

“Our capacity to make peace with another person and with the world, depends very much on our capacity to make peace with ourselves”.

- Thian Nhat Hanh
Living Buddha, Living Christ
In Rutledge, T., 1997, p.5

The son of a Rabbi went to worship on the Sabbath in a nearby town. On his return, his family asked, ‘Well did they do anything different from what we do here?’ Yes, of course’ said the son. ‘Then what was the lesson?’ ‘Love thy enemy as thy self’. ‘So, it’s the same as we say. And how is it you learned something else?’ ‘They taught me to love the enemy within myself’.

(Quoted in Tarrytown Letter, April,
1983, p.16, in Zweig, C. and
Abrams, J., 1991, p.190)

**EXPLORING THE RETROSPECTIVE EXPERIENCE
OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY**

BY

IRENE GILLIAN BOWMAN

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SUPERVISOR: DR A. GILDENHUYS

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‘But I have discovered the secret that, after climbing a great hill, one only finds there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom, comes responsibility and I dare not linger for my long walk is not yet ended’ (Mandela, 1994, p.751).

EXPLORING THE RETROSPECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS
IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, using a hermeneutically and existentially oriented research approach and using phenomenological principles in the data analysis (Giorgi, 1975). This research focused on the phenomenon of self-forgiveness, not only as a critical human experience in the individual's everyday life's experience, but also as an integral part of treatment and healing in the therapy process. Religious, cultural, moral and philosophical approaches to self-forgiveness were discussed with a focus on the cultural backdrop and the profound socio-political changes in South Africa, against which this research was conducted. In addition the relevant theories and approaches to the phenomenon were reviewed.

Using a mixed research method, three questions were formulated in order to elicit the lived structure of the experience being researched. Two, in-depth interviews, were conducted with six of my own therapy clients whose therapy had ended with myself. This phenomenon had not been articulated in therapy and was considered from the point of view of the client who experienced this phenomenon and not from that of the therapist. Painful relational issues had left the participants feeling estranged from themselves and others and the experience of self-forgiveness had resulted in feeling reconnected with themselves and the world. The study of the phenomenon, included six, one monthly discussions with three fellow practising psychologists, whose reflections enhanced the understanding of this phenomenon.

Significant findings of this research were that; the phenomena of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others were interrelated and that self-acceptance was mandatory in the experience of self-forgiveness without a blanket condoning of one's own actions or the actions of others. Non-forgiveness without vengeance and forgiving without condoning or forgetting the actions of others, could be emotionally and morally appropriate for the individual. Educative insight, a renewed identity and reinterpreted memory were important elements of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy. Experientially, the moment of recognition of this phenomenon had come as a 'revelation' for the participants after therapy had ended and self-forgiveness, formed an integral part of therapy although this experience was not directly articulated in psychotherapy.

In this study the significance of the self of the client, the self of the therapist and the psychologists' discussions relating to the phenomenon were addressed. Emotions pertaining to the experience of self-forgiveness; theoretical implications of this phenomenon for further research and for psychotherapy; limitations of this research and how the experience of self-forgiveness differed from other significant experiences in psychotherapy were critically discussed.

Key Terms:

Existential
Psychotherapy
Hermeneutic
Self-forgiveness
Forgiveness

Self acceptance
Insight
Identity
Phenomenology
Reconciliation

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

Our world is dominated by general feelings of anxiety, malaise, at times deep fear and despair, insecurity, vulnerability and a sense of being disconnected from ourselves, our families and our communities. These feelings of being disconnected and alienated are often reflected and presented in psychotherapy in the form of a cluster of feelings such as anger, guilt, shame, anxiety, panic, fear and at times, overwhelming grief and sadness. In addition, there seems to be a lack of direction and a search for meaning and identity in the lives of many clients. Generally, clients seek help in psychotherapy in order to overcome these overwhelming feelings, which often cause a severe interruption and dysfunction in their lives.

The inspiration for this study originated with the research of Rowe, et al. (1989) in their Chapter on *Forgiving Another – A Dialogal Research Approach*. The theme of the group's phenomenological research at Seattle University, as well as their later research on *Exploring Self-Forgiveness* (Bauer et al. 1992) and the *Psychology of Forgiveness – Implications for Psychotherapy*, (Rowe & Halling, 1998) seemed to resonate at a deep personal level with my experience as a psychotherapist working with clients in psychotherapy. The researchers at Seattle University embarked on a study of forgiveness in order to answer the questions of what impact injurious behaviour has on our personal and cultural lives and how we could heal from the hurt caused by the injury and wrongdoing. The focus of their research on forgiveness was within the context of everyday life.

1.2 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to explore the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy using a hermeneutic and existential approach. This mixed method involved applying Giorgi's steps of data reduction (1975) and a qualitative hermeneutic approach to the reasoning of the subjects' responses and to the dialogue within the psychologists' group. 'The most fundamental claim of existential-phenomenological psychology is that it provides with an approach that leads to a deeper and fuller understanding of human existence, ourselves and others' (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p.16). In this research I hope to focus on the phenomenon of self-forgiveness, not only as a critical human experience included in the individual's everyday life's experience, but also as an integral part of treatment and healing in the therapy process.

In addition, this research took place against the background of profound cultural, social and political changes in South Africa and I will compare the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy with

the broader cultural and social experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa (1996 – 1998). The TRC was the platform from which twenty-two thousand of the perpetrators and victims of apartheid crimes, could convey their personal recollections and seek forgiveness of others and /or self-forgiveness, which enhanced the sense of *ubuntu*¹. The TRC was a giant macrocosm of the experiences of forgiveness and self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, and illustrates the significant cultural, moral, social and ethical implications of these phenomena for intrapersonal, interpersonal, socio-cultural and political relationships as a whole.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

It must be emphasized that this work was based on two in-depth interviews conducted with six of my therapy clients (two men and four women, of varying ages and beliefs), who had not entered therapy primarily with the intention of exploring their experience of self-forgiveness, nor was the subject articulated directly in their therapy sessions by either client, or therapist. It was only after therapy had ended and the research questions were put to these clients, that they spoke about their experiences of self-forgiveness, what life issues gave rise to this experience, their experience of self-forgiveness in the therapy situation and how this phenomenon had impacted on their lives. The three research questions were:

1. 'Can you tell me what self-forgiveness means to you?'
2. 'What situation or situations, in your life, gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness?' (based on the research questions in Rowe, et al., 1989).
3. 'How did your experience in therapy contribute to your understanding of self-forgiveness?'

It was evident from the participants' responses that the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others were significant issues which had taken place in psychotherapy. It must be noted that in this research, self-forgiveness was not experienced by the participants as a result of having been forgiven by the other. The experience of self-forgiveness arose (although this was not articulated in psychotherapy) as a result of painful relational issues, e.g. betrayal, childhood abuse and deprivation, divorce and separation. In addition, a series of misperceptions, unrealistic expectations, life scripts and identities

¹ 'This is the African philosophy of humanness emphasizing the link between the individual and the community', (Krog, 1999, p. 454).

were formed as a result of events in the individuals' lives in relation to significant others, which gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness. The initial reason for the referral to psychotherapy for more than half of the research participants was anxiety and panic disorder as a result of feeling estranged from the self and others. This distress was as a result of a series of perceived wrongdoings for which the participants felt anxiety, self-blame, shame, guilt and pain. The injurious and painful relational issues left the individual acutely aware of being estranged from the self and others in the world. For the participants, experiencing forgiveness for themselves resulted in a 'shift from fundamental estrangement to 'being-at-home' with oneself in the world' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.237).

The study of the phenomenon of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy included six one-monthly discussions with three practising psychologists. This approach was inspired by the dialogal group research method at Seattle University undertaken by Leifer (1986); Rowe, et al. (1989); Halling & Leifer (1991), & Bauer et al. (1992), (cited in Rowe & Halling, 1998). These general reflective group discussions involved coming to terms with our understanding of the phenomenon, reading selected literature of prior research regarding the phenomenon, utilizing this phenomenon in our work with clients and discussions of the data obtained from the six participants interviewed by the researcher. The difference between the dialogal group research method at Seattle University and our reflective dialogal group discussions regarding self-forgiveness in psychotherapy was that I, the sole researcher, had formulated the research questions, carried out the interviews, transcribed the descriptions and then presented the transcribed scripts to the group for discussion. The reflective group discussions were used by the researcher in order to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon as it was lived and experienced by the participants. The researcher assumed that the group would provide an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon. This was based on the fact that according to Rowe & Halling (1998) and the group research at Seattle University (1989-1998), an understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon arose out of dialogue within the group, particularly pertaining to self-forgiveness (and forgiveness), which is fundamentally interpersonal and 'could be studied most appropriately using a method characterized by open and ongoing conversation'. (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.231)

1.4 THE PHENOMENA OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVING ANOTHER

According to Rowe, et al. (1989), & Rowe & Halling (1998), the phenomenon of forgiving another is intimately related to forgiving oneself and may be two sides of the same coin. The authors explain that

the experience of self-forgiveness or being forgiven is similar to forgiving another, in that it requires more than one's will and for that reason, is not experienced as something that one does for oneself but rather seems to come when one least expects forgiveness. In addition, forgiving another and self-forgiveness are transforming experiences, bringing one an awareness of one's humanity and connection with the world, while offering new freedom and possibilities. Rowe, et al. (1989), assert that the similarities between self-forgiveness and forgiving another are so striking that they question whether they are not in fact simultaneous processes, i.e. whether self-forgiveness is in the background of forgiving another and vice versa. In other words, 'one cannot realize one's own freedom and humanity without realizing that of the other' (p.243). Although, as stated above, the phenomena of forgiving another and self-forgiveness may be considered simultaneous defining these phenomena within a phenomenological framework, will help explain the individual's experience of self-forgiveness and forgiving another in her everyday lived world. In addition, defining these phenomena would assist the psychotherapist in her own understanding of these experiences, the similarities between these experiences, and the difference between them. This would, in turn, help clients grapple with these issues within the therapeutic setting and the manner in which they integrate these experiences within the views of themselves and the world.

1.5 THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The present thesis is compiled of seven chapters including the first introductory chapter. In Chapter 2 the phenomenological-existential view of the phenomena of forgiving another and self-forgiveness is defined and the similarities and differences between these phenomena discussed, outlining the relational and temporality dimensions pertaining to these phenomena. Chapter 3 explores the religious, cultural, moral and philosophical approaches to forgiveness and self-forgiveness, including a focus on the background of the profound cultural, social and political changes in South Africa against which this research took place.

Chapter 4 includes the theory and literature survey of the phenomena. The reason for focusing on selected literature and theory pertaining to both forgiveness and self-forgiveness is that according to researchers at Seattle University (1984–1998) these phenomena share the same depth and often are simultaneous processes although forgiving others is not necessarily a prerequisite for experiencing forgiveness (Halling, 1994). Included in this chapter will be: a case study using a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic approach to forgiveness; three theoretical perspectives of forgiveness in the psychotherapeutic environment synthesizing theological and psychological principles; a

psychiatrist's view of anger and the healing power of forgiveness; in a clinical setting; a model of interpersonal forgiveness with couples in psychotherapy; the cognitive approach to therapeutic intervention within the forgiveness triad, on forgiving, receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness; the pastoral/counselling approach to forgiveness and self-forgiveness; the existential- phenomenological approach to these phenomena.

Chapter 5 focuses on the research methodology, outlining the rationale for the research and containing a description of Giorgi's (1975) empirical phenomenological research method of data reduction. A brief description has been included of the six individuals who participated in the research. All were the researcher's former therapy clients who had terminated psychotherapy. These clients were assigned pseudonyms and were known as Vernon (Subject A), Sally (Subject B), Justine (Subject C), Kathy (Subject D), Michael (Subject E) and Wilma (Subject F). The data obtained involved two in-depth, 60 to 90 minutes audio-taped interviews, during which three research questions were asked. These interviews were then transcribed verbatim, edited, and analyzed applying Giorgi's (1975) empirical phenomenological principles of data reduction.

In addition, Chapter 5 consists of the data which emanated from the psychologist (three colleagues) groups' reflective discussions of the phenomenon. These two-hourly meetings took place once a month over a period of six months. Themes which emanated from these reflective discussions were then compared with the participants' data of their experience of the phenomenon and similarities and differences between the two sets of data were evaluated by myself, the researcher.

Chapter 6 consists of the results of the analysis of the data obtained from the six research participants. An example of the division of the descriptive data into 'Natural Meaning Units' and corresponding 'Thematic Meaning Units' was included for Subject A. The presentation of the results consisted of specific descriptions of the situated structures for each of the six participants in response to the three research questions, the common elements of which were then formed into a general psychological description of the phenomenon. Illustrative vignettes of the general description of the phenomenon were included. An elaborated structural description of the constituents of the general experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy was formed, in order to establish a platform from which the focus of the discussion of this phenomenon would be illustrated in Chapter 7.

Themes from the edited reflective dialogue of the psychologists' group regarding the phenomena were

identified and a general description of these identified themes was formulated in chapter 6. The constituents of the general description of the participants' experience of the phenomenon and the identified themes of the groups' reflective discussions were then compared and similarities and differences between the two were extrapolated.

Chapter 7 consists of an amalgamation of the focal points of the theory and literature research survey, illustrating how these different perspectives could be used in a synthesized approach to this phenomenon from the integrative psychotherapist's perspective, using the most useful aspects within a broad empirical phenomenological psychotherapeutic tradition. The discussion of the phenomenon included a blending of the findings of the research and analysis of the data obtained from the six participants, as well as the contribution and implications of the reflective group discussions of the phenomenon. The significance of the self of the client as well as the self of the therapist in relation to the phenomenon were discussed. In addition, the cultural and social implications of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy against the South African background in which this research was conducted, were addressed.

Included in the discussion were:

- the implications of the phenomenon for psychotherapy;
- a critical review of the methodology used in this research;
- limitations of the research; and
- the differences between the experience of self-forgiveness and other significant experiences in psychotherapy.

The above factors were included in the discussion in order to illustrate the multi-dimensional aspects and significant implications of the phenomenon of self-forgiveness for intrapersonal, socio-cultural and political relationships.

In addition, it is hoped that this discussion will provide an integrative synthesis (from the psychotherapist's perspective), of the most useful aspects of the approach to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, not only within the hermeneutic, existential and phenomenological frameworks, but within the broader psychotherapeutic traditions. It is hoped that the hermeneutic, existential and phenomenological approaches to this phenomenon could be included in the psychoanalytic/psychodynamic, family systems, cognitive behavioural, transpersonal and

pastoral/religious counselling approaches, in order to reach the individual client and broader socio-cultural and political communities.

1.6 CONCLUSION

This research focuses on the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy as a ‘corrective emotional experience’, unfolding within an authentic personal encounter with an ‘enlightened witness’² (the therapist) and ‘between two fully human individuals’ (Moss, 1989, p.211). One agrees with Moss (1989) when he states that ‘therapeutic technique lends a practical effectiveness to therapeutic intervention but only when it serves the process of re-awakening a human being to the broader horizon of his or her own world and life’. (ibid, 1989, p.211) In this study, against the background of profound social and cultural changes in South Africa (which contributed to the understanding and relevance of this phenomenon), the multidimensional cultural and personal aspects of the experience of self-forgiveness are discussed.

NOTE : In this text I will be using the feminine gender in order to simplify the references to both genders. However, both the masculine and feminine gender will be used when the researcher refers specifically to the male and female research participants as well as to the male and female psychologist group members in the study. The feminine gender is only used for ease of editorial style. At times the masculine gender has been retained in order to maintain the authenticity of the quotations.

² The term ‘enlightened witness’ is taken from the book entitled ‘The Truth will set you Free’ by the psychotherapist Alice Miller (2001), and is not meant to refer to the psychotherapist in an arrogant way ‘as all-knowing’ but rather as more informed and helping the client to achieve insight and ‘move from ignorance to knowledge and compassion’ (Miller, 2001, p187)

CHAPTER 2

2. FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The first part of this chapter will include a reference to the existential-phenomenological research carried out by previous researchers on the phenomena of forgiveness and self-forgiveness. In addition, the need for additional research of the lived experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy which, hitherto, has been overlooked in both general and applied psychology, will be addressed.

The second half of this chapter focuses on the phenomenological descriptions of the phenomena of forgiveness and self-forgiveness, the similarities and the difference between these phenomena and the implications of the existential-phenomenological view for psychotherapy.

The main phenomenological research of the experiences of forgiveness and self-forgiveness has been conducted at Seattle University (1984-1998). Self-forgiveness as a lived experience has not been well explored in the field of psychology and the paucity of research in both general and applied psychology indicated the importance of conducting this research.

Self-forgiveness is a multidimensional phenomenon and impacts on both the personal and socio-cultural aspects of our lives. Problem areas which various mental health practitioners deal with are clients' feelings of chronic guilt, self-blame, shame, anger, anxiety, depression, pain and general feelings of estrangement and isolation. There is a great deal of personal and cultural pain in our world and the impact of injury on the individual's life impinges not only on the functioning of the individual but has a spin-off on families, communities and society as a whole. On a personal level, part of resolving and healing the individual's pain involves exploring the lived experience of self-forgiveness through the process of psychotherapy.

In South Africa, we have seen and lived through a history and legacy of hostility and alienation at both interpersonal and socio-cultural levels. We have had our share of ethnic pain which emanated from centuries of hatred and distrust, political tension and social and domestic violence. Self-forgiveness, as well as forgiving another, are crucial issues which have become familiar and more easily understood in the 'new South Africa'. We have seen the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996-1998) focus on the phenomena of forgiveness of the self and others when dealing with both the perpetrators and victims of crimes in our society.

Bauer et al. (1992), of Seattle University, state that hitherto dominant, statistical, experimental research methods in the social sciences (and psychology), have increased the obscurity of forgiveness – ‘and the fragmentation and alienation of modern life’ (Bauer et al., 1992, p.160). This provided the impetus for the existential research carried out by the research team at Seattle University (1985-1998). Further existential-phenomenological research included the work of Rooney (1989), in his unpublished dissertation, which focuses on the experience of forgiveness in psychotherapy; Safer (2000) and Ferch (2000), focus on the lived experience of forgiving and non-forgiving as well as the meanings of touch and forgiveness respectively. These phenomena are studied within the context of every day life rather than the complexity of studying the phenomena within social and political contexts. (The different approaches to these phenomena will be discussed in the theory and literature survey in Chapter 4).

In focusing on the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, the researcher hones in on the experience at a deep and personal level and moves from the understanding of self-forgiveness as an abstract ideal to one that is powerful and central to one’s experience of healing in psychotherapy. More significantly, as a psychotherapist working with psychic pain, one is in the position to help facilitate the movement towards self-forgiveness (and forgiveness) and in so doing, would hopefully enhance the sense of individual freedom, a reconnection with the self and others and a restoration of hope and options regarding the future. This research would, in turn, have positive repercussions on the family, communities and society as a whole. Thus extending the research of the individual’s actual experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness in every day life to the individual’s retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy would have ‘far reaching implications for intrapersonal, interpersonal and political relationships’ (Rowe, et al., 1989) and therefore, would justify additional scientific research in this area.

Rowe, et al. (1989), state that traditionally, psychology has shied away from phenomena that are closely related to theology and religion. Furthermore, psychology which has been conceptualised as a natural science, has placed priority on experimental methods. Psychology has thus avoided topics which cannot easily be studied by statistical experimental methods (Giorgi, 1970, cited in Rowe, et al., 1989). These researchers state that forgiveness (and self-forgiveness), being human phenomena, are topics which are resistant to simple definitions and direct observations. They felt that exploration of the individual’s experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness was critical and significant for further research, in order to realize one’s own freedom and humanity. Despite the increased attention given to the topic of forgiveness, Rowe & Halling (1998), reiterated the need for further phenomenological investigation of this phenomenon as they stated that very few systematic studies of the actual lived experience of forgiveness (and self-forgiveness) had taken place. This was the inspiration for this research of the lived experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

2.2 THE EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PHENOMENA OF FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

The existential-phenomenological view of both the phenomena of forgiving another and forgiving oneself, will be described in this chapter, in view of the fact that previous researchers have shown that these may be simultaneous processes and may be two sides of the same coin (Rowe, et al., 1989 and Rowe & Halling, 1998). In addition, the similarities and difference between these phenomena and the relational and temporality dimensions pertaining to these phenomena, will be outlined in order to understand the client's 'unique world of the experience' of self-forgiveness (and forgiving another) 'in terms of time, space and interpersonal forms' (Moss, 1989, p.194). This chapter will also focus on the implications of the existential-phenomenological view for psychotherapy.

2.2.1 THE DESCRIPTION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FORGIVENESS

In describing the lived experience of forgiveness, Rowe, et al. (1989), state that 'the need for forgiveness arises when someone has acted in such a way as to bring about a fundamental disruption to the wholeness or integrity of one's life' (p.239). The authors continue, that according to the individual's experience, this injury is 'initially on a deep almost organic level, there is a tearing of the fabric of one's life, one's world and that the injury that involves forgiving, is one that violates a person's identity' (p.239). Forgiveness, is thus experienced, when one perceives oneself as having been harmed by the wrongdoer and ends in a psychological reconciliation with the perceived wrongdoer (i.e. intrapersonally) this reconciliation may or may not take place face-to-face with the wrongdoer (i.e. interpersonally).

The initial hurt is often accompanied by feelings of blame, anger and a desire for revenge and retribution. These feelings need to be acknowledged and experienced if genuine forgiveness is to take place. This is difficult when the individual is emotionally dependant on the other and/or has disowned the disliked parts of the self which has resulted in, self-blame and guilt for 'bad' or 'angry' parts of the self (Rowe & Halling, 1998). The experience of forgiveness may be a long arduous process, where the individual feels trapped. The individual feels caught, on the one hand between holding on to the hurt and anger, thus maintaining boundaries and creating distance between the self and the wrongdoer and avoiding grief and loss, and on the other hand, accepting the past (1998). Grief and loss, is felt not only for the relationship and what was and/or could have been, but for the loss of identity and a particular way of viewing oneself and the world. These researchers suggest that the experience of forgiveness as a solution to betrayal, anger and hurt,

occurs unexpectedly and cannot be willed. However, to some degree, there is a certain willingness and receptivity within the individual to forgive the injurious other. “Experientially however, the moment of forgiveness, appears to be the moment of recognition that forgiveness, has *already* occurred. Rather than being aware of changing, one realises that one *has* changed, one *has* forgiven the other’ (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.235). The researchers state that ‘forgiveness comes as a revelation and is often viewed as a gift’ (p.235).

Forgiveness is usually distinguished from reconciliation (Horsbrugh, 1974, & Kolnai, 1973-1974 cited in Enright, 1994). While forgiveness is an internal, psychological response to injury, reconciliation with the other is seen as a behavioural coming together again, often after negotiation has taken place (ibid, 1994). However, it is possible to forgive without reconciliation. In the research and further readings, it has shown that forgiveness is neither condonation nor indifference. In fact, the forgiver is aware that injustice has occurred and yet takes a stance of letting go and overcoming amongst other feelings, despair, anger and pain within oneself, as well as towards the wrongdoer.

In defining forgiveness, Safer (2000), proposes a paradigm shift and states that genuine forgiveness ‘as it is commonly understood is only one of many routes to resolution, humanity and peace’ and that ‘false forgiveness damages self and society and that not forgiving without vindictiveness can be morally and emotionally right’ (p.2). For this author, the resolution process (which she states may or may not lead to forgiveness), consists of three essential tasks: firstly, re-engaging internally with the hurtful relationship; secondly, recognizing its emotional impact and, thirdly, re-interpreting the meaning of the experience and one’s own participation in it, from a deeper broader perspective. Safer, states that this tripartite model applies equally to forgiveness and real unforgiveness, i.e. non-forgiveness without vengeance.

2.2.1.1 INTERPERSONAL, INTRAPERSONAL AND TRANSPERSONAL ASPECTS OF FORGIVENESS

The interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of this definition are significantly illustrated by Fischer (1970), who stated that ‘(i)dentify is grounded in the unfolding of (one’s) relationships in the projects and plans to which one has assigned oneself’ (Fischer, 1970, cited in Rowe, et al., 1989, p.239). The impact of the injury or pain is felt at an intrapersonal level having a profound impact on the ‘individual’s only world his/her only meaningful identity perceived at the time’ (ibid, 1970, p.239). However, forgiveness is experienced most immediately at an interpersonal level, in that the relationship with the other comes to an abrupt halt as it

occurs within a specific event and/or relationship involving the other, who has by causing harm, deeply impacted on the self. In addition, the experience of forgiving another, also has qualities which transcend the relationship with the other and were described by researchers as having a spiritual or transpersonal, as well as interpersonal dimension resulting in 'a deeper sense of connection to oneself, to others and in some cases, to something beyond oneself' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.237). These aspects are also evident in the experience of self-forgiveness.

2.2.1.2 THE TIME ELEMENT IN THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS

Understanding the definition of the experience of forgiving another, has great significance within the therapeutic setting regarding the impact of the injury caused by the wrongdoer on the individual's sense of self, which causes a disruption of 'one's only world' and 'one's only meaningful identity as perceived at that time' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.235). In addition, the injury impacts on one's interpersonal relationships and the time element involved, i.e. how the injury impacts on the past relationship, the present relationship and the vision of a planned future relationship. The future may be experienced as irrevocably changed and/or even destroyed. Merleau-Ponty (1968), speaks of time as a difficult phenomenon to examine because it is not 'something outside of us, flowing past us, instead we are time' (cited in Halling, 1979, p.201).

2.2.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS

Rowe & Halling (1998), describe the individual's lived experience of self-forgiveness as a pervasive ongoing process which 'involves a shift from fundamental estrangement to being at home with oneself in the world' (p.237). This estrangement from the self and others, occurs as a result of a traumatic or stressful event in one's life (e.g. divorce, death of a loved one, abuse, etc). As a result, this painful, traumatic experience, the need to forgive oneself (which may or may not be articulated), becomes an issue because the understanding and awareness of the event, is generally accompanied by feelings of self-judgement, anger, blame, shame and guilt. 'This experience is so intense it pervades one's existence and the embodied belief is that nothing will ever change, the future seems dark and foreboding' (p.239). The experience of forgiving oneself is also accompanied by a change in identity, a self-acceptance and acknowledgement and the integration of previously denied or rejected parts of the self (such as one's own anger and the ability to inflict pain). One then gradually moves from an attitude of critical self-judgement to 'embracing who one truly is' (p.237).

There is an intrapersonal and interpersonal aspect to the experience of self-forgiveness (as in the experience of forgiving another), mainly focusing on the awareness and acceptance of one's own human fallibility and

that of others resulting in a connectedness with oneself and the other, a sense of freedom as well as a positive movement towards faith in the future, healing and 'being at home in the world' (ibid, 1998, p.238). Bauer et al. (1992), state that 'the term self-forgiveness implied that this is a solitary act, completed in isolation from others'. Instead, research has shown that the individual's experience of self-forgiveness, is not 'entirely of one's own doing, which takes place within some form of relationship and involves a radical shift in one's way of moving in the world' (p.150). As self-forgiveness is gradually 'embodied', the individual moves towards feeling 'at home in the world' (p.150). According to Bauer et al. (1992), the lived experience of self-forgiveness involved a movement from estrangement and reconciliation with the self and the human community. This arduous journey involved coming to terms with oneself, not being stuck in the past and holding on to illusions about oneself 'as a fellow human being, like others, imperfect but no longer alone' (p.160). A core aspect of the self, in the experience of self-forgiveness and overcoming self-judgement and despair is that, according to Kierkegaard, 'the opposite of despair is to be the self which one truly is' (Kierkegaard, 1941, p.28; cited in Halling, 1979, p.202).

2.3 SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE EXPERIENCES OF FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

Thus from the above descriptions, one clearly concurs with the researchers at Seattle University when they say that these phenomena may be simultaneous processes or two sides of the same coin. Both are transforming experiences, bringing one an awareness of one's own humanity and connection with the world while offering new freedom and possibilities (Rowe, et al., 1989). In both cases, one embraces, with a compassionate view, both one's own human fallibility and that of the other.

Halling (1994) claims that in forgiving the other, one relinquishes the notion and illusion of one's own innocence and perfection and as being not unlike the other. In addition, with both experiences, 'one moves into a deeper more profound connection with one's own life and the lives of others, one moves towards selfhood' (p.112).

Thus, common themes have emerged in the research on the two phenomena, e.g. both involve overcoming unrealistic feelings of shame, guilt, pain, loss, anger, self-blame, a letting be, a letting go and acceptance of one's human fallibilities the fallibility of others resulting in a renewed identity; both phenomena not being acts of will; both phenomena being described as transformative and as 'a gift'; both are arduous, pervasive and ongoing processes and normally these phenomena occurring within the context of some variation of a loving relationship with others. Although research has shown that the experience of

research may reveal that often individuals, in forgiving the other, discover that they have indeed forgiven themselves, ‘both of these experiences partake of the same depth’ and ‘either form of forgiveness implicitly touches upon the other’ (p.112).

2.4 THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE EXPERIENCES OF FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

Halling (1994), in his article on ‘Embracing Human Fallibility: on Forgiving Oneself and Forgiving Others’, points to an integral difference between forgiving another and self-forgiveness, saying that the experience of self-forgiveness is the more difficult issue to get at. Our feelings about ourselves and our own judgements and actions, infiltrate, influence and pervade our being, our lives and our attitudes. However, our feelings about ourselves and what we do and do not forgive about ourselves, are not implied in what we do and say but are also carefully concealed. Halling asserts that Freud was correct in saying that human beings have an extraordinary capacity for self-deception and concealment, particularly parts of ourselves, which we dislike, deny and reject. In addition, the experience of self-forgiveness is difficult to describe because there are no clear boundaries, unlike forgiving another, where there is an injury caused by a specific person involving and followed by a specific course of events. Halling warns that ‘with the issues that gather around self-forgiveness, we operate in murkier territory’ (ibid, 1994, p.112).

2.5 IMPLICATIONS OF THE EXISTENTIAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL VIEW FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY

Psychotherapists generally have formed theoretical and philosophical views regarding the essence of human existence. These views may range from an adherence to a particular theory and beliefs or a more integrated eclectic and synthesized approach to human nature (King, Valle & Citrenbaum, 1978).

The existential-phenomenological understanding of human existence is particularly significant in our world of technical and scientific advancement. The therapeutic environment is where psychotherapists are having to deal with individuals’ concerns and issues regarding the nature and meaning of their existence. The key concepts in psychotherapy are alienation (ibid, 1978) and existential isolation (Yalom, 1980). These concerns could be dealt with directly, using an existential-phenomenological approach to psychotherapy.

Moss (1989), states that a phenomenological approach to psychotherapy would require a 'human science' approach to human behaviour and experience in order to understand these phenomena; that psychological

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phenomena, behaviour and experience have an 'intentional structure', in that they are intentionally and meaningfully directed toward a situation or object; and more significantly, that in order to meaningfully relate to and understand the client, the psychotherapist needs to mutually experience the temporal, spatial and interpersonal aspects of the client's unique experience of the world.

Pertaining to the temporal aspect of forgiveness in psychotherapy, the psychotherapist deals with the impact of the pain of the injury in the present, as well as the experience of the client's mourning and loss of the past, present and future relationships, i.e. 'the past is the present and the future too'. The statement that 'the past and future only exist in relation to the present' (Minkowsky, 1970, p.37 cited in Halling, 1979, p.201) help the psychotherapist understand and situate the client's experience of interpersonal pain and loss regarding relationships within a time frame. Loss of one's past and on a deeper level, a change in one's present identity and 'the loss of a, particular way of viewing oneself and the world' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.235), interpersonal and intrapersonal issues pertaining to the pain of the injurious relationship, despair at the loss of past and hope in future relationships, are all experiences associated with forgiving another and self- forgiveness, which will be included in this research on the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

At an interpersonal level the psychotherapist's role in the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy is helping the client accept and integrate parts of the self, which the client dislikes and rejects, into the whole self and assisting the client with a solid foundation from which to move forward and face the future with renewed hope. An acceptance of the self, who 'one truly is', overcoming self-blame and accepting responsibility for one's own 'situated freedom' and role in the injurious or problematic event, are core phenomenological issues the psychotherapist needs to be aware of in helping the client move from an attitude of self-judgement to enabling who one is – a 'shift from fundamental estrangement to being at home in the world' (Halling, 1998, p.237).

Healing and change take place within the context of a profoundly interpersonal relationship between the vulnerable client, who has begun a process of self-exploration and the respectful, empathic, responsible affirming therapist (ibid, 1998), 'out of this develops a relationship with a quality unlike any other' (ibid, 1998, p.243). A basic therapeutic tool in the existential-phenomenological approach to psychotherapy is the therapist being present to the client in order to make the client present to the consciousness of the therapist with as little distortion or interpretation as possible. 'This client as present to the therapist, becomes the data for the therapy sessions' (King, Valle & Citrenbaum, 1978, p.270). The existential-

phenomenological idea is that a phenomenon is always located in the dialectical relationship of the individual in her world, i.e. the concept of co-constitutionality and that the individual could not exist without the other (ibid, 1978).

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The focus of the existential-phenomenological therapist is to deal with the client's life as it is lived, 'the concrete embodied existence of the client is the data of the therapy sessions' (ibid, 1978, p.268). In fact, all perceptions and experiences are subjective and the focus of the therapy is from the perspective of the individual experiencing the world in terms of unique 'personal history, present situation and future goals' (p.268).

The existential-phenomenological approach focuses on language and human reality and the clients recounting their personal stories. It is in the dialogue between psychotherapist and client that the client is assisted in constructing unique and different versions of self-understanding. It is within the therapeutic setting that clients are able to view themselves and events as 'different from their current view'. 'Narrative truth emerges from the dialogue between therapist and client which provides an organizing influence in the client's life' (Messer, 1986, p.1269, cited in Moss, 1989, p.207).

According to Yalom (1980), the single most important lesson that a psychotherapist must learn is that 'it is the relationship that heals' (Yalom, 1980, p.401). It is the encounter itself in psychotherapy which is healing for the client 'in a way that transcends the therapist's theoretical orientation' (ibid, 1980, p.401). Within the therapeutic encounter and the client's confrontation with her existential isolation, the therapist becomes the external reference point with whom the client can relate regarding the experience of self-forgiveness whereas previously, the self may have been the only reference point and it is difficult to describe the experience of self-forgiveness 'which has no clear boundaries' (Halling, 1994, p.112).

Yalom states that it is 'extraordinarily difficult to absolve guilt for the past in the presence of ongoing guilt-providing behaviour' and 'one must learn first to forgive oneself for the present and the future' (Yalom, 1980, p.349). The presence of the therapist as 'witness', may enable the client with 'educative insight', to cease to operate toward the self in the present in the same way that one has acted in the past. As a result, one can then forgive oneself for the past and cease to carry assumed, unrealistic, disproportionate guilt, shame and self-blame for others' actions and feelings, particularly pertaining to childhood relationships. Thus the therapist may help the client locate the appropriate boundaries of responsibility (ibid, 1980). In other words, the memory of the past 'is reconstituted by the present' and it is through therapy that one can change the image of oneself and thus, 'one may reconstitute or reintegrate one's past' (ibid, 1980, p.349).

The lived experience of self-forgiveness has been described by researchers as a moment from 'estrangement

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to feeling at home, from darkness to light, from deception to honesty and acknowledgement' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.238). Research has shown that self-forgiveness is a difficult ongoing journey involving a personal struggle, a to-ing and fro-ing between maintaining past illusions about oneself and others and coming to terms with oneself and others, resulting in a reconnectedness to the self and the world (ibid, 1998). In addition, self-forgiveness involves a letting go of one's old identity, expectations and beliefs, a grieving and mourning process for who one was and what might have been. More significantly, the experience of self-forgiveness is accompanied by an acceptance of one's human fallibility and the fallibility of others resulting in a sense of belonging to the human community but, at the same time, feeling a sense of separateness, individuality and freedom (Bauer et al., 1992).

This hermeneutically and existentially oriented research of the individual's retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, using phenomenological principles, will elaborate on the work of previous existential-phenomenological researchers in focusing on the experience of this phenomenon within the therapeutic environment, as well as the impact of this phenomenon within the South African context. Bauer et al. (1992), state that the complexity of the experience of self-forgiveness was reflected in both the cultural and personal contexts and that the cultural values of the Western world served to obscure forgiveness, a factor which had provided impetus to their study. This research may show that the profound political, social and cultural changes within South Africa which provided the background against which this study was conducted, resulted in the phenomena of forgiveness and self-forgiveness becoming common, familiar and more easily understood. In the South African context, the terms forgiveness and self-forgiveness are no longer spoken of in abstract terms but as central to people's existence.

It is evident, as previous researchers have stated (Rowe, et al., 1989), that these phenomena are multi-faceted and would have far reaching significant effects on the individual and on social, cultural and political relationships. In addition, the experiences of self-forgiveness and forgiveness would impact on the psychotherapist as 'witness' to this process, in dealing with clients in psychic pain who are grappling with this phenomenon in psychotherapy.

In Chapter 3, the religious (with a focus on the Jewish perspective), cultural (with a focus on the South African background against which this research was conducted), moral and philosophical approaches to

forgiveness and self-forgiveness will be explored. These approaches to both phenomena will be discussed in view of the fact that researchers have found that these phenomena are 'intimately related' and may possibly be simultaneous processes (Rowe, et al., 1989 and Rowe & Halling, 1998).

CHAPTER 3

3. RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL, MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Hanna Arendt (1958), rates the concept of forgiveness as one of the two most original ideas in world civilization (cited in Bauer et al., 1992). This concept, which is deeply imbedded in the Judaic/Christian religions, has largely been dealt with in the world of theology and religion. Although there has been an increased interest in this topic in the last two decades, this phenomenon has hitherto been neglected in the psychological literature and research, especially regarding the experience of forgiveness in everyday life and how the individual integrates this experience into her view of herself and the world.

Previous research has shown that ‘not only forgiving another, but the experience of forgiving oneself is common, profound and vital to one’s sense of health, human growth and psychological wholeness’ (Bauer et al., 1992, pp.149 & 150). As a conceptual problem, forgiveness has roots in theology, philosophy and psychology, because forgiveness is an interdisciplinary issue and philosophers and theologians often base their interpretations on observations of specific human behaviour (Rowe, et al., 1989). Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000) state that one needs to be an interdisciplinary scholar in order to ‘understand the multifaceted nature and deeper meaning of forgiveness’ (ibid, 2000, p.321).

In this chapter, the focus will be on dealing with the religious, cultural, political, moral and philosophical backgrounds against which forgiveness and self-forgiveness take place and which are significant in contextualizing and enhancing the understanding of these phenomena. In addition, discussing the phenomena of forgiveness and self-forgiveness within the socio-cultural, political, religious, moral and philosophical contexts may help to explain why these phenomena have become foreign, incomprehensible and often disturbing and abstract concepts, rather than being seen as concepts which are pivotal and critical to one’s experience. From a personal perspective within the South African context, (culturally, socially and politically), we seem to have come full circle. In the past there was confusion regarding the experience of forgiveness because our previously held contemporary and cultural values ran contrary to the attitudes necessary for forgiveness. At present, the experience of the socio-cultural and political values in South Africa seem to have become more synonymous with the experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness, i.e. ‘an openness to oneself and

others, to the metaphorical or mysterious in living and to mercy' (Bauer et al., 1992, p.151).

3.2 RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING FORGIVENESS

Literature from the ancient world, especially from Hebrew, Christian, Islamic, Hindu and Buddhist viewpoints, illustrates that forgiveness occurs within the context of moral right and wrong involving reduced resentment and increased compassion and moral love, culminating in transformation (Enright and Fitzgibbons, 2000).

The Jewish/Christian religions focus on the need for forgiveness because of sin and wrongdoing. The Old Testament deals with this concept in describing the myth of the Garden of Eden - Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge in direct contravention of God's command and in so doing, are expelled from the garden 'estranged from God, themselves and one another' 'and they realized they were naked' (Genesis 3:7 cited in Bauer et al. 1992). God seeks to be reconciled with humankind and in order to achieve this reconciliation, mankind is required to acknowledge their wrongdoing, embrace their sinfulness, repent, open themselves and seek God's forgiveness. Repentance and the acknowledgement of wrongdoing are based on the desire to reconcile with God and others. There is recognition also that there is a dependence on God's will for this to occur. Part of the religious teachings is that the ability and willingness to forgive others is also crucial to being forgiven. This is based on the assumption that in order to be pardoned and experience forgiveness oneself, one has to accept the fallibility and humanness of others, e.g. asking God to 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us' (The Lord's Prayer). The process of forgiving others and being forgiven, results in a sense of community and becoming aware of the similarities between mankind: 'one recognises one's similarity and takes one's place in the human community' (Bauer et al., 1992, p.150).

In South Africa particularly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of 1996-1998, clearly showed the aim of the biblical tradition of forgiveness in maintaining the integrity of community. The TRC (led by the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who fought the evils of racism during the apartheid years) sought to listen to the stories of both the perpetrators and victims of crimes against humanity during the apartheid era, and to reconcile and integrate these stories into the psyche of the South African nation as a whole. The commission represented and mirrored the religious teaching of calling us to confront our sinfulness, to be accountable before God and others, and to be merciful toward humankind. Forgiveness also allows us a future that is not determined by the past, and as Archbishop Tutu (1998) stated, 'humankind is freed to imagine and move into new possibilities'. He

further warned, that ‘without forgiveness, there can be no future’ (cited in Enright & North, 1998, p.xiii).

A Jewish perspective and reinterpretation and understanding of guilt and forgiveness is given by Rabbi Harold Kushner (1996). He looks at the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the concept of original sin, where we are left with the notion that we are supposed to be perfect and that we expect others to be perfect, because we need them to be. This leaves us feeling constantly guilty and perpetually disappointed. Kushner, states that when religion teaches us that one mistake is enough to define us as sinners and puts us at risk of losing God’s love (as happened to Adam and Eve in the traditional understanding of the story), and that even angry and hurtful thoughts are sinful, then we all think of ourselves as sinners. This defines every one of us as doing something wrong daily. He further states that, ‘if nothing short of being perfect will permit us to stand before God, then none of us will, because none of us is perfect’ (p.39). Our lives will thus be dominated by guilt and fear of having made, and of making, mistakes.

Instead, his reinterpretation of the story of original sin focuses on religion teaching us that God loves the wounded soul that has learned something of its own fallibility and its own limitations; that being human is a complicated challenge and we all make mistakes in the learning process. It is this recognition of our human fallibility and humanness which could result in a perception of our mistakes not rendering us unworthy, but as experiences we can gain and learn from. Kushner states that in changing this perception, we will be brave enough to try something without being afraid of getting it wrong, our sense of shame will be the result of humility in recognizing our limits and learning, rather than wanting to hide from something because of our wrongdoing. Our religion sets standards and ideals and can therefore make us feel guilty, but in addition, religion can welcome us in our imperfection (ibid, 1996).

According to Kushner, we have the power to choose happiness over righteousness and righteousness means remembering every time someone hurts us or disappoints us, and never letting them forget it. It also means that we will see that others will remember every time we hurt them or let them down and that they will constantly remind us of it. Happiness means giving people the right to be human, weak and selfish, and occasionally forgetful and realizing that we have no alternative to living with imperfect people, ‘because imperfect people are the only kind we will ever find’ (ibid, 1996, p.111). Thus the reinterpretation of our inheritance from Adam and Eve is not sin and punishment, but the burden and challenge of being truly human. On eating the fruit of the tree, we gained the knowledge that some things are good, others are evil and we learned how painfully complex life could be (ibid, 1996).

Another significant Jewish perspective regarding intrapersonal and interpersonal relational components as well as insight in the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others, is discussed by Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1968) in the translation of his original lectures entitled *Nine Talmudic Readings* (1990). Here texts and thoughts from the Talmud (the code of Jewish and religious civil law) are translated 'into the language of modern times' (Aronowicz, 1990, p. ix). Levinas states that according to Jewish law, the instrument for forgiveness is in the individual's own hands and that appeasing the wronged Other should take place before the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) - the day of fasting and the holiest day in the Jewish calendar - in order to be forgiven by God, 'the other, *par excellence*' (Levinas, 1990, p.16) (italics in original). According to the Talmud, one is obliged to ask forgiveness of the wronged other not more than three times. 'An evil requires a healing of the self by the self and the moral conscience must establish itself as a moral conscience' (p.16). Teshuvah or Return/Repentance is simultaneously 'the relation with God (the Other) and an absolutely internal event' (p.16). Thus, on the one hand, one is solitary and in the most severe position of isolation; asking for, and obtaining, forgiveness from God on the Day of Atonement. On the other hand, 'one must rely on the objective order of the (Synagogue) community to obtain this intimacy of deliverance'. Levinas states that it is 'a set day in the calendar and all the ceremonial of solemnity of Yom Kippur are needed for the 'damaged' moral conscience to reach its intimacy and reconquer the integrity that no one can reconquer for it' (p.17). This dialectic of the collective and the intimate is of great significance in the experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness, 'the power to purify guilty souls, so important within Jewish thought, is the communal basis of inner rebirth' (p.17).

In addition, insight is a significant constituent of forgiveness and self-forgiveness in Levinas' analysis of anecdotal texts. In his commentary, he states that there are two conditions for forgiveness: the goodwill of the offended party, and the full awareness of the offender (ibid, 1990, p.17). However, he explains that the offender is in essence unaware, and that the aggressiveness of the offender is perhaps his very unconsciousness: 'aggression is the lack of attention *par excellence*' (p.25)(italics in original). Thus, according to this interpretation, without the development of insight and taking responsibility for one's own actions, accomplishing genuine forgiveness and self-forgiveness would be impossible.

3.3 CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING FORGIVENESS

In researching forgiveness, there is no doubt that this concept is central to Western civilization and is

significant for one's general feeling of well being and need for peaceful existence. However, the difficulty in researching forgiveness thus far suggests to Bauer et al. (1992), that this phenomenon has become alien, disturbing and generally not understood. Significantly, these phenomenological researchers state that the concept has been discussed in abstract terms rather than as central to people's experience, and the confusion regarding the experience of forgiveness may be because of contemporary cultural values, which are not representative of the attitudes necessary for forgiveness: 'openness to oneself and others, to the metaphorical, or the mysteries in living, and to mercy. Instead, justice has become synonymous with punishment, mercy with weakness, strength with power over others' (p.151). This has had a significant impact on the human psyche, resulting in disease, and feelings of chronic guilt, isolation, loneliness and estrangement.

There is a growing awareness in the new millennium that despite major advances in science and technology and the availability of consumer products, expectations of success, happiness and personal empowerment have not materialised. The Western world has seen the rise of individualism, self-sufficiency and egocentricism as well as a lack of sense of community (Bellah, 1986 cited in Bauer et al. 1992). Wachtel (1989) states that this lack of a sense of community is partly responsible for an increasing preoccupation with growth and acquisition and that these pursuits can be seen as unsatisfactory attempts to compensate for the lack of community and human interrelating in Western industrial democracies (Wachtel, 1989 cited in Bauer et al., 1992).

In psychology (and other social sciences) this trend is reflected in the focus on scientific, quantitative and statistical investigation, as well as the overriding belief in rationality and technology: and that through this, the world can be shaped according to our own desires and plans. Unfortunately, that all this progress and advance has been at the expense of, and disregard for, the experience and suffering of human beings, is patently obvious. In the face of the idea that ever increasing control results in progress, there has also been a gradual increase in the movement towards an awakening of the spiritual and transcendent aspects of existence and an acceptance and valuing of abstract analysis in experiential studies.

The aim of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German philosopher and the primary proponent of phenomenology, was 'the rigorous and unbiased study of things as *they appear*' in order to understand human consciousness and experience (cited in Valle, King & Halling, 1989, p.6). Husserl's focus (1970) was not on a world interpreted and created by scientific fact and theory. His concern, was the world immediately experienced and directly expressed in everyday language to get 'back to the things

themselves' (ibid, 1989, p.9) i.e. the world, prior to reflective interpretation and scientific and technological views of life. In other words the world being 'given directly and immediately in human experience' the world of '*Lebenswelt*' or '*life world*' is the starting point or ground for the existential – phenomenological psychologist' (ibid, 1989, p.9).

Kruger (1986) states that in our western culture 'psychotherapists are tempted to look for shortcuts that really work, to develop ' psychotechnologies' which are generally applicable and which avoid the slow, often painful, work of psychotherapy'. (p.193) Kruger suggests, that the psychotherapist should have the ability to understand the origin and describe phenomena, characteristic of modern man, which are critical to contemporary existence. The author warns that the psychotherapist 'should be able to look critically at the culture in which he lives and to understand how the culture itself alienates man from his body and fellowman' (ibid, 1986, p.195). He continues that 'without this broad perspective, there is always a possibility that psychotherapy will degenerate into a set of techniques' (ibid, 1986, p.193). Without this insight, the lived experiences of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others in psychotherapy may be unattainable. These existential-phenomenological views of psychology and psychotherapy, are as pertinent today, as they were in the past.

Tragically, it seems to have taken the September 11th terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the U.S.A. – 'prime symbols of America's economic, cultural and military hegemony' (Sparks, 2003, in Cape Times, p.9) - to have resulted in a sense of community, interrelatedness and pulling together of the American nation as a whole. Western capitalism, democracy and technical advancement have resulted in an increase in international trade and communication; reshaping the world in both productive and disruptive ways (ibid, 2003). The impact of globalization is not only economic, but political and cultural as well. We live in a divided world where globalization 'has impacted on traditional ways of life and culture' and 'here lies the battleground of the 21st Century' (ibid, 2003, p.9). This divisiveness and attempting to understand the causes of terror, have mystified and overwhelmed the Western world. Sparks further states that globalization and a religious and ethnic fundamentalist reaction against it, defines the world in which we live and the underlying conflict of our times. The fundamentalists find these developments disturbing and dangerous and take refuge in a new and purified tradition, tending towards lashing out in violent retaliation. Generally it is important to understand that 'distributive justice' and 'righting the wrongs of gross economic inequalities', need to be redressed, and equally important is to understand 'the underlying cultural issues involved' (p.9). Also, significant for psychotherapists involved in dealing with the individual's emotional, social, and cultural world, is a greater understanding of these socio-cultural issues.

In the last decade, our South African cultural experience has indicated that terrorism, driven by deep cultural grievances, cannot be overcome by military means alone. We have realized in South Africa that revenge or turning a blind eye are no longer options if we are to co-exist in a diverse socio-economic and cultural climate. The answer to our problem has been transformation and it is within psychotherapy and dealing with issues such as the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiving others, and experiencing the full impact of one's humanness within 'the fragmentation and alienation of modern life' (Bauer et al., 1992, p.160), that this transformation has been possible. The solution was to deal with core issues which involved a proper understanding of the underlying cultural and social issues involved. Within our African culture, the word '*ubuntu*' (which is difficult to translate in Western languages), essentially speaks about the essence of being human, that 'my humanity is caught up in your humanity because we say a person is a person through other persons. I am a person because I belong. The same is true for you' (Tutu, 1998, cited in Enright and North, 1998, p.xiii). It has taken the tragedy of the apartheid era in South Africa and its impact on the South African psyche to return us once more to the idea of '*ubuntu*' and the African understanding and importance of communal peace and harmony. However, health, social, political, economic and educational issues, like violence and crime for example, remain a complex problem and an ongoing threat and challenge to '*ubuntu*' in a democratic South Africa. Tutu (1998) claims that anything that subverts this harmony is injurious, not just to the community, but to all of us and therefore, forgiveness is an absolute necessity for continued human existence. According to Tutu, forgiveness means facing the reality, 'the ghastliness of what has happened and giving the other person the opportunity of coming out of that ghastly situation' (ibid, 1998, p.xiv). Forgiveness also means calling into question the authenticity of your contrition. As part of the process of reconciliation, of forgiving, of healing and the willingness to make good, it is essential that restitution is appropriated. Forgiveness does not mean amnesia or a blanket condoning, which would be dangerous to a community at a national or international level; nor does it mean ever forgetting the atrocities of the past, in order that these atrocities are never repeated. 'If we don't deal with our past adequately, it will return to haunt us' (ibid, 1998, p.xiv). Thus forgiveness has ramifications for personal, communal and national life.

In dialoguing with fellow psychologists while researching the topic of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, Nelson Mandela's name surfaced repeatedly as an example of a forgiveness which has had an enormous impact on all our lives in South Africa and the world as a whole. South Africa was fortunate to have President Nelson Mandela at the helm in its transition to democracy. Mandela was incarcerated for 27 years for so-called political crimes, armed struggle and terrorist activities against the then South African government. His release from prison in February 1990

marked a turning point in South African history and had a marked effect on the 'rainbow nation' (a term later coined by Archbishop Tutu to describe the diversity and hope in the 'new South Africa'). Mandela's magnanimous and magnificent gesture of humility, asking for forgiveness and offering forgiveness to members of the former regime, his wardens and whomever he came into contact with, whether Percy Yutar (State Prosecutor - Rivonia Trials) or Betsy Verwoerd (wife of the architect of apartheid), earned him the deepest respect worldwide. Mandela became President and led South Africa out of what could have potentially been a civil war and political wilderness to the country's first national, non-racial, one person, one vote election in April 1994. There is the recognition also, that deep within this man, there is a spiritual quality in the way he has forgiven others. In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994), Mandela pays tribute to President F.W. de Klerk, the then President of apartheid South Africa, who made a genuine and indispensable contribution to the peace process. Mandela's words, 'to make peace with an enemy, one must work with that enemy and that enemy becomes your partner', refer to his relationship with President de Klerk and forgiveness of the other (Mandela, 1994, p.735).

3.4 MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000), maintain that forgiveness is centred in morality, which is concerned with the quest for good. When people seek the good, they do so in relation to others. Thus morality has interpersonal qualities, which are not self-satisfying nor hedonistic, and being moral implies good intentions towards other people. This does not mean that one ignores goodness towards the self, 'on the contrary, when morality is centred in relationships, the self is included' (p.23). Altruism, in which one gives up one's rights in order to help others, would be an exception. Two aspects of human goodness which are connected with forgiveness are justice and mercy. At times, these ancient forms of morality seem to be in conflict with one another. The *lex talionis* (eye for an eye) of Hebrew society is contrasted with 'love thy neighbour'. In Islam, Allah is seen as both just (which includes punishing) and forgiving (which implies mercy). The philosopher Gouldner (1973, cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000), contrasted reciprocity (giving back in proportion to what is given) and beneficence (giving something for nothing) as principles in tension within society. One would assume that a person who forgives has been treated unjustly by another person, or group of people. Forgiveness is the merciful response to this injustice (ibid, 2000). In other words, the person who forgives has a clear sense of right and wrong, concludes the other acted wrongly, and offers mercy. Merciful implies giving good things to others which they don't deserve, and refraining from the punishment stance they may deserve. Forgiveness may not be uppermost in the forgiver's desire for good towards someone who has unfairly

treated her. It could be centred on peace of mind and letting go, forgetting and reconciling, or a letting go of the negative energy without necessarily wishing the other good. In other words, justice can co-exist with forgiveness.

Another important moral aspect of forgiveness is that it implies transformation. With transformation, there may be a qualitative alteration in a number of areas. Firstly, the forgiver may change previous responses toward an offender; secondly the forgiver's emotional state may change for the better and thirdly, relationships may improve. 'Forgiveness is a developmental variable that shifts perspectives, feelings, attitudes, behaviours and interactions' (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p.24). Murphy (1988) states that forgiveness of a wrongdoing involves a change of heart towards the other (i.e. the overcoming of resentment towards her). However, the 'change of heart' is not necessarily a change in one's views on how the wrongdoer should be treated. Restitution, repentance and compensation is required. 'Condonation is not forgiveness' (Hampton, 1988, p.40). The theory of human worth, i.e. maintaining one's self-respect and worth, and/or being worthy of being accorded better treatment is, according to Hampton, of the utmost significance when dealing with forgiveness and overcoming resentment and hatred. According to Kant (1964), by virtue of having the property of rationality, we are intrinsically valuable as ends-in-ourselves, so that we are all equal in worth and have the same rank, relative to one another (cited in Hampton, 1988).

Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000) state that forgiveness has the combined attributes of a skill, a coping strategy and a commitment. If the practice of a moral virtue says something about one's character, then forgiveness, at least in part, is a quality somehow connected to oneself. In psychological terms, the act of forgiving may form a part of the person's identity as she practises forgiveness, knows it is good and realizes that forgiveness is not some quality that exists independently of the self or even outside the self but is part of who one is. 'At this point, forgiveness ceases to be only an act that one performs and becomes part of the moral self' (Lapsley, 1996, cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p.256). These researchers state that if this is true, then forgiveness and self-forgiveness in therapy, at least in part, is a deliberate attempt to transform character and identity in the client by expressing goodness towards an offending person or people and/or towards the self (ibid, 2000).

North's study (1998) on the 'ideal' of forgiveness is influenced by thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and philosophers of the Rationalistic school. North's view of the individual in dealing with forgiveness (when describing acceptance of forgiveness and offering forgiveness) is that of a cognitive, rational being, capable of thought, self-reflection and exercising some control over emotional responses to given

situations. However, she does assert that there is not a complete split between the cognitive and emotional sides of our nature; that there is also a 'spiritual' component. Her belief is 'that human beings have a spiritual side in which yearnings, hopes and fears are expressed and experienced' (p.17). Forgiveness, she states, 'is closely allied to this spiritual component of our nature and thus transcends the narrowly religious or denominational beliefs of individual religions' (p.17).

In addition, North believes that this spiritual side is connected in a complex way to our capacity for morally significant feelings and actions. Thus she states that forgiveness is of profound spiritual and moral relevance to us all, regardless of whether we hold more specifically religious beliefs. This view of the person would have a significant influence on Western philosophical thought, as well as important implications for psychology and psychotherapy, particularly in the realm of transpersonal psychotherapy. Here clients may come to recognize a profound truth, that no matter what has been accomplished in their lives true fulfilment escapes them and 'their attention turns to spiritual questions', more universal, moral and transpersonal issues and the experience of 'transcendent love and unity' (Wittine, 1989, pp.274 & 276). Paradoxically clients become more compassionate towards the suffering of others which results in responding more compassionately to themselves and their own suffering (ibid, 1989). These are core issues which are applicable when dealing with the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

North, (1998) describes the processes of acceptance of forgiveness and offering forgiveness as 'ideal in two ways. Firstly, these processes are described as 'ideal' in that 'they are ideal archetypes, generalized patterns, which describe typical stages that occur in most situations where forgiveness is offered and accepted' (ibid, 1998, p.34). Secondly, these two processes are 'ideal' as goals towards which the author believes, we should strive. The author states that the process of forgiveness encompasses and includes common human values and virtues. 'Restoring affection and regard, overcoming estrangement and alienation, accepting and welcoming others', are general moral values and principles which North prescribes in our interpersonal actions (p.34). In forgiving another, being forgiven by another, or forgiving ourselves, the author states, 'we experience and put into practice the moral virtues of trust, compassion, and sympathy which are the fundamental bonds of unity between all human individuals' (p.34).

However, the psychotherapist is not value-free and each client's experience is unique. Thus whilst one may agree in principle with North's insights on the 'ideal' of forgiveness, non-forgiveness without vengeance and forgiving without condoning or forgetting, may be morally and emotionally appropriate for the client in dealing with the lived experiences of forgiveness and self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

(These different viewpoints are discussed in the Theory and Literature Survey in Chapter 4, and the Discussion Chapter of the phenomenon in Chapter 7). As Smedes so aptly puts it, ‘the act of forgiving , by itself, is a wonderfully simple act, but it always happens inside a storm of complex emotions. It is the hardest trick in the whole bag of personal relationships’ (Smedes, 1984, p.2).

3.5 CONCLUSION

From a personal point of view, especially in the South African context, one notes that forgiveness and self-forgiveness serve to assist us in altering the significance of past deeds in order to help integrate this experience in our present everyday lives, view ourselves and the world differently and hopefully face the future with more optimism, less despair and estrangement and a general feeling of ‘being at home’ in the world. Researchers have shown that the experience of self-forgiveness is not a solitary act which one fulfils in isolation, but one which depends on a long process ‘not entirely of one’s own doing, which involves a radical shift in one’s way of moving in the world’ (Bauer et al., 1992, p150). This phenomenon is multifaceted and has far-reaching implications, both at intrapersonal, interpersonal and socio-cultural, political and religious levels.

Rethinking our spiritual, cultural and moral values will hopefully result in an increased openness and acceptance of ourselves and others. From a professional point of view, our values as psychotherapists have been shaken by events and trends which have stretched our conceptual foundations. This researcher’s basic training in personality theory has been extended through spiritual and moral factors which have opened up as a result of the shift in theoretical structure through this study. As Bergin (1988), states, ‘this does not mean abandoning the form or structure but building upon it and adding another cornerstone’ (p.22). For the researcher, this research on the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy meant adding a spiritual keystone to the building blocks already provided by the behavioural, psychodynamic, cognitive, developmental and humanistic approaches.

CHAPTER 4

4. THEORY AND LITERATURE SURVEY OF THE PHENOMENA OF FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, psychology has been conceptualized as a natural science; placing priority on experimental and scientific methods and shying away from phenomena that are closely related to theology and religion. Psychology has thus avoided topics which cannot be easily studied by this method (Giorgi, 1970 in Rowe, et al. 1989).

The experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness in the world falls within this category and is a topic which is resistant to simple definition and direct observation (ibid, 1989). However, in the last two decades, there has been a gradual increase in interest in the topic of forgiveness in psychology, although not much has been written on the topic of self-forgiveness. The studies regarding forgiveness include empirical research, a number of unpublished doctoral dissertations, literature for clinicians focusing on strategies for facilitating forgiveness with psychotherapy clients, self-help literature dealing with helping the individual with forgiving others and self-forgiveness and phenomenological research (Rowe & Halling, 1998). Reports of specific experiences provide a basis for integrating and interpreting in a more experiential and existential fashion, the sometimes abstract notion of forgiveness articulated in the literature (Rowe & Halling, 1998).

4.2 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SELECTED PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE AND THE RESEARCH APPROACHES TO FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

In discussing the selected psychological literature and theoretical approaches to forgiveness and self-forgiveness, I will endeavour to focus on the significance of the research, particularly regarding psychotherapy and the therapist's role in forgiveness and self-forgiveness. The reason for focusing on selected literature and theory pertaining to both forgiveness and self-forgiveness is that, as mentioned in previous chapters, these phenomena share the same depth and often are simultaneous processes although, 'it is not, as is commonly supposed, that forgiving others is a prerequisite for experiencing forgiveness' (Halling, 1994, p.112).

In order to create a theoretical and operational framework to understanding and conceptualizing the essential nature of forgiveness, various approaches to the phenomena of forgiveness and self-forgiveness

will be discussed. With the exception of the phenomenological approaches to the phenomena, the following approaches do not focus on the lived experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness as it occurs in the individual's every day world. These approaches were based mainly on the therapists' preconceived hypotheses, theoretical orientations and applications and/or guidelines for explaining and facilitating forgiveness and self-forgiveness in the clinical or therapeutic setting. In this research of the lived experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, a different perspective of this phenomenon will be presented.

The following approaches to forgiveness and self-forgiveness will be presented in this chapter:

1. The case study and psychoanalytic/psychodynamic approach to forgiveness and self-forgiveness.
2. The theologian C.A. Bonar's (1989) view of three personality theories, in an approach to forgiveness, within the theoretical framework of Jung's psychoanalytic theory about individuality; Dollard & Miller's learning paradigm and Maslow's humanistic approach in synthesizing psychodynamic/psychoanalytic and theological principles, in the application of forgiveness in the psychotherapeutic setting.
3. A psychiatrist's perspective of facilitating forgiveness and overcoming anger in the clinical setting.
4. A model of interpersonal forgiveness within the clinical setting.
5. A cognitive/behavioural therapeutic intervention in facilitating forgiveness, receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness.
6. The pastoral/counselling approach to forgiving ourselves.
7. The experimental statistical research and the application of forgiveness to various disorders.
8. The phenomenological approach to forgiveness and self-forgiveness, with the explanation of the phenomenological approach to these phenomena.

4.2.1 THE CASE STUDY AND THE PSYCHOANALYTIC/PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH TO FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

The case study has been a significant means of studying and understanding human nature, from the time Freud originally used this method in a clinical setting in order to study and understand his patients' difficulties. Martyn (1977) in her description of an abused child in play therapy, attempts to combine psychoanalytic concepts pertaining to personality structure and the theological principles of grace and forgiveness. The lack of a coherent framework in this article results in confusion in comparing these two specialized approaches.

However, of interest from a psychotherapeutic perspective, is that the author conceptualizes the therapeutic journey as a 'recapitulative miracle'. This is based on the observation and interpretation that within the therapeutic relationship, the child (or adult) will embark on a recapitulation of his/her infancy and childhood which unfolds at an unconscious level within the contained 'transference' relationship with the 'good enough parental nurturer i.e. the therapist' (Winnicott, 1971, cited in Martyn, 1977). The healing force is set in motion by the therapist (a different internalization from one's original distorted relational matrix), although the latter is not its prime cause (ibid, 1977). The resultant alteration of the personality structure and a less primitive internalized superego is the basis of psychoanalytic treatment. This results in a forgiving attitude towards the self and in less acting out and aggressive behaviour in the environment. The significance of this theoretical base is that the development of the self takes place in relational interdependence and not in isolation. It is within the accepting therapeutic relationship that the self of the client is able to accept and apply the 'gift-like' quality of the experience of compassion, grace and forgiveness to the self and others. In this case study of an abused child, the researcher applies psychoanalytic and theological concepts to forgiveness and the conclusions are based on the clinician's application, observation and interpretations within the clinical setting.

Hunter (1978), includes four case studies in a psychodynamic, psychotherapeutic approach to the individual's capacity for forgiveness in his paper on 'Forgiveness, Retaliation and Paranoid Reactions'. Hunter perceives forgiveness in relation to its polar opposites - the fear of retaliation and paranoid anxiety - as a response to psychic injury. Of significance to the psychotherapist involved in clinical work is Hunter's statement that the cognitive and developmental aspects of Piaget's & Erickson's developmental stages are involved in the individual's capacity for forgiveness. In addition, Hunter describes the process of forgiving in the therapy setting as helping the client overcome aggression and blame in her movement towards forgiveness. Of significance in the therapeutic setting is that the client's improved reality testing would impact on the self, in that the self seems more clearly separated from the other and the relationship

between the self and the other is more realistically assessed (ibid, 1978). While these insights may be useful in understanding forgiveness from a psychodynamic perspective, these speculations are based on theoretical principles and subjective observations in the clinical setting and not on the client's own experience of forgiveness and self- forgiveness as it occurs in her everyday world.

4.2.2 THREE THEORETICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OF FORGIVENESS IN THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC ENVIRONMENT, SYNTHESIZING THEOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Bonar (1989) discusses the significance of our human concern regarding forgiveness and our relationships with others from a psychological and religious perspective. He states that this concern can compel us to want a healing reconciliation with our God, with ourselves, with others and with our community, and asking for forgiveness can affect this reconciliation. The author questions whether psychological theories that attempt to explain our behaviour are able to clarify our response to a requirement based on our religious tradition of asking for forgiveness for our sins.

In this article, Bonar compares the three perspectives of the psychoanalytic approach of Carl Jung (1928); John Dollard and Neal Miller's learning paradigm (1965) and Abraham Maslow's humanistic approach (1965), in addressing the dynamics of personality which may be involved in self-forgiveness and asking forgiveness of others. From a Jungian and psychoanalytic perspective, the focus is on individuation and looking for wholeness and integration within the individual, whereas (as Bonar emphasizes), from a Christian perspective, reconciliation and forgiveness deals with relationships with the other and with God. In individuation, the archetype representing the darkest part of the psyche must be uncovered and encountered i.e. the hidden repressed negative parts of the collective unconscious must be dealt with and self-realisation achieved through the process of individuation. Jung's concept of personality concerns the inner processes and the personality is thus to be integrated independently of the way the individual relates to the outside world, while relations with others become of secondary importance. Bonar criticizes Jung's analytical theory for not considering what he identifies as a deep human need to relate to others and the transcendental spiritual dimension of forgiveness.

According to Dollard & Miller's (1965) approach, based on Freud's psychoanalytic principles and Hull's (1943) learning theory, human behaviour is learned. These researchers help us understand how our behaviour is motivated by drive (primary and innate, e.g. hunger or secondary learned feelings of fear, anxiety, etc), cue (guiding the behaviour, indicating appropriate direction), response (reducing the drive) and reinforcement (causing the reduction). Dollard & Miller combine the individual inner processes with

their effect on external behaviour. Bonar claims that this inner-outer connection offers a plausible, although only partial, explanation of 'asking forgiveness' behaviour in order to fulfil our deep human need for healing.

In contrast to Jung's analytical theory, which looks strictly inward, Maslow identifies relating through our belongingness and esteem needs as essential components of being self-actualized. 'In contrast to Jung, Maslow recognised that higher level needs can only be fulfilled by and through other human beings' (Friedman, 1984, cited in Bonar, 1989, p.49). Bonar states that 'healing through forgiveness becomes an issue when the relationships are broken or damaged, and need mending. With this healing, one can continue to receive love and give love' (ibid, 1989, p.50).

Bonar claims that the attempt in this article at integrating psychological theories on a functional level and faith issues on a transcendental or spiritual level, is mismatched. However, he does contribute to an understanding of the inner-outer connection regarding forgiveness i.e. that reconciliation involves not only the inward process of individuation and reconciliation with the self, but a healing reconciliation in relation 'with our God, with ourselves, with others and with our community' (ibid, 1989, p.50). The significance of this article within the psychotherapeutic setting, is that it focuses on both the inner intrapersonal, as well as outer relational, needs of the client in dealing with forgiveness.

Pingleton (1989) attempts, in his article, to integrate and synthesize theological and psychological perspectives of the nature and dynamics of forgiveness within the psychotherapeutic relationship. The author maintains that forgiveness is a highly complex phenomenon encompassing social, spiritual, volitional, cognitive and emotional dimensions of human experience and therefore holds challenging prospects for integration. According to Pingleton, there is a paucity of integrative conceptualizations and theoretical formulations about the psychological nature of forgiveness. He contends that the study of forgiveness is a theological term being utilized to describe a psychological process.

Forgiveness, Pingleton states, is necessitated 'whenever individuals experience a violation of their sense of fairness, justice or innocence' (Pingleton, 1989, p.30). In psychodynamic terms, the loss to the wronged individual constitutes an injury to the narcissistic grandiose aspects of the self. This loss is experienced as a diminishment of the self in terms of esteem, pride and omnipotence which also results in a deeper awareness of one's humanness and underlying vulnerability, helplessness, dependence and inadequacy (ibid, 1989). The psyche then responds swiftly in order to protect the weak, vulnerable, exposed self in an effort to ward off the pain of the narcissistic wound. In order to adapt, the ego acts defensively by projection of the self's internal fear, guilt and anger, externally on to the violator. This

sense of anger empowers the weakened vulnerable self in an attempt to protect it from further injury. Pingleton states that although this defensive externalization of blame can serve the adaptive purpose of establishing and/or strengthening healthy interpersonal boundaries and differentiation, it becomes destructive when excessive psychic energy results in destructive fantasies and/or actions. This hostility can harm interpersonal relationships when expressed outwardly and can be insidiously harmful when unexpressed rage and resentment, turned inward, results in depression, alienation, estrangement and the erection of protective defensive barriers.

Dynamically opposed to the sadistic ways of relating with anger to others, is the masochistic way of inwardly relating to one's narcissistic self with punitive guilt. Instead of projecting and blaming others for one's loss and pain, the individual becomes guilt-ridden and internalizes blame and self-hatred. Pingleton states that there is more to forgiveness than the social, spiritual and emotional components and that the cognitive and volitional elements of forgiveness are a fundamental necessity, based on the individual's decision to continue the procedure at each stage of forgiving.

Pingleton asserts that working through pain and hurt is a crucial factor in the requirement of forgiveness and he says that 'there is no short cut to healing and growth and there exist many obstacles along the pathway' (Pingleton, 1989, p.31). In fact, 'when forgiveness denies that there is anger, acts as if it never happened, smiles as though it never hurt, fakes as though it's all forgotten - don't offer it. Don't trust it. Don't depend on it. It's not forgiveness - it's a magical fantasy' (Augsburger, 1981, p.52, cited in Pingleton, 1989, p.31).

In discussing the facilitation of forgiveness in the therapeutic relationship, Pingleton (1989) focuses on the therapist's role in working through a client's resistance to forgiveness when the presenting problem in therapy is a 'generalized or circumscribed feeling of having been violated and/or victimized by others, oneself, the world, or even God' (ibid, 1989, p.37). The author states that the therapist's role is one of unconditional acceptance and positive regard in trying to recontextualize the pain of the violation. The client's resultant defense mechanisms such as denial, projection, rationalization, regression, isolation, splitting and undoing (which result in avoidant behaviour and social and spiritual alienation), are common in the therapeutic setting. It is within the safe, contained empathic trusting therapeutic relationship that the client is able to disclose the loss, anger and fear of judgement and condemnation. This results in the gradual self-acceptance of the client's true self. 'The experience of being forgiven implicitly by the therapist and set free from their bondage or entrapment of indebtedness, empowers clients to begin to forgive themselves and others' (Angyal, 1952, cited in Pingleton, 1989, p32).

Pingleton states that self-acceptance involves admission of vulnerability, dependence, weakness and inadequacy and facing up to the additional psychological loss of relinquishing ‘the immature defensively grandiose, omnipotent self and thus embracing more fully one’s humanness’ (Pingleton, 1989, p.32). The paradoxical experience within the therapeutic setting of gaining strength in order to admit one’s weakness and vulnerability, enables one to forgive. In abandoning one’s egocentric needs, one moves from emotionally dependent, often symbiotic, relationships to emotionally mature, autonomous interdependent, interpersonal relationships with others. (ibid, 1989). In addition, this results in modifying one’s unrealistic expectations of oneself and others. The ability to forgive oneself is intimately related to forgiving others: ‘the failure to forgive others is ultimately, the failure to forgive oneself’ (Pattison, 1965, cited in Pingleton, 1989, p.34). Pattison (1965) claims that forgiveness is ‘not a superego phenomenon’ but rather as Piers & Singer (1971) claim, ‘an act of a healthy cohesive ego’ (cited in Pingleton, 1989, p.34).

Fig. 1

A Psychologically and Theologically Integrated Schematic Representation of the Forgiveness Process



According to Pingleton, the psychotherapist is in a unique position to mediate the experience of forgiveness. In the transference, the client’s residual feelings towards themselves and others may be projected onto the therapist. This, the author claims, presents the therapist ‘with a unique opportunity for healing, if therapists manage their countertransference therapeutically by distinguishing between one’s person and one’s role’ (Wapnick, 1985, cited in Pingleton, 1989, p.33). The therapist, by not reacting defensively, empowers the client to change, not what happened in the past, but how to react to, and undergo, the painful experience in the here and now (ibid, 1989). Pingleton claims that, in order to do this

formally, it is essential that the psychotherapist recognises and endeavours to cultivate what he proposes as three organismic maxims of forgiveness: (a) forgiveness can only be received from God if given to others, (b) forgiveness can only be given to others if received from the self and, (c) forgiveness can only be given to the self if received from God. ‘This tripartite model of forgiveness is found in the Disciples’ Prayer (Matt. 6:9-15)’ and ‘the dynamic interplay among these principles’ is depicted in Fig. 1 p.35 (Pingleton, 1989, p34).

Both Bonar (1989) and Pingleton (1989) offer useful insights regarding the application of theoretical psychological principles to forgiveness. However, both authors, in trying to synthesize psychological and theological principles within the therapeutic setting, approach this phenomenon with preconceived psychological hypotheses, theories and religious beliefs. In this case, the therapist could be seen as being directive, subjective and, in Pingleton’s words, being ‘in the unique position to mediate the experience of forgiveness’ (Pingleton, 1989, p.33).

4.2.3 A PSYCHIATRIST’S VIEW OF ANGER AND THE HEALING POWER OF FORGIVENESS

For over 20 years, Fitzgibbons (1986) has carried out work on the meaning of forgiveness, in order to clarify ‘how it can be used effectively as a cognitive and emotive psychotherapeutic technique to diminish anger, in a number of clinical disorders’ (Fitzgibbons, 1998, p.63). Fitzgibbons has carried out this work in clinical practice with children, adolescents and adults and maintains that the use of forgiveness, as a psychotherapeutic tool has helped resolve clients’ hostile feelings and vengeful thinking, has helped reduce their emotional, physical and mental suffering and has resulted in successful reconciliation in various relationships.

Clinicians have increasingly come to believe that forgiveness can help clients overcome anger, resentment and pain and thus have attempted to formulate techniques and procedures in order to facilitate the movement towards forgiveness. In his article, Fitzgibbons (1998) focuses on cognitive, emotive and spiritual therapeutic techniques in order to diminish excessive anger and achieve forgiveness. The author bases his work on two aspects of the definition of forgiveness by North & Enright (1996), viz that forgiveness is ‘the process of relinquishing one’s feeling of resentment and thoughts of vengeance’ and, secondly, that forgiveness is ‘the process of fostering compassion, generosity and even love toward those who have inflicted pain’ (cited in Fitzgibbons, 1998, p.65). In this article, the author suggests that the four phase model, (i.e. the ‘uncovering, decision, work and outcome’ phases), based on the work of

Enright & The Human Development Study Group (1991 & 1996), would be useful in promoting forgiveness in clients.

Fitzgibbons guides his clients, by analyzing the origins of their pain, helping them with re-enacting the hurtful situation and then motivating the clients to make a cognitive decision to forgive and to let go of anger or the desire for revenge (ibid, 1998).

The second aspect in the process of reducing anger and encouraging the client to forgive, is emotional forgiveness which occurs in the forgiveness process when the injured party understands and empathizes with the offender. This stage of forgiveness is usually preceded by using cognitive forgiveness exercises in the therapeutic setting. At this stage, Fitzgibbons warns that the therapist can err by pressurizing the clients to forgive the wrongdoer too quickly and by not validating the effectiveness of cognitive forgiveness.

The third approach to forgiveness is a spiritual one. Here Fitzgibbons utilizes a modification of the Alcoholics Anonymous' twelve steps in dealing with anger, betrayal, revenge or justice and forgiveness. According to Fitzgibbons, all three of these approaches, the cognitive, emotional and spiritual approaches, can be used in psychotherapy, in order to help resolve the individual's anger from past hurts, present stresses and to protect one in the future from overreacting to hurt with resentment (ibid, 1998).

Fitzgibbons warns that 'forgiveness does not resolve all emotional pain, resulting from traumatic life events', nor can 'forgiveness alone bring about a complete resolution of the excessive resentment, hostility and hatred in our culture' (p.67). The author acknowledges the significant role of forgiveness in the treatment of mental disorders and expressing hope that, in the future, forgiveness will move into the mainstream of the mental health field in the clinical treatment of people of all ages, for disorders such as, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in children and depressive and eating disorders and certain physical illnesses, such as, coronary artery disease, in which hostility plays a major role (ibid, 1998).

Of significance in the psychotherapy environment is that Fitzgibbons advises that therapists themselves become receptive to examining countertransference issues in the treatment of anger. The therapist's 'own personal journey in attempting to resolve anger at different life stages', would be advantageous at various levels, especially when developing skills in assisting their clients 'to work through areas of resentment' (ibid, 1998, p.73).

In the above approach, Fitzgibbons does not define the theoretical and empirical basis for his conception of forgiveness nor for the intervention he proposes.

4.2.4 A MODEL OF INTERPERSONAL FORGIVENESS WITH COUPLES IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

In this article, Worthington & Di Blasio (1990) focus on promoting mutual forgiveness in troubled relationships. These include, religious concepts such as granting and seeking forgiveness, repentance, atonement and sacrifice between couples.

In this approach there is a 'preparation session' of the couple before the therapist-directed 'forgiveness session'. Here the therapist focuses on definitions and perceptions of forgiveness, as well as the differences and similarities between forgetting and forgiving (Smedes, 1984), with the couple making respective lists in the areas requiring forgiveness. This exploration session is then followed by the forgiveness session, where the couples discuss their respective lists regarding forgiveness issues. Each partner (with the therapist's support), is given the opportunity to forgive the perceived transgressor (or not), for hurt caused in the relationship. According to the authors, intimacy between the partners is reinforced, both in and after these sessions. The clinicians provide therapists with assessment criteria for evaluating whether clients have the capacity for the forgiveness session or not. They state that when defenses such as denial, projection or displacement are evident in the couple, therapeutic work is recommended before genuine forgiveness may occur. Also, religious and spiritual issues may either enhance or detract from forgiveness between couples depending on their religious beliefs.

The implementation of this approach is based on clinical judgement and not on mechanical procedures and Worthington & Di Blasio do confirm via their observations and interpretations of the sessions, that forgiveness can be a powerful influence on anger reduction and the restoration of healthy relationships.

In a response to Worthington & Di Blasio's article on interpersonal forgiveness, the Human Development Study Group at the University of Wisconsin, led by Robert Enright (1991), have addressed five issues regarding interpersonal forgiveness in psychotherapy. In their article, the researchers Freedman et al, (1991) state that therapists should first understand the subtleties in the definition of interpersonal forgiveness before introducing the topic to clients; secondly, forgiveness should be viewed as an unfolding process which takes place over time; thirdly, clients should be directed to forgive one issue at a time; fourthly, both the client and therapist should be aware of the concept of pseudo-forgiveness and lastly, one should consider whether a client should forgive even when an offender remains unrepentant. While this article may contain useful therapeutic guidelines in interpersonal forgiveness, there may be an imposition of the therapist's preconceived ideas of what forgiveness is, or is not, and thus the therapy may be prescriptive and directive and not based on the client's own needs or perspective and experience of forgiveness in her own world.

4.2.5 THE COGNITIVE APPROACH TO THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION WITHIN THE FORGIVENESS TRIAD: ON FORGIVING, RECEIVING FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

Since 1985, Enright and the group at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, have conducted various studies on forgiveness. The researchers devised a model in order to facilitate forgiveness (1991). This model was then revised in 1996, based on Al-Mabuk's assumption (1990) and Freedman's findings (1995), that most people need to be taught about forgiveness in order to begin forgiving (cited in Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998). This is in contrast to Patton's (1985) challenge that most people discover the idea of forgiving on their own. (Refer to the following point: *4.2.6 Pastoral/Counselling Approach to Forgiving and Self-Forgiveness*). According to Enright and The Study Group (1996), the terms 'forgive' and 'self-forgiveness' are, at times, misunderstood and easily distorted. He states that the therapist, reading about such issues, may bring a distortion and misunderstanding into the therapeutic encounter and thus an examination and critique of the concepts involved warrant a brief discussion. Enright (1996) states that a therapist's awareness of all three aspects of forgiveness may lead to greater clarity in the therapeutic encounter, as these three processes are not mutually exclusive and are, at times, interrelated.

Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1991 & 1996) and North (1987), have defined forgiveness as 'a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, condemnation and subtle revenge toward an offender who acts unjustly while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him or her' (Enright, 1996, p.108). Here forgiveness essentially involves an attempt to overcome resentment. Forgiving is seen primarily as one person's response to the other. Therefore a forgiver may unconditionally offer this 'gift', regardless of the other's current attitude or behaviour.

Enright, in his 1996 article, maintains that in therapy, focusing on the forgiveness triad goes beyond solving interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict. Therapeutic intervention within the forgiveness triad results in the individual gaining cognitive insight into the interacting perspectives of forgiving, receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness. The insight here would be on the relationship and intrinsic worth of the self and the other, rather than exclusively on intrapersonal and/or interpersonal relationships and conflict. Enright maintains that this focus would bring about a cognitive awareness, fostered on self-respect and moral love; result in an increase in moral strength; create a protection or buffer against continued anxiety, depression, despair and hopelessness and improve emotional healing and well-being.

Fig. 2

The Phases and Units of Forgiving and the Issues Involved

(In Enright et al., 2000, p.68)

(Note. This exhibit is an extension of Enright and the Human Development Study Group 1991. The references at the end of each unit here are prototypical examples or discussions of that unit.)

UNCOVERING PHASE

1. Examination of psychological defenses and the issues involved (Kiel, 1986).
2. Confrontation of anger; the point is to release, not harbor, the anger (Trainer, 1981/1984).
3. Admittance of shame, when this is appropriate (Patton, 1985).
4. Awareness of depleted emotional energy (Droll, 1984/1985).
5. Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the offense (Droll, 1984/1985).
6. Insight that the injured party may be comparing self with the injurer (Kiel, 1986).
7. Realisation that oneself may be permanently and adversely changed by the injury (Close, 1970).
8. Insight into a possibly altered “just world” view (Flanigan, 1987).

DECISION PHASE

9. A change of heart/conversion/new insights that old resolution strategies are not working (North, 1987)
10. Willingness to consider forgiveness as an option (Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998).
11. Commitment to forgive the offender (Neblett, 1974).

WORK PHASE

12. Reframing, through role-taking, who the wrongdoer is by viewing him or her in context (M. Smith, 1981).
13. Empathy and compassion toward the offender (Cunningham, 1985; Droll, 1984/1985).
14. Bearing/accepting the pain (Bergin, 1988).
15. Giving a moral gift to the offender (North, 1987).

DEEPENING PHASE

16. Finding meaning for self and others in the suffering and in the forgiveness process (Frankl, 1959).
17. Realisation that self has needed others’ forgiveness in the past (Cunningham, 1985).
18. Insight that one is not alone (universally, support) (Enright et al., 1998).
19. Realisation that self may have a new purpose in life because of the injury (Enright et al., 1998).
20. Awareness of decreased negative affect and, perhaps, increased positive affect, if this begins to emerge, toward the injurer; awareness of internal, emotional release (Smedes, 1984).

Enright’s model (1991 & 1996) of the process of forgiving another has been empirically validated. (See fig.2). The uncovering phase, decision phase, work phase and outcome phase of his model have been proven by other researchers (cited in Enright, 1996). Enright (1996) also uses the model of forgiving another in the areas of receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness, and states that using this model in these areas should be viewed as hypotheses in need of testing, as this model has not been empirically supported in these areas.

(A) THE COGNITIVE APPROACH AND THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION TO FORGIVENESS (i.e. FORGIVING ANOTHER)

Enright et al. (1991) describes the model of forgiving another as involving twenty units or steps. (See Figure 2). This model has been empirically proven (1996) and can be adapted to the models of receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness although the model has not been statistically researched as far as the two latter processes are concerned. The researchers state that these units should not be seen as rigid and step-like, but as a flexible set of processes with feedback and feedforward loops. Units 1 - 8 represent the Uncovering Phase of change as the person becomes aware of the problem and accompanying- emotional pain of the unjust deep injury. Here anger and hatred toward the offender are common. Holmgren (1993) states that a 'forgiver must accurately see and acknowledge the injustice, which in her view is a sign of self respect' (cited in Enright & North, 1998, p.52) in order to maintain her self-respect. Units 9 - 11 represent the Decision Phase, with new decision-making strategies and willingness to try new methods of healing.

North (1987) calls this a 'change of heart' which is opposite to the original position towards the offender and may not result in reconciliation with the offender. Reconciliation would be dependent on a behavioural change on the part of the offender. According to Enright (1996), this 'change of heart' may allow the person to assess the merits of forgiving (unit 10) before actually embarking on forgiving the offender (unit 11). Units 12 - 15 involve the Work Phase of forgiveness, understanding the offender, empathy, feelings of compassion and acceptance and absorption of pain. The Outcome Phase of Units 16- 20 represents benefits of the above processes, usually accompanied by an emotional release and finding meaning for the self and others in the forgiveness process.

The interrelatedness of forgiving another and self-forgiveness may be noted in the claim that Enright et al (1996) make that the 'change of heart' and compassion for the offender involves a regaining of one's confidence in one's own worth, despite the immoral action challenging it. This, he states, is accompanied by overcoming and transcending resentment. The paradox of forgiving another often has a boomerang effect on the self, i.e. when we abandon a focus on the self and give a 'gift' of acceptance to the offending other, we ourselves are often healed from the effects of the offence.

(B) THE COGNITIVE APPROACH AND THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION TO RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

Enright (1996) defines this process as the offended person's willingness to offer the cessation of negative attitudes, thoughts and behaviour toward the offender, as well as substituting more positive feelings,

thoughts and behaviour. Enright makes the distinction between deserving and being worthy of receiving forgiveness. He states that unjust offensive behaviour makes one undeserving of the gift of forgiveness. Yet all individuals are worthy of receiving forgiveness on the basis of the capacity for good will, while acknowledging the behaviour as wrong.

Another distinction needs to be made between hope and entitlement. The offender may hope for the other's forgiveness (a gift freely offered by the other) while the offender may not be entitled to it. Insisting on forgiveness makes the offender unaware of the gift-like quality of the offended person's act.

One cannot wipe away the original act which caused harm and it is part of an historical record (Minas, 1975, cited in Enright, 1996). According to Enright, the essence here is to distinguish between the impossible task of wiping away an event in space and time and taking a new stance toward the event, a stance which includes the acknowledgement of wrongdoing and taking responsibility for one's part in the wrongdoing. Once the offence is viewed in a different light, it is possible to receive forgiveness for an offending act.

Once again, one can see the interrelatedness between the processes of receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness. In therapy, self-awareness and the exploration of pain and suffering centres on the self-realisation of hurting another. Examining defenses such as denial results in experiencing guilt, remorse and self-criticism, which generalises beyond the hurtful act. These realisations result in forgiveness being received as well as empathy and compassion toward the other. The absorption of pain is an acknowledgement that the offender feels remorse, seeks change and can suffer as she realises the other's pain and waits for, but does not demand, a response. Absorption of the pain by the offender shows a respect for the other as a volitional being, one who is able to make the choice of forgiveness (or not) in her own time and way (ibid, 1996).

(C) THE COGNITIVE APPROACH AND THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION REGARDING SELF-FORGIVENESS

Enright (1996) maintains that self-forgiveness is the least studied of the triad. He states that the approach to the construct is that whatever one offers to another in interpersonal forgiveness, is offered to oneself in self-forgiveness. Self-forgiveness may be defined as 'a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one's own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity and love toward oneself' (p.116).

As in interpersonal forgiveness, a self-forgiver has a right to self-resentment for the specific behaviour leading to the offence, but she gives up the resentment nevertheless. Self-forgiveness is not the same as excusing oneself or condoning one's own unjust behaviour. The self-forgiver may have the insight to know that certain behaviours must change but nonetheless, sees the self as worthwhile.

This sense of inherent worth may only come about as a result of psychotherapy. 'Self-forgiveness may be a key to genuine positive change' (p.117). In the face of serious acknowledged wrongdoing, one may not be duty bound to forgive oneself with compassion, generosity or love, although self-respect is necessary. Once self-respect is regained during the therapy process, this may allow one to see the offence either as a wrongdoing towards another, or as a misperception of the blame of the wrongdoing and enter a self-forgiveness journey which leads to healing.

Unlike interpersonal forgiveness, which is philosophically distinct from reconciliation, self-forgiveness and reconciliation with the self are always linked (ibid, 1996). In self-forgiveness, we move from a position of self-estrangement to being comfortable with ourselves and others in the world. We are welcoming ourselves back into the community and are not minimising the wrongdoing. True self-forgiveness 'originates from a position of guilt, remorse and shame' (p.117). It is not an opiate which blinds us to our faults (ibid, 1996). He further states that excessive self-focus may result in an imbalance if self-forgiveness is practised to the exclusion of forgiving the other or receiving forgiveness.

In addition, Enright maintains that if self-forgiveness is recognised and practised as part of the triad, then the self-forgiver reaches out not only to the self, but to the offended and offending others. He states that self-forgiveness frees one from chronic self-resentment and self-flagellation and thus one may be more equipped to enter into mutual respectful relationships with others. Thus 'self-forgiveness becomes an indirect gift to others' (p.117).

An awareness of our own suffering results in compassion towards ourselves and we acknowledge and accept the pain caused by the actual offence and the suffering that has emerged over time as a consequence of that original act. 'As in the other forgiveness paths, this acceptance is the crux of forgiveness and perhaps of healing' (p.118).

(D) THE COGNITIVE APPROACH AND THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION REGARDING INTERACTIONS WITHIN THE FORGIVENESS TRIAD

Enright (1996) states that counsellors and therapists who include forgiveness in counselling and therapy

should be aware of the complex interactions of the three processes: forgiving another, receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness, which may enhance or inhibit the work of forgiveness in clients. He states that self-forgiveness is the most difficult of the three to tackle because it is the most abstract of the three forms, in that forgiving and receiving forgiveness from others have concrete referents, whereas self-forgiveness only has the self as referent. Welcoming oneself into the human community, reconciliation with the self and compassion toward the self are difficult concepts to grapple with. Therefore Enright states that understanding self-forgiveness makes more cognitive demands (according to the cognitive model) than the other forms.

Enright (1996) supports Bauer et al.'s findings (1992) that experiencing love and acceptance from others is the catalyst to self-forgiveness and thus the experience of acceptance and unconditional regard in the therapy situation would be critical to the experience of self-forgiveness. The research states that in many cases, it may be to the client's advantage to focus on the self-forgiveness journey independent of, and prior to, receiving forgiveness or forgiving another (ibid, 1996). These three processes should not be perceived as occurring sequentially. In other cases, receiving forgiveness may be a catalyst to self-forgiveness and/or self-forgiveness may occur with or without the other's forgiveness. Thus the three parts of the triad can be seen as complementing one another and may form in clients a 'forgiveness worldview'. (p.120).

Enright states that therapeutic intervention within the forgiveness triad extends beyond resolving interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict, although this may be the goal within therapy. He reiterates that the cognitive insight gained in the interacting perspectives of forgiving another, receiving forgiveness and self-forgiveness serves to refocus on the relationship and intrinsic worth of the client's self and other, rather than exclusively on the self and one's own conflicts. This focus would seem to result in the development of both self-respect and moral love. 'As a person cultivates and practices the issues implied in the forgiveness triad, the person is actually gaining moral strength, which should be a buffer against continued anxiety, psychological depression and hopelessness' (p 121).

4.2.6 THE PASTORAL/COUNSELLING APPROACH TO FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVING OURSELVES

The authors Smedes (1984) and Patton (1985) both focus on a mixture of psychological insights, theological assumptions and individual's personal stories that seem to have withstood the test of time.

Although these reflections do not examine the individual's experience with forgiveness in a systematic

way, spiritual insights gained could enhance the psychologist's wholistic understanding of the self regarding forgiveness. It is significant that the literature focuses on the theological and philosophical explorations of forgiveness because, as Rowe, et al. (1989) state, 'forgiveness is an interdisciplinary issue and philosophers and theologians are often basing their interpretations on observations of specific human behaviour' (p.234).

According to Smedes (1984), forgiving oneself takes great courage: the courage of love. Honesty is also an integral part of the self-forgiveness experience. Smedes asserts that we cannot really forgive ourselves 'unless we look at the failure in our past and call it by its right name' (p.71). Smedes describes passing through four stages when we forgive another for hurt caused. These are: hurt, hate, healing ourselves and reconciliation. These stages can also be applied to the self, in that we all hurt ourselves, our pain becomes self-hate and then hopefully, we heal ourselves. Smedes maintains, that when we forgive ourselves, we rewrite our script, i.e. what we are in the present is not tied down to what we did at an earlier stage in our lives. However, this release is not a simple process: 'the part of yourself that did the wrong, walks with you wherever you go' (p.73). He further states that 'the climax of self-forgiveness comes when we feel at one with ourselves again. The split is healed. The self inside of you who has condemned you so fiercely embraces you. Now. An integration has taken place, 'you are whole, single, you have come together' (p.74). He recognises that there is a vacillation and return to one's self-loathing and self-rejection from time to time, but one then returns to the self again, i.e. there is an ebb and flow movement.

Smedes states that to forgive your own self is almost the ultimate miracle of healing (p. 74). This requires honesty, clarification and differentiating between self-esteem and self-forgiveness. He states that you esteem yourself once you discover your own excellence, and that you forgive yourself after you discover your own faults. In addition, self-forgiveness requires self-love, courage in the face of the other's self-righteousness, being concrete about the reason for self-forgiveness, and forgiving ourselves for one thing at a time. 'To forgive yourself is to act out the mystery of one person who is both forgiver and forgiven. You judge yourself; this is the division within you. You forgive yourself; this is the healing of the split' (p.77).

In reflecting on different aspects of human forgiveness, Patton (1985), who writes from a pastoral/counselling perspective, states that the common understanding pertaining to this phenomenon is that it is not an act to be performed or an attitude to possess. He describes forgiveness as a discovery and says that the human problem is not how to forgive (as something to be done) but finding a way to discover the humanness of the other as well as the self in spite of what may have occurred. 'Being human is to recognize that I am neither above nor below the other' (p.184). Patton asserts that the aim of pastoral counselling is to facilitate this discovery, not maintain one's specialness through forgiving. The

implication of forgiveness understood as a 'discovery' rather than an 'act' is that 'pastoral caring is helping persons, not with forgiveness, but with the pain of being themselves' and 'accept responsibility for their lives and the guilt that goes with it' (p.186).

4.2.7 EXPERIMENTAL STUDIES REGARDING FORGIVENESS

The issue of forgiveness has also been studied using traditional methodology. McCullough & Worthington state, working within a natural science psychological perspective, criticize theological, philosophical and psychological understandings of forgiveness as not being well integrated. They continue that, given the potential benefits associated with forgiving, researchers and practitioners should continue to consider forgiveness a therapeutic technique and to investigate its effects scientifically. These benefits cited by previous researchers allegedly include positive change in effect and well-being, improved physical and mental health, restoration of a sense of personal power and reconciliation between offender and offeree. McCullough & Worthington (1994) state that there is not enough data to conclude that forgiving has any 'clear psychological or physical benefits' (p.5) and that research programmes investigating forgiveness should be carried out empirically using control groups, specifying the technique and treatments involved and using standardized measurements.

However, McCullough & Worthington assume, without any examination of the actual experience of forgiveness, that this phenomenon is a religious behaviour, a promising therapeutic tool and a 'variable' whose effects can be researched, measured and facilitated by specific interventions and techniques. These techniques would include persuasion and encouragement on the part of the therapists (especially those of Christian beliefs), working with injured clients, in order to help them forgive their offender. According to these authors, the therapist would be prescriptive and directive using techniques to prove a phenomenon which may not be dependent on, nor controlled by, the therapist.

Maltby, Macaskill, and Day, (2000), examine the relationship between forgiveness and self-forgiveness of others, as well as personality and general health measures. Three-hundred and twenty-four undergraduate students (100 males and 224 females, aged 18-51 years), completed measures of forgiveness of oneself, forgiveness of others (Mauger et al. 1992), the abbreviated form of the Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Francis et al. 1992) and the General Health Questionnaire (Goldling & Williams, 1991).

It was found that failure to forgive oneself was accompanied by personality and general health scores that reflected individual psychopathology, with both men and women scoring higher in neuroticism, depression and anxiety. A failure to forgive others was accompanied by personality and general health scores which reflected social introversion among men (low extraversion scores) and social-pathology

among women (social dysfunction and psychotic behaviour). In addition, a failure to forgive others was accompanied by higher depression scores among men and women. The researchers state that these findings would suggest that the concept of forgiveness can be related to individual and social psychopathology. These findings were consistent with an earlier study by Mauger et al. (1992), who argued that a failure to forgive oneself is 'intro-punitive' (reflected in depression, anxiety, distrust) and failure to forgive, was 'extra-punitive' (reflected in social alienation and social introversion). Maltby et al. (2000) extended the research of Mauger et al. (1992) to include a non-clinical sample using two forgiveness scales and found that their findings were inconsistent with those of Mauger et al. in finding that forgiveness was not significantly related to social desirability.

The study carried out by Maltby et al. (2000) suggested that similarities for sex in these findings and failure to forgive oneself, shares a significant positive association with neuroticism, anxiety and depression and that failure to forgive others shares a significant positive association with depression. The study suggested that there were differences between men and women in personality and psychological well-being correlates of forgiveness of others, but not in forgiveness of self and suggested the need to explore why men and woman differ in the forgiveness of others and are similar in their forgiveness of self.

The research findings of Maltby et al. (2000), supported the speculation of Mauger et al. (1992), that in a non-clinical setting, the failure to forgive oneself is intro-punitive and the failure to forgive others is extra-punitive. Of significance in the therapeutic and clinical setting, is that these results indicated that the concept of forgiveness was related to personality and psychological well-being variables and had implications for individual and social psychopathology.

While these experimental research studies would be helpful to the psychotherapist in dealing with clients trying to overcome general emotional, personality and health issues and also validate the usefulness of including the phenomena of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others in overcoming these difficulties, these studies would not take into account the freedom of the human being to act as an agent in her own life and to be able to recover her ability to be in charge of her concerns. These studies do not take into account the client's experience of these phenomena in her everyday world, nor do they consider the clients' experience of grappling with these phenomena within the context of their diagnosed disorders. This research reflects the transfer of the contemporary, technological, scientific model to the areas of psychology and psychotherapy. Sentiment conveyed in the past, that within statistical, experimental research, 'the truth can only be disclosed by quantitative measures and operations' (Kruger, 1986, p.201),

remains pertinent and applicable today. Kruger, asserts that what takes place in psychotherapy, ‘cannot be elucidated by the quantitative correlational approaches of standard psychological approaches’ (p.201).

Enright & Fitzgibbons, in their empirical research on forgiveness (2000), described working in various population groups with a wide range of disorders including anxiety disorders, substance abuse disorders, eating disorders and personality and depressive disorders, as well as working with children and adolescents in overcoming resentment and anger (which the authors state needs further research), and with forgiveness in troubled marital and family relationships. However, the researchers do not focus on the clients’ actual experience of forgiveness and their difficulties in grappling with this phenomenon within the framework of their diagnosed disorders. In this study, the researchers apply a social-cognitive model of four phases of forgiveness (see Fig.2, p.34), in order to fit certain guidelines in treating the above disorders. Results of this empirical research, suggest that forgiveness can be an effective therapeutic technique using the social-cognitive model of forgiveness, in resolving anger associated with depressive disorder; in facilitating the healing of anxiety disorders by resolving various degrees of anger associated with these disorders and in clients learning to resolve and control excessive anger related to recovery from substance abuse disorders.

4.2.8 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO FORGIVENESS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

Since 1984, a group approach to phenomenological research was developed within the graduate programme at Seattle University. The central part of the whole process was the dialogue among the researchers, and between the researchers and the phenomenon being investigated, which resulted in the method of research being described as ‘a dialogal approach’. Two earlier research studies using this approach were carried out at Seattle University involved the psychology of ‘Forgiving Another’ (1984 & 1985) and of ‘Self-Forgiveness’ (1985 & 1986).

Rowe, et al. (1989) present a phenomenological analysis *The Experience of Forgiving Another*, based on a series of interviews. This study focused only on the hurt inflicted by another in the interpersonal context of a personal relationship. The researchers addressed the following research questions: defining the nature of the injury necessitating forgiveness; looking at the initial responses to this injury; what enables one to forgive and, most significantly, looking at the core essence of the experience of forgiveness.

Rowe, et al. (1989) state that ‘the process of forgiveness begins when one perceives oneself as harmed by

another and ends in a psychological, if not face-to-face, reconciliation with the one who was perceived as hurtful' (ibid, 1989, p.239). Two dimensions were evident within this context. Firstly, the process was experienced at an interpersonal level and then, more profoundly, at an intrapersonal level, in that it 'opens one up to oneself and the world in new ways' (Halling, 1994, p.233). The experience of forgiving another was expressed as being more than 'a letting go' and as a new beginning. This also resulted in the authors describing this experience as being spiritual or transpersonal as well as interpersonal, although the religious or spiritual aspects were not included in the research group's initial agenda.

The researchers define the experience of forgiving another as a complex multidimensional process that moves from 'a tearing of one's lived world through feelings of hurt, anger, revenge and confusion, to an opening up to a larger experience of oneself and others' (Rowe, et al., 1989, p.242). Through forgiving another, one experiences a sense of freedom, a belief in the future, a kinship with the other and the self as though one has been given 'a gift'. The experience is one of transformation i.e. a 'sense of a transcendence, a more intense connectedness with the world and the self which is experienced as more expansive, more graceful, more mysterious than ordinary egocentric living' (p.243).

Rowe, et al. then extended their work on 'forgiving another', by looking at the experience of 'being forgiven' or 'self-forgiveness'. The researchers realised that the phenomenon of forgiving another is intimately related to forgiving oneself and suspected that they may be two sides of the same coin. In addition, they described self-forgiveness as a transforming experience, bringing one an awareness of one's own humanity and connection with the world (ibid, 1989).

Bauer et al.'s research (1992) evolved out of the two earlier research studies (1985 & 1986). The group researchers were dissatisfied with the level of understanding reached and decided to renew their study of self-forgiveness in 1988. This research was based on in-depth interviews with seven subjects and they concluded that the experience of self-forgiveness was both 'common and profound' (ibid, 1992, p.160) and that this phenomenon had been described not as an achievement but as 'a gift' where one moves 'from estrangement and brokenness to a sense of at homeness' (p.149). The description of the interviewees' personal struggles revealed the two sides of self-forgiveness, i.e. estrangement and reconciliation.

In their description of forgiveness 'as it is lived', the researchers concluded that self-forgiveness is a difficult, pervasive, long-winding journey involving the return of 'the individual to the human community', after the experience of 'brokenness and estrangement from the self and others' (ibid, 1992, pp. 154 & 160). The authors conclude that the journey of self-forgiveness is a transition from being stuck

in the past, 'holding onto illusions about who one is', to a renewed identity and 'coming to terms with oneself as a fellow human being, liking others, imperfect but no longer alone' (p.160).

Halling (1994) describes the experiences of forgiving another and forgiving oneself as bringing relief and a sense of a new beginning in life. In the article, entitled *Embracing Human Fallibility: On Forgiving Oneself and Forgiving Others*, the relationship between these two phenomena is explained by means of a phenomenological and hermeneutical interpretation of one individual's story of reconciliation.

It is argued that guilt and shame give rise to the search for forgiveness and that with either type of forgiveness, one moves into a 'deeper more profound connection with one's own life as well as the lives of others, one moves towards selfhood' (Halling, 1994, p.112). The author states that forgiving others is not a pre-requisite for experiencing forgiveness but that both of these experiences 'partake of the same depth', i.e. 'when we live from the heart, we forgive from the heart, from the centre where offender and offended are one, where healing has its roots' (Steindl-Rast, n.d., cited in Halling, 1994, p.112).

Of significance to our understanding of the two phenomena, from a therapeutic point of view, is that Halling states that self-forgiveness is the more difficult issue to explore as there is no outside referent (as in forgiving another) and there are no clear boundaries. Thus, it may be able to be revealed in the present research that the therapist (as the 'enlightened witness' on the journey of the client's self-forgiveness), becomes the outside referent and is able to explore, together with the client, the concealment and self-deception that we as humans use to protect ourselves and what we forgive and do not forgive. Halling states that it is through compassion and embracing our own human fallibility and that of others that 'we are able to move along the road to freedom' (ibid, 1994, p.112)

In an article entitled *Shame and Forgiveness*, Halling (1994) explores the experience of shame and its relation to forgiveness. The author states that self-forgiveness requires that one accepts, as part of oneself, what has previously been viewed as unacceptable or one has tried to change. Self-forgiveness requires that one overcomes one's shame and forgives oneself for one's vulnerabilities and limitations (ibid, 1994).

In their article on the *Psychology of Forgiveness-Implications for Psychotherapy* (1998), Rowe & Halling, describe the experience of self-forgiveness as a pervasive ongoing process which 'involves a shift from fundamental estrangement to being at home with oneself in the world' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.237). This estrangement from the self and others occurs as a result of a traumatic or stressful event in one's life (e.g. divorce, death of a loved one, abuse, etc). As a result this painful traumatic experience, the

need to forgive oneself (which may or may not be articulated) becomes an issue because the blame, shame and guilt.

This experience is so intense it pervades one's existence and the embodied belief is that nothing will ever change, the future seems dark and foreboding' (ibid, 1998, p.239) The experience of forgiving oneself is also accompanied by a change in identity, self- acceptance, and acknowledgement and the integration of previously denied or rejected parts of the self (such as one's own anger and the ability to inflict pain). One then gradually moves from an attitude of critical self-judgement to 'embracing who one truly is' (p.237). There is an intrapersonal and interpersonal aspect to the experience of self-forgiveness (as in the experience of forgiving another), mainly focusing on the awareness and acceptance of one's own human fallibility and that of others, resulting in a connectedness with oneself and the other, a sense of freedom as well as a positive movement towards faith in the future, healing and 'being at home in the world' (p.238).

In addition to the studies of forgiveness by Rowe, et al. (1989), there have been a few studies which have looked at descriptions of the movement towards, and the experience of, forgiveness. Rooney (1989), in his unpublished thesis, conducted a phenomenological study of five patients and how they found forgiveness through individual psychotherapy. This psychotherapy was not specifically designed to promote forgiveness. The patient's view of forgiveness was the focus in this research and not that of the psychotherapist.

Rooney concluded that these patients managed to overcome guilt in their experience of forgiveness. In addition, a common thread experienced in their psychotherapy was the 'confessional exchange' between client and therapist in which the client experienced a continued acceptance by the psychotherapist despite the client's 'confessions' of the pain, guilt, shame, anger about themselves, their behaviour and their treatment by others. This genuine acceptance and attention by the therapist to the experience and, perhaps offering a different perspective of the client, resulted in the client's reconsidering and reframing (via the therapist), her relationship to the self and others.

Flanigan (1992) undertook a study based on interviews with seventy people on '*Forgiving the Unforgivable*'. Flanigan described 'unforgivable' injuries as those that were inflicted by the significant others closest to the individual in her environment (e.g. parent, spouse, etc). These injuries involved betrayal, where the person's sense of morality was deeply wounded. This book is written as a step-by-step manual for individuals seeking forgiveness and as a result, one does not gain a complete sense of the subject's experience. Although the anecdotes of individuals who have forgiven the unforgivable, are informative and educative, these stories are interpreted from a cognitive and social psychological

perspective and thus, the individual's own perspective of her intrapersonal experience, pain and of forgiving another remains uncaptured.

Jeanne Safer (2000) states that our cultural belief that 'to err is human, to forgive divine' is so prevalent that few of us question its wisdom. Her book is written partly as an autobiographical description of her own lived experience regarding her relationship with her own father and partly on fifty interviews conducted with men and women of varying ages with diverse experiences of betrayal. As a psychotherapist, Safer proposes a paradigm shift, which challenges conventional wisdom and offers a new consoling perspective: that forgiveness (as it is commonly understood) is only one of many routes to resolution, humanity and peace. Psychotherapists, like members of the clergy, may also assume that forgiveness of others is the only significant solution to conflicts and betrayal. Safer warns that therapists must take care not to foist forgiveness and/or self-forgiveness on the clients but rather assist them in reaching their own conclusions, even if this means 'thoughtful unforgiveness of the other', which can be as liberating to the self as forgiveness. She states that patients intuitively know what their therapists expect, even if it is not explicitly stated, and that they comply without realizing it. This cuts off and interferes with the exploration and grieving process, essential for resolution and leads to compliance, 'false' forgiveness, a lack of insight and secret despair (ibid, 2000).

Safer describes the struggle to come to terms with forgiveness and betrayal as a living experience which accompanies one throughout life, rather than one that must be completed successfully in order to move on with one's life. The author continues that a real change of heart and mind is arduous, subtle and rare, that self-forgiveness is an experience which metamorphoses over time and that one may only achieve partial success as lingering doubt, residual anger, bitterness and grief may be typical rather than rare (ibid, 2000).

Safer claims that the resolution which may or may not lead to forgiveness consists of three essential tasks. The first task is to re-engage internally with the hurtful relationship; the second task is to recognise its emotional impact and the third task is to re-interpret the meaning of the experience and one's own participation in it from a deeper and broader perspective. The author states that this tripartite model applies equally to forgiveness and real unforgiveness (as opposed to vengeance which she likens to false forgiveness). Safer continues that the significance of the experience of self-forgiveness is in attaining a more three-dimensional view of one's life together with the realization and acceptance of what cannot change and the reason for this. 'Self-examination and fearless confrontation with the past, lead to understanding and acceptance of personal truth' (p.7). This, according to Safer, is the only genuine basis for compassion, liberation and, sometimes (although she warns, not always), forgiveness.

Ferch (2000) examines personal meanings ascribed to the experience of touch in the context of forgiveness in personal familial relationships. This study uses the qualitative method of hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990, cited in Ferch, 2000), which is based on an interpretation (hermeneutic component) and description (phenomenological component).

Data from in-depth interviews with six self-reported Christians was analyzed in order to determine themes in the meaning participants assigned to a forgiving touch within previous 'loving relationships. Analysis of the interviews revealed five themes which emerged in the individuals' lives: restoration of a loving bond (father-son and mother-daughter relationship); restoration of character (self-perception in relation to healing relationship wounds); lifting the burden of past relational pain; lifting the burden of shame and the restoration of oneness with the self and others (healing and the experience of the self being forgiven by another).

Implications of this study for psychotherapy, would be the transition within the individual from the acknowledged pain of injury, mistrust and powerlessness to renewed relational connection, hope and a sense of empowerment. The movement of the self from 'a stance of victim to survivor' and 'for the preservation of personal dignity' (ibid, 2000, p.168). The researcher warns that there is a balance in therapy as to when forgiveness is needed and when it is preferable to avoid reconciliation or when reconciliation is contra-indicated.

The therapist's role, Ferch states, is in the skill at 'exploring, encouraging and deepening the forgiveness process' which may be 'pivotal in a client's choice to forgive' (p.169). The researcher continues that, the clinical ability of the therapist to explore painful emotions in the forgiveness process, may promote emotional freedom required when a client forgives the wrongdoer and facilitates the environment for the forgiving touch to take place (ibid, 2000).

Ferch warns that the relationship between touch and forgiveness is complex and there may be a danger in unsystematic attempts to promote an intervention involving touch and forgiveness. This study indicates that forgiveness between individuals may be beneficial if both are willing, if there is an appropriate balance of power and neither person feels he or she is sacrificing identity.

Of significance in a psychotherapeutic setting is that the participants' experiences revealed that, although forgiveness is an internal choice, this choice is acted on, confirmed and often completed in relation to others (which confirms the studies of Rowe, et al., 1989; Bauer et al., 1992, & Rowe & Halling, 1998)

Touch becomes this action, in healing and forgiveness in interpersonal relationships. It is the confirmation and the tangible completion of what began intrapersonally for the participants. In this study, Ferch confirms that a forgiving touch can be viewed as a symbolic representation of the enduring relational connection and bond which existed prior to the severed loving relationships. According to Ferch, this study points towards clinical applications of touch between individuals. Ferch suggests that touch between therapist and client would provide valuable data which was not within the scope of the study (ibid, 2000). However, this researcher states that this would probably only take place under certain circumstances as this was previously a prohibited stance.

4.3 CONCLUSION

In the above selected literature review and theoretical approaches to forgiveness and self-forgiveness, various significant issues regarding these phenomena have been considered by the researchers. Useful insights include the need for forgiveness and self-forgiveness arising from intentional or unintentional harm; various responses to the experience of being harmed or causing harm, (viz anger, anxiety, blame, guilt, shame, recrimination, revenge, depression, helplessness), factors which facilitate forgiveness and self-forgiveness (such as taking responsibility for one's own actions and acceptance of one's own human fallibility and that of others); that forgiveness and self-forgiveness may occur at a different spiritual level to ordinary moral or psychological functioning; that one's past and developmental history impinge on one's view of the self and the world; that forgiveness can occur without reconciliation; that forgiveness does not mean forgetting and that often, not forgiving is appropriate. In addition, the experiences of forgiveness and self-forgiveness result in an acceptance of the self, a reconnection with oneself and others; a liberating experience, leading to a restored sense of hope in the future; a freeing from the embeddedness in the past and an alteration and extension of one's own identity as a human being in the world.

The abovementioned approaches to forgiveness and self-forgiveness (with the exception of the existential-phenomenological approaches), tended to be directive and prescriptive using techniques based on the psychotherapists'/researchers' preconceived hypotheses, theoretical orientations and applications, in order to prove their cause-effect relationships. Although these contributions to the field of research may be valuable, these forms of research would inhibit the unfolding of the lived experience of the phenomenon. The scientific, structural, more formal approach in psychological research contrasts with the psychotherapist's 'intuitive sense of human nature' as well as not 'doing justice to the realities of human life' (Valle, King & Halling, 1989, p.3). The unknown in our world has not necessarily been fully explored by scientific methods and techniques, neither is the individual's experience of her lived world easily observable or quantifiable.

In keeping with the existential-phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches to studying this phenomenon, the aim was a 'rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear so that the researcher might reach an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience' (ibid, 1989, p.6). This was a different conceptualisation for studying the human experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy in that the researcher, was not guided by the experience in a determined way and could conduct this research of the individual's significant experience in psychotherapy, without specific guidelines and predetermined hypotheses. This was the world as lived and experienced by the individual and not the hypothetical entity, separate from or independent of the individual's experience. The participants' therapy was not directed towards this experience, nor was it prescribed by the psychotherapist in psychotherapy. The retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy was from the client's perspective and was not that of the psychotherapist.

The rationale of conducting further hermeneutic/existential research of the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy (using phenomenological principles in the data analysis), was to confirm and elaborate on the existential-phenomenological research carried out mainly by the group at Seattle University. However, in this study, instead of locating forgiveness in the context of particular lives in the course of ordinary living, the experience of self-forgiveness in individuals who had undergone psychotherapy was included.

The implications of a phenomenological understanding of the experience of forgiveness and self-forgiveness in psychotherapy are based on the assumptions of Rowe & Halling (1998) regarding the process of psychotherapy, their understanding of the place of these phenomena within the context of psychotherapy and the role of the psychotherapist working with the client's psychic pain and facilitating the movement towards forgiveness.

The authors cite the following implications of a phenomenological understanding of forgiveness for psychotherapy:

1. That healing and change take place within the context of a deep interpersonal relationship.
2. That a mutual faith exists on the part of the psychotherapist and client in the individual's processes and that of psychotherapy.
3. That a unique psychotherapeutic relationship evolves out of the spoken and tacit interaction between psychotherapist and client.

4. That the therapist brings the self to the therapy relationship which includes one's own life experience and one's own personal psychotherapy and training in response to clients and their living. Here the psychotherapists always need to be aware and insightful as to their limitations as human beings and psychotherapists. (This is discussed in Chapter 7).
5. That there is the assumption that the individual chooses psychotherapy in order to make a change in her life, although neither the manner of change nor the route would be immediately clear to either the client or the psychotherapist.
6. That individuals are essentially interpersonal beings and a disturbance in their ability to enjoy community participation, means a disturbance in their ability to enjoy themselves.

These authors state that open acknowledgement and an assessment of the injury as experienced by the individual, is a crucial part regarding forgiveness in psychotherapy. 'The attitude of genuine regard for experience is at the heart of depth psychotherapy' (Rowe & Halling, 1998, p.245). The acceptance, sensitivity and patience of the psychotherapist, are ideal facilitators of forgiveness and 'thus the two processes of forgiveness and psychotherapy are harmonious' (p.245). These authors conclude that 'the better the psychotherapist understands the nature of injury and forgiveness, the more comfortable he or she will be as 'witness' to the process, even when forgiveness is never explicitly on the agenda' (p.245). This may be true of this research of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

CHAPTER 5**5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY****5.1 AIM OF THE RESEARCH**

Using a mixed method in which the phenomenological principles of data reduction were used (Giorgi, 1975), six participants' retrospective experiences of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy were investigated in order to provide an experientially based and clinically useful understanding of this experience, i.e. the undertaking of the systematic study of human phenomena as they are actually lived, enacted and experienced by human beings. In addition, a hermeneutic approach was applied to the subjects' responses, to the researcher's own and to the discussions within the psychologists' group.

According to Giorgi (1975), 'Phenomenology is the study of the structure, and the variations of structure, of the consciousness to which any thing, event or person appears' in order to elucidate both that which appears and the manner in which it appears, as well as the overall structure which includes only 'that which appears precisely as it presents itself' (pp. 80 & 84). In other words, 'man can only speak of that which appears to his/her stream of consciousness or experience' and Giorgi states that 'the minimum condition for the study of anything is that it be present to someone's consciousness' (p.84). As Fischer (1983) so aptly puts it, the researcher would like to 'reawaken reflectively understand and articulately characterize the psychological meanings of the human phenomenon' (p.64).

In understanding the experience of self-forgiveness as it is lived and experienced in the individual's world, it is important to explain how self-forgiveness is involved in a situation not only pertaining to the self, but in relation to the other. In other words, self-forgiveness is a relational phenomenon and 'describes the manner in which a person co-creates, is affected by, and responds to, a situation' (ibid, 1983, p.65). Thus the aim of this study is to research the experience of self-forgiveness in the individual's world, as well as the interrelated meanings of the situation(s) in his/her life which gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness. It also aims to research the styles individuals use to live out their situation and how they experience this phenomenon in psychotherapy.

5.2 METHOD

In this study, a mixed research approach was used, based on Giorgi's psychological, scientific,

phenomenological principles of data reduction. As Giorgi (1985) states, the guiding theme of phenomenology is to go ‘back to the things themselves’ (Husserl, 1900, cited in Giorgi, 1985, p.8). For an existential-phenomenological psychologist, ‘the interpretation of that expression means to go to the everyday world where people are living through various phenomena in actual situations’ (ibid, 1985, p.8).

In this study, the set of data was subjected to a mixed existential/hermeneutic interpretive approach, as was the dialogue within the psychologists’ group (based on the dialogal research method at Seattle University, 1984-1998). This was done in order to elaborate on the understanding of themes which I, as the primary researcher, had extrapolated from the data obtained with the six participants I had interviewed over two sessions. The assumption that the group would provide an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon was based on the fact that according to Rowe & Halling (1998), understanding and interpretation arose out of dialogue, particularly pertaining to a phenomenon such as self-forgiveness, which is fundamentally interpersonal and ‘could be studied most appropriately using a method characterized by open and ongoing conversation’ (p.231).

5.3 SOURCES OF DATA

There were two sources of data using empirical phenomenological principles in order to analyze the individual’s retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in his/her world and psychotherapy, as well as an existential hermeneutic approach to the subjects’ responses, to the researcher’s own interpretations and to the dialogue within the psychologists’ group.

The first was gaining data on the phenomenon from initial and follow-up in-depth interviews with six research participants (former therapy clients) and checking interpretive themes against various data collections (from previous research) in order to verify existing data and/or introduce new data or elaborate on interpretations.

The second was the dialogal group discussions involving the group’s understanding and experience of the phenomenon. The significance of the discussions with fellow psychologists was that while it was important to get close to the phenomenon in order to let its dimensions emerge, it was also important to be able to distance oneself from the phenomenon in order ‘to be able to share one’s articulation imaginatively with someone else’. In other words, ‘the truth requires a third as witness’ (Kruger, 1986, p. 201).

5.4 THE DATA COLLECTION

5.4.1 THE INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The six participating clients consisted of four women and two men (ranging in ages from 22 to 55 years) who had been in psychotherapy with the researcher (duration of between six to eighteen months) and all of whom had now completed psychotherapy. The clients were selected at random, the only prerequisite being that they had terminated therapy. The selection was also based on their consent and availability. (See Client Permission Form, Appendix B)

It must be emphasized that their reason for contracting for psychotherapy was not in order to seek self-forgiveness and neither had these clients specifically dealt with the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness in psychotherapy. It was only once the psychotherapy had ended that they were asked about their understanding and experience of this phenomenon and that they reflected retrospectively on their experience of this phenomenon in psychotherapy. In addition, this study focused on the view of the client who experienced self-forgiveness and was not that of the psychologist.

Brief descriptions of the six clients interviewed follow, introducing them by pseudonym and giving the reason for their referral to psychotherapy as well as a sense of the circumstances that may have given rise to the need for self-forgiveness:

Vernon, (Subject A), a professional man in his thirties, had been in therapy for six months. The reason for referral for psychotherapy was panic and anxiety as a result of dysfunctional childhood experiences and a painful relationship with his father.

Sally, (Subject B), a journalist aged twenty-two years, had been in therapy for nine months. The reason for referral to psychotherapy was panic and anxiety as a result of traumatic childhood experiences connected with sexual abuse and her parents' dysfunctional behaviour.

Justine, (Subject C), a woman in her early forties and the mother of two young children, had been in therapy for nine months. The reason for referral was to work on her marital issues and childhood experiences.

Kathy, (Subject D), a successful businesswoman in her late thirties, recently separated from her husband and the mother of two young children, had been in therapy for fifteen months. Ongoing stress in her marriage was the reason for referral for psychotherapy.

Michael, (Subject E), a businessman in his early thirties, had been in therapy for eighteen months. The referral reason for psychotherapy was panic and anxiety as a result of dysfunctional childhood experiences and his recent divorce.

Wilma, (Subject F), a nursery school owner/manager in her early fifties, had been in therapy for twelve months. She was in a second marriage and mother of four children from a previous marriage (two teenagers and two young adults) whom she had raised single-handedly after the divorce from their father. She was referred to psychotherapy for panic and anxiety as a result of unresolved issues with her former husband.

5.4.2 THE DIALOGAL GROUP PARTICIPANTS

The four psychologists (including this researcher) participating in the informal dialogal group consisted of three female and one male of varying ages, from varying backgrounds and religious beliefs. All had different theoretical training and approaches to their work, and studied at different training institutions within South Africa. One of the participating psychologists had been on the Masters' training programme at Seattle University. All the psychologists have had their own psychotherapy practices from between five to twenty years. (See Confidentiality Form For Participating Psychologists' Group, in Appendix E).

5.5 PROCEDURE

5.5.1 THE COLLECTION OF THE DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Each participating client was interviewed over two sessions. A third interview with one of the

participants was conducted, as it was clear that an additional session was required in order for her to reflect and elaborate further on her experience, so that a mutual understanding of the phenomenon could be reached. In interviewing the six participants regarding their experience of self-forgiveness, this researcher was principally guided by a respectful concern for the phenomenon. The subjects were encouraged to recollect and articulate their own understandings and experiences of self-forgiveness.

At the outset of the first interview, when the individual had agreed to participate as a subject in this research, each participant was reminded about the parameters and conditions of this involvement. (See Sample Introduction for Participant Interviews, Appendix C, adapted from Rooney, 1989). Each participant was then asked to sign a consent form (reproduced in Appendix D, adapted from Rooney, 1989).

The following four general questions were then presented and audiotaped in the first interview: (See Appendix A).

1. **‘Can you tell me what self-forgiveness means to you?’** (adapted from Bauer et al., 1992).
2. **‘What situation or situations in your life gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness?’** (adapted from Rowe, et al., 1989).
3. **‘Can you tell me a time in your life when self-forgiveness was an issue?’** (adapted from Bauer et al., 1992).¹
4. **‘How did your experience in psychotherapy contribute to your understanding of self-forgiveness?’**

‘The only sense in which the subjects’ description is focused by the instructions, is that both situational and subject meanings of the phenomenon are solicited’ (Fischer, 1982, p.66). Thus an attempt is made ‘to remain faithful to the realization that every phenomenon is situated and that it is a phenomenon for someone’, the aim being to induce the individual’s own concrete, situated, and yet unrestricted,

¹. Only the data obtained in questions 1, 2 and 4 were used in the analysis as it was found by the researcher that the participants’ responses to question 3 were often repetitive of question 2.

5.5.2 THE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

A follow-up interview was conducted once the audio-taped responses to the questions had been transcribed. In the follow-up interview, the subject was given a copy of his/her original description to read and a clarification and/or elaboration of the original descriptions was then requested. No new material was introduced, which ensured the protection of the phenomenon as the subject experienced it, free from the researcher's own preconceptions. This procedure of having the subject read his/her original descriptions helped to situate the subject in the situation that had been experienced and thus facilitated the recall of finer details (Fischer, 1982).

The second interview provided the interviewer and the interviewee an opportunity to reflect on the lived experience presented. The clients responded to the research questions being asked, with both interviews being conversational and open-ended. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were both audio-taped and transcribed.

Each interview was conducted as a collaborative dialogue. The interviewer/researcher tried to be as empathically aware and completely present to the participant as possible. At times, the researcher asked questions for clarification and elaboration, until both the interviewer and interviewee felt a sense of mutual understanding of the phenomenon being explored. An effort was made to keep the questions as open-ended and as non-directive as possible in order not to influence the participant's responses. Interviews ended when a clear empathic understanding and description of the experience of the phenomenon had been obtained.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Staying with the phenomenon meant reading the transcripts at the same time as listening to the audio recording of the scripts. The scripts were then re-read numerous times in order to empathically enter the world of the participant's lived experience rather than being an objective observer. The fact that this researcher had conducted the psychotherapy as well as the interviews, meant that a therapeutic relationship and bonding had occurred. This resulted in the participants being more relaxed and uninhibited about their discussions. However, because of this, client bias could have interfered with his/her discussion regarding the psychotherapy (see Limitations of Research).

Each script was edited by removing or altering all identifying information and fictitious names were

assigned to each of the participants and any other person(s) or places mentioned in their interviews. Questions or remarks by the researcher were deleted, as were those comments judged by the researcher to be repetitive.

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These judgements were based on assessing each statement pertaining to ‘what is revelatory about this question’ and ‘how does this statement shed light on the participant’s experience of finding forgiveness?’ (Wertz, 1983, cited in Rooney, 1989, p.46).

The initial editing process attempted to retain the participant’s own words and only identifying data was changed in order to maintain the participant’s anonymity. This resulted in a more concise version of the participant’s original descriptions in the initial interview.

Questions or remarks made by the researcher were edited. In addition, only statements which were based on the relevance of the individual’s experience of the phenomenon in his/her own world were included. Editing of the scripts resulted in a more concise version of the original descriptions made by each participant in his/her interviews.

5.6 DATA ANALYSIS

5.6.1 THE APPLICATION OF THE EMPIRICAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD TO THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

The data was analyzed in a way that was proposed by Giorgi (1975). A brief description of the structure follows (adapted from de Koning, 1979, in Giorgi et al., 1979; Fischer, 1982, & Giorgi, 1985):

- The researcher reads the entire description of the situation in order to get a sense of the whole.
- The researcher then reads the same descriptions and describes each time that a transition in meaning is perceived with respect to the intention of discovering the meaning of the phenomenon. This procedure results in a creation of a sense of meaning units or constituents.
- Redundancies within the meaning units are then eliminated and the researcher clarifies or elaborates the meaning of the units by relating them to each other and to the sense of the whole.

- The researcher reflects on the given units (expressed essentially in the concrete, everyday, spontaneous language of the subject) and then goes through all of the meaning units and expresses

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the psychological insights and themes in more precise and direct psychological terminology. This is especially true of the meaning units most relevant of the phenomenon under consideration. These transformed psychological insights and themes are listed under the heading of Thematic Meaning Units, in a second column which corresponds directly to the subject's concrete language of the Natural Meaning Units in the first column.

- The researcher then synthesizes all of the transformed Thematic Meaning Units into a consistent description for each of the six participants' respective experiences of the phenomenon. The analysis of each individual description is the achievement of a situated structural description, i.e. a characterization of how self-forgiveness was lived and experienced by each of the particular subjects in each of their particular situations.
- In this research, the situated structural descriptions were grouped under three headings. These headings were the experience of self-forgiveness as lived and experienced by the respective participants; situation(s) in their respective lives which gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness and their respective experiences of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.
- After completing the situated structural descriptions of each of the six participants' experiences of the phenomenon as described above, an attempt was made by the researcher to determine the general themes around which each of the situated structural descriptions was a variation. A general psychological description of the phenomenon was then formed bearing in mind what general meanings these situations and experiences shared, and as such, how they constituted examples of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy.

5.6.2 THE DIALOGAL GROUP'S REFLECTIVE DISCUSSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

Group dialogue on the phenomenon took place with three psychologists (including this researcher),

during six two-hourly audio-taped sessions over a period of six months. Initially, these open-ended general discussions focused on reading and discussing the literature on forgiveness and self-forgiveness and sharing our own descriptions and experiences of the phenomenon. These discussions then progressed to informally discussing, clarifying and elaboration of the data/scripts.

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Similar to Leifer's (1986) analysis of the dialogal research of the group at Seattle University (cited in Rowe & Halling, 1998), audio recordings of dialoguing within our group meetings confirmed that the context in which the research happens is constituted by three levels of dialogue. These levels are preliminary; transitional; and fundamental. The movement is from preliminary to fundamental dialogue; being the movement from abstract, disjointed, generalized discussion, to a more focused experientially grounded one. It is from this dialogue that a collective understanding emerged (Rowe, et al., 1989). All three levels of dialogue were present in each of our collaborative group discussions and did not happen sequentially.

In addition, the dialogue was not merely between ourselves 'about' the data but more dialogue 'with' the phenomenon (ibid, 1989). We were all personally touched by the phenomenon being studied, which had a direct impact on the group. During one session, discussions of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, brought to mind the psychologists' own subjective experiences which were personal and painful and, at times, threatening to 'one's sense of the world', which left one feeling vulnerable (Bauer, 1992, p.153). This self-revelatory session reflected the experiential reality of self-forgiveness in our own lives. Themes relating to the phenomenon which were also based on our personal experiences emanated in these discussions. Gradually a broader general understanding of the phenomenon emerged, as well as an understanding of the role of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy and the value of understanding, both forgiveness and self-forgiveness as therapeutic tools in helping clients deal with these issues in psychotherapy.

The dialoguing investigative process helped the group differentiate between experiential description and theoretical generalization. Ultimately, it got us back to the core essence of the phenomenon itself. The dialogue 'made the phenomenon come alive for us, within us and before us' (Halling & Leifer, 1991, p.10). Dialoguing not only assisted with the group discussion, but resulted in a group cohesion and bonding. Each person's personal account and observations pointed to a larger whole rather than a statement about an individual life. This helped us understand the phenomenon in a broader sense i.e. the notion of 'the general is a positive phenomenon and that structures are lived or implicit, rather than

5.6.3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE DIALOGAL GROUP RESEARCH METHOD AT SEATTLE UNIVERSITY AND THE DIALOGAL GROUP DISCUSSIONS REGARDING THE RESEARCH OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

The main difference with the dialogal group discussions used in this study and the dialogal group research carried out at Seattle University, was that I, being the primary researcher, formulated the research questions on my own. I then collected the descriptions by carrying out the interviews and follow-up interviews with the six participating clients, and informally presented the transcribed scripts (from the audio-tapes) to the group for discussion, clarification and elaboration of themes which I had identified within the scripts.

I read and re-read the scripts on my own whilst listening to the audio-tapes. This was done in order to extrapolate and experience pertinent themes relevant to the individual's experience of self-forgiveness as it occurs in his/her world, which may have been missed in earlier readings. Writing and critiquing the interpretation of the data involved not only continued re-reading of the narratives and transcripts, but returning to the literature and previous research. Unlike the Seattle group, this did not take place in dialogue with fellow colleagues.

Another difference compared to the dialogal research group at Seattle University, was that our dialogal group consisted of four practising psychologists (including this researcher) and besides me, none of the psychologists were directly involved in the research. The groups at Seattle University consisted primarily of students on the Masters' programme who were directly involved in the research. Only one of the groups had more than one faculty person among its members (Halling & Leifer, 1991).

Chapter 6 contains the Results of the Research and includes the following:

1. THE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The complete breakdown of the protocol of Subject A into Natural Meaning Units and corresponding Thematic Meaning Units.

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2. **THE PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS**

- The Situated Structural Descriptions of Subjects B, C, D, E and F, in response to the three general questions presented and audio-taped in the first interview with the six participants.
- The General Psychological Description of the Experience of Self-Forgiveness in Psychotherapy.
- 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.
- The Elaborated Structural Description of the Experiences of Self-Forgiveness in Psychotherapy.
- Themes Identified from the Edited Dialogue of the Psychologists' Group regarding the Phenomenon of Self-Forgiveness.
- The General Description of the Identified Themes of the Psychologists' Dialogal Group regarding the Phenomenon of Self-Forgiveness in Psychotherapy.
- The Comparison of the Constituents of the General Description of the participating clients of the Experience of Self-Forgiveness in Psychotherapy and the Identified Themes of the Psychologists'

- The conclusion includes an integration of the above results and an overview of the significant points of the participants' experience of the phenomenon in psychotherapy as well as the psychologist group's reflective understanding of the phenomenon and its role in psychotherapy.

Note :

The hermeneutic or contextual approach to research and to psychotherapy is an interpretive approach within the context of the individual's own world of experience. As psychotherapists, the 'challenge is to illuminate this experience' and 'this approach places a dramatic emphasis on the individual experience of the patient in psychotherapy' (Moss, 1989, cited in Valle & Halling, 1989, p.197).

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

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)¹

6.3 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

¹. 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.

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

99/.....

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'¹, 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.

¹. '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**

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.

RENEÉ² 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.

² 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.

7. DISCUSSION

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

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

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

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

1. 'Can you tell me what self-forgiveness means to you?'
2. 'What situation(s) in your life gave rise to the need for self-forgiveness?'
3. 'How did your experience in psychotherapy contribute to your understanding of self-forgiveness?'

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

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

7.1 THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS

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

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

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

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

7.2 TEMPORALITY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS

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

validating other/therapist.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.5 RESPONSIBILITY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Subject D said:

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

Subject E said:

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

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

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

- * John* said: 'It's (the experience of self-forgiveness) got major implications and I think it's one that we're not *au fait* with in our training because it goes beyond guilt and undoing, it's a much more spiritual sort of concept and it's a concept to do with healing, it's like psycho-neuro-immunology and existentialism'.
- * Rene* said about self-forgiveness: 'That higher power stuff and it, you know, if you think about in terms of the addict, it is about somehow giving to the self, the self-forgiveness thing because I've got to say I can't judge it all myself, I can't take all this on my own shoulders and that it, in a way, I think it is really a part of accepting the higher power, perhaps also part of it, realizing it'.

(*Pseudonyms used)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Subject C illustrated this point by saying:

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

7.7.1 ANXIETY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She continued:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Subject A said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- The important result of the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy was that the psychologists felt that it had a transcendent, spiritual quality which was above justice and went beyond guilt and wrongdoing. This they felt would have major implications for the practise of psychotherapy, as in our training as psychologists, it is an experience/phenomenon that is not addressed; hence we're not *au fait* with it.
- While the power and usefulness of this phenomenon in psychotherapy was agreed upon, colleagues felt that the processes involved in this experience would happen in 'good' effective therapy anyway. Thus one could speculate that the phenomena of self-forgiveness and forgiveness or non-forgiveness of others, form an integral part of all psychotherapy whether articulated or not. This is especially the case when dealing with painful relational issues and childhood misperceptions where one's self-definition and definition of others are called into question, when the individual is required to accept her human fallibility and that of others and to take responsibility for her own actions.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- For therapists, the therapeutic value of including the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy would be in treating clients who experience painful relational wounds during personal and interpersonal development.
- This research highlights the role of self-forgiveness (and forgiveness or non-forgiveness of others) in the clients' experiences of being in the world and how lack of insight into the blockages to forgiveness and self-forgiveness would impede their transformative experience. Thus working with the experience of self-forgiveness within the appropriate therapeutic context would help clients overcome obstacles to greater self-illumination and self-identity and enhance a reconnectedness to the self and others.
- Enright & Fitzgibbons have researched forgiveness in psychotherapy for over twenty years. In their synthesized work entitled *Helping Clients Forgive* (2000), the researchers explain the process of forgiveness in psychotherapy using a model of forgiveness (1991 & 2000) and how clinicians, regardless of their theoretical orientation, could apply this process in psychotherapy. These researchers have

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

- In addition, the majority of clients come into therapy having experienced a sense of injury and wrongdoing from others or experiencing feelings of being 'wrong' or 'bad' themselves regarding significant others in their lives. These experiences are often, despair and depression. Insight and acceptance, in psychotherapy, of the individual's human fallibility and self-forgiveness, as well as that of others, would help them reassess often irrational feelings resulting from the injustices in their lives, in a constructive, therapeutic and healing manner accompanied by feelings of alienation, self-blame, guilt, shame, anger, anxiety and
- Possible therapeutic value of the experience of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others would be for clinicians from interdisciplinary professions and perspectives to introduce these phenomena when working with individuals in psychic pain, e.g. philosophy, religion, psychology, general medical practitioners, psychiatry, etc. An interdisciplinary approach to forgiveness would enhance our ability to negotiate and connect with others and move towards new possibilities in a world which seems dominated by terror and fear and a lack of, or unwillingness to, improve our insight and understanding of different cultural, religious, social and political issues which result in our mutual intolerance of the beliefs of others. 'Collective responsibility across generations, may be a morally necessary idea' (Shriver, 1998, p.141).
- Clients often come into psychotherapy articulating the need for self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. A deeper understanding of, and familiarity with, these phenomena would assist these clients with their difficulties. 'Knowing and being familiar with forgiveness therapy well, is a sign of respect for those humans we serve' (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000, p.5). A broader awareness of the client's religious, spiritual and philosophical beliefs is required by the psychotherapist because forgiveness and self-forgiveness are embedded in, amongst others, Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

- Multidisciplinary approaches to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy would apply to the various theoretical orientations and approaches experienced in one's training and when working with clients. This would include psychodynamic/psychoanalytic oriented therapists, cognitive behavioural therapists and family systems therapists when dealing with their clients' painful traumatic issues. The issue of self-forgiveness pertains to transformation and renewed identity rather than therapeutic techniques (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000).
- The therapeutic value of this research of the retrospective experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy may be extended to general bereavement counselling in psychotherapy and more particularly, with various specialized groups, such as hospice counsellors, compassionate friends, specialized trauma workers, (e.g. counsellors and participants in groups such as Rape Crisis Counselling, Abuse against Women and Children, NICRO Groups), general trauma counselling, Correctional Services (staff and prisoners and their families), community social workers, therapists, counsellors, medical doctors, (including medical students) and medical personnel, alternative healers and workers in the helping profession, all of whom are trying to deal with individuals' feelings of pain, of self-blame, of guilt, shame and anger, as well as the therapists'/counsellors' own issues relating to loss, betrayal and injustice.
- The existential hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches to the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy may be extended to transpersonal psychology. In the discussion group, psychology colleagues felt that the phenomenon of self-forgiveness was a transcendental, 'spiritual' or transpersonal experience. Valle (1989), states that these types of awareness are not really 'experiences' per se but are in some way 'prior to our daily experiences and pre-reflective sensibilities and are more of a 'context' or 'space' from which our more common experience or felt sense emerges' (Valle, 1989, p.258). Transpersonal psychology focuses on issues such as optimal functioning of the self and others and the ability for spiritual experience e.g. Yoga, Zen, Buddhism, Sufism, Christian and Judaic mysticism, Taoism, traditional African cultures, etc. In applying these approaches to psychology, particularly the experience of self-forgiveness in psychotherapy, the focus is not only on self-identity and the process of individuation, but on human experience which extends beyond the level of self-awareness: 'identity is not confined to the individual mind or more limited sense of self' (p.262).

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

- In South Africa, political issues such as racial discrimination in the apartheid vs post-apartheid eras relating to forgiveness and self-forgiveness could be explored and researched. In addition, research on forgiveness and self-forgiveness could be included with the participants (both victims and perpetrators) of the TRC. Rowe, et al. (1989) state that it is clear these are phenomena 'with many facets and far-reaching implications for intrapersonal, interpersonal and political relationships' (p.243).
- Enright & Fitzgibbons (2000), have applied self-forgiveness and forgiveness therapeutically, in order to ameliorate feelings of anger-related emotions to those who have suffered injustices. These authors state that most of our work as therapists applies to those who have developed clinical symptoms and suggests that forgiveness (and this could be extended to self-forgiveness) should be introduced in a systematic fashion as preventative measures with children in schools and families. Helping children learn about self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others and helping equip them with skills in order to cope with injustice, betrayal and anger while in their formative years, would assist them in understanding and integrating these phenomena in their adult lives and relationships. In turn, they may become individuals who could help with these issues in future generations. The current research shows the significance of multigenerational transmission of family scripts, myths, beliefs, pain, anger and misperceptions. The introduction of forgiveness and self-forgiveness in psychotherapy as well as in education, may be a significant means of promoting

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

7.14 CRITICAL REVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.15 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

- In their retrospective interviews, the participants described their experience of the phenomenon before reflection and their understanding of this experience was rooted in the world as they lived it. However, the psychologists had read the literature and had had time to reflect on the phenomenon in the discussion group and therefore, their experience of the phenomenon was not pre-reflective. Thus the researcher could only use the psychologists' observations and interpretations of the literature and data in order to deepen and enhance the understanding of the phenomenon as well as to facilitate the use of this phenomenon as a tool in their therapy with clients.
- Another limitation of the research was the potential subjective bias of myself as the researcher who had also been the psychotherapist involved in psychotherapy with the research participants. I was the primary researcher who had interviewed the participants and the sole analyzer of the data provided by the participants.

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

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

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

- As mentioned in Chapter 6, another disadvantage of the psychotherapist/researcher conducting the interviews, was that I was familiar with the subjects and their history and there was an interwoven quality of the shared text and world with the clients/participants. Thus the assumption, on the part of the participants, was that I would understand the meaning of the experience they were trying to convey. At times, because of this familiarity, I failed to question and clarify an assumed meaning although it may have been compatible with the client's known history.
- In addition, the participants' responses to the interview question describing their experiences in psychotherapy were all positive, in that they had found that the validating, accepting, empathic presence of the therapist had enhanced their experiences of this phenomenon. Involving an outside research interviewer in order to ask his question of the participants, with whom they had not formed a therapeutic relationship, may have produced alternative responses.
- Limitations may have been inherent in the small sample size as well as the participants' relatively homogenous set of religious beliefs. Implications for further research may be to extend an investigation of this phenomenon to include various alternative religious traditions, e.g. Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, which would yield its own rich set of qualitative data.
- Cross-cultural research, as well as research of different population groups (e.g. prisoners who had been in counselling groups vs those who had not; victims vs

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

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

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

- The experience of letting-go in psychotherapy, which is not an intellectual conscious act, often involves a letting-go of one’s old identity, expectations and beliefs and may not necessarily involve self-forgiveness or the forgiveness of others.
- The experience of reparation and reconciliation is not a prerequisite for forgiveness and self-forgiveness. In other words, one can forgive without reconciling or forgetting the injurious behaviour or one could forgive oneself without necessarily seeking reconciliation with the other. In cases of sudden death or injury, in painful divorce and custody issues, while self-forgiveness may be possible, reconciliation and reparation with the wrongdoer may not be possible.
- Self-acceptance, which was found in this research to be mandatory in the experience of self-forgiveness, need not include forgiveness in psychotherapy. Non-forgiveness without vengeance, an acceptance of issues which cannot be changed and accepting uncertainty and ambivalence, can take place in therapy. ‘Sometimes what people really need is permission not to forgive, to feel what they feel. Granting permission need not foreclose resolution; it may be the step that makes it possible’ (Safer, 2000, p.166). Often, psychotherapists will encourage self-forgiveness or forgiveness of others without considering whether doing so serves their own needs or their clients’ needs’ (ibid, 2000).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ This researcher’s brackets

APPENDIX A

SUBJECT INSTRUCTIONS

FIRST INTERVIEW

Key Research questions to be put to the client by the researcher and transcribed for discussion.

1. Can you tell me what self-forgiveness means to you?
2. What situation(s) in your life gave rise for the need for self-forgiveness?
3. How did your experience in therapy contribute to your understanding of self-forgiveness?

SECOND INTERVIEW

Clarification of data transcribed in first interview and further elaboration of data if necessary.

APPENDIX B

CLIENT PERMISSION FORM

I hereby give permission to ***IRENE BOWMAN*** to use my historical data and nature of my presenting problem for research purposes.

I understand that, at all times, the confidentiality of the data will be upheld and my identity will be protected.

Signed

Dated

APPENDIX C**SAMPLE INTRODUCTION FOR PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS**

Everything you share with me today will be kept strictly confidential. Also, if there is a question you do not wish to answer for any reason, I will certainly respect your right to privacy. It's important to me that this interview be a positive experience for you, as well as a contribution to my research.

Before this study is published, I may ask your permission to print excerpts from our discussion today. If I do, those excerpts would not be associated with your name in any way, and would be edited to conceal your identity. Also, if you wanted to see a copy of those excerpts before they were published - just to be sure your privacy was adequately protected - I'd be happy to give you one.

What I am most interested in today is your experience, and with experience there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. In doing this type of research, I am not so much interested in thoughts or ideas or theories 'about' self-forgiveness, though I realise they may be important to you. My goal today is to understand your own personal, lived experience of finding self-forgiveness - as deeply as I possibly can - without being limited by pre-conceived notions about self-forgiveness.

So, in order to minimize the amount of influence I have over your description of your experience, I'm going to do my best to avoid asking questions that might 'lead' you in any way. Instead, I'll try to only ask questions for clarification, or perhaps to find out more about something you've already described. I'd rather have you tell me about your experience in whatever way feels natural to you.

This type of research is based on the idea that the best way to understand a phenomenon like self-forgiveness is to listen to people describe their personal experience of these phenomena. In this way, the research is collaborative: you and I will be working together today to better understand your experience, which should in turn shed light on the nature of the forgiveness process as it applies to all of us.

Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

APPENDIX D**CONSENT FORM**

I understand that I am being asked to participate in a research project designed to gain insight into what people understand by self-forgiveness and how the experience of psychotherapy contributed to this understanding.

My participation will include a face-to-face interview (during which time I will be asked to describe my personal understanding and experience of self-forgiveness), and a follow-up interview (during which time I will have an opportunity to correct or elaborate on the information exchanged at the first interview). Each interview will last approximately sixty to ninety minutes, and can be scheduled at a time and place of my convenience.

I understand that a tape recorder will be used to make an accurate record of our discussions. I also understand that anything I share will be held strictly confidential. Any excerpts from our interviews that are transcribed for publication will be assigned a fictitious name, and will be disguised additionally, if necessary, to protect my anonymity.

Finally, I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary, and that I may withdraw my participation at any time should I feel the need to do so for any reason. I also understand that I am free to ask questions about the study that may be helpful or otherwise of interest to me.

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

CONFIDENTIALITY FORM FOR PARTICIPATING PSYCHOLOGISTS
IN THE DISCUSSION GROUP

I hereby understand that the data to be discussed, will be kept in the strictest confidence and will not be discussed outside the discussion group.

Signed

Dated

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