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## CHAPTER 6

### 6. INVESTIGATION AND RESULTS

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

In embarking on this research and analyzing the data obtained from the six participants regarding their retrospective experiences of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, I found myself in the unique position of having to formulate my own participating role as the psychotherapist who had been involved in the participants' therapeutic experience. In other words, I as the psychotherapist, had been an active participant in their therapeutic processes as well as now being the sole researcher involved in the qualitative research and analysis of the data. These clients, as I explained in Chapter 4, had terminated their therapy with myself and the subsequent interviews which I conducted with them, were retrospective. This meant on the one hand, I was in the advantageous position of walking alongside the participants on their therapeutic path, and was involved in the multidimensional layers of their recovery process and their experiences. On the other hand, as the psychotherapist involved in the qualitative research, the participants often assumed that because of my personal involvement in their psychotherapy, I understood the meaning of the experience they were trying to convey. I was in the unique position of learning and participating in their immediate experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, being principally guided by a respectful concern for the phenomenon in the here and now. In addition, I had an intimate and participating knowledge of the second story, which was not necessarily being voiced in the present, i.e. referring to their individual histories, past experiences and unique multilayered convoluted psychotherapeutic journeys. As the active participating psychotherapist, interviewer and researcher, there was an interwoven quality of a shared text and world, involved in the research, with the participating subjects/clients.

Thus in understanding this mixed hermeneutic/existential study (using phenomenological principles in the data analysis), one is illustrating not only the human phenomenon as it is actually lived, enacted and experienced in psychotherapy by the six participants, but also as it is shared and lived by the participating psychotherapist/researcher. The psychotherapy took place over many sessions, involved the individual's understanding and integrating his/her often overwhelming feelings and eventually, the acceptance of himself/herself and the reconnection with the self and others in her world. This took many psychotherapeutic interventions and what was in reality an entire life's experience, seemed in the interview, to be embedded in one or two statements. Thus the qualitative research material which emanated from the individual's experience of the phenomenon within the psychotherapeutic context was a unique, shared, lived experience. I, as the psychotherapist, embarked on a

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collaborative journey, long before the initiation of the research project, the ultimate purpose of which, was to explore and articulate the essential psychological meanings of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

The disadvantage of interviewing the participants as their personal psychotherapist, was that although I was guided by a respectful concern for the phenomenon and had gained insight from working with these clients in psychotherapy, at times I failed to question the participant and ask for clarification of what she meant to convey, e.g. Sally (Subject B), in describing her experience of self-forgiveness says : ‘It is right that it’s so difficult self-forgiveness, otherwise you would carry on willy-nilly doing things. I’ve come to the conclusion that it’s guilt, it’s tied to the fact that everyone believes that you grow through suffering. It’s how you judge yourself by. I definitely think it’s tied in with the conscience. Maybe self-forgiveness is a recovery process because it’s so hard’. I failed to ask Sally what she meant by ‘a recovery process’ but know that she had been a recovering addict and therefore she assumed that I knew what she meant. Although I was vigilant in my adherence to the protocol of phenomenological inquiry, in this instance, I did not ask for clarification of this assumed meaning although it was compatible with her history. However, according to Gadamer (1975), all interpretation is based on prejudice and pre-judgement (cited in Heaton, 1982). ‘We cannot approach or communicate with any human being without holding certain common assumptions with him’ (Heaton, 1982, p.28). Heaton continues, that ‘it is only by having a basis in prejudice, an awareness that whether we like it or not we are all rooted in the finiteness of human society, that interpretive judgements gain the credibility, dignity and power which makes them effective’ (ibid, 1982, pp.28&29).

## **6.2 THE DESCRIPTIVE DATA OF THE SIX PARTICIPANTS BASED ON THE THREE RESEARCH QUESTIONS (REPRESENTED VERBATIM IN NATURAL MEANING UNITS, OF SUBJECT A, IN 6.3.2 AND SUBJECTS B,C,D,E AND F IN APPENDIX F)<sup>1</sup>**

### **6.3 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

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<sup>1</sup>. The six participants’ descriptive data based on the three research questions were transferred verbatim to the Natural Meaning Units in the protocol of Subject A (see 6.3.2, p.72) and the protocols of Subjects B, C, D, E & F. (See Appendix F pp.188-241).

**6.3.1 THE DIVISION OF THE DESCRIPTIVE DATA INTO NATURAL MEANING UNITS AND THE CORRESPONDING CENTRAL THEMATIC MEANING UNITS FOR EACH NATURAL MEANING UNIT (SEE APPENDIX F)**

**6.3.2 SELF-FORGIVENESS AS LIVED AND EXPERIENCED BY VERNON (SUBJECT A)**

**FIRST SESSION**

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

1. I think it means coming to terms with one's own sense of self...of confronting.
2. I think we all have criticisms of ourselves and have ways in which we project ourselves both positively and negatively.
3. Self-forgiveness means being able to understand ourselves and we start to look at what we consider to be our own shortcomings with a more sympathetic view, with a view to, I suppose to dealing with those parts of oneself, which aspects of one's personality or character that you can change if you feel that change for the better needs to be made.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

- 1&2. For V the experience of self-forgiveness meant coming to terms with his own sense of self which involved self-confrontation, self-criticism and understanding his positive and negative self-projections.
3. For V, self-forgiveness meant self-understanding, looking at himself sympathetically and considering his shortcomings and dealing with the parts of himself which need to be changed.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

4. But also coming to terms with those things that can't change and either letting go of them or understanding them differently so that one can move on.
5. I was saying that understanding the past or the things that we can't change differently and starting to change one's behaviour.
6. And I suppose it's about, tied up with it is also how one feels about things because it's intellectual, it's emotional and it's about behaving differently when one feels those feelings that call for self-forgiveness.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

4. V realized that self-forgiveness also meant acceptance of those things he could not change and either letting go or understanding them differently in order to move on.
5. V realized that self-forgiveness involved an understanding of the past and all the things that he could not change and in other ways changing his behaviour.
6. V understood that the experience of self-forgiveness takes place intellectually, emotionally and behaviourly when feelings associated with the need for self-forgiveness were evoked.

**SELF-FORGIVENESS AS LIVED AND EXPERIENCED BY VERNON****SECOND SESSION****NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

1. 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.
2. I think I've carried a lot of anger towards him and I'm learning to look at him more sympathetically.
3. 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.
4. I think I've recognized myself in him more and more and maybe that's also part of growing up.
5. I see just little things, silly little personal gestures. We're very similar types of people, we're very

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

- 1&2. For V, self-forgiveness involved understanding and accepting the non-relationship with his father and forgiving him by overcoming his anger and being more sympathetic.
3. This he felt had been beneficial because he had accepted the disliked parts of himself which he identified as being like his father.
4. V thought that recognizing that he had found and had identified with his father, was part of his maturation.
5. V thought of his father sympathetically,

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

quiet and understated, we don't speak a lot, he was also a very thoughtful person. Although he never had the opportunities I had, I think he would have been a very good student if he'd had a more supportive family situation. So in many ways, there's a lot of similarities between us and I think when I was a teenager especially, I started rebelling against that and my rebellion made me very similar to my father because I think he was also rebellious, he often talked about how he got caught-up with the wrong friends and didn't finish school and for him that was always one of his biggest regrets that he didn't finish his education.

6. But the point is that I think the more I tried to rebel, the more I realized that he's my father and we share things in common and I need to understand that and make peace with it rather than resist it.
7. So I think my major example of self-forgiveness is about forgiving myself and forgiving my father.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

especially when he recalled the similarities between himself and his father; their personal gestures; both being reserved and being thoughtful and realized that his father would also have been a good student if he had been given the opportunity and family support and, like himself, his father had rebelled as a teenager, although his father had expressed regret that this had interfered with completing his education.

6. V understood that he needed to make peace with rather than resist these similarities.
- 7&8. For V, self-forgiveness meant forgiving himself and forgiving his father which involved accepting

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

8. 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.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

and recognizing that he had identified with his father and making peace with who he was.

**II. SITUATION(S) IN VERNON'S LIFE WHICH GAVE RISE TO THE NEED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS**

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

1. I suppose there are things relating to my relationship with my family, with my parents, particularly with my father.
2. I have gone through a number of attitudes towards my father, I think when I was a little child, I was fearful of him and also looked up to him in many ways as a role model, as somebody that I aspire to be like.
3. I also missed him in the sense that he was never able to be available to me emotionally as a little boy, and that these things only really started to affect me as a teenager and I found myself trying very hard

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

1. V was aware that his relationship with his family, with his parents, particularly his father, gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness.
2. V was aware of mixed attitudes towards his father, from being fearful of him as a child, as well as looking up to him as a role model.
3. As a young boy, V also missed his father whom he felt was emotionally unavailable to him and this he felt only affected him later as a teenager when he tried to distance himself

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

- distance myself from him and from my mother, I suppose that's sort of a grey area.
4. Because if I look back now, I think I was behaving very much like my father did although I was trying to be different to him, I was rebelling, I was going out and getting drunk and doing all that kind of stuff which I think my father must have gone through in his youth as well.
5. But mostly, I think emotionally I was quite angry with him, for not being available to me when I was a young boy.
6. An uncle of mine became a sort of substitute father and gave me a lot of emotional support, he did all the things that little boys want their fathers to do with them.
7. And my relationship with my father when I was a kid, that I remember then as a teenager growing up, was often one of disappointment of adults, when my father bought me a

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

- from both his parents.
4. In retrospect, V said he identified with his father's acting out rebellious behaviour, although he was trying to be different from him.
- 5&6. V felt anger for his father and his uncle became a substitute father figure in an emotional sense as well as being involved in fatherly activities.
7. V recalled feeling disappointed with adults, as a child and a teenager, particularly with his father for not fulfilling promises and playing a

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

fishing rod but never took me fishing. He bought me a pair of soccer boots and I think often I was waiting for him to take me out, he's got to be the person to sort of lead the way. So I don't think he understood it as a disappointment then, it only became later on and then this uncle was the person who played cricket with me, he taught me to play cards and just did things with me, took me for walks in town in the Gardens.

8. So I think that when I talk about self-forgiveness, I talk about learning to understand what was going on there with more sympathy, I mean they (parents) were just perhaps dealing with things they needed to deal with there and then and probably weren't aware of the impact it was making on me.
9. The self-forgiveness means forgiving the people around me as well as myself.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

fatherly role, which his uncle had fulfilled.

8. For V, self-forgiveness meant understanding his parents more sympathetically, in that they were dealing with their own issues and were unaware of how their actions impacted on him.
9. For V, self-forgiveness meant forgiving those around him as well as forgiving himself.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

10. I think that my ability to forgive my father stemmed from also seeing him become a vulnerable person. With the help of the therapy sessions being able to put myself in his shoes, I keep learning more about him and what shaped him.
11. I think being able to understand where my father was coming from, helped me to make sense of what I needed to do, to let go of some of the things that had been going on with me, because I could then say to myself, I don't have to blame my father for what is going on with me.
12. I need to take responsibility for it. I need to understand that my father dealt with his life in ways that there's a proverb that somebody told me that other day, 'you should judge people not by the height that they've come from'. Very often it's useful to understand people in that sense.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

10. V felt that his ability to forgive his father stemmed from also seeing him as a vulnerable person and being able to empathize with his father as a result of the therapy sessions.
- 11&12. V developed the insight and understanding which helped him overcome blaming his father for his own issues, to let go of and to take responsibility for these issues. V was told a proverb concerning judgement and acceptance of others which clarified his father's situation by taking into account, the depths of his struggle rather than by focusing on his achievements. This V found had helped him understand how his father had dealt with his life.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

13. The point is simply that I think it's helped me to make peace with myself and which I am still exploring now.
14. But it's been very liberating to be able to forgive my father and I think about him quite fondly now. I don't think of him in an angry way like I did when I was in my early twenties or my late teens, as a person who was a failure, who had no self-respect.
15. There were all kinds of terrible things, terrible things I was thinking but could never say to him or confront him about it. There were things that my father did that I felt were also blocking my sort of rites of passage to manhood and my mother for that matter.
16. For example, my mother would stop me from seeing girls when I was a teenager. But that may not have been the most mature thing to do for my mother as well. She should have been the person teaching me how

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

- 13&14. V felt that understanding his father helped him make peace with himself and he was liberated by being able to forgive his father.
- 15,16.&17 V realized that there was a lack of openness in relation to his parents' actions and that his parents' actions blocked and interfered with his normal developmental and social progress and he felt he had to find his own way to manhood and self-realization.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

- to deal with girls, rather than stopping me but that's got to do with her own issues.
17. My father would never let me use his car and I would see other friends of mine and their relationships with their fathers. Their fathers would teach them how to fix a car and I never had that. So for me those were all blockages and I had to find my own way towards manhood and person who does the self-realization.
18. The only thing which my parents allowed me to do and that I had to do on my own anyway was become educated. They paved the way in the sense that they, I think, nurtured and encouraged and I don't think they realize what a profound impact they had on me in that sense. Just by the power of suggestion, saying that my children should have a university education and so for me that was tremendously empowering to have that - have your parents say that to you and that I think

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

18. V realized that his parents had a positive impact on aspects of his life by nurturing and encouraging his education, which he found tremendously empowering and this contributed to his development and to achieve a higher level of education and a Master's degree.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

- the same when I did a Master's degree and that I probably didn't think I would do it until my parents said it, opened up the possibility and said it. So, there are aspects of life which I think have been enabled by my parents.
19. But I think because of their own pain and their own ways of dealing with their own pain, there are things that they also stopped themselves from – or there are ways in which, in my view, at the same time, they stopped my self-realization of maybe improving.
20. So I think that my own healing needs to be about making sense of that and then understanding how I forgive myself and then forgiving myself, make sure that I don't pass that on to other people, that I have a more understanding or adult relationship with the people around me and whatever children I have in the future.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

19. V understood his parent's involvement with their own painful issues interfered with them enhancing his self-realization.
20. V thought that his own healing evolved from making sense of his past and with this insight and understanding of his own self-forgiveness himself in order not to pass on his issues to others and to gain a greater understanding of those around him, including his present adult relationships and possible future offspring.

### III. TIME IN LIFE WHEN SELF-FORGIVENESS WAS AN ISSUE

#### NATURAL MEANING UNITS

1. I think in my teen years and the whole idea of making passage, through the educational process as well, has been very difficult for me because I felt very on my own.
2. In Grade 11, I was doing drugs with some friends at school in my last year and starting to do it at home as well in the neighbourhood where I lived and there was one moment when I started walking around on my own, because normally it was a social thing to do in a group of people and looking to score something and then scoring something and going off on my own to a quiet place to go and smoke it and I was aware that this was a problem because I was beginning to get now, this is like taking it to a new level now.
3. Luckily for me I got caught by a teacher at school who had the good sense to call me in quietly. He felt that I was a promising student

#### THEMATIC MEANING UNITS

- 1&2. V found his teen years a difficult lonely time of making both personal and educational developmental changes, finding himself negatively influenced by his peer group which he then realized was a problem and he became fearful of becoming a drug addict.
3. V felt fortunate that a teacher realized he had potential, intervened, affirmed him and warned him of the consequences of his destructive behaviour. This had protected him

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

otherwise I probably would have been expelled without second thought and he warned me that the school had an automatic expulsion policy and I stopped immediately and I got a shock.

4. So I don't know where I was going and maybe that was an expression of, this blockage that, anything I was trying to achieve or trying to find in my life was leading nowhere and I had no way of relating to my parents and asking them to help me along, so I'm always thankful for that, I think.
5. So that's one moment I'm not sure it was only as I got a bit older that I started to realize that these are all things that I need to understand especially in relation to authority figures, especially my parents. Try to understand what went wrong there and begin to heal myself.
6. I think that my relationship with my father and mother is really the main question about self-forgiveness.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

and resulted in a shocked reaction and immediate cessation of taking drugs.

4. V thought he was going nowhere and could not ask his parents for help.
5. V reflected that it was only as he got older that he understood his issues in relation to authority figures, particularly his parents and then he began to heal himself.
6. V thought that his main experience of self-forgiveness was in relation to his parents.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

7. And maybe, the other thing to comment on is my relationship with my sister. It's always been very difficult as well, we've never been particularly close or affectionate with one another. The one thing I did not mention was the death of my brother. I was a baby, I was eighteen months old at the time when he died and so I grew up hearing about him and the legend, M was his name, and also my father's sort of shattered hopes for him.
8. But I have never felt resentful about that, I don't think, what I did feel resentful about was my father sort of invested all his support in my sister and she got all the breaks that I didn't get, as the older sister.
9. I mean, that's tied up with his lack of investment in me in taking me to play soccer or whatever. There was always an incomplete gesture, it was never quite followed through.
10. I suppose it's about finding my place in the family, because my brother's death had a devastating

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

7. V reflected on his difficult sibling relationship with his older sister and the loss of his older brother M when V was eighteen months old and the impact his death had had on his father.
- 8&9. V reflected that he did not resent the aspect of his brother's loss but felt resentful at the lack of his father's interest and overinvolvement with his sister. V linked his resentment with his father's lack of interest and time taken in his activities and the fact that his sister was given greater opportunities than himself.
10. V reflected that his experience was about finding a place in his family after the effects that the devastating

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

effect on both my parents and it stayed with them, but they always lived in the shadow of that event. It's because of my father's withdrawal I think and my mother's terrible fear that something was going to happen to me which I have a sense of, it shapes me and it still walks with me now.

11. I think it's about looking at those events again and saying that I do not have to feel sort of adrift in this situation but I have realized myself. I have been able to become a functioning person, and I can see again why things happened the way they did in relation to my sister L, in relation to M (brother) and I can understand my father's withdrawing in that sense. I think he was absolutely devastated and I think all that investment went into M and that's only natural I think.
12. If I look at other families, the youngest often is the luckiest of the lot because he gets the benefit of all the other parental training that goes on in that process and I didn't feel that way in some sense.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

loss of his brother had had on his parents, causing his father's withdrawal and his mother's over involvement in V's well being, which had an ongoing effect on him and this projected fear continued to influence his life.

11. In this situation, he didn't go adrift but had become a functioning, self-realizing person and he developed an understanding of his father's withdrawal.
12. V did not feel, as the youngest child, that he benefited by his parents' experience.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

13. I think it's about looking at all of those and looking at myself in that situation and looking at myself as an adult rather than as little V having to find his way through all of this.
14. Also, being a kind of a passive recipient of my mother's fear and my father's withdrawal and my sister's rivalry of myself and my sister's relationship with my father. I mean, it's as I said, it relates to knowing, making peace with my father and with my mother.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

- 13&14. From an adult perspective, V reflected and understood that, whilst growing up, he was a passive recipient of his mother's fear, of his father's withdrawal, of his father's preferential treatment of his sister and of sibling rivalry and these insights helped him make peace with his parents.

**IV VERNON'S EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY****NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

1. I think in quite important ways. Until I came to therapy, I did not realize how profoundly I had been shaped by my family and by what's happened in my family.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

1. V thought that his experience in therapy contributed to his understanding of self-forgiveness, in that, until therapy, he did not realize how the family situation had shaped him.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

2. I found the role-playing exercises powerful and I think that it was through those experiences, being able to feel and have a sense of how my mother was dealing with my father and how my father was dealing with my mother and how that becomes transferred to me.
3. That was very liberating and I was able to then kind of rethink, redevelop my own memories. It helped me to look at my father sympathetically and it helped me make peace with it.
4. So that now when I think about him or when I'm going about my daily stuff, I suddenly think about him, I always catch myself being sympathetic and I am very glad about that. I think it makes me feel a lot more calm.
5. I think the Transactional Analysis has also been very helpful, it gives one a grid to work with so that you become more self-aware of how you're dealing with the world, what's going on in one's own communication with people especially.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

2. V found the role-playing exercises in therapy helped him understand his parents' relationship and his father's relationship with his own parents.
3. The experience was liberating and helped him to redevelop his memories of his father and make peace with his past
4. As a result, when he thought about his father, he became more sympathetic and felt calmer
- 5&6. V thought that therapy provided him with insight which resulted in increased self-awareness in dealing and communicating with others.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

6. I think that's what therapy has also helped me to do, is not only use it in my immediate sort of personal relationships but also have a sense of how people use it in everyday, like in the work.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS****SECOND SESSION****EXPERIENCES IN THERAPY****NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

1. I think it's understanding through the role-playing and the interpretation, the discussions that we had about my family, who they were and looking at the world from their perspective, from different people's perspective in my family, that made a big difference.
2. It helps a lot to have somebody sort of walking you through your own personal story with different perspectives so that you get a sense of distance from yourself, what happened to me.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

1. V felt that the therapy process helped him to empathize with his family members.
2. V felt that having the therapist walk him through his story had assisted him in gaining a different, objective perspective of his past.

**NATURAL MEANING UNITS**

3. It was a very powerful start and maybe it is something I should keep working for.
4. I am strongly aware of the impact that adults make on children because of my own experience, so I think it's important for adults to build that kind of trust with children as well.
5. As I said, it would be, I think, especially important for me to do that with a boy child because it would take a lot more effort from me to condition myself to learn to do that, it would be about healing myself as well.

**THEMATIC MEANING UNITS**

3. V found this a powerful start to an ongoing process.
4. V was aware of the impact adults have on their children and the significance of developing a trusting adult/child relationship.
5. V thought this especially important regarding a possible future father/son relationship situation and learning to do this would contribute to his own self-healing.

**6.4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

**THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF THE SIX INDIVIDUAL DESCRIPTIONS FOLLOW, BASED ON SELF-FORGIVENESS AS LIVED AND EXPERIENCED BY EACH OF THE SIX PARTICIPANTS RESPECTIVELY; THE SITUATION(S) WHICH GAVE RISE TO THEIR NEED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

**6.4.1 VERNON : (SUBJECT A)**

#### **6.4.1.1 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AS LIVED AND EXPERIENCED BY VERNON**

**VERNON** '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'.

For Vernon, self-forgiveness meant a self-acceptance, involving an intellectual and emotional understanding of parts of himself (personality and character), resulting in a behavioural change particularly when feelings associated with the need for self-forgiveness were evoked. For Vernon, the experience of self-forgiveness involved an acceptance of the past and letting go of past issues in order to move on. The main experience of self-forgiveness for Vernon was a two-way process which involved forgiving his father (for not having had a relationship with him) as well as himself (for parts of himself which reminded him of his father). The acceptance and recognition of these shared common aspects helped him overcome resistance and anger and was a healing process helping him make peace with his father and himself.

#### **6.4.1.2 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF THE SITUATION(S) IN VERNON'S LIFE WHICH GAVE RISE TO THE NEED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS**

The situation(s) in Vernon's experience which gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness, took place within his family and focused particularly on his relationship with his father. The situation which provided this experience were his mixed feelings regarding his father and that he felt his father was emotionally unavailable and did not fulfil his paternal role in Vernon's life, that both his parents' actions had blocked and interfered with his normal development and social progress and that Vernon had to find his own path to manhood and self-realization.

The experience of self-forgiveness was a result of Vernon gaining insight and understanding his parents' issues, regarding them more sympathetically, empathizing with them and forgiving them. This experience helped Vernon overcome blaming and judging his father in particular and taking

responsibility for his own similar identified issues. For Vernon, this understanding was enhanced by a proverb he had heard from another source. Taking responsibility for his own issues, self-acceptance, making peace with himself, as well as his father, resulted in self-forgiveness and forgiveness of his father and Vernon felt this was a liberating, empowering, self-realizing experience. Vernon understood that making sense of his past and forgiving himself and others would result in a greater understanding of his present relationships as well as his possible future paternal role.

#### **6.4.1.3 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF VERNON'S EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

In therapy, Vernon realized how significantly his development had been conditioned by his experience within his family particularly with his father. Through the role-playing exercises in therapy, Vernon gained insight into his parents' marital relationship as well as his father's relationship with his parents. Vernon was aware that he felt liberated by this insight which had also influenced his understanding of his past and helped him view his father and make peace with their relationship. Vernon felt the skills he gained in therapy increased his self-awareness in dealing and communicating with others in his personal and working relationships. Vernon used the metaphor of the therapy experience as 'walking through his own personal story' with another which helped him gain an alternative insightful perspective of his past. This he felt was a powerful start and thought it was something which he should continue to work at.

#### **6.4.2 SALLY : (SUBJECT B)**

##### **6.4.2.1 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AS LIVED AND EXPERIENCED BY SALLY**

For Sally, self-forgiveness meant coming to terms with past actions and letting go of feelings of guilt and self-blame because, for her, this was connected to self-forgiveness. Self-forgiveness meant understanding, justifying and putting the past into context and then moving on. Sally thought there was more to forgiveness than forgiving the self, this included forgiving the other

for having wronged one, which had improved her own feelings. Sally found self-forgiveness a difficult task as she felt she had high moral standards and unrealistic expectations. She continued to carry her guilty feelings, had a problem letting go and could not forget the past but could only come to terms with it.

#### **6.4.2.2 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF SITUATION(S) IN SALLY'S LIFE WHICH GAVE RISE TO THE NEED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS**

For Sally, the situation which gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness was taking drugs which had made her feel guilty but Sally felt she had learnt from this experience and had come to terms with it. Self-forgiveness remained difficult and unclear for Sally because, although she understood the reason for her behaviour, she continued to feel guilty about her past actions and felt that self-forgiveness and guilt were connected and that she could not condone all her behaviour but could learn from her past and move forward. For Sally, self-forgiveness also meant overcoming self-blame for her parents' issues and forgiveness and acceptance of others which Sally thought would be beneficial for her.

#### **6.4.2.3 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF SALLY'S EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Sally's experience of self-forgiveness in therapy centred around forgiving others because, in therapy, she understood that her problems resulted from the abusive actions of others and this had made it easier to forgive herself. Sally forgave herself when she empathized with her childhood role as a parental child, had overcome self-blame and guilt and realized that she had judged herself harshly and had had unrealistic self-expectations. As an adult, Sally was able to forgive herself for her perceived lack of strength and now understood that she could act emotionally and accept help from others. She understood the origin of her anger, had now dealt with it, knew her limitations and forgave herself and realized that this was an ongoing, difficult recovery process. Sally realized that she had to continue working on herself and could not be dependent on the therapist. Although Sally could not forget her past, her therapy had helped her come to terms with her memories and had clarified her past issues. Although fearful of change, in therapy, she

had changed her life scripts, had renewed her identity and had found inner peace. Sally felt she now understood herself and that therapy had shortened her healing period.

### **6.4.3 JUSTINE: (SUBJECT C)**

#### **6.4.3.1 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AS LIVED AND EXPERIENCED BY JUSTINE**

For Justine, the experience of self-forgiveness meant overcoming negative self-judgement as objectively as possible, attaining a sense of peace regarding her past experience and accepting that she had done the best she could under the circumstances. Justine had gained insight into the physical manifestations of her anxiety and had responded differently to the memory of her experience which had resulted in letting-go of the painful memory and self-acceptance. Justine realized that self-forgiveness was a process whereas, in the past, she was defended against painful issues and, at a later stage, whilst in therapy, she felt stronger and was able to look at the experience with more clarity and insight.

#### **6.4.3.2 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF SITUATION(S) IN JUSTINE'S LIFE WHICH GAVE RISE TO THE NEED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS**

For Justine, the situation in her life which gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness and self-acceptance related to overcoming self-blame for what difficulties in her marriage. Justine found overcoming feeling responsible for another extremely freeing, as this had been repeated and learned from her parents' marital relationship. Through self-forgiveness, Justine felt empowered and this helped her to self-discovery in order to do what she felt inwardly was best for herself and environmental criticism no longer overwhelmed her or pervaded her life. The one area relating to self-forgiveness with which Justine continued to struggle were at times, her uncontrolled reactions to her children as she knew at a core level how childhood experiences impacted on one's life.

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#### **6.4.3.3 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF JUSTINE'S EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Justine's experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy centred on a deep, meaningful understanding of the source of her childhood feelings and behaviour and she recognized this when it recurred and her feelings manifested as a bodily awareness. This insight resulted in self-acceptance. In therapy, Justine also gained insight into the impact of her parents' conflictual, co-dependent marital relationship and how her own disempowering submissive behaviour in her marriage contained elements of learned repetitive behaviour. The initial shift regarding the experience of self-forgiveness took place, when Justine met an intuitive healer and then she used psychotherapy, where she felt acknowledged and validated, as a stepping stone. This resulted in Justine overcoming negative critical self-judgement and being strengthened. Justine gained insight and made the connection to her childhood memories which she likened to gaining a useful instrument and skills which she felt had helped her deal with various situations. Justine realized that feelings of worth and self-forgiveness went hand-in-hand and this realization empowered and allowed her to take action and make changes in her life and she felt she had become more integrated, inwardly secure and did not need to depend on external sources.

#### **6.4.4 KATHY: (SUBJECT D)**

##### **6.4.4.1 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AS LIVED AND EXPERIENCE BY KATHY**

For Kathy, the experience of self-forgiveness meant forgiving herself for past actions, forgetting what happened and learning from that experience. For Kathy, her religious beliefs played a part in her understanding of self-forgiveness.

##### **6.4.4.2 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF SITUATION(S) IN KATHY'S LIFE WHICH GAVE RISE TO THE NEED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS**

For Kathy, the main situation which gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness was blaming herself

for the breakdown of her marriage. Kathy realized that she needed to understand the reason for this in order to learn from this experience and not repeat the same behaviour and then move on. Kathy also understood and accepted her own human fallibility and that of others.

#### **6.4.4.3 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF KATHY'S EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Psychotherapy helped Kathy increase her understanding of her thoughts and feelings, helped her work through situations, broaden her perspective and helped her overcome self-blame. For Kathy, therapy was like a sounding board because she gained an alternative view, became less self-critical and felt affirmed.

#### **6.4.5 MICHAEL: (SUBJECT E)**

##### **6.4.5.1 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AS LIVED AND EXPERIENCED BY MICHAEL**

For Michael, the experience of self-forgiveness meant self-acceptance and being less self-critical. Michael understood that self-forgiveness was a process which resulted in an acceptance of past actions, learning from those experiences and using them positively and being able to affirm himself.

##### **6.4.5.2 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF SITUATION(S) IN MICHAEL'S LIFE WHICH GAVE RISE TO THE NEED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS**

Michael thought that the main situations which gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness were his actions in his marriage for which he had felt self-blame and which he now accepted. He also forgave himself for what he understood now as misplaced shame in his youth and for his past anger which had affected those close to him. For Michael, as a divorced father, self-forgiveness also meant coming to terms with not being present to his son. In therapy, Michael understood his

past issues and he had overcome self-blame for his parents' divorce, understood and reassessed his misplaced childhood religious beliefs and had also developed realistic self-expectations.

#### **6.4.5.3 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF MICHAEL'S EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN THERAPY**

In therapy Michael had understood his faulty belief system and that the repercussions thereof would not be as dramatic as he had thought. Michael developed skills in therapy which helped him control and express his emotions, to accept and like himself and become the person he wanted to be. He also learnt to differentiate between feelings of shame and guilt and got in touch with his misplaced childhood shame which previously he had been unable to do. Michael felt assisted by having an independent supportive person with whom to interact in therapy and this also helped him overcome his self-blame and misplaced guilt for past issues. In addition, Michael felt that he could not achieve self-forgiveness without self-acceptance.

#### **6.4.6 WILMA: (SUBJECT F)**

##### **6.4.6.1 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AS LIVED AND EXPERIENCED BY WILMA**

For Wilma, self-forgiveness meant coming to terms with past actions with which she had learnt to live.

##### **6.4.6.2 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF SITUATION(S) IN WILMA'S LIFE WHICH GAVE RISE TO THE NEED FOR SELF-FORGIVENESS**

The main situation in Wilma's life which gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness, she felt, was depriving her children of their father, as a result of their divorce, although, since she had overcome self-blame and guilt in therapy, she felt a great load had disappeared. Wilma accepted she could not change the past, could only do the best she could in the future and, as a result, had achieved a great deal.

#### **6.4.6.3 THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURE OF WILMA'S EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN THERAPY**

Wilma felt that self-forgiveness could not have been achieved without therapy, during which she had been able to explore herself inwardly, had overcome her past burdens and had found solutions regarding her problems. She had overcome her self-blame, guilt, unrealistic expectations, no longer tried to compensate for her feelings and had accepted that she had done the best she could. Although Wilma thought she should have acted sooner, she felt she had now cleared her own mind and looked forward to a positive future and was not preoccupied with the past.

#### **6.5 THE GENERAL PSYCHOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

The experience of self-forgiveness meant an understanding and acceptance of oneself and past actions involving painful relational issues. This was based on a cognitive and emotional understanding of the self and others as seen from an adult perspective. This experience involved overcoming irrational self-blame, shame, guilt, anxiety and anger which resulted in a behavioural and emotional change, realistic expectations, a letting go, taking responsibility for and coming to terms with one's own issues and ambiguities, moving on and facing the future in a more realistic and positive manner. Self-forgiveness was a difficult ongoing two-way process, involving an understanding and acceptance of one's own human fallibility as well as the human fallibility of others, without a blanket condoning of one's own actions or the actions of others. It was clear that the experience of self-acceptance was mandatory in the experience of self-forgiveness and vice versa. The experience of self-forgiveness was enhanced by self-confrontation and gaining clarity and insight in psychotherapy. This resulted in feelings of self-acceptance and self-worth. In the therapeutic environment, feelings of being strengthened, empowered and liberated, as well as a sense of healing and making peace with the past were experienced with the assistance, validation, affirmation and acceptance of an independent, sensitive, congruent and committed therapist within a profoundly interpersonal relationship.

**6.6 ILLUSTRATIVE VIGNETTES OF THE CONSTITUENTS OF THE GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY AS EXTRAPOLATED FROM THE SPECIFIC DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SITUATED STRUCTURES OF EACH OF THE SIX PARTICIPANTS FOLLOW :**

**6.6.1 ACCEPTANCE OF ONESELF AND ONE'S ACTIONS, SELF-CONFRONTATION AND OVERCOMING SELF-JUDGEMENT**

**VERNON :**

'I think it (self-forgiveness) means coming to terms with one's own sense of self ..... of confronting'.

**MICHAEL :**

'Self-forgiveness means the ability to be able to, firstly, accept yourself for who you are, meaning accepting the points about yourself that you're not positive about and, secondly, it means not to be too critical of yourself and not judge yourself too harshly'.

'It means accepting the things that you may have done incorrectly in the past and not letting those influence you negatively but learning from those experiences and being able to use them positively. Self-forgiveness basically means developing the ability to be able to love yourself, it's one of the steps in that process'.

**6.6.2 SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPTANCE OF ONE'S HUMAN FALLIBILITY, LETTING GO, FINDING PEACE AND MOVING ON**

**VERNON :**

'Self-forgiveness means being able to understand ourselves and we start to look at what we consider to be our own shortcomings with a more sympathetic view, with a view to, I suppose, dealing with those parts of oneself which aspects of one's personality or whatever that you can

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change, if you feel that change for the better needs to be made. But, also coming to terms with those things that can't change and either letting go of them or understanding them differently so that one can move on'.

**SALLY :**

'So that I am basically coming down to what I said about your limitations, realizing I should not have been in that situation and it was alright not to say no and not to realize the guilt about the abuse and not to tell my parents'.

**KATHY:**

'I think one needs to look at it and understand why things happen and you come to understand so that the next time round you won't do the same things and then you move on'.

'We all have choices in life to make, there's never a perfect way to do something, we're all human, we all make mistakes'.

**JUSTINE:**

'So if the memory comes up, it's not about feeling I really was bad, I really would have been better or responded in a better way. It's kind of almost allowing a peace to settle around that experience and knowing that I possibly, at that specific point in time in my life, in the bigger picture that was, did the best that I could do with wherever, whatever, however, I was best equipped to handle it'.

**6.6.3 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS, SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING TAKE PLACE ON A COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL LEVEL AND RESULT IN BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE**

**VERNON:**

‘Understanding the past or things we can’t change, differently and starting to change one’s behaviour’.

‘I suppose it’s about, tied up with it is also how one feels about things because it’s intellectual, it’s emotional and it’s about behaving differently when one feels those feelings that call for self-forgiveness’.

**JUSTINE:**

‘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 but there’s definitely a feeling aspect because it’s not just about what the head says, because you can say all those things in your head and still get that sense in your body of anxiety or that dread feeling about the experience. So, I think it’s about when that memory comes up and you can really just let it pass and the memory flows as opposed to like a jolting in the body. I think that’s what it means (self-forgiveness) and how I experienced it’.

**6.6.4 SELF-FORGIVENESS IS A TWO-WAY PROCESS WHICH INVOLVES FORGIVING ONESELF AS WELL AS OTHERS****VERNON:**

‘I think my major example of self-forgiveness is about forgiving myself and forgiving my father’.

‘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’.

‘Self-forgiveness means forgiving the people around me as well as myself’.

‘I think my ability to forgive my father stemmed from also seeing him (his father) become a vulnerable person’.

‘I need to understand that my father dealt with his life in ways that there’s a proverb that somebody told me ..... ‘you should judge people not by the height that they’ve achieved but by the depth where they come from’. Very often it’s useful to understand people in that sense’.

**SALLY:**

‘Well, I mean, because forgiveness when we’re sitting here was like for yourself, so you forgive, but there is more for someone else you know, if they have wronged you, you forgive them and then feel better yourself’.

‘For me, self-forgiveness mainly centred around being able to forgive others so I would feel better and the feeling better meant I forgave myself’.

**6.6.5 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVES OVERCOMING ANGER, BLAME, SHAME AND GUILT**

**VERNON :**

‘It’s about learning to forgive him (his father), understanding who he was and looking at him sympathetically rather than with anger’.

‘That’s also 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’.

**MICHAEL :**

‘The things I blame myself for in the marriage, which I’ve come to terms with now and I’ve had to also forgive myself for shame that I had with regards to my youth which was misplaced. I’ve had to forgive myself with regards to the way I’ve used my anger in the past and how that’s upset or hurt people close to me .....’

‘The therapy helped me also in understanding the difference between guilt and shame, the fact that that was misplaced, the shame from my childhood and it helped me get in touch with the part

of my childhood that I wasn't in touch with'.

**SALLY:**

'To forgive myself for the guilt. I don't carry that around any more so I don't project it onto other people and that's what's important to me'.

**KATHY:**

'Initially I used to blame myself a lot for what was happening and maybe now I've got a better understanding'.

**6.6.6 SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVES SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE'S OWN ACTIONS AND REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

**VERNON:**

'I think being able to understand where my father was coming from helped me to make sense of what I needed to do, to let go of some of the things that had been going on with me, because I could then say to myself, I don't have to blame my father for what is going on with me. I need to take responsibility for it'.

**WILMA:**

'I can't change the past and I can only do my best in the future and I'm happy to live with that now and it is an amazing feeling of just, I am who I am and I can only do the best I can and since I've felt that way, I've been able to achieve so much last year'.

**JUSTINE:**

'I think the issue around forgiving myself was coming to an understanding that I had actually done the very best that I could do in the relationship, coming from the parenting that I had

received. I was only equipped to handle it in the way that I had and that there was nothing in my experience that had kind of allowed me to do any differently, so I came to the understanding that I really had done the best that I could do at that time with the limited resources that I had’.

‘I put so much energy and effort into meeting his needs that could never be met until I kind of came to that understanding and started to perceive the whole experience through completely different lenses. I was then able to forgive myself and say it was almost an impossible task, so there were things I could have done better but at the time, I really was not well equipped and did the best I could under the circumstances’.

‘So it was a very freeing experience because it was like somebody just took this huge load off my shoulders of not being responsible for somebody else’s happiness’.

‘To actually be able to say, you know that I did the best I could but it was, and it was really good enough, it really was, but it wasn’t ever going to fill that gaping hole because it couldn’t. That was like almost a physical experience of kind of letting something go that I felt was very much my responsibility to carry and it was that initial experience I think freed me up’.

**SALLY:**

‘To me it is contentment within and maybe being on the level, don’t judge others not on the basis which they are better or bad as just accept them for who they are’.

‘And I think self-forgiveness is finding yourself and your limitations and once you know what they are, you won’t exceed your limitations and you won’t feel bad about anything if you don’t reach them’.

**MICHAEL:**

‘Whereas previously I expected the impossible almost of myself, I was an extreme perfectionist and I’ve now developed more realistic expectations and am more comfortable. I am comfortable with who I am, whereas previously, I wasn’t and I was trying to change myself but change myself

in a fashion that wasn't realistic or wasn't achievable. I would have had to be perfect or a computer to have satisfied those expectations'.

### **6.6.7 SELF-FORGIVENESS IS NOT A BLANKET CONDONING OF ONESELF, ONE'S ACTIONS OR THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS**

#### **WILMA:**

'I still don't know if it is connected, I still have quite a lot of anger towards my previous husband but you know, I don't let it sort of bug me'.

'Without maybe being fully aware of it, I had blamed myself for what happened to my first husband subsequent to his leaving the family. I felt a lot of guilt about that too and now I don't feel, well, I don't feel totally guilt free, but I know that I'm in a position that if I hear that he needs help, that I can extend help to him. It's not how it should have been, it's not how it was intended to be and I could have done things earlier. I should have been maybe much firmer with my husband rather than being the role of husband and wife, like he said he wanted to do certain things and make certain decisions and I acceded to that even though I knew that he wasn't capable of it and I should have been stronger in this regard'.

#### **SALLY:**

'Self-forgiveness for me, the bottom line is, because you can't forget, it makes it so, I mean, it's difficult, that's why we have a saying, like 'out of mind, out of sight'. Somewhere it relates to therapy, is that you come to terms with it and it makes it easier because you are always going to have those memories'.

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

'I understand why I got involved with it but I still carry the guilt for it because I don't agree with it. I don't know, I just, self-forgiveness is real hard for me'.

‘When you really let yourself down, you know, how do you forgive yourself? Do you say it’s never going to happen again? Do you just put that one behind you and carry on? Sometimes it’s not as clear as black and white. You can’t excuse all your behaviour’.

#### **6.6.8 SELF-FORGIVENESS IS A DIFFICULT ONGOING PROCESS**

##### **VERNON:**

‘The point is simply that I think it’s helped me to make peace with myself which I’m still exploring now’.

##### **SALLY:**

‘That I have changed my scripts and I am still trying, it is an ongoing difficult process, it’s not easy. It is right that it’s so difficult, self-forgiveness, otherwise you would carry on willy nilly doing things. Maybe self-forgiveness is a recovery process because it’s so hard’.

##### **JUSTINE:**

‘It’s also, there’s a timing aspect to it (self-forgiveness), it’s something that almost has to be worked through at levels.

It’s not something that even in the therapeutic environment, you can address and then it might present as actually, there’s still a little bit there that needs a bit more kind of almost clearing and kind of letting go’.

‘You can, like you can have done a big lot of the work but then maybe there’s a little residue that remains and it can pop up, but it’s very much that you know, that it’s not clear or that true self-forgiveness hasn’t occurred, because there’s still that feeling attached to it. So it’s a process as opposed to a one-off like experience of now I really have forgiven myself. It takes time’.

#### **6.6.9 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVES FACING THE FUTURE IN A MORE POSITIVE EMPOWERED AND REALISTIC MANNER**

##### **WILMA:**

‘Mainly I used to try and take on so much as a way of sort of trying to compensate and how I feel, I don’t need to do that any longer. I can actually, well I can do so much but I can’t do anymore and that’s reasonable because that I can do well. If I take too much on I won’t be able to do anything well. I’m just so busy getting on with the future that I’m actually not hassling much about the past which is very exciting. There is just so much to look forward and be able to do and I feel just so clear in my own mind now of excess baggage, that I’m quite excited about what I feel I can achieve in the future’.

##### **SALLY:**

‘So I just try to learn from each lesson in life and then basically, as long as I’m taking two steps forward and not like three backwards, then you’re alright, I think you just move on’.

##### **JUSTINE:**

‘Self-forgiveness has given me the strength to make those kind of decisions. So it’s very much about, it’s almost like if you don’t forgive yourself, you can’t allow your power to manifest through your life’.

#### **6.6.10 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Gaining insight, clarity, self-awareness, feeling liberated, empowered, affirmed, valued and making peace with the past from an adult perspective with the assistance of the therapist.

##### **VERNON:**

‘I think in quite important ways, until I came to therapy, I did not realise how profoundly I had

been shaped by my family and by what's happened in my family. I found the role-playing exercises powerful and I think it was through those experiences, being able to feel and have a sense of how my mother was dealing with my father and how my father was dealing with my mother and how that becomes transferred to me. That was very liberating and I was able to rethink/redevelop my own memories. It helped me to look at my father sympathetically and it helped me make peace with it. It helps a lot to have somebody sort of walking you through your own personal story, with different perspectives, so that you get a sense of distance from yourself, what happened to me. It was a very powerful start and maybe it is something I should keep working for'.

**KATHY:**

'Maybe it helped me understand more what my feelings were and what I was thinking, it helped me work through situations and understand the bigger picture'.

'I just think if you talk about things and you talk through things and then one tends to be very harsh on oneself and when you talk it over with someone else, then you are better able to understand with another person's view-point and then you forgive yourself, because you see that everyone is human. Also, it's nice to sound yourself out and to get like a sounding board, because sometimes you can blow it out of proportion and it can go round and round within yourself. Sometimes you just need to get another perspective and also to hear that you're okay'.

**SALLY:**

'But I think that is where the self-forgiveness comes in, to realize that your scripts were not wrong but they were tainted, can you say, they served a purpose for a coping mechanism back then, but in order for me to grow, I have had to, you know, find peace within and change those scripts, because I'm a different person now that I have been in therapy'.

**WILMA :**

'You opened doors for me to go through and I went through and you enabled me to explore, you know, within myself and you always made me feel good about myself, that you made me able to

find the answers to a lot of questions and to find many solutions’.

‘Well first of all, you took away from me such a burden that I could actually see that what I had done in the past was not so bad’.

**MICHAEL:**

‘Through the therapy that I’ve been having and through the better understanding of my youth that I’ve gained, I realize that to a degree I blame myself for my parents’ divorce and also for misplaced beliefs that were sort of formed at a very young age which I felt guilty about ..... and see the inadequacies or the faults in the belief system that I’ve developed regarding myself, I’ve come to terms with’.

‘The therapy assisted in numerous ways, firstly helping me understand the faults and the belief system that I had developed and to understand that the repercussions would not be as dramatic as my sort of sub-conscious perceived they would be or I perceived they would be’.

‘One of the major points that assisted me in therapy was having an independent person that I could speak to and have a totally unbiased sort of interaction. The therapy also helped me realize ..... that okay, because I was a very insecure person who didn’t believe in myself, I blamed myself for a lot of things in the marriage and various things in various parts of my life where I wasn’t to blame and the therapy made me realize, made me able to draw the line and identify where the guilt was not misplaced and where it was. It gave an independent person to say, well you weren’t wrong there whereas I myself was thinking I was wrong’.

**JUSTINE :**

‘Also, what I do remember being very powerful, was almost gaining acknowledgement from yourself about the difficulties that I’d had. It felt so often that I was so completely on my own and just gaining acknowledgement really was strengthening. It was just a validating experience ..... I was allowed to feel those things’.

'I think the part of the self-forgiveness process is realizing that your security comes from within. But a pivotal part of reaching that was around self-forgiveness ..... and it's like the worth issues and the forgiveness issues go hand-in-hand and you've got to connect those two and get there and then that inner strength and all those wonderful other things will really be in place and you just know that it's very pivotal and in any healing process of the whole being, it's crucial. So it has definitely been the foundation on which you can really build and continue to build'.

'I think that what the therapy, when thinking back really helped with, was understanding my world as the little girl, as a child and really taking me back into those little girl experiences and understanding that it's at a deep level ..... to really get a deep understanding of where that's coming from and what the pain was all about'.

## **6.7 THE ELABORATED STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

### **6.7.1 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENT OF FAILURE OR LOSS**

Before the experience of self-forgiveness (and forgiveness of others) took place, the individual experienced his/her world on an intrapersonal level as a failure, loss and estrangement of the self. In addition, he/she experienced the failure of intimate relationships, reciprocal engagement with others and the lack or absence of a cohesive parental structure. This experience resulted in a feeling of unease, malaise with himself/herself, a disconnectedness with his/her world and, often in being overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety, anger, self-blame, shame, guilt, depression and despair.

### **6.7.2 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENT OF REPARATION**

Reparation and reconciliation formed the alternative side of the experience of self-forgiveness: The reparation took place with the self, with reciprocal engagement with others (both with intimate relationships and work relationships) and for over half of the respondents, reconciliation implied a reparation and healing of the parental structure.

### **6.7.3 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENTS OF INSIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY**

Insight took place on a cognitive, emotional and behavioural level with the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy. This often resulted in a 'change of heart' and a different attitude towards the self and others. This insight involved an acceptance of what could or would not be changed in relation to the self and others and the development of a realistic perspective of the role and sense of responsibility for the participatory action in the individuals' own lives, without blaming others and, at the same time, understanding the need for the owning of responsibility and actions by significant others. Before gaining insight, blame and guilt were directive forces in the individuals' lives. The experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy resulted in meeting the 'shadow self'<sup>1</sup>, in gaining insight and consciously re-owning and integrating disowned parts of the self.

### **6.7.4 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENT OF ACCEPTANCE**

Reparation involved an acceptance, recognition and acknowledgement of emotions such as anger, sadness, anxiety, guilt, shame and self-blame, which resulted in a more accepting relationship with oneself and others. Without being fully aware of what was happening and without this experience being an act of will or articulated at the time, the participants in this study realized that they had experienced self-forgiveness, i.e. what they had previously rejected or tried to change in themselves, they now accepted and understood as part of their renewed identity and they accepted who in fact they truly were. A gradual confrontation with and acceptance of the individual's projects, self understanding and ambiguities took place in psychotherapy, resulting in a transformative reassessment of these projects, self-understanding and the experience of self-forgiveness.

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<sup>1</sup>. 'Shadow self' - Jung (1917), stated that 'by shadow self, I mean the 'negative' side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the context of the personal unconscious'. (Jung, 1917, cited in Bly, 1991, p.3). This author states that, 'for Jung and his followers, psychotherapy offers a ritual for renewal in which the shadow personality can be brought to awareness and assimilated, thus reducing its inhibitions or destructive potentials and releasing trapped, positive life energy' (ibid, 1991, p.4).

### **6.7.5 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENT OF TEMPORALITY**

The experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy involved the issue of time, i.e. the individual experienced a journey through time. It was clear that the individual's experience of emphatically and ambivalently refusing to confront and accept the ambiguities of his/her thoughts, feelings and insights had resulted in a fundamental blockage of his/her developing his/her true self, i.e. the past impinged on the present and resulted in blocking the future and new possibilities. However, the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy resulted in the individual confronting and accepting the present ambiguities of his/her life's projects and self-understandings which opened him/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 his/her present actions, commitments and self-understandings.

### **6.7.6 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENT OF LETTING-GO**

The constituent of letting-go forms part of the experience of self-forgiveness where one is able to let go of the past, live in the present and make plans for the future. Letting-go involved a letting-go of one's old identity, expectations and beliefs and an acceptance of one's own human fallibility and the humanness and fallibility of others. The letting-go often involved grief, mourning and loss. The sadness involved gaining insight into the loss of a sense of self and the loss of intimate relations. An important aspect of the self-forgiveness process is experiencing the grief that comes with letting-go, grieving for what had occurred.

### **6.7.7 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENT OF IDENTITY**

The experience of self-forgiveness resulted in a release of past pain and the forming of a new and stronger identity, an identity from which the individual related with more connectedness to the self, others and freedom to the world. The past and present relationships were often transformed, from ones in which fear, shame, guilt, anger, self-blame, despair and anxiety were experienced, to

relationships where the individual felt enhanced and strengthened. This resulted in unexpected grace towards oneself and others. The shift in identity resulted in a shift in one's sense of self. This did not mean a blanket condoning of one's own actions nor the actions of others, but, a sense of balance and movement was restored. Instead of being directed and determined by 'bad' feelings (although these feelings surfaced from time-to-time), the individual recognized the origin of these feelings without being overwhelmed by them and realized that the movement that had begun in therapy was a difficult, pervasive and ongoing process which would continue.

#### **6.7.8 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENT OF RELATIONSHIP**

The experience of self-forgiveness took place both on an intrapersonal as well as an interpersonal level, usually within an accepting, caring, as well as validating relationship. The acceptance of one's humanness involved an awareness of a connectedness to the self and the world. 'Recognizing myself', 'contentment within', 'reaching an equilibrium', 'making peace', 'not feeling adrift in a situation' and 'realizing oneself', were words which described the participants' deepened sense of involvement and forgiveness towards themselves. It was in the therapeutic relationship that the individual connected with his/her 'shadow self', integrated the self into the whole self and was not fearful within the contained therapeutic relationship to show his/her true self.

This resulted in a restored sense of trust, a re-connectedness with and acceptance of the self and the world. The experience of being forgiven, self-forgiveness and/or forgiving others took place within the therapeutic relationship. Thus a relationship develops in which self-exploration and 'educative insight' takes place with an enlightened witness. It was in relation to the other, an objective affirming, containing other that insight was gained, misperceptions and past scripts were reviewed from an adult perspective and the acceptance of the ambiguities of one's projects and self-understandings were made possible.

#### **6.7.9 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENTS OF SEPARATION AND INDIVIDUATION**

At the same time as feeling a reconnectedness with the self and the world, the experience of self-

forgiveness resulted in a feeling of the individual's own separation and individuation, a feeling of being liberated from the yoke of the past and with renewed insight, seeing oneself as separate, not forever condemned to a past identity. This resulted in the experience of a sense of freedom and hope of future possibilities.

Feeling separate from the other was relevant in subject A's case when he said, 'self-forgiveness, it's about living with the pain of not having had a relationship with my father, it's about learning to forgive him, understanding who he was and looking at him sympathetically rather than with anger'. This separation also took place on an intrapersonal as well as an interpersonal level within the therapeutic relationship, seeing and recognizing the other as if for the first time.

In the interpersonal context of the therapeutic relationship, there is the moment of being both the perceived and the perceiver, where the individual participates in the perspective of the other/the therapist who perceives and responds to him/her. This two-way mirroring takes place between the therapist and client: of significance here is the notion of participation. The therapy situation provided an opportunity for genuine discourse to take place, through the other insight is gained. This renewed insight, awareness and understanding, takes place on both cognitive and emotional levels. It was through the eyes of the other/the therapist, that the participants were able to recognize their own individuality and separateness, as well as the separateness of the other (parent, sibling or spouse), seeing a significant other perhaps for the first time. 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.

#### **6.7.10 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND THE CONSTITUENT OF MEMORY**

The memory of the past in psychotherapy resulted in all six participants gaining an understanding, insight and reassessment of the truth about the past which, in turn, resulted in a reconciliation with the self and a reconnectedness to the world and others. The experience of self-forgiveness (and the forgiveness of others) in psychotherapy, involved a reinterpretation of memory, which restored the person's essence, renewed his/her identity and a renaming of the self took place,

resulting in a sense of peace and feeling ‘at home’ in the world. The identity had a particular role in memory and the survival of the renewed identity meant the survival of the essence (the renewed essence) of ‘being in the world’. The identity/essence that was now remembered would thus be changed in history, which would have broader social and cultural implications and the multi-generational transmission of the memory would be forever changed. This reconnectedness was accompanied by a restoration of trust in the world, a restoration of human dignity.

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’.

In recalling the past in psychotherapy, the participants’ experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others was not an act of will nor was forgiveness, forgetting or a blanket condoning of the individual’s actions or the actions of others. Restoring a reframed memory of the situation and issues in psychotherapy resulted in the experience of self-forgiveness and a change of attitude, a change of heart towards oneself and others. This change of attitude became an indirect decision, not forgetting the wrong but overcoming the resentment that accompanied it.

## **6.8 THEMES IDENTIFIED FROM THE EDITED DIALOGUE OF THE PSYCHOLOGISTS’ GROUP REGARDING THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS**

The edited dialogue of the psychologists’ group regarding the phenomenon of self-forgiveness revealed the following themes which emanated from the discussions, reflections and interpretations of the literature, and of the collected data of the six research participants:

### **6.8.1 SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVED SELF-ACCEPTANCE AND OVERCOMING GUILT, BLAME AND ANGER AND CHANGING MISPERCEPTIONS OF THE SELF AND OTHERS, ACQUIRED FROM PAST EXPERIENCES (USUALLY IN CHILDHOOD)**

- 6.8.2 SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVED ACCEPTING, INCORPORATING AND INTEGRATING THE NEGATIVE PARTS OF THE SELF INTO THE WHOLE, SEPARATION OF THE SELF AND DEIDEALIZING THE SELF AND THE OTHER**
- 6.8.3 SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVED AN ACCEPTANCE OF ONE'S HUMANNESS/ORDINARINESS AND THE HUMANNESS/ORDINARINESS OF THE OTHER**
- 6.8.4 SELF-FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS OF THE OTHER IS A TWO-WAY PROCESS AND IS BASED ON ENHANCED SELF-VALUE AND SEPARATION OF THE SELF AND IS NOT A BLANKET CONDONING OF ONE'S ACTIONS OR THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS**
- 6.8.5 SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVED A MATURATION AND MOURNING PROCESS, A LETTING GO AND A GIVING TO THE SELF AND OTHERS**
- 6.8.6. SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVED A COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING**
- 6.8.7 THE ROLE OF THE OTHER/THE THERAPIST IN THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS INVOLVED A CONCERNED, CARING, VALIDATING, AFFIRMING RELATIONSHIP, THE VALUE OF WHICH WAS THAT, AT THE SAME TIME, THE THERAPIST OFFERED EDUCATIVE, DETACHED, OBJECTIVE INSIGHT, WHICH ULTIMATELY EMPOWERED THE CLIENT AND RESULTED IN SELF-ACCEPTANCE, ACCEPTANCE OF OTHERS AND OFTEN REPARATION INVOLVING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**
- 6.8.8 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS WAS ASSOCIATED WITH A FEELING OF LIBERATION, A SENSE OF FREEDOM AND THERE WAS A TRANSCENDENTAL, SPIRITUAL, HEALING AND MORAL QUALITY TO THIS PHENOMENON**

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**6.8.9 THE USE OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS BY PSYCHOLOGISTS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY RESULTED IN A NEW UNDERSTANDING AND PERSPECTIVE OF ISSUES/PROCESSES AND A DECISION THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS WAS A SIGNIFICANT AND INTEGRAL PART OF THE THERAPY PROCESS WHICH TOOK PLACE WHETHER ONE ARTICULATED THIS CONCEPT DURING THERAPY OR NOT**

**6.9 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE IDENTIFIED THEMES OF THE PSYCHOLOGISTS' DIALOGAL GROUP REGARDING THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Self-forgiveness involved self-acceptance and overcoming guilt, blame, anger and changing the misperceptions of the self and others acquired from past (mainly childhood) experiences which were based on a cognitive and emotional understanding. Self-forgiveness was not an act of volition and involved accepting, incorporating and integrating the negative parts of the self into the whole self; a separation and individuation of the self; the deidealizing of the self and the other and an acceptance of one's ordinariness/humanness and the ordinariness/humanness of the other. It was clear that the experience of self-acceptance was mandatory in the experience of self-forgiveness and vice versa. All of these processes resulted in an altered sense of the self and one's identity. The phenomenon of self-forgiveness involved a two-way process involving the forgiveness of the self and the other based on a sense of self-worth and self-forgiveness was not a blanket condoning of one's actions or the actions of others. Self-forgiveness involved a maturation as well as a mourning process, a letting go as well as a giving to the self, and to others. Self-forgiveness was a relational experience which took place in a caring and accepting relationship and the value of this experience in the therapeutic environment was that this relationship was based on the therapist's educative insight, consensual validation and detached concern. The experience of self-forgiveness was associated with a sense of liberation, healing and a transcendental spiritual quality. The psychologists felt that articulating and broadening their understanding of self-forgiveness had impacted on them at a personal level, had enhanced their therapeutic skills and as a result, they had integrated this phenomenon in their therapeutic work. Generally, the therapists had found this phenomenon to be a powerful tool in the therapy

situation and felt that this was a crucial part of the therapeutic process.

#### **6.10 THE COMPARISON OF THE CONSTITUENTS OF THE GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY OF THE SIX PARTICIPATING CLIENTS AND THE IDENTIFIED THEMES IN THE PSYCHOLOGISTS' GROUP DISCUSSIONS REGARDING THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Similar themes emerged when comparing the data of the participating clients where the experience of self-forgiveness had not been included or discussed in their therapy and a professionally enlightened group of practising psychologists using their own language to describe their experience, observations and interpretations of the literature, the data and of this phenomenon in practice. However, with regard to the latter group, this phenomenon had not specifically been included in their psychology training nor had it been consciously articulated and integrated in their own therapy experiences or in working with their clients. Although, this phenomenon had not hitherto been clearly articulated nor defined, nonetheless, the lived experience of self-forgiveness seemed to have been addressed in both groups.

##### **6.10.1 SIMILAR THEMES WHICH EMERGED WERE THAT :**

- The experience of self-forgiveness involved self-acceptance, overcoming blame, guilt, anger and changing the misperceptions of the self and others, involving past painful, relational issues (mainly in childhood). All of these processes resulted in an altered sense of self and one's own identity.
- This acceptance of the self and others was based on a cognitive and emotional understanding of the self and others as seen from an adult perspective.
- Self-forgiveness was a two-way process involving an understanding and acceptance of one's own human fallibility and the human fallibility of others without a blanket condoning of one's own actions or the actions of others. This resulted in an integration of disowned parts of the self and a reconciliation with others in the world.

- Self-forgiveness involved a letting go, a sense of liberation and healing and feelings of self-worth which were enhanced by the assistance, educative insight, consensual validation, acceptance and detached concern of the therapist.

**6.10.2 DIFFERENT THEMES WHICH WERE BASED ON THE CLIENTS' EXPERIENCES AS OPPOSED TO THE PSYCHOLOGISTS' OBSERVATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS, WERE THAT:**

- The psychologists thought that the experience of self-forgiveness was not an act of volition and involved a maturation, separation, individuation, as well as a mourning process, in the process of letting go. At the same time, the group members felt that self-forgiveness involved a giving to the self (a debt repayment), as well as a giving to others (This observation may have been influenced by the group members reading the literature prior to our group discussions).
- The psychologists felt that there was a transcendental and spiritual quality involved in the experience of self-forgiveness.
- Self-forgiveness and self-acceptance generally could take place in any warm, caring, accepting relationship. However, the educative insight, consensual validation and detached concern of the therapeutic relationship were elements which were not present in the non-therapeutic relationship.
- Self-forgiveness was an ongoing process which the clients felt they should continue to work on in their personal lives (which included the work environment), whereas, the psychologists, as working professionals, felt that understanding and articulating this phenomenon had resulted in gaining personal insight as well as a useful tool with which to work. They felt that self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others was a crucial and fundamental part of the therapeutic process as well as having powerful socio-cultural and historical implications within our South African culture.

**RENEÉ<sup>2</sup> SAID :**

‘I think even for oneself, even though we might have been through therapy before and done things and got to conclusions, I think, even just to be able to label it in ourselves, also made a kind of additional shift, a shift in retrospect or however you want to put it, as that by being able to label that process or coming to terms with certain things, was actually about self-forgiveness. It kind of highlights it, it underlines it, it sort of illuminates it I suppose, in some sort of way. So, I think that the term is really useful and important. I also think it has, you know what I mean, what I was saying earlier, not that I’m a practising Christian or anything but, I mean, in terms of our whole culture, our history and it’s part of our language, forgiveness has got quite powerful, historical connotations. It’s quite a powerful concept altogether’

**6.11 CONCLUSION**

Clearly, from the analysis of the data, one can see the interrelatedness between the phenomena of forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness, i.e. the experience of forgiveness for oneself. Both experiences are multi-faceted and extensive processes, incorporating many different emotions which infiltrate our lives and relationships with others. Although the participants had experienced self-forgiveness and forgiveness of significant others in their environment, Subject B did not find this as healing or as satisfying an experience, as had the other participants. She continued to grapple with ongoing guilt and expressed the fact that she had a problem with letting go. It is significant to note that for her, the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others did not include forgetting and condoning her own actions or the actions of others. Rather for her, self-acceptance meant coming to terms with these actions. This emphasizes the fact that the experiences of reparation and reconciliation are not necessarily pre-requisites for the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. One can then come to terms with and accept painful issues without condoning or forgetting injurious behaviour or reconciling with the wrongdoer. A phenomenological therapeutic approach to the client’s resistance to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy would indicate the client’s continued blockages to freedom and would be to focus on assisting the client’s development of her potential rather than focusing on the narrower concepts of resistance and repression in psychotherapy.

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym for one of my fellow colleagues.

The experience of self-forgiveness became a retrospective issue for the six participants (although this phenomenon had not been directly articulated in their psychotherapy), as a result of painful relational issues, such as, childhood deprivation (Subjects A, B and E); childhood abuse and behavioural difficulties (Subject B); separation from partners (Subjects C and D); divorce (Subjects E and F) and betrayal (Subject D). These issues resulted in the manifestation of deep-seated emotions such as anxiety, guilt, anger and shame, all of which indicated various forms of being emotional and describing the participants' diverse ways of 'being' in the world. This resulted in a feeling of being estranged from the self and the world, self-judgement, a sense of helplessness, feeling blocked and facing the future was a frightening and unwelcome prospect. It was clear from the participants' descriptions that being emotional was a particular way of being in a situation which manifested in situational, self, bodily and/or behavioural themes.

Another relevant aspect which emanated from the research of the participants' retrospective experiences of self-forgiveness was temporality and the experience of self-forgiveness. This meant that the experience of self-forgiveness was a 'recapitulative miracle' in that the individual experienced a journey through time, assessing and reviewing the past, gaining insight and accepting one's humanness, renewing one's identity and feeling empowered in order to face the future in a more positive manner.

A most significant experience for the participants was that of gaining educative insight within the nurturant, validating and accepting therapeutic relationship. It was within the therapeutic relationship that this educative insight resulted in the individual gaining insight into and integrating the disowned and previously disliked parts of the self or the 'shadow self' (Jung, 1917). Trust developed in this relationship, as well as the ability for the individuals to become authentic beings in the world and explore their negative feelings. Insight was gained regarding the misperceptions of the past, scripts were reviewed, reinterpreted, understood and accepted from an adult perspective in relation to an 'enlightened witness', an affirming, empathic, sincere and committed other/the therapist.

The experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy had a significant impact on the self of the client in that, self-acceptance resulted in taking responsibility for and coming to terms with past issues as well as facing the future with a sense of empowerment, renewed hope and freedom. This

experience resulted in a reconnectedness with the self and others and also involved a feeling of separateness and individuality, seeing oneself as not being condemned to the yoke of the past and to one's past identity.

In addition, as a result of the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, the possibility existed that the participants would become generators of positive change, i.e. having renewed their identity, re-owned disowned parts of the self, accepted their humanness and that of others in a more realistic way, were all actions which could have a positive impact on their personal, social and cultural relationships, e.g. Subject A spoke of reconciliation with his father and that the way in which he now perceived himself would have an impact on possible future children and on his social and work relationships; Subject B spoke of 'coming to terms' with her past issues and not being so critical of herself which could have an impact on her life; Subject C spoke about valuing herself and that worth issues and forgiveness issues went hand-in-hand which had impacted on her personal relationships and she had felt empowered to make new life choices; Subject D had come to terms with issues, accepted herself and felt that the experience of self-forgiveness had helped her come to terms with betrayal, and that self-acceptance had empowered her in dealing with her personal and work relationships; Subject E felt that the experience of self-forgiveness had helped him come to terms with childhood misperceptions, and his divorce and this experience had helped him differentiate between misplaced shame and guilt and understand his anger, all of which would enable him to relate differently on an interpersonal level; Subject F felt that the experience of self-forgiveness had helped her come to terms with the past, accept her actions and had empowered her to face the future with renewed hope, all of which had resulted in her becoming pro-active, especially in developing her work opportunities.

The therapy situation provided the opportunity for genuine discourse to take place. Psychotherapy took place within the context of language, of speaking, listening and remaining silent. Being together in a shared world involved language, dialogue and understanding the self and seeing the other and the self as separate individuals took place within the discourse of therapy. The experience of self-forgiveness took place in communicating with the other in therapy and revelation and finding the truth evolved out of this process. It was by using language within the therapeutic relationship that the participant found the openness of '*Dasein*' or being in the world and it was in language that her humanness was actualized.

Consensual validation, detached yet sensitive concern and educative insight gained in psychotherapy, were qualities which the participants stressed made their experience of self-forgiveness (and forgiveness of others) workable and accessible. Psychotherapy is a human relationship between two phenomenal selves, client and therapist and my participating role in the research and accompanying role in the psychotherapy meant that this was a co-operated experience between two phenomenal selves. The therapist became the first witness to acknowledge and affirm the client's position. The qualities and task of the therapist when facilitating the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, were not unlike the approach when working through other psychological issues in psychotherapy, nor were these qualities mutually exclusive but were interrelated. Being responsive to the client, meant acting with responsibility towards the client, i.e. the ability of the therapist to respond to the client in her separateness and individuation with care, sensitivity and congruence even when having to confront the client's difficult and painful issues. This meant the participants were, in turn, able to take responsibility for their own issues, their co-creation of situations even if this meant carrying residual feelings of guilt, anger and sadness and not necessarily forgetting or condoning their actions or the actions of others.

Another important role of the therapist was providing a safe, contained environment in which the participants could live out a corrective, emotional experience in which they could present their authentic selves, their internal struggle would manifest outwardly and be reassessed from a realistic adult perspective within the therapeutic relationship. Psychotherapy is a human activity in which incomplete developmental tasks can be completed within a validating, secure relationship and a new identity can be established.

Being the sole researcher of this study and having embarked on an accompanying role as the psychotherapist on the participants' therapy path, my own knowledge of human experience and personal understanding of the nature of injury and forgiveness were all factors which resulted in myself the researcher, being more comfortable as an 'enlightened witness' to the process of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others.

In the group discussions, the psychologists felt that they had gained a new perspective of the phenomenon of the experience of self-forgiveness and stated that this was a significant and integral part of the therapy process, one which they felt should be included in our training as therapists and in our therapy with clients. Similar and different themes which emanated from the therapists' reflective observations, discussions and interpretations of the literature and data, and the participants' descriptions of their experiences of the phenomenon in psychotherapy were extrapolated in this chapter.

As a result of these discussions, the psychologists felt an enhanced understanding of the experience of self-forgiveness, that this had impacted on them at a personal level, had enhanced their therapeutic skills and they had integrated this phenomenon and were more aware of the experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness in their therapeutic work. In the group discussions, a faith was established in being open to the phenomenon of self-forgiveness, which they agreed, occurred unexpectedly, not of one's own making but, nevertheless, coming to one in the therapeutic environment. They felt that although therapy with clients was not specifically designed to foster forgiveness, that their own increased awareness and understanding of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others, meant they were more comfortable with and were prepared to address these issues with clients whether they spontaneously surfaced or whether, as 'enlightened witnesses', they could identify and address these issues within the appropriate context when they remained hidden and unarticulated in therapy. My colleagues felt that the experience of self-forgiveness, in addition to being a powerful tool in therapy and a crucial part of the therapeutic process, would have powerful and far-reaching, emotional, social and cultural implications.

As a participant in both the subjects' experiences of self-forgiveness and the psychologist groups' reflective discussions and interpretations of the phenomenon, it seemed as if the lived experience of the participants was extremely powerful and insightful, given that they had not reflected on or discussed this experience previously. It seemed as if the group discussions were mainly reflections of the literature, studies and data which had been read prior to our meetings. However, of significance in the group discussions, was the fact that this phenomenon had not been dealt with directly nor articulated in their own therapy or therapy with their clients and this

had started a process of being present to, an increased awareness and incorporating of this phenomenon within the appropriate context within the therapy setting with their clients.

Not only did the participants gain educative insight pertaining to their issues which had resulted in the experience of forgiveness and forgiveness or non-forgiveness of others, but the group discussions resulted in the educative insight of the psychologists themselves, impacting on their own issues pertaining to self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others as well as those of their clients. This included the knowledge that one should not foist forgiveness or self-forgiveness on to clients and what was required of the therapists was thoroughly acknowledging and addressing the clients injurious experiences.

In addition, my colleagues felt that the focus on justice and forgiveness of others may not always be helpful in the healing process and that at times forgiving without condoning or genuine non-forgiveness may be healthier than forgiving others, as this maintained necessary boundaries between the self and others, thus sustaining a sense of self. I agreed with my colleagues that the experience of self-forgiveness was associated with a sense of healing and that this experience had a transcendent spiritual quality. This could be included in an interdisciplinary and transpersonal psychological approach to this phenomenon. Thus, whether this phenomenon was a lived experience (by the participants) or a professional reflective experience (by the psychologists' group), there is no doubt that the experience of self-forgiveness is a powerful phenomenon which, would have far-reaching, implications for intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, social and political relationships.

Significant findings of this hermeneutic/existential research were that: the phenomena of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others were interrelated and that the experience of self-forgiveness took place on both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels (thus validating the work of previous research at Seattle University, 1984-1998); self-acceptance was found to be mandatory in the experience of self-forgiveness and vice-versa, without a blanket condoning of one's own actions of the actions of others; non-forgiveness without vengeance and forgiving without condoning or forgetting the actions of others, can be emotionally and morally appropriate for the client in psychotherapy; educative insight gained by the client was important in the 'confessional exchange' between the client and the therapist in psychotherapy, and as a result of this educative

insight, an 'existential confession' was made possible as the client embarked on ongoing self-illumination, self-identification and a reconciling relationship to the world; the experience of self-forgiveness resulted in a renewed identity and a reinterpreted memory which meant that the participants could become transitional figures and generations of positive change, in that, the clients would have gained insight into their past dysfunctional relational patterns and, as a result, these renewed patterns of behaviour may continue in future generations.

In addition the retrospective interviews with the participants after psychotherapy had ended, validated the work of Rowe & Halling (1998), in that although the experience of self-forgiveness (and forgiving another) was not articulated in psychotherapy nor had it ever explicitly been on the participants' agenda, nevertheless experientially the moment of forgiveness and self-forgiveness seemed to be the moment of recognition that this phenomenon had been experienced after psychotherapy had ended. In other words, the experiences of forgiveness and self-forgiveness had already occurred (although in Subject B's case this experience was not as satisfying or as healing as that felt by the other participants). In the retrospective interviews the participants realized that their feelings and identities had changed and that they had forgiven themselves and others. Thus in this research, one concurs with Rowe & Halling (1998) that self-forgiveness (and forgiveness of others) came as a 'revelation', that this experience formed an integral part of psychotherapy and would probably occur, with the psychotherapist as 'witness' to the process, whether this phenomenon was explicitly on the client's psychotherapeutic agenda or not.