, 'badness', of being 'wrong', were still felt. However, these did not overwhelm the participants, nor pervade their being.

The therapeutic exploration was the essential task in a successful resolution of painful issues requiring forgiveness in the client's life: 'what matters most is attaining a more three-dimensional view of one's own life' (Safer, 2000, p.7). Included in this view was the clients' acceptance of what could not change and the reasons for this. In Safer's opinion, 'this is the only genuine basis for compassion, liberation and-sometimes- forgiveness'. In the contained therapy situation, 'self-examination and fearless confrontation with the past, lead to understanding and acceptance of personal truth' (p.7).

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Being with the client in her world of experience is 'the core of the phenomenological challenge to the psychotherapist' in experientially oriented psychotherapy. (Moss,1989, p.196). As a researcher/psychotherapist it was the challenge and 'the invitation to enter into the world and story' of the participants (ibid, 1989, p.196). My personal life's experience, my psychotherapy and training were inspirational and contributed to my understanding, 'as 'witness' to the process of the participants' lived experience of injury, forgiveness and self-forgiveness (Rowe & Halling, 1998). As a practising psychotherapist, I agree with Safer's personal research findings and found that this research was a profound enlightening spiritual experience which led me to understand that, forgiveness and self-forgiveness resulted in dramatic changes in the way one perceives and experiences the world.

7.11   THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PSYCHOLOGISTS' GROUP DISCUSSIONS FOR THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

The comparison of the identified themes of the edited dialogue of the psychologists' group regarding the phenomenon of self-forgiveness with the six participants' retrospective experiences of the phenomenon in psychotherapy, was dealt with in Chapter 6. The themes which emanated from the group discussions confirmed the work of Holmgren (2002), where the author found that psychologists working toward forgiveness and self-forgiveness can promote other values such as self-respect, responsibility and self-empowerment. Colleagues in the group discussions felt that the processes involved in this experience would evolve in 'good' (effective) therapy anyway, without deliberately directing this process or articulating the phenomena in psychotherapy, i.e. whether forgiveness or self-forgiveness were explicitly on the client's therapeutic agenda or not. However, the group discussions, observations and interpretations regarding the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness in psychotherapy raised the therapists' awareness of this phenomenon. Whereas this phenomenon had not been previously labelled and articulated in therapy with clients, the therapists were now addressing it where appropriate and not leaving it at a 'subterranean level'. Understanding the concept, having articulated and discussed it in the group, had given the therapists an additional frame and structure within which to address issues with clients. Whereas previously they may have overlooked the concept, they found this a powerful therapeutic tool and felt this phenomenon deeply underlies and is critical to the whole therapeutic process.

Safer (2000) and Holmgren (2002), both warn that therapists should not foist forgiveness and self-forgiveness on clients before thoroughly acknowledging and addressing the injurious

experiences. Colleagues felt that injustice and forgiveness of others may not always be helpful in the healing process and that genuine non-forgiveness (without vengence), may be healthier than falsely forgiving others. They felt that non-forgiving and/or forgiving without condoning often maintained necessary boundaries between the self and others, sustaining a sense of self. In the book entitled *Before Forgiving – Cautionary views of Forgiveness in Psychotherapy*, Lamb & Murphy (2003) critically question the popularity of forgiveness. The authors question what this experience entails and when it might be more appropriate for a therapist to advise non-forgiveness and when encouraging forgiveness may be harmful to the client. The current research data, based on the participants' experience as well as the psychologists' observations and intepretations, may be helpful in answering these questions.

Hanson's study (1997), which was designed to assess psychologists' use of forgiveness in psychotherapy, described their personal and professional attitude about forgiveness and factors that one associated with its use. The major findings of this study - in which eighty-six licensed psychologists participated - were; that psychologists did report that they use self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others in psychotherapy with clients; that the degree of use of forgiveness was context-dependent and that there were some significant relationships between the use of forgiveness in psychotherapy and personal and professional characteristics of psychologists and their practices, values and beliefs.

The current research validates the major implications of the above study, viz that psychologists use forgiveness, value forgiveness and believe in supporting its use in psychotherapy. This was confirmed by the following themes which emanated from the psychologists' group discussions regarding the experience of self-forgiveness within the therapeutic alliance :

- The value of the therapeutic relationship was highlighted when the therapists expressed the view that consensual validation and the mediating presence of the therapist, the therapist's 'detached concern', 'educative insight', understanding and empathic compassion became part of the client's internal dialogue. The client underwent a paradigm shift, becoming less critical and more compassionate towards the self and others, precipitating an energy flow which led to the client becoming unblocked and experiencing a freedom and openness. This resulted in a 're-parenting of the self', 'of the soul'. and ultimately self-forgiveness, where the client not only gained insight and displayed emotionally corrective behaviour and self-acceptance,

but more significantly, underwent a transformation in how she viewed herself – a renewed identity – and how she viewed and responded to others.

- The important result of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy was that the psychologists felt that it had a transcendent, spiritual quality which was above justice and went beyond guilt and wrongdoing. This they felt would have major implications for the practise of psychotherapy, as in our training as psychologists, it is an experience/phenomenon that is not addressed; hence we're not *au fait* with it.

- While the power and usefulness of this phenomenon in psychotherapy was agreed upon, colleagues felt that the processes involved in this experience would happen in 'good' effective therapy anyway. Thus one could speculate that the phenomena of self-forgiveness and forgiveness or non-forgiveness of others, form an integral part of all psychotherapy whether articulated or not. This is especially the case when dealing with painful relational issues and childhood misperceptions where one's self-definition and definition of others are called into question, when the individual is required to accept her human fallibility and that of others and to take responsibility for her own actions.

In his article *Forgiving in Psychotherapy,* Hanson (1997) complains that this phenomenon is not sufficiently being written about. An advantage of the group discussions would be that these observations would contribute to the research and literature. An additional advantage of the insight gained in these group discussions was described by Rowe & Halling (1998) when they stated that 'the better the psychotherapist understands the nature of injury and forgiveness, the more comfortable he or she will be as 'witness' to the process even when forgiveness is never explicitly on the agenda' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.245).

My own participation and contributions in the group discussions were constructive in that I had been the participants' psychotherapist, was the sole researcher and analyzer of the data and had first-hand knowledge of their experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy. A disadvantage of this subjective role was that at times, I was inhibited in the professional discussions and often found myself being a facilitator of workshop/discussions rather than a participator in the discussions.

7.12   CULTURAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Bauer et al. (1992), state that although forgiveness is central to western civilization and important for one's well-being and peaceful existence, this phenomenon has 'become alien, disturbing and not generally understood' (p.151). The authors continue that forgiveness is spoken of in abstract terms rather than 'as central to people's experience' and that this confusion arises because 'contemporary cultural values run counter to the attitudes necessary for forgiveness', which are 'openness to oneself and others, to the metaphorical or mysterious in living, and to mercy'; with the result that 'justice has become synonomous with punishment, mercy with weakness, strength with power over others' (p.151).

In our culture the growth of technology and consumerism and a need to control and focus on individualism and independence have resulted in a general lack of a sense of community and a lack of relating to others. In the last decade, on the one hand, we have seen the democratic elections in South Africa, the end of apartheid and the establishment of democracy, with a focus on forgiveness, negotiation and transformation. On the other hand, the rise of globalization and a religious and ethnic fundamentalist reaction against it, defines the world in which we live. The world is dominated by fear and insecurities, where the reaction is one of revenge, an eye-for-an-eye, war, agression and/or turning a blind eye or the other cheek, rather than one of dialogue, negotiation and transformation.

As psychotherapists, we deal with clients who are overwhelmed by feelings of guilt, shame, estrangement from the self and others, a lack of identity and a concomitant loss of a sense of direction and of life's meaning. These are qualities which consistently overwhelm the individual and are aspects of the self which the individual dislikes, disowns and tries to change. Dealing with the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy and the acceptance of one's humanness and one's ordinariness, one focuses on, and is confronted by, one's limitations and fallibilities, the capacity to be hurtful to oneself and others and one's insecurities and interdependence in the human community (Bauer et al., 1992). The desire for wholeness and healing precipitates the need for seeking psychotherapy and self-forgiveness and this research illustrates the fact that the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy was a transformative experience which was profoundly signficant in healing the brokenness of the subjects/participants and had significant ramifications for their personal and broader social and cultural relationships.

In order to highlight this experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, this researcher will briefly discuss the cultural and social background against which this research was conducted and compare the broader cultural and social experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa (1996-1998). With the successful transition from the apartheid regime to a democracy in South Africa, our cultural attitude towards forgiveness and self-forgiveness has made these comfortable, familiar and powerful phenomena in South African society. The movement towards forgiveness was facilitated by the TRC which was the platform from which twenty-two thousand of the perpetrators and victims of apartheid crimes could convey their personal recollections and seek forgivenss of others and/or self-forgiveness. This process enhanced the sense of *ubuntu* in our society, which is 'the African philosophy of humanness emphasizing the link between the individual and the collective community' (Krog, 1999, p.454).

This socio-cultural, collective, therapeutic undertaking of the past by the TRC, mirrored this researcher's work as the psychotherapist dealing with individuals' psychic pain in psychotherapy. The TRC was a giant macrocosm of what takes place in psychotherapy and illustrates the powerful cultural, moral, social and ethical implications of this phenomenon for intrapersonal, interpersonal and political relationships in society as a whole. The individuals who recounted their stories for the TRC, those who were involved in mediating and reporting this process, those who listened to and read about their stories, were fellow South Africans. Like the individual in psychotherapy, we were all struggling to find identity for ourselves, 'individually and collectively, within the shadows still cast by our country's brutal history' (publisher's note, 1999, in Krog.1999, p.ix).

Temporality was involved in the Truth Commission hearings in that it was a painful revelation of the past, and it illuminated present difficulties as well as future possibilities. The individuals' truths as recounted to the TRC were a compilation of peoples' perceptions, stories, myths and experiences and resulted in a restoration of memory and a fostering of a new humanity which Krog (1999) described as 'justice in its deepest sense' (p.23). Similarly, with the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, the therapist could be regarded as an ethical and moral witness to justice and the truth of the memory of the client, in the sense that this experience involved a reinterpretation of the memory of the past. In reinterpreting the memory of the past in therapy, the person's essence and identity were renewed and restored. Thus the therapist's humanistic role became that of an ethical and moral witness. A renaming of the self and a transformation took place with the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy. The individual's identity had a particular role in memory and the survival of

the renewed identity meant a suvival of the essence of 'being in the world'. The identity/essence that was now remembered would thus forever be changed in history, as well as in the multi-generational transmission of this memory. This reconnectedness with the self was accompanied by a restoration of trust in the world, a restoration of humanity. The redemptive role particularly pertaining to the experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness, may be illustrated in a powerful way in psychotherapy by this renewed identity and transformation in responding to the self and others.

The experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy takes place on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level. Crucial for forgiveness to occur in therapy is that in dialogue with the self (intrapersonal) and with the therapist (interpersonal), the 'truth' of one's painful, relational issues and the injustice as experienced by the individual is addressed, acknowledged and openly examined. 'This openness to the injury and its consequences, create room to move past the hurt' and 'the attitude of genuine regard for experience is at the heart of depth psychotherapy' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.245).

The notions of truth, i.e. 'personal or narrative truth, social or 'dialogue truth' and healing and restorative truth' were highlighted by the Commission in its search for truth and reconciliation (Tutu et al, 1998, cited in Bell, 2002, p.84). Similar to the participants of the TRC, where recounting their personal and narrative truth provided healing potential, the research participants' personal or narrative truth gave meaning to their lived experience of the phenomenon in psychotherapy. The group dialogal discussions and dialogue truth, focused on the truth of experience that is established through interaction, discussion and debate. Healing and restorative truth in psychotherapy, a reconnectedness to the self and transformation of how the individual viewed the self and others, had impacted on broader relationships which would have an ongoing ripple effect within the context of the broader personal and social community. The report of the TRC showed that through narrative and language one can forge 'a collective memory from individual experiences with the purpose of constructing national unity' (p.85).

This research emphasizes the fact that the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others in therapy is about dealing with and acknowledging the individual's reactions to injustice, self-acceptance, acceptance of one's human fallibility (often resulting in a renewed identity). In addition, it is also about extending and deepening the transformation which takes place in therapy to one's interpersonal relationships in the world. The research participants related that they had extended the learning and transformation gained by their experience to

their personal and work relationships. The experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy focuses on this phenomenon as a relational one, in that it is within the relationship matrix that the client experiences the pain of deep hurt, betrayal or injustice, questions her worth and identity in the world, as well as issues regarding her attitude and beliefs about her self and her perceived failures. Significant others in the client's environment strongly affect her and would, in turn, be significantly influenced by the individual's transformation as a result of this experience in therapy.

Working with this phenomenon in this research and being part of a society which epitomizes the phenomena of forgiveness and self-forgiveness, highlights for the psychotherapist that one's impulse is to explain and blame all our frustrations and difficulties in terms of the society in which we live. Bugental (1987) states that there is much that is wrong in our and any culture 'but this only set the terms of the task', as psychotherapists this 'does not dismiss us from responsibility' (p.257). He states clearly 'that social apathy of the intellectual' is 'a flight from existential confrontation' and we are 'personally' and collectively 'responsible for what is wrong in society'. 'We need to meet and incorporate that fact, not deny it and thus deny our own being in the process' (p.257).

In the research of the six participants' experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, it was evident from the participants' responses that in completing psychotherapy, it was possible that the participants would become agents for societal change. The participants gaining of insight and a renewed identity resulted in a transformation which led to a different view of the self and views of, and responses to, others. There was a connectedness to the self and others, the possibility of becoming a 'societal change agent', i.e. becoming 'such not from rejection of society and standing outside of it but from incorporation of society and participation in bringing about changes' (ibid, 1987, p.257). 'Commitment is one of the defining attributes of existential authenticity' and this commitment 'becomes an ongoing process of being' (in the world). The experience of authentic commitment can be seen as 'a contrast to the flight from responsibility into preoccupation with blame' (p.261).

7.13   **THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY**

- As research has shown, self-forgiveness takes place on an intrapersonal and

interpersonal level. The phenomenon of self-forgiveness 'seems to imply that this is a solitary act completed in isolation from others' (Bauer et al., 1992, p.156).

However, the participants' retrospective experiences of self-forgiveness showed that this was an ongoing, arduous process (even after therapy had ended) which involved a reconnectedness with themselves and others in the world. Coming into therapy, the participants were overwhelmed by core emotions such as anxiety, depression, anger, despair, guilt, shame and self-blame, which had resulted in a fundamental imbalance and dysfunction in their lives. More significantly, there was a feeling of alienation and a feeling of separation from themselves and others, a lack of identity and direction in their lives. In this research, the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy included forgiving significant others in the participants' lives, and with this experience, there was a feeling of increased connectedness to the self and others and a feeling of 'being at home in the world'. Simultaneously, this increased feeling of self-acceptance and acceptance of others was accompanied by a sense of renewed identification, enhanced individuation and separation from others, a sense of empowerment and freedom to make critical life-altering decisions, a reclaiming of boundaries and a looking to the future with a sense of renewed anticipation and hope.

- For therapists, the therapeutic value of including the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy would be in treating clients who experience painful relational wounds during personal and interpersonal development.

- This research highlights the role of self-forgiveness (and forgiveness or non-forgiveness of others) in the clients' experiences of being in the world and how lack of insight into the blockages to forgiveness and self-forgiveness would impede their transformative experience. Thus working with the experience of self-forgiveness within the appropriate therapeutic context would help clients overcome obstacles to greater self-illumination and self-identity and enhance a reconnectedness to the self and others.

- Enright & Fitzgibbons have researched forgiveness in psychotherapy for over twenty years. In their synthesized work entitled *Helping Clients Forgive* (2000), the researchers explain the process of forgiveness in psychotherapy using a model of forgiveness (1991 & 2000) and how clinicians, regardless of their theoretical orientation, could apply this process in psychotherapy. These researchers have

applied forgiveness and shown statistically in their research that this phenomenon has been successful in reducing clients' anger, anxiety and depression and helped enhance their sense of hope and sense of self. Fitzgibbons (1998), expresses the need for forgiveness to move into the mainstream of the mental health field and that forgiveness has a vital role to play in the clinical treatment of mental disorders and people of all ages (cited in Enright & North, 1998).

- In addition, the majority of clients come into therapy having experienced a sense of injury and wrongdoing from others or experiencing feelings of being 'wrong' or 'bad' themselves regarding significant others in their lives. These experiences are often, despair and depression. Insight and acceptance, in psychotherapy, of the individual's human fallibility and self-forgiveness, as well as that of others, would help them reassess often irrational feelings resulting from the injustices in their lives, in a constructive, therapeutic and healing manner accompanied by feelings of alienation, self-blame, guilt, shame, anger, anxiety and

- Possible therapeutic value of the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others would be for clinicians from interdisciplinary professions and perspectives to introduce these phenomena when working with individuals in psychic pain, e.g. philosophy, religion, psychology, general medical practitioners, psychiatry, etc. An interdisciplinary approach to forgiveness would enhance our ability to negotiate and connect with others and move towards new possibilities in a world which seems dominated by terror and fear and a lack of, or unwillingness to, improve our insight and understanding of different cultural, religious, social and political issues which result in our mutual intolerance of the beliefs of others. 'Collective responsibility across generations, may be a morally necessary idea' (Shriver, 1998, p.141).

- Clients often come into psychotherapy articulating the need for self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. A deeper understanding of, and familiarity with, these phenomena would assist these clients with their difficulties. 'Knowing and being familiar with forgiveness therapy well, is a sign of respect for those humans we serve' (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p.5). A broader awareness of the client's religious, spiritual and philosophical beliefs is required by the psychotherapist because forgiveness and self-forgiveness are embedded in, amongst others, Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

- Multidisciplinary approaches to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy would apply to the various theoretical orientations and approaches experienced in one's training and when working with clients. This would include psychodynamic/psychoanalytic oriented therapists, cognitive behavioural therapists and family systems therapists when dealing with their clients' painful traumatic issues. The issue of self-forgiveness pertains to transformation and renewed identity rather than therapeutic techniques (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000).

- The therapeutic value of this research of the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy may be extended to general bereavement counselling in psychotherapy and more particularly, with various specialized groups, such as hospice counsellors, compassionate friends, specialized trauma workers, (e.g. counsellors and participants in groups such as Rape Crisis Counselling, Abuse against Women and Children, NICRO Groups), general trauma counselling, Correctional Services (staff and prisoners and their families), community social workers, therapists, counsellors, medical doctors, (including medical students) and medical personnel, alternative healers and workers in the helping profession, all of whom are trying to deal with individuals' feelings of pain, of self-blame, of guilt, shame and anger, as well as the therapists'/counsellors' own issues relating to loss, betrayal and injustice.

- The existential hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy may be extended to transpersonal psychology. In the discussion group, psychology colleagues felt that the phenomenon of self-forgiveness was a transcendental, 'spiritual' or transpersonal experience. Valle (1989), states that these types of awareness are not really 'experiences' per se but are in some way 'prior to our daily experiences and pre-reflective sensibilities and are more of a 'context' or 'space' from which our more common experience or felt sense emerges' (Valle, 1989, p.258). Transpersonal psychology focuses on issues such as optimal functioning of the self and others and the ability for spiritual experience e.g. Yoga, Zen, Buddhism, Sufism, Christian and Judaic mysticism, Taoism, traditional African cultures, etc. In applying these approaches to psychology, particularly the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, the focus is not only on self-identity and the process of individuation, but on human experience which extends beyond the level of self-awareness: 'identity is not confined to the individual mind or more limited sense of self' (p.262).

The experience of self-forgiveness would be appropriate if applied to transpersonal psychology as the participants first had to acknowledge their humanness (which included negative aspects), as well as positive aspects of the self and then acknowledge the humanness of others which went beyond the personal. Transpersonal psychology encompasses all aspects of human nature, not only the 'shadow self' but 'that which makes us noble and good as well, e.g. altruism, humility, forgiveness, joy and love' (ibid, 1989, p.262). The existential, hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy extends to the transpersonal in that the psychotherapist helps the client own and recognize unresolved grief and anger and helps her embrace the capacity for compassion, understanding and willingness to give to others and accept the human fallibility of others. 'Men are not only and in their ultimate essence for self, but for others' (Levinas, 1990, p.85).

- In South Africa, political issues such as racial discrimination in the apartheid vs post-apartheid eras relating to forgiveness and self-forgiveness could be explored and researched. In addition, research on forgiveness and self-forgiveness could be included with the participants (both victims and perpetrators) of the TRC. Rowe, et al. (1989) state that it is clear these are phenomena 'with many facets and far-reaching implications for intrapersonal, interpersonal and political relationships' (p.243).

- Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000), have applied self-forgiveness and forgiveness therapeutically, in order to ameliorate feelings of anger-related emotions to those who have suffered injustices. These authors state that most of our work as therapists applies to those who have developed clinical symptoms and suggests that forgiveness (and this could be extended to self-forgiveness) should be introduced in a systematic fashion as preventative measures with children in schools and families. Helping children learn about self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others and helping equip them with skills in order to cope with injustice, betrayal and anger while in their formative years, would assist them in understanding and integrating these phenomena in their adult lives and relationships. In turn, they may become individuals who could help with these issues in future generations. The current research shows the significance of multigenerational transmission of family scripts, myths, beliefs, pain, anger and misperceptions. The introduction of forgiveness and self-forgiveness in psychotherapy as well as in education, may be a significant means of promoting

emotional well-being across generations which would not only benefit the individual, but the family and broader culture and society as well.

7.14   CRITICAL REVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

'The most fundamental claim of existential - phenomenological psychology is that it provides us with an approach that leads to a deeper and fuller understanding of human existence, ourselves and others' (Valle, King & Halling, 1989, p.16). In this research, the emphasis was on descriptions from research subjects of their lived experiences of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy (Giorgi, 1985). Although this research can be termed 'qualitative' or 'descriptive', it differs from these approaches because the focus was on the subject's experience instead of descriptions of their overt actions or behaviour. Thus this hermeneutic/exisential research approach to the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy was appropriate in that forgiveness is spoken of in western culture more often as an abstract ideal, rather than as central to one's experience. In order to return to the actual experience of this phenomenon, one needs to analyze the individual's description of the experience which cannot be narrowly defined because it entails a broader shift in the attitude and identity of the individual. One cannot observe this shift nor explain it from an observer stance, 'because neither the inner meaning of the act of forgiveness(and self-forgiveness), nor the significance of the process is directly 'visible' or quantifiable (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.230).

It is clear that self-forgiveness is not a 'variable' with effects that can be readily measured, nor does it necessarily have to be facilitated by specific kinds of interventions, nor by clients being directed, pressured and manipulated in psychotherapy. The retrospective interviews with the research participants of their experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy proved that this experience took place in their therapy, even when forgiveness and self-forgiveness were not explicitly on the agenda. Thus the mixed hermeneutic/existential research method into this phenomenon using phenomenological principles in the data analysis, seemed appropriate, taking into account that this experience did not depend on the researcher or on outside control, but on the participants' experience of the phenomenon in psychotherapy. In other words, one did not have to rely on techniques and calculations which were statistically quantifiable and controlled.

Another important factor in a hermeneutic/existential approach to this phenomenon is that all perceptions and experiences are filtered through the person doing the experiencing and are therefore subjective in nature.

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Using an interpretive hermeneutic/existential approach, the researcher remained faithful to the basic of the phenomenological principle of staying true to the phenomenon in the study of human conduct. A hermeneutic/existential approach to the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy meant focusing on the subjective inner experience of the participants in their world. Bugental (1987) stated that 'we need to include the subjective in our lives'. He warns that 'objectivity is the black plague of the 20th Century' (and may be of the 21st Century as well) and says that 'we need to take account of the inner experiences of people, to recognize that many truths are not such that they can be rendered explicit, unambiguous or complete'(p.262). These subjective truths which are 'essential to our survival', have been rejected in seeking the objectification of human beings (p.262). The experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy brings us back to our inner selves, to our subjectivity, to our relatedness in the world. Paul Tillich (1952) wrote: 'Man resists objectification and if his resistance is broken, man himself is broken' (cited in Bugental, 1987, p.263).

It seemed as if Subjects A and C's experiences of the phenomenon, as compared to those of the other participants, provided richer, more illustrative examples of their subjective inner and interpersonal experiences. These have therefore been used in this chapter. One could hypothesize that this may have been due to the fact that Subjects A and C had gained more from their therapeutic experience than had the others and perhaps they had an innate ability to be able to analyze, introspect and assimilate the knowledge gained in therapy, which had resulted in a greater sense of connectedness to the self and others in the world. In addition, Subject C had stated that she had been to an intuitive healer prior to her entering psychotherapy, which she thought had started the process of change and that for her, psychotherapy was the final 'missing part of the jigsaw puzzle' which provided her with tools and the information and understanding of her own life.

An advantage of the mixed research method and interviewing the participants about their retrospective experiences of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, was that the process of engaging in the interviews and dealing with their lived experience of self-forgiveness, was therapeutic in itself and resulted in a sense of closure for the participants, although their therapy with me had been concluded. The retrospective interviews of their experiences of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy which had not explicitly been on the therapeutic agenda, were helpful in that it broadened their perspective. They realized that the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others, although not directly articulated, had taken place in psychotherapy, which had resulted in a renewed identity and insight and had restored their connectedness to themselves and others in the world.

7.15   **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

- In their retrospective interviews, the participants described their experience of the phenomenon before reflection and their understanding of this experience was rooted in the world as they lived it. However, the psychologists had read the literature and had had time to reflect on the phenomenon in the discussion group and therefore, their experience of the phenomenon was not pre-reflective. Thus the researcher could only use the psychologists' observations and interpretations of the literature and data in order to deepen and enhance the understanding of the phenomenon as well as to facilitate the use of this phenomenon as a tool in their therapy with clients.

- Another limitation of the research was the potential subjective bias of myself as the researcher who had also been the psychotherapist involved in psychotherapy with the research participants. I was the primary researcher who had interviewed the participants and the sole analyzer of the data provided by the participants.

  The lived experiential aspect of the research was that the retrospective interviews had been conducted with the participants regarding their experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy and this experience had not been explicitly on the psychotherapy agenda, nor was this phenomenon dealt with directly in psychotherapy.   The descriptions of the experienced situations were by the participants themselves and not from the view of the psychotherapist conducting the phenomenological research.

  The researcher endeavoured to read without prejudice and thematize the protocols from their viewpoint as understood by this researcher's self. Kruger states that 'the communion with the phenomenon is a dialectic of closeness and distance' (Kruger, 1986, p.201). As a result, the researcher must attempt to get close to the phenomenon in order to permit the emergence of its dimension. At the same time, one has to acquire sufficient distance from the phenomenon to be able to 'share one's articulation imaginatively with someone else and compel his agreement' (p.201). 'The truth requires a third as witness' (p.201) and thus the dialoguing within the discussion group was thought by this researcher to include this objective dimension relating to the research.

 In order to avoid subjective bias, it would have been advantageous for an outside therapist who had not been involved in the psychotherapy with the clients/participants, to have conducted the research and for this researcher (the psychotherapist/researcher) to have become a co-researcher in the research experience. However, Giorgi (1975), states that another researcher's approach to the same data is not wholly different but may be slightly different and divergent. Thus the control of the data comes from the researcher's context or perspective of the data. Giorgi states that the key criterion for qualitative research is 'whether a reader adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it' (Giorgi, 1975, in Giorgi et al., 1975, p.96).

- As mentioned in Chapter 6, another disadvantage of the psychotherapist/researcher conducting the interviews, was that I was familiar with the subjects and their history and there was an interwoven quality of the shared text and world with the clients/participants. Thus the assumption, on the part of the participants, was that I would understand the meaning of the experience they were trying to convey. At times, because of this familiarity, I failed to question and clarify an assumed meaning although it may have been compatible with the client's known history.

- In addition, the participants' responses to the interview question describing their experiences in psychotherapy were all positive, in that they had found that the validating, accepting, empathic presence of the therapist had enhanced their experiences of this phenomenon. Involving an outside research interviewer in order to ask his question of the participants, with whom they had not formed a therapeutic relationship, may have produced alternative responses.

- Limitations may have been inherent in the small sample size as well as the participants' relatively homogenous set of religious beliefs. Implications for further research may be to extend an investigation of this phenomenon to include various alternative religious traditions, e.g. Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, which would yield its own rich set of qualitative data.

- Cross-cultural research, as well as research of different population groups (e.g. prisoners who had been in counselling groups vs those who had not; victims vs

perpetrators who took part in the TRC in South Africa, etc), would be indicated in order to assess whether the experience of self-forgiveness differs across cultures and different population groups.

- Qualitative research does not aim at objective quantifiable results. An interpretation of a lived experience is an interpretation and therefore may fall short of a complete understanding and conveyed meaning of the experience. Van Manen (1990), stated that 'a phenomenological description is always some interpretation and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary or even potentially richer or deeper description' (cited in Ferch, 2000, p.7).

7.16 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCES IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

- The experience of letting-go in psychotherapy, which is not an intellectual conscious act, often involves a letting-go of one's old identity, expectations and beliefs and may not necessarily involve self-forgiveness or the forgiveness of others.

- The experience of reparation and reconciliation is not a prerequisite for forgiveness and self-forgiveness. In other words, one can forgive without reconciling or forgetting the injurious behaviour or one could forgive oneself without necessarily seeking reconciliation with the other. In cases of sudden death or injury, in painful divorce and custody issues, while self-forgiveness may be possible, reconciliation and reparation with the wrongdoer may not be possible.

- Self-acceptance, which was found in this research to be mandatory in the experience of self-forgiveness, need not include forgiveness in psychotherapy. Non-forgiveness without vengeance, an acceptance of issues which cannot be changed and accepting uncertainty and ambivalence, can take place in therapy. 'Sometimes what people really need is permission not to forgive, to feel what they feel. Granting permission need not foreclose resolution; it may be the step that makes it possible' (Safer, 2000, p.166). Often, psychotherapists will encourage self-forgiveness or forgiveness of others without considering whether doing so serves their own needs or their clients' needs' (ibid, 2000).

- Resistance in psychotherapy differs from self-forgiveness in that this experience presents an obstacle to therapeutic progress. Often clients present with chronic and severe difficulties in interpersonal relationships which inevitably manifest in psychotherapy as resistance to therapeutic work. Overcoming these impediments and working with the resistance may not result in self-forgiveness or forgiveness of others in psychotherapy. Often there is a client's general reluctance to experiment and be receptive to developing insight and more adaptive behaviour. Resistance in psychotherapy often impedes the formation of the therapeutic relationship and a collaborative experience. In dealing with and acknowledging the client's resistance, the therapist would effect changes in the therapeutic relationship which would then have an effect on the client's sense of self and her interpersonal relationships in her world. According to Bugental (1987), the client enters psychotherapy in order to change her life. The focus in therapy is on the client's identity (who and what she is) and her experience of 'being in the world'. Therefore, when therapy becomes life-changing, the client feels her world, her identity and sense of security being threatened and she increasingly resists the therapeutic effort. 'Resistance is the impulse to protect one's familiar identity and known world against perceived threat' (p.175).

One of Freud's (1916/1917) most significant contributions to psychotherapy was to identify resistance and to recognize its importance to the therapeutic aim (Bugental, 1987). Freud accepted the analysis of the resistance as an integral part of therapy rather than dismissing it or to interpreting it as poor motivation or stubbornness on the client's part. Resistance is used by the client in psychotherapy to reduce threat to the self, rather than being a defense against the therapist's interpretation . 'Resistance is the way in which the client avoids being truly, subjectively present, accessible and expressive – in the therapeutic work and whether in or out of therapy, resistance results in inauthentic being' (ibid, 1987, p.175).

Recognizing the resistance in psychotherapy discloses a central aspect of how the client identifies herself and structures her world. With regard to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, overcoming resistance to this phenomenon may result in non-forgiveness of others, thus maintaining or reinstating boundaries between the self and others, and/or forgiving oneself and others without forgetting or condoning one's actions or the actions of others.

The phenomenological approach to resistance in the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy would be to focus on the client's blockages to her own freedom and potentialities, rather than on the narrower concepts of resistance and repression (May, 1958, cited in Valle & King, 1978, p.294). The focus would be on the constructive aspects of the client's life and reinforcing the client's potential, while helping the client reduce the crippling aspects of the resistance to change and transformation. Bugental (1987) states that dealing with the existential crisis in psychotherapy would mean that the interrelatedness of tasks of disclosing and working through resistance and developing an understanding of the client's self-and-world construct system would eventually converge.

This took place in psychotherapy when the six participants recognized and re-owned the disliked and disowned parts of the self which resulted in self-acceptance and the acceptance of their human fallibility in a renewed identity, a reclaiming of oneself and ultimately, in the experience of self-forgiveness. Overcoming resistance in therapy resulted in 'a shift of focus to a meta-perspective' that could embrace all aspects of one's self'. One 'was no longer solely defined by incidents of feelings of being 'wrong' or 'bad', rather there was a sense of balance and movement and these feelings did not pervade the entire fabric of one's life' (Bauer et al., 1992, p.158). Owning one's dark side meant being less judgemental of the self and others and was no longer the primary way of relating to the world. Subject A said of his disliked parts, 'I'm learning to forgive myself as well because part of my anger has also been about, I think, not liking parts of myself that are like him' (his father).

- Developing and seeking truth and insight in psychotherapy does not necessarily result in self-forgiveness or forgiveness of others. Destructive and abusive parenting may result in an acceptance by the individual, but not necessarily in forgiveness. Safer (2000), warns that 'reconnection in any way with a mother who has violated her child's basic boundaries still endangers his autonomy' (p.160). The therapist investigating the meaning of non-forgiveness without pressurizing the client into a false forgiveness and helping the client experience her feelings of the injury and betrayal, may result in a more integrated form of unforgiving detachment with the required, appropriate boundaries. As this research has shown, the development of an authentic selfhood in psychotherapy does not necessarily include a blanket condoning of one's own actions or the actions of others. 'Individual truth, not premature closure or following external dictates matters most' (p.210).

- The experience of mourning and loss in psychotherapy, grieving for losses sustained, experiencing the grief of letting go, feeling regret for what was and what might have been and recognizing the loss without feeling like a victim, may result in legitimate authentic unforgiveness, rather than 'false' forgiveness.

  However, the experience of mourning and loss in psychotherapy; understanding and acknowledging the painful events in their true perspective, may result in a more realistic appreciation of one's own role in the relationship and a re-engagement with, and a reinterpretation and recognition of, one's feelings regarding the relationship.

CONCLUSION

> 'The key to genuine long-lasting change, lies not in the resolution of any particular circumstance, but in the ability to forgive oneself' (Rutledge, 1997, p.9).

According to the descriptions of the six participants, the need for self-forgiveness, which had not been directly articulated in psychotherapy, arose as a result of painful relational issues, which had impacted on their lives, such as feelings of intimate betrayal, childhood abuse and deprivation, separation and divorce. These experiences had manifested in feelings of being overwhelmed by anxiety, panic, anger, self-blame, shame, guilt, despair, pain and depression and had resulted in the individual's feeling disconnected from herself and others, feeling alone in the world, questioning her identity and direction and the meaning of life.

Although the participants had not labelled their experience as 'self-forgiveness' in psychotherapy, the results of the retrospective research of this experience indicated that this experience had indeed taken place in psychotherapy. Experientially, the moment self-forgiveness (and forgiveness of others), seemed to be the moment of recognition that the experience had already occurred (although in Subject B's case, this was not as satisfying and healing as that of the other participants). In other words, in the post-therapeutic interviews, the participants realized that their feelings and identities had changed, that they had forgiven themselves and others and that self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others had come as 'a revelation' (Rowe & Halling, 1998). Fellow colleagues reflected in the group discussions, that this experience - an integral part of psychotherapy - would occur in 'effective' psychotherapy, with the psychotherapist as 'witness' to the process, whether directly articulated or explicitly on the client's psychotherapy agenda or not.

The experience of self-forgiveness had involved a transition in the individual's life from feeling estranged from the self to a connectedness and feeling 'at home', 'not adrift', in the world. This experience involved an understanding and acceptance of oneself, re-owning and integrating the previously disowned and disliked parts of the self, and acceptance of one's human fallibility, as well as that of others without a blanket condoning of one's own actions, or the actions of others. These experiences resulted in a renewed identity and Rutledge states that, 'learning self-forgiveness is the classic human search for identity' and, 'as long as we remain in hiding from the so-called negative aspects of ourselves, we remain incapable of embracing who we are' (Rutledge, 1997, p.2).

This movement towards the experience of self-forgiveness was a long arduous process, which the retrospective interviews showed had continued after therapy had ended and which involved a continuous struggle, a 'to-ing and fro-ing' between feelings of acceptance and judgement. Although a realistic perspective gained in therapy had resulted in the feelings of being 'wrong' and 'bad' surfacing, they no longer directly dominated or pervaded the individual's being in the world. It was apparent in this study of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, that this phenomenon was related to the experience of forgiving others and was not a solitary act which took place in isolation from others.

This research showed that the experience of self-forgiveness took place within the context of a validating, accepting and empathic relationship with the therapist. Of significance for the participants was to feel accepted despite revealing their vulnerabilities and the disliked parts of themselves. More importantly, in therapy, they were confronted with themselves, gaining clarity and insight into their own co-creation and maintenance of repetitive cycles of dysfunctional behavioural patterns. This resulted in them taking responsibility for their own actions, feeling strengthened, empowered and liberated, healing and making peace with the past in order to move on, make choices and face the future with renewed hope. In forgiving the self as well as others, there was the experience of reclaiming the self, 'no longer does one see onself in a relationship of victim and victimizer' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.236). There are new alternatives resulting in an ability to make choices in one's life, 'a sense of responsibility of one's life and relationship is recovered' (p.236).

Not only was the 'confessional exchange' (Rooney, 1989) important between client and psychotherapist, but the 'educative insight' gained by the client (with the assistance of an enlightened witness, the therapist), resulted in a behavioural and emotional change, a restoration of self-worth, a sense of reconnectedness to the self and others, a renewed identity

and an acceptance of one's humanness and that of others. The 'confessional exchange', 'educative insight' and the experience of self-forgiveness in the therapeutic environment also resulted in what Buber calls an 'existential confession' (exchange), which he describes 'is possible only as a breaking-through to the great action of the high conscience in self-illumination, persevering self-identification and a reconciling relationship to the world' (Buber, 1957, p.124). It was clear from the retrospective interviews with the participants, that process created by the results of the 'educative insight', 'self-illumination', 'persevering self-identification' and a 'reconciling relationship to the world' was ongoing, and could continue even after psychotherapy had ended.

In addition, from the retrospective interviews with the research participants, it was evident that the individual could become the transitional figure in the family and broader social and cultural systems. With the renewed identity and reinterpreted memory they had gained in psychotherapy, the repetitive, dysfunctional cycle of past relational behaviour was not perpetuated and repeated in the family and broader significant interpersonal relationships. When the memory of the injurious behaviour it 'is evoked is not forgetting the wrong done but rather overcoming the resentment that accompanies it' (Margalit, 2002, p. 208). Renewed insight and gaining a new perspective of memory took place in psychotherapy, which did not mean forgetting the past. The significance of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy is that 'forgiveness' does not mean amnesia' (Tutu, 1998, cited in Enright & North, 1998, p.xiv) and that 'if we don't deal with our past adequately, it would return to haunt us' (ibid, 1998). In reliving and dealing with the past in psychotherapy, multigenerational transmission of the repetitive dysfunctional behaviour patterns may be arrested and new relationship patterns result which may be beneficial to present and future generations as well as having an impact on broader socio-cultural relationships.

All psychotherapists have theoretical philosophical, moral, cultural and religious views about the nature of human existence. These views form part of our training and socio-cultural heritage and may be based either on strict orthodox adherence to a particular theory or a more eclectic approach to understanding human nature. In any approach, these beliefs infiltrate and form the basis of the understanding of psychodynamics and 'therefore, have direct implications for what one does in that special human relationship known as psychotherapy' (King, Valle & Citrenbaum, 1978, p.265).

Since embarking on my PhD studies in psychotherapy, the influence of the existential-phenomenological approach to psychology in general and psychotherapy in particular, has

impacted on my work as a psychotherapist. This theoretical philosophical approach differed to my training as a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic, as well as a family systems therapist (at two different training institutions) and impinged on and affected my own experience and understanding of human existence, as well as my understanding of the therapeutic process. I was able to integrate this approach into my work because I found that increasingly, clients were entering therapy with concerns and issues regarding the nature and meaning of their existence and their identity. These issues could be directly and appropriately dealt with in therapy sessions by integrating an existential-phenomenological approach, in addition to my previous theoretical approaches.

I will briefly discuss my previous theoretical approaches to psychotherapy and how these dovetail with the existential phenomenological approach.

My original psychoanalytic/psychodynamic training focused on dual instincts in the individual, i.e. unconscious, libidinal, instinctual forces vs ego instincts and the demands of the environment which also included the demands of the internalised environment or superego. In addition, I was influenced by the neo-Freudian developmental theorists who focused on interpersonal dynamics and stated that instead of the individual being instinct driven and pre-programmed (in addition to innate qualities such as temperament and activity levels), one is shaped by the cultural and interpersonal environment. For me, the most important focus of this school of thought was that the child's basic need is for security, interpersonal acceptance and approval and that the interaction with significant adults in the environment (who either interpersonally accept and approve or reject and disapprove of their children), would determine and influence the child's character structure. The fact that parents and caretakers were not present to their children and were unable to provide security in order to encourage autonomous growth, could result in severe conflict and developmental dysfunctional behaviour in their offspring. 'The early child's experience of self is formed in the shadow of the parent-child relationship' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, cited in Moss, 1989, p.211).

My focus as a psychotherapist, dealing with the individual's conflict in psychotherapy, the significance and influence of the existential-psychodynamic approach was on '*the conflict that flows from the individual's confrontation with the givens of existence*' (Yalom, 1980, p.8). In other words, in the therapeutic encounter, the therapist's role would be to focus on the individual's existence, how she experiences 'being in her world'. This requires deep personal reflection within the safe, contained, accepting, empathic therapeutic relationship,

where the enlightened witness (the therapist) would interact with the client to provide an environment where she could reflect deeply, not only on 'the givens' of her situation in the world, but also on the potentials and the possibilities of her existence. In other words, the psychotherapist deals with the clients' past in psychotherapy in order to assess the way they deal with their current existence and concerns and its effects.

In addition, the therapist focuses on integrating future-becoming-present, which is the primary phenomenological approach in developing the clients' potential, together with the 'geworwenheit' (Heidegger, 1962) or 'throwness' of their existence. Thus, for myself as a psychotherapist, the primary focus of existential psychotherapy was to integrate this approach in my work with clients, which included exploring existential factors within a development framework. Working within an existential framework meant extending the developmental dynamic analytic model to include the immediate ahistorical, existential model.

May (1958) stated that 'the aim of therapy was helping the patient experience his existence as real' (cited in Bilmes, 1978, p.292). Whereas therapies like psychoanalysis emphasize the strictly determined aspects of personality with the existential model, one is faced with the paradox that with existential-phenomenological based therapy, the client can choose to change and become different (ibid, 1978). May (1969) recognized the central role of choice in therapy and puts choice back into theory' (ibid, 1978, p.293). 'The phenomenological approach does not consist in explaining by theories or using theories to construct practices but attempts to see things as they are' (Heaton,, 1982, p.27). Heaton further states that for the psychotherapist 'to be restricted to a method, is to give up any possibility of radical self-criticism or intimate knowledge of things themselves' (p.28).

An example of comparing the psychoanalytical and phenomenological empirical study approaches to anxiety in Fischer (1982), could also be used to illustrate the dual theoretical approach to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy. In his study, Fischer compares the two approaches and states that they concur regarding the individuals' refusal to confront and accept new meanings that are emerging and thus adhere closely to the past meanings which continue to dictate 'to the present and the future' (p.83). However, Fischer states that these two approaches diverge completely with regard to the possibility that the empirical-phenomenological approach would prove that an individual can confront and accept her anxiety (or the issues pertaining to the experience of self-forgiveness) and can be transformed by it.   In other words, facing one's anxiety produces the possibility of helplessness and change (ibid, 1982). However, Merleau-Ponty states that 'while

phenomenology and psychoanalysis are not parallel, much better, they are both aiming at the same latency' (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, p.87, cited in Fischer, 1982, p.83).

Family systems therapy and existential-phenomenological based therapy dovetail in that both approaches focus on the client functioning within her social system. The psychotherapist understands that the client enters therapy as part of a larger system consisting of family, ethnic and cultural influences within the existential approach to psychotherapy. The therapist is also committed to an implicit engagement with the client's 'family', i.e. all those who are significant figures in the client's life (which would include the family of origin, the conjugal family and social and work relationships). In other words, 'the client is not separate from others but is recognized as always living within a relationship matrix' (Bugental, 1987, p.254). As a psychotherapist dealing with client's difficulties, one recognizes that in order to achieve genuine authentic self-respect, there needs to be a recognition and acceptance of the lives and needs of others in the client's environment and a consideration of the impact of the individual's actions on others (ibid, 1987).

The reason that the hermeneutic/existential orientation seemed appropriate in researching the phenomenon of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, as well as in my approach to helping clients deal with issues of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others in psychotherapy, was that they presented with feelings of disconnectedness and alienation from themselves and others not only within their personal lives but also within the broader social, cultural world in which they live. Thus the hermeneutic/existential research (using phenomenological principles in the data analysis), focused on self-forgiveness as it is lived and experienced in the world.

There has been an increase in the growth of the modern technological, mechanistic, materialistic world where instant gratification and different personal and moral values have resulted in fragmentation and alienation. In South Africa, the legacy of the painful past of the apartheid regime has resulted in alienation from family traditions and values and political and socio-economical instability. This has led to an increase in mobility, emigration and separation and alienation of family members, a disregard for cultural, religious and moral values and at times, past authority figures being regarded as corrupt and pathological rather than leaders upholding moral principles.

In South Africa, the phenomena of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others have become familiar and central to our existence, and we have learnt that 'without forgiveness, there is no future' (Tutu, 1998, cited in Enright & North, 1998, p.xiii). Tutu states that in South Africa

'we are a living example of how forgiveness may unite people' (ibid, 1998, pxiii). Given the painful legacy of our past, our miracle almost certainly would not have happened without the willingness of people to forgive, exemplified spectacularly in the magnaminity of Nelson Mandela, who was able to forgive, despite the long years of incarceration (ibid, 1998).

The mixed method approach to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy meant focusing on the subjective inner experience of the participants in their world, 'as well as reflective and pre-reflective awareness being essential elements or dimensions of human beings as a being-in-the-world' (Valle, 1998, p.275). Including subjectivity in our lives meant an awareness of interdisciplinary approaches to the experience of self-forgiveness and an awareness of the transpersonal, transcendent and spiritual aspects of this phenomenon. Transpersonal, transcendent/spiritual awareness, 'seem prior to' the reflective-pre-reflective realm, presenting itself as more of a space or ground from which our more common experience and felt-sense emerge' (p.276). Valle (1998) defines trans-intentional awareness as representing 'a way of being in which, the separateness of a perceiver and that which is perceived has dissolved, a reality not of (or in some way beyond) time, space and causation as we normally know them' (p.277). Future research of the experience of self-forgiveness could include an integration of the experiences that reflect the transpersonal/transcendent dimensions of this phenomenon within the context of phenomenological research methods.

Bugental (1987) describes depth psychotherapy as the search for the child-god, the mystical, the unknown. He states that the intent of psychotherapy which is 'the nurturing of the spirit or soul', is also to 'confront and incorporate the existential conditions of our being', among which is the ultimate unknowingness of being 'the inexorable coming up against our limits in the midst of limitless mystery' (p .272).

Coming to the end of this research, I am aware of the fact that 'mystery enfolds knowledge' and 'as knowledge grows, even more does mystery grow'. Mystery is the latent meaning always awaiting our discovery and always more than our knowing' (ibid, 1987, p.273).

As a psychotherapist, I recognize my limitations and recognize the mystery of knowledge and not communicating to the client that the ways of being in the world are all 'knoweable' and controllable. Acceptance of one's limitations, humanness and fallibility, does not only apply to clients, but to therapists as well. Balanced with this approach and understanding is being open to the possibility, to the ability to reinterpret the familiar, to attempt the new, to have the

courage and strength to explore and 'cherish mystery and recognize it as an opportunity for new enterprise' (ibid. 1987, p.274).

As psychotherapists, we continue to see clients overwhelmed with chronic guilt, malaise and feelings of estrangement from themselves and others. Our world has placed huge burdens on the individual to try and hide one's fundamental 'humanness and limitations' as well as the inability to acknowledge one's 'human vulnerability', 'interdependence' and need for 'human community' (Bauer et al., 1992, p. 151). It was found, in this research, as in Bauer et al (1992), that 'forgiveness in relationship to the self is a profoundly transforming experience and central to the healing of one's brokenness' and that, although in psychotherapy it is clear that one may not always indicate or articulate one's experience as 'self-forgiveness', that as this research has indicated that the experience 'is common, profound and vital to one's sense of health and wholeness' (pp.150 & 152).

Confronting the truth in psychotherapy indicated that the experience of self-forgiveness was based on the truth. 'The truth is that we are imperfect beings and that perfectionism is a state of perpetual victimization' (Rutledge, 1997, p.19). As a result of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, the participants were able to accept their human fallibility, take responsibility for what was appropriate and reflect what was truly not theirs to be responsible for. 'Personal responsibility is necessary for genuine self-forgiveness and self-forgiveness is necessary for genuine personal responsibility' (ibid, 1997).

In psychotherapy, 'experiencing pain and emerging from it transformed may be the definitive metaphor of human resilience' (Ferch, 2000, p.170). This study of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy described the participants moving from estrangement and 'brokenness' to self-acceptance, resilience and a sense of connectedness to the self and others in the world. Clearly, the difficulties of the participants were based on painful issues and unresolved injuries in significant relationships. The experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy contributed to the healing of these emotional wounds and resulted in a stronger sense of identity and relatedness to others. It also resulted in the movement from estrangement to reconciliation, from a stuckness in the past, to a sense of freedom and renewed hope in the future; from rejection of the self and others to a renewed identity and an acceptance of one's human fallibility and that of others.

The psychotherapist who is armed with the knowledge and insight regarding the essence of injury and the experience of self-forgiveness (and forgiving others) becomes   more

comfortable to be a 'witness' to the process and encourage and incorporate these issues where appropriate in psychotherapy (Rowe & Halling, 1998).   'A clinical understanding of forgiveness (and self-forgiveness),[1] when used in therapeutic intervention, may invite clients to a way of relating that preserves the integrity of the self as it promotes healthy connection to others' (Ferch, 2000, p.170). However, in dealing with the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, 'the psychotherapist is no pastor of souls and no substitute for one. It is never his task to mediate a salvation; his task is always only to further a healing' (Buber, 1957, p.119).

Whilst the task of the psychotherapist is to facilitate healing in psychotherapy Bugental has the last word when he states:

'Psychotherapists must be knowledgeable, of course, but they must be humble in that knowledge. Let's be straight about it: We never know enough. We never can know enough. As fast as we learn, just so fast do we learn there is even more to learn. To pretend to a client that we know what the client needs, what the client should do, what choices the client must make, is to deny mystery and to betray the client. Any thorough-going therapy needs to help the client accept and confront the mystery within and the mystery which enfolds us all'. (Bugental, 1987, p.273)

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[1] This researcher's brackets